

ECONOMIC SYSTEM: ITS TRADITION VS. MODERNITY AMONG THE TRIBAL PEOPLE IN AN URBAN SETTING - AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN A SUB DIVISIONAL TOWN IN NORTH 24 PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL

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Introduction

The Oraons are one of the major tribes of India. They also call themselves Kurukh. According to Roy (1915), they probably owe their name Kurukh to their hero-king Karakh. The Oraons are supposed to have lived originally in the land called Karusha, south-west of the Ganga. They have a vague knowledge regarding their migration to Chotonagpur in Bihar from Rohtasgarh. Roy (1915) states that they were dislodged from Rohtasgarh by the Chero. Now they are concentrated in Chotonagpur in Bihar and the adjoining areas of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. They are also distributed in the states of West Bengal, Tripura, Maharashtra and Assam. Chotonagpur plateau, the homeland of the Oraon, is thickly dotted with hills and hillocks comprising pat or high table land. According to the 1981 census, their population in Bihar is 1,048,066. Though they are primarily rural, 1,24,290 persons (11.86 percent of their total population) are returned from urban areas.

Traditionally, land, their main economic resource, is controlled by the lineage or clan or individuals. To most of the Oraon, the economic importance of forests has considerably been reduced due to its extensive destruction. Only those who live near the forests have some degree of dependence upon it. They are mainly settled cultivators and also work as wage laborers and industrial workers. A number of the Oraon are engaged in salaried jobs in government and private organizations. In towns, some of them pull Rickshaws. A good number of them migrate to distant cities and towns to work as labourers, after the harvesting season. According to the 1981 census, 36.13% of their total population (41.52% males and 20.47% females) are returned as workers. Of them, 66.49% are cultivators, 18.59% are agricultural labourers, 3.84% are in other than household industries and the remaining 11.08% are engaged in various other occupations.

In West Bengal, the Oraons are distributed in the districts of Jalpaiguri, Midnapur and 24 Parganas. They have migrated here from the states of Orissa and Bihar. Their population, according to the 1981 census, is 437,574. They speak Bengali for inter-group communication and use the Bengali script.

Methodology

The study has been conducted through the mainstay of anthropological ethnography, supplemented by Participant Observation, Intensive Interview, Case Studies and Census Survey. Some secondary sources of data have also been used accordingly.

Discussions and interpretations

The present study, basically ethnographic in nature, has been conducted in the small tribal population, Oraons of Barasat, the Sub-divisional Town in the District North-24-parganas; West Bengal, India. They have been migrated from the Ranchi District of Bihar. The environment (physical and social-cultural) of the area has some socio-economic and cultural impacts on their age old traditional culture which they are trying to sustain under the thresholds of urbanism as living with the close proximity of the original settlers of the area, under modernization.

The age-old migrations from the homeland of Bihar to different districts of West Bengal, the Oraons are fallen under the process of urbanization which has also a long history. Recently, they are in a transitional mode of techno-economic and socio-religious milieu of the area they live. The same situation is felt in the

Adibasipara of the Sub division, town Barasat, during investigation.

As they came to city, were seeking jobs and the social, material, and cultural advantages they believe are available in urban area. They are forced out of the countryside by high population levels, inability to acquire land, environmental degradation, and, sometimes, violence.

Migration changes both the migrants themselves and the neighbouring communities they leave. Links between them and urban dwellers and those that remain at home in the country side allow new ideas and values as well as consumer goods to enter into the hamlet under study. In addition to the well developed physical communications, the cultural communications like radio, television, mobile phones, newspapers, are used and operated primarily by people located in urban areas broadcast their messages and their advertisements to the country side as well as the city of Kolkata, too.

With urbanization comes the development of a great variety of social groups based on voluntary memberships. Such associations may serve as mutual aid societies, lending money to members, arranging funerals and taking care of marriage arrangements for urban migrants.

Urban life sometimes becomes extremely difficult to the tribal people. Many of them are poor, unemployed and face hunger, unsafe drinking water, inadequate sanitation facilities and sub standard shelter in comparison to the neighbouring urban dwellers.

The fact that the urban centre continue to grow is indicative both of their appeal and of the desperate poverty of the countryside. Any solution to the problems caused by urbanization must focus on both tribal people in the urban area. Urbanism must provide some adequate services, including new jobs. During investigation, in the hamlet, locally known as *Adibasipara* (the hamlet of the tribe) in Barasat, it has been observed that in the spheres of their techno-economic and socio-religious life, various modern urban elements have been adopted as the adaptive strategy for settling in the core of a town. With these cultural changes it has been also observed that most of

water, sewage, education and health care to the tribal population. The new economic pursuits as followed at present by the tribals are labourer, accountant, driver, shopkeeper, private tutor, policeman etc. instead of their traditional one.

the people were also carrying with them some traditional cultural traits, which is showing their integrity and in group feeling strongly. The study finally highlights their economic system under the domain of the main stream urbanism in Barasat along with the impacts of developmental measures on them through the local administration (Municipality).

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