

Book Review

Tribal Agriculture and Modernization.

By Sujit Kumar Paul. Delhi: Daya Publishing House. 182 pp., Rs. 395/- (Hardbound). ISBN No 81-7035-348-3

Tribal population constitutes a considerable percentage in India. A tribe is defined as "a social group with a definite area, dialects, cultural homogeneity, and unifying social organization. Tribals have specific characteristics which make them a society based upon kinship, where social stratification is absent (Beteille, 1977). The tribal communities differ very much from one another in social traits, organization, kinship pattern, custom and beliefs. There are about 250 tribal communities in India and agriculture is the primary sources of livelihood for the overwhelming majority of the tribal population in the country. The Santal is one of the prominent tribal communities in India. They constitute more than 54 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the State of West Bengal. They are found in almost all the districts but, are concentrated mostly in the districts of Midnapur, Bankura, Purulia, Burdwan, Birbhum and Malda.

Agricultural modernization has been introduced in the tribal areas of West Bengal, with a view to raise the level of income, standard of living and improve the lifestyle of the tribal people. In agrarian sector, the Santals are mainly marginal and small farmers. They cultivate for own consumption without hankering after profit. But, most of the Santals are reluctant to adopt the modern methods in agriculture and their cultivation is subsistence oriented.

The present book is an outcome of an empirical study to find the extent and nature of adoption of modern agricultural technology by the Santal Community. It has been brought out in six chapters. The author has described the tribal situation in India, the research problem and its objectives in the introductory chapter. The systematic review of the tribal agriculture, its modernization and mechanization as well as the socio-economic changes and constraints have been presented in Chapter II. The concept of variables and the mechanization adoption index

formulated for the study has been discussed in the III Chapter. A profile of the study area and methodology has been presented in Chapter IV. The survey method has been followed for data collection. The data on variables of demographic and household distribution, the literacy status, occupations, poverty incidences, land holdings, the agricultural implements used and the cropping pattern by the tribals have been collected through interview schedules. The socio-cultural changes due to agricultural modernization and mechanized farming have been analyzed. The extent and nature of adoption of modern agricultural technology by the Santals and subsequently its impact on their lifestyles have been investigated by the scholar. An attempt has also been made to grasp the nature of their outlook on life in the changing context. Their income, consumption and distribution pattern has been analyzed and the socio cultural constraints towards the adoption of modern agricultural technology has been critically examined. The researcher has successfully carried out a complete enumeration of all the tribal households in the four villages with the help of a preframed inquiry forms and categorized them as mechanized, non-mechanized and landless households. The economic status of the Santal households was enumerated and the nature of adoption of modern technology and its impact on agricultural production has been assessed. Estimating the maximum criteria for existing cropping pattern, linear programming technique has been used. Following stepwise regression analysis the crucial constraints of crop production, both for mechanized and non-mechanized farmers, have been obtained.

Cultivation being the main occupation, a considerable percentage of population among the non mechanized farmers even worked as agricultural labourers where as it was very rare among the mechanized farmers. The economic condition of the non-mechanized households were found to be even worse than the landless households in the study area, the reason being that they have small land holdings with less productivity. The farmers, both mechanized and non-mechanized borrowed money, the mechanized farmers collecting loans from institutional

sources. They also used improved agricultural implements for cultivation.

The most crucial study constraints are lack of advice and guidance from change agents as per the study findings. The lack of innovative-ness, lack of entrepreneurship, lack of adequate credit and paucity of enough wealth retarded the process of mechanization. Agriculture being the main source of income, the Santals mostly practiced traditional method of agriculture with indigenous technology. Modern technologies such as shallow tubewells, pumsets, powertiller, thresher, sprayer etc. have been used sparingly and have switched over recently to HYV seed, chemical fertilisers, pesticides etc. for better yield. With the market orientation, the commercial farming has been gradually taking place among the Santal tribes.

Santal farmers have diversified their expenditure pattern into several spheres. They spent most of their income on food and feast in the past. But due to the increase in income and awareness they are now spending money for other durable consumer goods, also for education and health care. Saving habit has also been developed. Most of the old Santals are illiterates but are keen to send their children for higher education.

Marriage, being a religious sacrament among the Santals is associated with many customs and traditions, much of them have undergone changes in modern times. Early marriage is gradually decreasing. The changes taking place in three major areas relating to marriage among the Santals are (a) age at marriage, (b) area of selection of mates, and, (c) criteria for the selection of mates. The awareness regarding health and hygiene has considerably increased. They attended hospital

for treatment and some percentage of money is spent for medical care. The Santals were a non-political entity. They have a long tradition of managing their village affairs through traditional panchayats. But now, the political awareness and cosmo politeness has been achieved.

The book on the whole offers valuable contribution to the field of modernization and tribal life where research studies are very rare. The systematic analysis and the scholarly presentation of the subject matter needs special appreciation. It is a welcome reader to the social scientists, planners and the research scholars alike. No doubt, this resourceful empirical research will pave way to popularise and promote research in the field of Tribal development. Occasionally, the text suffers from oversimplification, lack of clarity and methodological thoroughness. On the other hand, the systematic empirical analysis and its candid presentation makes the volume a worthy addition to the academic resource of agricultural research and tribal studies.

REFERENCE

- Bateille, Andre. 1977. "The Definition of Tribe", in Ramesh Thapar (ed.) *Tribe, Caste and Religion in India*. Delhi: MacMillan Company of India Limited.

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