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SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STUDY OF SAUNTA TRIBE IN CHHATTISGARH

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Constitution gives special status to Scheduled Tribes (ST). Traditionally, Scheduled Tribes, who are called forest dwellers or Adivasis, constitute about 8% of the Indian population. There are 573 Scheduled Tribes living in different parts of the country, which are different from the Mainstream People of the State where they live. The Saunta tribe resides in Bilaspur, Mungeli, Gaurela Pendra Marwahi, Korba, Raigarh, Surguja and Jashpur districts of Chhattisgarh State. According to the 2011 census, their total population is 3502, in which 1760 (50.26 percent) are Males and 1742 (49.74 percent) are Females.

Members of the Saunta community mainly earn their livelihood from forest produce collection, agriculture, agricultural labour, animal husbandry, fishing etc. This community also does agriculture work as per time and land availability. Also, they fulfill their economic needs by collecting forest produce, making bamboo products, doing labour work, hunting, fishing, agricultural labour work etc. Saunta community is a community with a patrilineal lineage system. The important basis of their social life and organization is the lineage group. Saunta tribe also believes in religion, nature, soul, supernatural power and gods and goddesses. They accept the existence of soul and believe in rebirth through different bodies after death. People of this caste used to consider primary level education sufficient for their children, but due to availability of educational facilities and influence of other cultures, these people are now inclined towards higher education.



KEYWORDS : Tribe, Economic, Social, Saunta, Labour.

INTRODUCTION

A part of the total population of India lives in dense Forests, Mountains, Valleys, Terai and Coastal areas away from urban and rural civilization. Due to their residence in inaccessible forest areas, they are known by various names such as Adivasi (tribal), Vanvasi (forest dwellers), Girijan (mountain people), primitive tribe, wild caste or tribe etc. This community has been living in beautiful forest areas for thousands of years, dependent on the generosity of nature. Their social, economic, educational and health status is backward as compared to other societies. Historians consider them to be the oldest inhabitants of India. According to the Census of India 2011, the total population of these tribes is 104281034. Which is 08.61 percent of the total population of the country. And they live on about 15 percent of the total geographical area of the country.

In the list of Scheduled Tribes issued under the Madhya Pradesh Reorganization Act 2000 for the newly formed Chhattisgarh state, 42 tribal groups have been included as Scheduled Tribes. About

one third (31.76 percent) of the total population of Chhattisgarh state is of scheduled tribes, thus Chhattisgarh state is a tribal dominated state. Saunta tribe is included at serial number 39 in the list of scheduled tribes of Chhattisgarh, which mainly resides in Bilaspur, Korba, Surguja and Jashpur etc. districts of Chhattisgarh state. This tribe is one of the minority tribes of Chhattisgarh. This tribe resides in the northern and central tribal area of the state along with Oraon, Agariya, Kanwar and Baiga tribes. People residing in this region also address them as Saunta in the local dialect.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To do an ethnic (socio-cultural) study of the Saunta tribe.
2. To find out the economic status of the Saunta tribe.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was done by collecting secondary facts, using published books, census reports and Government reports. After that, the facts obtained were analyzed, tabulated and the report was written.

Saunta Tribe

There is no historical evidence available regarding the origin of the Saunta tribe. Legends are prevalent in the community regarding their origin. According to the legend, when Brahmaji created the universe, at that time Lord Shiva created two persons named "Naga Baiga and Naga Baigin" and both started living in dense forests, and continued to live in dense forests like this. After some time, two children were born to them.

After the birth of children, the eldest son was named Balak and the youngest son was named Bhura. They spent their lives roaming in the forests and eating wild tubers at a place called Sonachunguri and Masachunguri in the Maikal range of mountains. When both the children became of marriageable age, their marriage was fixed. In which the eldest son Balak was married to Noni Maswasi and the younger son Bhura was married to Bhuri. Shortly after the marriage of both the sons, due to unforeseen reasons, their eldest son Balak died. After which their younger son Bhura kept his sister-in-law Noni Maswasi as a Saunt along with his wife Bhuri. Their children later came to be known as Saunta.

Apart from this, on the basis of another legend, their origin is told from Jagannathpuri of Odisha. There were two brave brothers in the army of the king of Puri who belonged to the Khandayat caste. Among them, the younger brother married a local tribal woman. After which he was separated by the elder brother. Their children later came to be known as Saunta.

According to another legend, some members of the tribal group separated from their caste community and formed a new community which was called the Saunta community.

The Saunta tribe mostly resides in forests, foothills of mountains and plain plateaus. They make simple and easy material objects for themselves from natural resources, which shows a clear effect of environment on their socio-economic, cultural and material culture.

Men's clothing

In this community, the new born baby is wrapped in new gamchha, lungi or other clothes till the Chhathi. Only after Chhathi, clothes like "Jhabla" etc. are bought from the market are worn. School going children are made to wear half pants and shirt.

Adult men wear lungi or dhoti up to the knees. They wear vest or shirt on the upper part. In the modern environment, some people can now be seen wearing full pants and shirt.

Old people usually wear loincloth or lungi up to the knees. The upper part is usually open. They keep a turban of gamchha tied on the head. When going out of the village for visiting guests or for any other work, they wear dhoti and shirt up to the knees and keep a gamchha on the shoulder.

Women's clothing

In this community, young girls are made to wear frock or skirt shirt. School age girls usually use skirt and blouse. While other young women wear a "lugdi" or salwar kameez a little below the knees. Women wear colourful saris and blouses below the knees. Old women wear a "lugda" up to the knees. Some old women were not found wearing blouses. The upper part of the body is covered with the pallu of the lugdi.

After the death of the husband, widowed women wear white saris as per social customs till Dashkarma (Dashagatra). After this, they can wear saris of any colour as per their wish.

Make-up and jewellery

The women of this community use coconut oil or other fragrant oil on their body and hair after bathing. They make a plait by combing their hair and tie a coloured ribbon or rubber. They put adhesive on the hair on the upper part of the ears. For makeup, they wear bindi on the forehead, kajal in the eyes and colourful glass bangles as a mark of being a married woman and payeri (anklets) on the feet. Married women wear beaded necklaces. Most of the women also make a hanging "khosa" (bund) on their neck.

Items of makeup of Saunta women

Table No.-1

No.	Jewellery	Used	Metal
1	Kaldar	around neck	Gilt
2	Suta	around neck	Gilt
3	Thaar, Karchhi	in ear	Gilt/silver
4	Bahuta, Nagbhor	on arm	Gilt/silver
5	Kakni, Haraiya	on wrist	Gilt/silver
6	Mundri	on hand finger	Gilt/silver
7	Kardhan	on waist	Gilt/silver
8	Chuda	on foot	Gilt/silver
9	Chutka	on toe	Gilt/silver
10	Bindi (Chikli)	on forehead	Rubber

Source: By book "Saunta Janjati ka Nrijatiya Adhyayan"

Household Equipment

Saunta family keeps its needs in mind and collects various necessary equipments/items which are required for carrying out daily activities. The following household equipments are found in Saunta community:-

Table- 2

No.	Name of equipment	Price	Construction material	Construction	Use
1	Hadi	20-50	Clay	Potter	Making rice
2	Kadahi	100-200	Aluminium	Market	Making vegetables
3	Tawa	75-150	Iron	Market	Making rotis
4	Doksi	20-30	Clay	Potter	Stirring vegetables
5	Dechki	100-150	Aluminium	Market	Fetching water, making rice
6	Karchhul	20-30	Aluminium/Blacksmith	Market	Storing vegetables
7	Chatu	-	Wood	Self-made	Storing vegetables
8	Duva	25-50	Iron	Market	Lentil Extraction
9	Kannauji	20-40	Clay	Potter	Giving water

10	Lota	150-200	Bronze	Market	Drinking water/ Giving
11	Glass	40-100	Bronze/Steel	Market	Eating food
12	Thali	100-400	Steel/Bronze	Market	Storing vegetables
13	Mali/Katori	10-30	Steel/Bronze	Market	Drinking/ Giving water
14	Haula	400-1000	Brass	Market	Eating food
15	Bucket	150-300	Aluminium	Market	Storing vegetables
16	Tokiya/Jhauha	-	Bamboo	Self-made	Storing/ Filling water
17	Supa	-	Bamboo	Self-made	Filling water
18	Dheki	-	Iron/Wood	Self-made	Storing vegetables
19	Stilbatta	50-100	Stone	Self-made/ Market	cleaning of grains etc
20	Jata	50-75	Stone	Self-made/ Market	for Threshing Paddy
21	Padhera	-	Wood	Self-made	Grinding Chutney / Spices
22	Chatai	100-150	Date palm, Chhindpatra	Market	Grinding Rice / Dal etc
23	Peedha	-	Wood	Self-made	To store oil, spices
24	Bahri	-	Birni grass	Self-made	to sleep, to sit
25	Tija	-	Para (Paddy) Rope	Self-made	sitting, serving rice etc
26	Chulha	-	Clay	Self-made	dusting
27	Sarki	-	Gondla grass	Self-made	storing paddy, for cooking food, lighting a fire, sitting, bedding

Source: By book "Saunta Janjati ka Nrijatiya Adhyayan"

Agricultural Equipment

Members of Saunta community do agriculture through traditional method, for which they need some traditional agricultural equipment. Since this community is not financially strong, they do agriculture work through limited and traditional equipment only. The main agricultural equipment used in agriculture are as follows:-

Agricultural equipment of Saunta tribe:-

Table-3

No.	Agricultural equipment	Useful	Manufactured Goods	Construction	Market Value
1	Nagar (plough)	for ploughing land	Wood, iron	Self made	300-400
2	Juda	for ploughing with bullocks	Wood	self-made	100-150
3	Kopar	for levelling soil	wood	self-made	200-400
4	Rapa (Spade)	for digging soil, levelling land	Iron/Wood	Market	100-150
5	Gainty	digging land	Iron/Wood	Market	150-300
6	Kudal	digging land	Iron/Wood	Market	50-100
7	Sabal	digging land	Iron	Market	100-400
8	Hasia	harvesting crops	Iron	Market	50-100
9	Dabri	for tying bullocks for threshing	Rope	self-made	-
10	Soupa	for cleaning grain	Bamboo	self-made	40-50
11	Gadi	for bringing crops	Wood	Carpenter	4000-5000

Source: By book "Saunta Janjati ka Nrijatiya Adhyayan"

Hunting and fishing equipment

Due to the ban on hunting, hunting (Kheda) is not done by this community at present. Birds are hunted for the purpose of protecting crops and entertainment. This community hunts fish in rivers, streams, ponds and fields etc. during rainy season. The following equipments are used for hunting and fishing :-

Table-4

Sl.	Hunting Equipment	Use	Manufacture
1	Bow, arrow	To catch birds, animals, fish	Wood, iron
2	Tangia	To cut	Wood, iron
3	Chop Gawa	To catch birds	Bamboo, rod
4	Slingshot	To pluck fruits, kill birds	Rubber, wood
5	Net	To catch fish	String (rope)
6	Choriya	To catch fish	Bamboo
7	Gari	To catch fish	Bamboo
8	Jholni	To catch fish	String (net)
9	Pelni	To catch fish	Bamboo+String

Source: By book "Saunta Janjati ka Nrijatiya Adhyayan"

Musical instruments

Songs and music have special importance in the Saunta community. From time to time, on the occasions of festivals, religious ceremonies, marriages etc., folk songs are traditionally sung with the help of musical instruments. Among musical instruments, the "Nakri Baja" made of wood, strings, two gourds and the "Dholak" made of wood and leather were used prominently. At present, the "Nakri" musical instrument is not in use. But along with the "Dholak", Manjira, Tanmuga and Thali etc. are used.

Food

Rice, dal and seasonal vegetables are the main food of the Saunta community. "Bhat" of rice, stale rice and rotis (cheela) made of rice flour etc. are also eaten. Children eat two or more times. In economically weak families, dal and vegetables are not cooked regularly. In these families, food is taken by making vegetables juicy or with chutney of tomato, chilli, salt etc.

Economic Resources

The economy of the Saunta tribe is limited and simple, which is mainly based on agriculture and forest. Even today, they are dependent on natural sources of income. Their economic life is based on seasonal activities. Agriculture, labour, forest produce collection, hunting, animal husbandry and collecting wood from forests are their sources of economy. Their work continues throughout the year, and they survive on whatever economic profit they make.

Forest Produce

Forest and forest produce have special importance in the economic life of the Sonta community. They earn their livelihood by collecting and marketing forest produce. The work of collection is done collectively by adolescents, young and adult men and women. Fuel, fodder for animals, Char-Chironji, Mahua, Tendu leaves, Sarai seeds, Tamarind, Amla, Mango, Harra, Baheda, tubers like Gaith Kanda, Pitha Kanda, Sukdi, Putu, Birni grass, Dates, Chhind leaves, Bamboo and various other types of health related forest medicines etc. are collected from forests.

Animal Husbandry

At present, Saunta community is found to be engaged in agriculture, agricultural labour, forest produce as well as animal husbandry as per the requirement. There is a separate house for animals in

their houses, which is called "Kotha". Since grazing animals in the forest is prohibited during rainy season, they are fed by cutting green grass. In the rest of the time, they are fed paddy straw etc. Old women/men or children of the family go to the forests to graze the animals. Saunta community rears cows, bulls, buffaloes, goats and chickens etc. for different purposes.

Debt Status

The economy of the Saunta community is based on agriculture, agricultural labour, forest produce etc. Due to the traditional means of agriculture, single crop and being dependent on monsoon rain, they are found to be indebted. They do not get enough income from all their sources to fulfill all the needs of their family. On the other hand, they have to depend on loans for emergency expenses for social and religious work.

Social Status

Caste. Saunta tribe is a separate community in itself which has its own caste system. In social stratification, they consider themselves lower than Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes but consider themselves higher than the castes of Shudra Varna. They look at other tribal communities living nearby with equality. This community, while having respect for the upper castes, has a feeling of brotherhood towards the castes of the tribal community - God, Kanwar, Savra, Vinjwar etc. The Saunta tribe has a feeling of unity, brotherhood, affinity and organization towards its own members.

Subcaste

(1) Saunta Kisan - The part of Sonta tribe who have agricultural land available and are engaged in agricultural activities for their livelihood are called Sonta Kisan.

(2) Saunta Vanvasi - The group of Sonta tribal community who do not have agricultural land available and their livelihood is based on the money earned by collecting forest produce and selling items made from bamboo (like- Soopa, Tookna, Chariha, Bauba etc.) are called Saunta Vanvasi.

CONCLUSION

Saunta caste has its own caste system, who consider themselves lower (below) in social caste stratification than Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, but consider themselves above the castes of Shudra Varna. According to the Saunta caste, all cultural activities from birth to death are similar to that of the tribes residing in the area. Along with this, there is respect for higher castes (Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya) and brotherhood towards other castes. In the Saunta caste, marriage is done with the maternal uncle's daughter. Permission is required for marrying within the same caste. The Saunta caste does not have a separate dialect, all Saunta caste people use Chhattisgarhi language. Both joint and nuclear families are found in the Saunta caste. The number of nuclear families is comparatively more.

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