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BETWEEN THE NATIVE LAND AND THE CITY

**NEGOTIATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE SANTAL
MIGRANTS IN KOLKATA**

DR. RUCHIRA DAS



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Negotiations and Experiences of the Santal Migrants in Kolkata

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Abstract

India is the abode of hundreds of tribal communities constituting 8.2 percent of the total population of the country. The 'adivasis', as they are called, generally maintained a very contented, isolated and self-sufficient life with their fascinating rich cultural heritage. However, caught between the varying perceptions of development in the current neo liberal era, the tribals of India are at a crossroads of asserting their rights over native lands, quest for dignified life and the promises of greener pastures outside their native lands i.e in the cities and urban centres where they seem to be reaching in considerable numbers. A conservative estimate suggests that the tribal populations are the major constituents of the groups that are migrating within the country for various reasons, most strikingly, of course, due to development-induced displacement. Tribal communities are thus involuntarily driven out of their home lands as a result of the neoliberal, corporate driven and state sponsored, development models/frameworks and policies. It is in this context that the paper specifically attempts to study the Santal tribe who have migrated from different parts of West Bengal and the neighbouring states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa and have settled in Santragachi, an urban locality that falls within the ambit of the Greater Kolkata region. The paper captures the reasons, contexts and conditions that initiated the Santal migrants to leave their native habitations and move to the city. It further discusses the role of social networks and the way they influenced the psychology of migration and migrants. The paper then goes on to present the experiences recounted by the Santal migrants about their living conditions, the challenges they confronted and the struggles they had to overcome while settling in the city. It also studies the impacts of migration and the dilemmas of the migrants as they negotiated their rural/native identity and the newly acquired urban/city identity.

Keywords: Migration, Santals, Identity

Biodata

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INTRODUCTION

India is the abode of hundreds of tribal communities constituting 8.2 percent of the total population of the country. The 'adivasis', as they are called, generally maintained a very contented, isolated and self-sufficient life with their fascinating rich cultural heritage. With distinct language, political and cultural institutions, they remained in geographical and social isolation from the larger Indian society and have continued to maintain their cultural autonomy and economic independence. However, in the popular imagination, tribes are construed as backward, uncivilized, 'rustic' or are said to be far from what is called the 'mainstream'. Thus one often finds discourses of tribal communities centre around what is generally referred to in the public policy lingo as 'mainstreaming' or 'integrating' the 'hill' or 'forest' people or 'civilising' the so-called rustics. This often means a top-down infusion of dominant cultural, social, political and economic practices of the larger society on the tribals.

One such recent onslaught has been guided by the notion of development which has varied meanings for the tribals and those who sponsor such development, namely, the state, the corporates and the non-tribal "oppressive" communities. Prasad (2004) argues, while there are those who celebrate capitalist development for tribal areas, there are others who empathize with the tribes and oppose intrusion of the market into tribal areas though even they believe that modernity and technology can be employed positively to transform their lives. There is yet another group that believes in the cultural specificity of tribes. This

group of activists strongly favours perseverance and disapprove any change in the tribal's pristine ways. Change is seen as a sign of intrusion by these groups (Prasad, 2004: 29-31).

Caught in between these varying perceptions of development, the tribal communities in today's Indian context are at a crossroads of asserting their rights over native lands, quest for dignified life and the promises of greener pastures outside their native lands and in the cities and towns where they seem to be reaching in large numbers. A conservative estimate suggests that the tribal populations are the major constituents of the groups that are migrating within the country for various reasons, most strikingly, of course, due to development-induced displacement. In this sense tribal communities are driven out of their home lands as a result of neoliberal, corporate driven and state sponsored, development model. Such a movement is thus involuntary by nature.

However, this is not to deny the effect of processes of modernisation, urbanisation and liberalisation that the country as a whole has been undergoing, which has its effects on the socio-economic and cultural life of the tribal communities too. It may be unfair if one does not recognise the impact of various developmental and welfare measures, which have improved the connectivity of the tribal people with the non-tribal populations and also raised their levels of aspiration to attain the mobility they witness among their non-tribal counterparts. One of the consequences of such processes has been that the indigenous tribal cultures and people now face what Ambasht (2002) called 'the problem of withering identity' (p.153).

Tribal communities seem to confront two contradictory contexts. On the one hand, the influence of non-tribal cultures creates a state of alienation and estrangement from their native cultures and, on the other, contact with the so-called 'mainstream' or the non-tribal brings them closer to the socio-economic processes as a result of which they have started viewing their life beyond the confines of isolated, secluded geographic and cultural spaces to take advantage of the new advances and be a part of the wider development process. However, what one does not take into account is that a strange process of hope for improvement is accompanied by the simultaneous process of impoverishment of the tribal population as a result of the encroachment of tribal lands by corporate houses and state governments in the name of development and progress of the nation. In this sense, national progress is seen as a greater good compared to the good of the minorities such as the tribal communities.

At the other extreme, the growing trends of urbanisation of the countryside and the expansion and multiplication of cities and towns in the past three decades or so has led to the emergence of a universal notion among the tribals that migration from rural to urban areas is the inexorable path to progress and growth (Arya and Roy, 2006: 7). The indigenous tribal communities tend to migrate from their native lands to the urban centres in order to rescue themselves from the burdens of chronic poverty, leaving their age old habitations and homes. The processes of migration for these communities unquestionably leave behind a familiar world while they carry along elements of such a world in a milieu which is completely alien to them.

As mentioned earlier, migration among the tribes is largely involuntary or forceful but sometimes it can be voluntary as well. As Arya and Roy (2006) observe, "migration is undertaken mostly with a hope for a better survival in an unknown terrain but it does have a constraining effect not only in the spatial sense but also in terms of experiences of exploitation and marginalisation" (Arya and Roy, 2006: 7). In the cities the tribal communities

are found negotiating with the conflicting situations, protecting transcendence from their deeply ingrained socio-structural traditions (Allen, 2003: 12). Due to handicaps of their own pathetic conditions of living and absence of necessary skills to cope with the situation, the tribal communities feel helpless. In the city, neither are they able to accept the increasing influence of 'other' cultures nor are they in a position to defend and preserve their ethnic identity to which they are extremely attached (Dhanpat, 1997: 47).

It is in this context that the paper specifically attempts to study the Santal tribe who have migrated from their native lands and have settled in Santragachi, an urban locality that falls within the Greater Kolkata region. It may be mentioned at the outset that the group under study is not a typical group of tribal migrants who have just arrived in the city. Instead it is a community living in the city for more than 35 years and has gone into the third generation of city dwellers, that too in the settlement of Santragachi.

The aim of the paper is to explore the causes, contexts, conditions and the impact of Santal migration to the city of Kolkata. The study intends to understand the social-psychology of the migrants who have undergone spatial change, the role of social networks in the life of the migrants during their settlement phase and the struggles of everyday living in the new, unfamiliar world as they survive being tribal and urban at the same time. The methodology undertaken entails an empirically grounded account of the first generation migrant Santals obtained through in-depth interviews and informal discussions. The study is exploratory and descriptive in nature, providing qualitative data on the concerned aspects undertaken as part of the study. A total of forty respondents were selected as samples for the study. The participant Santals are chosen on the basis of 'expedient selection'¹. Data collected were primarily from the first generation men. First generation women respondents were also interviewed on certain aspects where a gendered perspective was thought to provide richness to the analysis.

Santragachi 2, the area of study, falls under the Howrah division of West Bengal located on the west bank of the river Hooghly. It is about 7 kms away from the main city of Kolkata, but falls within the spatial limits of Greater Kolkata city region. In the early twentieth century, Santragachi was a village which became an urban settlement over the years commensurate with the growth of the city of Kolkata, triggered by the process of migration from rural hinterlands and into the urban metropolitan cities. In anticipation of change in life and livelihoods, about 1300 Santal families made Santragachi their home ever since the 1960s. Migrant Santal families have been living in different localities of Nayabaj Adarshapally, Railway colony, Satashi, Dharsha, Dharsha Dakinpally and Sundarpara. Each of these localities is spread within a walking distance of 10-15 minutes across the settlement of Santragachi (Government of West Bengal 2012: 3-4).

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part traces the reasons behind the movement of the Santal migrants from their native lands to the city. The second part discusses the role of the social/community networks in helping them settle in Santragachi in their initial phases of migration. The third part narrates the multiple struggles the migrants confronted to survive the unfamiliar terrain- the city. The final part presents the state of quandary among the Santal migrants as they negotiate their dual identity of being a tribe as well as an urbanite in the city.

1. CAUSES, CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS FOR SHIFTING LOCALE

First generation migrants who came to Santragachi, most of them did not come with their family. The families joined much later. A minimum of five and a maximum of seven years were taken by the families to join the migrant men in the city. Santal men decided to shift their wives and children from the native village to Santragachi when they felt that they were in a position to provide them with a roof to stay and manage their needs in the city. In all 40 Santal households are covered for the

study where three generations live together till date under the same roof.

However, none of the first generation migrants were accompanied by their parents. All of them either came with their relatives, friends, neighbours or co-villagers. Their parents did not accompany them to the city as they were unwilling to shift from their own land even though they supported their sons' decision to move out. Their parents did not come to the city as they could never have adjusted to city life. As informed by the migrants, this was because living close to nature was their parents' first love and the forests and hills that surrounded their habitat were inseparable from their everyday existence. However, the parents of first generation migrants of Santragachi do come occasionally to the city (those who are alive) when they are seriously ill and require advanced medication and health facilities to cure their illnesses and, at times, when their children are unable to pay a visit to their native villages for a long period of time because of their varied engagements.

The first generation migrants of Santragachi offered various reasons for shifting their locale. They felt a necessity to come to the city because they could not earn a living in their native lands. They were not able to fulfill subsistence needs as there were some who had no land and there were most who did not have sufficient land to provide food for their family throughout the year. In addition, the journey from the native village is not one of choice, but a consequence of the circumstances.

According to Mohan Tudu, a first generation migrant from Midnapore,

"I never wanted to come to the city. Coming to the city of Kolkata is not a matter of my choice, but a travesty of my conditions of life. In the village, my family's condition was very poor as we could not hold back land for cultivation. Along with my family, I worked in the lands of the rich villagers who owned huge amount of land. But the wage we got in return was very low. It was not sufficient to fulfill the daily needs of the family. We faced times when there was no work in the

lands because of no rain which increased the suffering of the family. I decided to leave my village and come to the city in search of work to lessen the misery of my family”.

Land alienation is another factor for the movement of Bankura migrants to the city. Under the conditions of state-sponsored development models, they lost their farm lands and the State/ government had taken away the piece of land they were cultivating as they were unable to produce land-ownership certificate. Santals also lost their land in mortgaging; in return of money they borrowed from the non tribal landowners to clear their debts. Land was mortgaged by many families with the thought that they would be able to take it back. But that never happened and hence they lost its possession. Further, migrants from Birbhum noted that there has been no support from the government to increase irrigation facilities to provide water for their lands which are mostly rain-fed. They mentioned that there were very few wells and tube wells in their villages. Those that were there were mostly found in the areas where the upper caste non tribal families lived. Few of those that were there on their side were either dried or broken or dysfunctional.

Migrants from Birbhum recounted that government, instead of facilitating water supply for growing crops, was, in fact, making ‘pucca’ roads, lampposts and bus stops for them. *“If we are unable to provide food for our families because of poor or bad or no crops, what would we have to do with the roads and the lampposts”, asks a respondent, Kapil Hasda. Raj Narayan Mandi also wonders, “If we are hungry, what would we do by learning sanitary measures?”* Thus, these responses of the Santal migrants suggest that shift to lucrative greener pastures such as the city from an unproductive and economically deprived society of their native village is crucial for their survival and mobility. For the respondents, migration thus seem to act as a ‘defense coping strategy’ (Breman, 1985 cited in Patnaik, 2011: 273) as it helps in paying off debts, supplements income from agriculture, help survive agricultural lulls and contributes to agricultural production or investment in assets.

Social discrimination has been an important reason for many families across the districts to migrate to the city. Respondents said that landless Santal families like them worked as agricultural labourers in the lands of the upper caste Hindu landowners. The landowners paid very less in return for their hard work. Minal Tudu and other respondents affirmed that they were not allowed to use water from the wells and tube wells used by the upper caste Hindu families because of the stigma attached to them of being a tribe. Besides, if not access, retention in schools for the Santals was also difficult as most of the children and the teachers came from the non tribal families of higher strata who often ridiculed their children. This frequent humiliation and discrimination constrained the life of Santal families in the village and triggered their urge to move out.

Another reason for shifting locale was the decreasing solidarity in the village. Migrants of Midnapore shared that they would have lived despite the socio economic crisis in the village had the solidarity among them remained intact over time. Respondents felt that the intrusion of the government through panchayati raj system affected the community’s unity. Greed for political power weakened their traditional Santal council. Unlike earlier times, their traditional council could no longer decide everything as in the past for the welfare of the community. Migrants of Midnapore said that they were not able to accept the decreasing importance of their ‘Manjhi’ (headman) and the Santal council. The migrants also informed that what was more worrisome for them was not the panchayat system taking over their traditional council but the increasing hostility among community members affiliated to different political parties. This increasing divide was disturbing for them and hence became a reason to move to the city.

Nevertheless, there were migrants from Purulia who despite having considerable amount of land that was sufficient to provide them with a comfortable living preferred to migrate to the city because of their extreme curiosity to visit the place

and to explore the unfamiliar world. Migrants from Purulia said that despite having enough land for a comfortable living in the village, they moved out only to experience the city life. They migrated to break away from the closed confines of the village and get exposure of the city to increase their awareness about what was happening in the world around them, something they were completely unaware of living in the villages.

Thus as evident from the above reasons the drive for change triggering movements of Santals from their native land to the city can go beyond the regular and often suggested trajectory of push and pull factors. In other words, migration and uprooting is not merely a consequence of one's poor economic conditions. The urge to move out of the native lands and villages is also found to have come from within the community. And this drive is a consequence of the educational attainments of the populations that undertook the journey out of their own villages.

All the 40 first generation migrant Santals included in the study are found to have attained a certain level of education before they set off to migrate. In a way, education has been the most crucial factor in impelling migration to the city. The educated migrants said that though they were aware of competitive examinations which open up ways for acquiring government jobs, they never felt confident of sitting for those exams and clearing them. A respondent from Maldah, Kadey Soren, said: *"Getting a good government job was a distant dream for me despite being educated"*. Thus, inspite of attaining a certain education level, migrants felt that their living in the village can never get them privileged jobs that will give them life time security and help to attain a high social status in the society. Hence they desired to shift to the city. Formal education thus played a significant role in triggering what may be called voluntary migration of the Santals to the city of Kolkata. Besides the urge for attaining a high social position, education helped them develop social consciousness that prompted them to state reasons beyond poor economic conditions which provoked them to move to the city.

However, for some, moving to the city is seen as a status symbol in the villages. Those who migrated are seen as 'givers' because most of the families living in the city either send money to the village by money order or bring along money when they visit their villages as they contribute to major expenses such as house construction, improving farmlands for better yields, debt repayment, spending money on family weddings and also for celebrating festivals. Further, in the village, the incomes are less and the expenditures are more. Hence migration becomes important as the families and individuals feel that it helps improving earning condition of the families. Also, when the migrants visit their native village, they carry clothes, TVs and radios for their family members living in the village. Rashik Hembrom, a respondent, observes, *"Due to this, we migrants enjoy high status and prestige in our native place. We feel superior in our position as givers."* Thus the remittances brought by the migrant families have an important symbolic value in increasing their honour and reputation and, in turn, raise their social status in their native villages, which is a matter of pride for them.

2. ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY NETWORKS AND SETTLEMENT IN THE CITY

Migrants of Santragachi noted that the very idea of shifting to the city has never been their individual decision. Back in the villages, the decision is largely taken by their larger extended family that includes not only their family, parents, siblings and their families; at times it can be other members of their community closely related to their family. However, most of the migrants informed that they decided to shift to the city ensuring that they faced minimum risks and difficulties while they aspired to increase their income level and living standards for their family. Hence the process of migration requires to be explained beyond mere economic reasons and must be understood in terms of the socio-psychological nature and processes as we examine the causes and contexts for migration to the city.

Respondents felt it was their 'larger extended family' -- i.e., members from their own village closely related to their family who have already moved to the city and have been living there -- that acted as a support system for them to settle in the city, be it by finding them shelter to live or by accommodating them in their own houses or by finding them jobs or lending them money for their daily needs whenever they were in need of it while struggling to live in the city. However, the support remained till they became capable enough to cope with the city and its life. In fact, all the migrants stated that they got their first job through relatives and friends. This was because finding a job all by themselves was difficult in the city as the place was unfamiliar to them and the people there also did not know them. As time passed Santal migrants also came in contact with other tribal families who have migrated to Santragachi from either their own region or other regions. Santal migrants' close association with the other tribal families also acted as a moral support for them as they live among Bengali community who are 'outsiders' to them.

Migrants also had apprehensions about being a tribal, as they knew that people in the city see them as 'uncivilised' and 'jungle' and hence might not give them jobs. Therefore they never made efforts to search for jobs all by themselves and hence relied on their networks for it. Most of the first generation respondents affirmed that they got their first job as a tailor, as a helper in a grocery shop, as a wage worker in various construction sites or as newspaper boys and vendors either through their relatives, friends or people from the same native village. Some of the respondents also taught children of the family with whom they stayed as tutors either free of cost or at times on some token payment.

'Aboa Kaota' and Adivasi Socio-Cultural and Educational Association, the nongovernmental associations for the tribes located near Santragachi further acted as strong social networks for Santal migrants giving them information about where suitable work for them was available in the city. In fact, for the migrants, it was from these associations that they came to know in which localities

of Santragachi Santal families had settled so that they could settle in those areas. These organizations also helped them with financial support for admitting their children to schools and also for their initial settlement in the locality. All the first generation migrants who were retired as government servants from various departments stated that they began with unskilled, low-level daily wage jobs like helpers in garment shop, tailoring or grocery store. But those were jobs they never wanted to pursue as they have attained a certain educational level. Migrants informed that it was only with the help of these tribal organizations that they were able to receive information about how to apply for government jobs and also the benefits of employment in government services, something that they felt suited their educational attainments. Migrant thus acknowledge the contributions of the social and community networks to have opened up opportunities for them to settle in the city and enhance their living standards to lead a comfortable life with their family unlike their native locales.

However, respondents confessed that a familiarity has grown over the years with their non tribal Bengali neighbours but trust and dependence remained only with their own community members when faced with any crisis. It was the close knitted social networks of the Santals in the settlement that helped them overcome the feelings of dejection, estrangement and alienation in the unfamiliar world of the city. In fact, the social networks became strong with the consistent choice of the Santal migrants to settle in Santragachi over the years. Living in Santragachi, migrants felt that they were not completely lost in the city. The experiences of warmth, intimacy, appreciation and freedom to converse in their mother tongue amongst the people of their own community compensated for the everyday struggles they underwent outside the settlement and in the larger city. Celebration of Santal festivals, cultural practices and the community gatherings in the settlement also helped them boost their moral courage to face the hardships of the city.

This 'comfort zone' of the closed social and com-

munity networks have played a crucial role in the formation of a Santal 'ghetto' in Santragachi. In a way, Santragachi connected the migrants with their homelands in the city and reduced or mitigated their struggles of migration and settlement in the city. Possession of this asset is an example of Bourdieu's (1986) concept of Social Capital which he defined as the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationship of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (cited in Richardson, 1986: 248). Relevant in this context is the study by Pani and Singh (2010) whose study on migration capital i.e. "means to facilitate the migrant to find a position in the new social milieu" argued, "migration networks provide individuals the outlook that is important to deal with challenges of migration. Such disposition requires resilience crucial to confront the pressures of being an outsider" (Pani and Singh, 2010: 387).

Interestingly, however, the adverse effect of being part of such networks is also highlighted by the Santals of Santragachi. In a way these expressions of disillusionment with the city are a result of their constant constructions of glory and happiness of the past life in the village or the imagined realities of the native lands. The tribal identity in the city thus intersperses with the imagined identities of the native and creates unique socio-psychological dispositions among the Santals of Santragachi.

A first generation respondent, who retired from the central government railway department and a migrant from Maldah, said,

"I never thought to come to the city for job. Yet I happened to land up here. Friends and relatives already living in the city, whenever they visited the village talked about the city. Seeing them I got pulled to experience it. But whatever I may have dreamt about the city, after coming here I realised that it was just the opposite. My co-villagers showed a brighter picture of the city as they were treated like a 'bonga' (God) in the village. But it misled me and many Santals like me about the reality of

city and its life. Even after spending so many years of my life here, I do not like it."

Steinberg's (1981) study too discusses how migrants from villages are lured by visions of gold lying in the streets (cited in Flanagan, 2010: 121), but confront a different social reality when they actually live in the urban space. Migrants admitted that they moved to the city because to a great extent they were lured by those among them who migrated before them.

3. COPING THE UNFAMILIAR SPACE

Despite their settlement in Santragachi and possessing the community network, the woes and struggles of everyday city life did not end. Rather, they aggravated. Acceptability in the city as a tribal migrant has been a struggle both in terms of economic security and socio-cultural expressions.

The Santal headman of Santragachi, Kanailal Manjhi while talking about how he coped with the challenges of urban life said,

"I was one of those few who first came to Santragachi from Bankura district of Bengal. I came all the way to the city with the hope to do well in life. To get a decent job I needed a roof on top of me. But getting a place to stay was not easy. At that time there was nobody from my village to help me. Who will give house on rent to a Santal? The way the Bengali residents spoke to me was as if I came from the jungles and could not be trusted to be their tenant. Also an 'adibasi' is seen as unclean by them. At times I had to hide my identity while looking for a rented house".

Thus searching for a house was one of the biggest challenges for the Santali pioneers in the city of Kolkata. The city expenses were way higher in comparison to that of their village. Food, water, and electricity everything had to be bought and what majorly added to their expense was the rent they had to pay for the houses they lived in. Many of them said that before bringing their family to the city, they managed their living on footpaths or pavements or railway stations to save every

rupee so that they were able to send that money to their family in the village. Others lived in the 'jhupris' and 'jhoporpottis' (the make shift houses) around the railway tracks of Santragachi with their friends or fellow villagers who came to the city for seasonal work or in low cost mess to save their expenses.

A respondent, Ajit Tudu, informed the researcher that when they spoke Santali with their neighbours or friends from the same village while traveling in a bus or tram, people looked at them in such a way as if they were 'mongol groher jontu' (aliens from the planet Mars). He further shared that from their language, appearance and clothes it was easy to make out that they did not belong to the city. This unfamiliarity could be read from their faces and hence they were easily cheated and misguided by the non tribals in the city. Many respondents claimed that they have experienced high charges being taken from them by the bus conductors in the initial years of their stay because they did not know the charges while traveling in the city. While in search for work, locating the right places was equally a challenge for them. According to respondent Mihir Mandi, *"I never knew that finding places can be so difficult in the city. Through numbers and nearby buildings one has to locate a place in Kolkata, something I never knew. I had to walk kilometers to find a place as most of the time I was lost"*.

Majority of the migrant Santals also shared their experiences of bribing officials to get their tribe certificate as the officials demanded document proof confirming that their fathers and grandfathers were tribes and are Santals. Since producing such document was impossible for them, understanding their helpless situation the non tribal officials demanded heavy bribes to give certificates. They had to offer this despite their limited income so that they were able to apply for government jobs in the city. Sharing a similar kind of experience, few other migrants mentioned that they were in desperate need of ration cards so that ration could be availed to fulfill their everyday requirements using ration cards. This was because ration availed through cards are cheaper in

comparison to the ration bought from the market without the card. Back in their villages they never felt the need of possessing a ration card but in the city they were in dire need of it as their financial situation at that point of time was very unstable or rather poor. Seeing their vulnerable condition, officials took bribes from them to make their ration cards and which they were bound to give so that they could avail ration to meet their daily necessities.

On the one hand, getting a job in the city was a difficult task and on the other, retaining the job was also not easy. In their work place, migrants were mocked at and ridiculed as 'jonglee' (people of the jungle), 'janoar' (animal), 'buddiheen' (brainless) and 'boka handa' (foolish) by their non tribal co-workers. They were made to do more work by their 'malik' (employer) and paid less in comparison to their non tribal co-workers. Respondents also mentioned that in their workplaces they were made to do more physical work as non tribal 'maliks' were of the view that since they were from the jungle, they had less brains and more physical strength.

In this context, the experience of Hari Soren, retired class IV central government employee, of his first job in the city is interesting:

"I was educated. I was higher secondary school pass-out. But after coming to the city, the first work I got was to distribute newspapers door to door. I did that. Although I could do accounts work better as I studied commerce I was never given the task. It was only given to non tribals as my upper caste bengali Malik thought Hasda, Tudu, Murmu, Kisku do not have brains like them."

Thus migrants, despite being educated, always remained in a vulnerable and precarious position till they were in low level jobs, as social hierarchy and relationships in the city played a crucial role if not in gaining access to the jobs, at least in the allocation and performance of tasks in such jobs.

Santali women migrants have also presented interesting narratives of their experiences of being uprooted from their villages and settlement in the city of Kolkata. The first generation women said that moving to the city did not free them from burdens. In fact, they said it increased all the more. They faced problems of food shortages as the amount of ration they were entitled to was not provided to them, there was indebtedness, overworking of their men resulting in their ill health that further increased their problems in the city. However, none of the women said that they went out for work unlike the usual practice in their native villages even if their men's income was not enough to suffice to the family's needs in the city. Women noted that their men did not want them to work because of the unfamiliar surroundings and the fear of being exploited at the work places. The reason: this was the first time the women ventured into any place outside their own native villages. They have had no experience of visiting even the neighbouring village. In contrast, men due to their search for livelihood have always been stepping out of their village before they landed in the city.

Language barrier was also a reason for the men to disallow their women to go out to work in the settlement or in the main city of Kolkata. Because in the initial years most of the women only knew Santali except those few who came from mixed villages having Bengali population, the men thought that their women because of their inability to communicate with the city people might land in a situation where they can get lost or be cheated easily. Men also wanted the women to be at home to take care of their children as the locality was unknown to them. Safety was a major reason for men not willing to send their women for work outside their home. Women therefore never attended the Bengali ceremonies or social gatherings organized in the locality. Women thus spent all the time inside their homes till their men returned from their day's work. Women respondents informed that throughout the day they engaged themselves in doing household works and for recreation they watched television.

Das, & Das (2014) also discusses that on moving to the Tripura main city, women migrants from 'Tripuri' tribe were not able to communicate. This is because the residents of the city spoke mixed Bengal language and the 'Tripuri' tribe women could only speak their local language- Kokborok. Language barrier thus restricted the tribal migrant women from attending functions and social gatherings organized by the non tribal communities (Das, & Das, 2014: 11). Further, most of the first generation Santal women mentioned that they never went to even drop or pick their children from school as their children went to the nearby schools. They either came back home walking or in rickshaw-vans. Thus the first generation Santal women were restricted to a closed world within the confines of their homes after coming to the city, a life they were unaware of back in their villages.

4. 'ASCRIBED NATIVE' IDENTITY OR 'ACHIEVED URBAN' IDENTITY: THE DILEMMA

This section aims to depict how the Santal migrants survive the struggle between twin identities - the ascribed and the achieved. The struggle of interplay of identities in a diverse social milieu such as the city is captured through two aspects. One is with a description of how the conditions of Santal migrants changed over the years since their initial years of settlement in Santragachi. The other is by presenting an account of the impact of migration. The impact is further reflected through a discussion on the increasing financial crisis back in the village and the economic divide that is created between those natives whose families are living in the city and the ones who remained in the village. The section thus presents the perceptions of the natives about the migrants in the city and vice-versa and how they view cultural heterogeneity within the community, again a consequence of migration.

Spending considerable number of years in the city and placed in a surrounding where majority of the people have a lifestyle totally different from the one they follow, the first generation San-

tal migrants seem to have adjusted, if not completely adapted, to the city life. Attainment of the 'achieved' identity is marked by significant changes over the years. From unskilled, daily wage workers to skilled, white collar government services, this upward mobility at the professional and, in turn, the income level had an impact on their status of housing and physical conditions.

A majority (70 percent) of the families are found to live in their own flats/houses in the Adibasi Janakalyan Cooperative Housing Society in Santragachi, land for which was given by the government. About 17.5 percent have built their own independent houses and another 17.5 percent lived in government accommodation. From footpaths, pavements, railway stations, make shift houses (see plate 1) around the railway tracks, low cost mess or small single room dingy flats, the migrant Santal families have shifted to their own flats (see plate 2) or have built single storied houses in their locality. However there were a small number of others who stayed either in government accommodations or in rented flats but in the decent apartments of their locality.

Plate 1: An area of makeshift houses in Santragachi where migrants lived in the initial period of their settlement



Plate 2: Adibashi Janakalyan Cooperative Housing society where migrants bought their own flats



Changes in housing conditions and professions followed change in the way they dressed. Migrants said that they came to the city in 'dopata', their traditional Santali dress, and continued wearing that in the initial years after migration. But today they wear ironed trousers and shirts. Customs and rituals have also undergone change as narrated by the migrants. The celebration of the festivals and community gatherings is definitely not abandoned but undergoing transition. "There is participation in all the occasions but there is a difference between participation and involvement," said Ratan Tudu, a respondent. He noted that the lack of involvement is higher among the second generation. However, there are some who stated that while the community seems to get divided and broken in terms of solidarity and unity in their native villages, in Santragachi, migrants claim to possess a 'collective identity' (Ogbu, 2008), being united and having a sense of community, despite belonging to different native backgrounds. With one another Santal migrants feel secure in the city amidst what they call 'dikus' (outsiders). Therefore the relationship of the community members with one another is cordial and has resemblance to what Tonnies and Harris (2001) called 'gemeinschaft' (the community).

The Santals of Santragachi are very rigid about their identity and they are yet to discard it even while they live in the city. Therefore they are in a

constantly conflicting state of mind. On one hand they have their own native, 'ascribed' identity which according to them they possessed by birth on the other there is their new urban, 'achieved' identity which they want to maintain in order to adjust and be accepted by the city and its people. Interlocked between the two identities, they find themselves in a state of quandary. Respondents shared that living in the city and possessing an urban 'achieved' identity has its own advantages but what disturb their minds is the increasing economic divide back in their native places between those in the city and those who remained in the villages. This according to them has affected their 'ascribed' 'adi' identity as cohesion in the community which use to glorify is no longer there as it used to be in the earlier times.

This, however, is majorly because families in villages have become over dependent on the support received from the migrants in the city. Even if a family is poor and has no land they no longer look for work. Instead they wait for the money to come from their family members who have moved to the city. If money does not reach them on time or for whatever reason if the money order services are delayed or if migrants in the city are not able to send enough money, suffering increases for the family. Some respondents also mentioned that the money that is sent back to the villages almost on a monthly basis has to a certain extent decreased the value of hard work among the natives- something that they as a hardworking community could never have imagined of- despite experiencing poverty. Most of them look forward to the money from the city. This financial support has further led to an uneven increase in the economic standards among families back in their native places. Those having good job and stable earning could send handsome amount of money back to their village and this has created and widened class differences within the native community itself.

When a family in the native village received less amount of money, then that led to two different kinds of disadvantages to both the native and the city dweller. For the native, it meant that there has

been some continuity of chronic poverty and the status of being poor. For the city dweller, it meant that his/her resources to meet the demands in the city life are depleted as a result of sharing some portion to the kins left behind in the village. Thus migration seems to have exacerbated the financial crisis and economic disparity among their extended families in the villages.

However, there is much deeper connotation than mere prevalence of class divisions that the money from the city seems to generate in the native village. Discussing the reasons for the divide, some argued that their decision to shift to the city to a great extent was dependent on the economic condition and the connections of the families with friends or relatives and their families settled in the city. Even for migration to the city, the family needs to have some economic and social capability. As Nandu Soren, a respondent, suggests, "My family should have the capability to afford my moving to a new place". Another migrant from Jharkhand and a retired class III central government employee of the railway department, Kartik Hembrom, said that if a family decided to send a member or members to a big city like Kolkata, they either sold their land or mortgaged jewellery of the women members in the house or land or took loan from either the rich non tribal landowners or from their well off relatives, friends, co-villagers. But that only happened when the families felt that they would be able to pay back the loan or get back their mortgaged jewellery or land or other possessions. According to the respondents, there are families till date could not pay back their loan or get back their land or jewellery even after they settled in the city.

Further, some families took the risk when a number of their members had some level of education which they thought would be a savior in the city life. Education gave confidence to the families that their members would be able to earn well and clear the debts of the families. Those who were illiterate or not educated enough could not take chance. They either managed their living coping with the crisis in the village or migrated to nearby

small towns or villages of neighbouring districts to have an earning and yet not bear heavy expenses of migration.

Migration also had a deep impact on the minds of their own families, relatives, friends or co-villagers who could not come to the city. Natives' perception of the migrants and vice versa is leading to disunity among the members of the community and affecting their 'ascribed' identity. This is because members of Santal community no matter where they lived always considered themselves part of a larger extended family which in the recent times has become doubtful.

Rashik Hembrom observes that the status difference is actually affecting their relations and activities in the village. Families like his, whose most members have moved to the city, are maintaining good relations with the neighbours, relatives, friends and co-villagers at their native place as their support is required in cultivation activities – be it for ploughing or at the time of the harvest. Hembrom, however, felt that, over the years, the impact of migration to the city has been such that it has reduced cooperation on the part of those living in the village in farming or at the time of harvest, as villagers felt that the additional farming income would make the migrants richer.

Thus the impact of migration is seen producing and reproducing inequalities in varied ways in the native village. The situation in the villages affect the migrants as well and they seem to be in a state of dilemma whether to maintain their connection with the native land and protect their native 'ascribed' identity or adapt to their urban existence to sustain their 'achieved' identity. Given the changing scenario in the villages, many first generation migrants felt that they do not want to move back to their native land permanently they as they want their family to live in a 'good environment', meaning access to basic facilities, better living standards and a social status which are not available in the villages. But at the same time they are worried as they feel that if they did not fulfill reciprocal obligations like financing community

feasts, bringing gifts or contributing in the community welfare funds, the support network in their native place might get eroded, which seems equally unacceptable to them.

An important additional aspect to this issue as expressed by the first generation migrants is their second generation paying annual visits to the village or attending some family occasions but their participation and involvement in the rituals and customs is minimal and their attachment for the village and its culture is negligible due to urban upbringing. This according to the migrants has increased the gap between those living in the village and those who have moved and settled in the city. Migrants also informed that when they pay visits to the village, they no longer have long chats with friends and relatives in the village. The feeling is the same for those in the village as well. The respondents noted that their relatives and friends in the village felt equally hesitant and uncomfortable to speak to them. In many families the attachment of the migrants is thus limited to the immediate family members only. Migrant Santals' clothes, shoes, preference for food, the way they speak and the subject they talk about have also widened the distance. Thompson (2007) also argues through his study conducted in Kampung village, Malaysia, that 'both the return migrants as well the native residents experience a high degree of alienation with each other and often do not feel comfortable engaging in relationships of long term mutual reciprocity' (Thompson, 2007: 111).

CONCLUSION

To recapitulate and conclude, the stories of migration highlight that the Santals of Santragachi left their native places out of economic and cultural misery and have moved to the city in order to improve their conditions of life. However, one important characteristic that differentiates this group from many other tribal groups displaced and dispossessed from their native lands is that this group is better educated in comparison to those who are impoverished and are displaced due to neoliberal

corporate capitalism triggered by the state and the market. This bunch is educated, mostly secondary education or even beyond that, from within the state of West Bengal and the neighbouring states of Jharkhand, Bihar, and Odisha. Their movement towards the 'city of hope' is mainly a consequence of education and aspiration for better life, opportunities and education of their children. This particular group of Santal migrants thus defies the usual stereotype of tribal migrant communities: ignorant, 'uncivilized' or 'rustic' and without any literacy as often portrayed and talked about in the popular media.

On arriving to the city, the social/community networks helped the first-generation Santals to gain a foothold in the city. The networks acted as a protecting agency within Santragachi and in the city of Kolkata to cope with the miseries and struggles migrants confronted in their settlement phase. It is this that contributed to making Santragachi a 'ghetto' of Santals. It may be noted that the emergence of the Santal 'ghetto' in Santragachi is a result of a unique situation. On one hand it is a consequence of the migrants' everyday experiences of exclusion, subjugation and marginalization that they confronted in their initial phase of settling down in the city. On the other, the 'ghetto' formed is also to create a dissenting minority and discern the domination of the non tribal Bengali community in the city. The residential flats of the Santali Welfare Housing Apartments in Santragachi thus fulfill the tribe's need to coherently sustain and maintain their ethnic identity and cultural integrity-continuity in the city.

The discussions presented in the paper thus suggest that the identity of the Santals is torn between their native roots of being a tribe and the newly acquired urban social world as they settle as residents of a city. Santal migrants seem to negotiate and recreate both the worlds that help them emotionally, socially and psychologically confront and deal with peculiar social situations that may arise from the native land and the newly acquired home of the city.

Notes:

1. Peter Freebody (2003) discusses that "expedient selection is the procedure in which the sample respondents are selected on the basis of their availability and their suitability for the inquiry perhaps because they are interested, are engaged in relevant activities, show characteristics of interest to the study or perceive problems relevant to the terms of the study" (Freebody, 2003: 78).
2. Santragachi is part of the Howrah Municipal Corporation and has come to aggregate some of the smaller neighbourhoods such as Ramrajatala, Jagacha, Buxarah, Unsani, Garhpa to form substantially larger area of Santragachi (Government of West Bengal, 2012: 8). This extended locality of Santragachi became the destination for many migrants and specifically tribal migrants from different parts of West Bengal and the neighbouring states of Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha to explore their fortunes and opportunities which they assume would come their way and would subsequently mitigate their disadvantage and deprivation of their native lands.
3. Same number of migrant families was also found to be settled as per the Santragachi police station records, which the researcher accessed during her fieldwork.
4. Louis Wirth (1927) observes that in American cities a ghetto is a place where the poorest and most backward groups of immigrants find their home. Ghettos are formed as a result of prolonged isolation and are also regarded as form of accommodation that emerges as a consequence of minority migrants being subordinated by the dominant group (Wirth, 1927: 57-58). On the contrary in Western Europe, ghettos are formed as migrants tend to sustain their culture and maintain its integrity and continuity while they settle in an unknown habitat (Wirth, 1927: 58). Thus ghetto is not, as is sometimes mistakenly believed, "the arbitrary creation of authorities, designed to deal with alien people. Rather it is the result of the unwitting crystallization of needs and practices rooted in the customs and heritage, religious and secular, of the immi-

grants themselves" (Wirth, 1927: 59). The Santal settlement of Santragachi is formed due to the existence of both such conditions of being marginalized by the dominant Bengali community and also more importantly because of the tribe's urge for cultural continuity to uphold their tribal identity within the urban space they have settled.

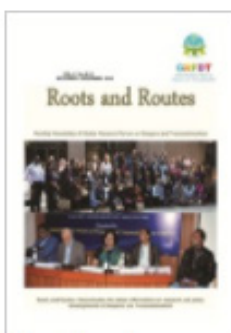
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GRFDT NEWSLETTER

***Roots and Routes* disseminates the latest information on research and policy developments in Diaspora and trans**

Newsletters



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Roots and Routes is a monthly newsletter of the Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT). It is inclusive of articles, book reviews and news analysis, which help in disseminating latest information on research and policy development in Diaspora and Transnationalism. The newsletter enjoys readership of academicians, policy experts, diaspora think tanks etc.

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Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT) is a consortium of researchers and policy makers drawn from national and international universities, institutes and organizations. GRFDT is presently based in India and is shaping as the largest such group focusing specifically on the issues related to diaspora and transnationalism.

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