

Incidence of Crime and Parental Behaviour for character buildings among Santals : A Qualitative Judgment

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ABSTRACT

A child borne innocent and if nourished with tender care and attention, he or she will blossom with faculties physical, mental, moral and spiritual, into a person of stature and excellence. On the other hand, noxious surroundings, neglect of basic needs, bad company and other abuses and temptations would spoil the child and likely to turn him a delinquent. Thus children being an important asset, every effort should be made to provide them equal opportunities for development so that they become robust citizens physically fit, mentally alert and morally healthy endowed with the skills and motivations needed by society. As is often said, the child of today is the citizen of tomorrow, the criminal tendency in youngsters must, therefore, be timely curbed so that they do not turn into habitual criminals in their future life. When the whole world is suffering from the problem related to childhood development, the Santals, a tribal community rendering the responsibility of child development peacefully. Their social organisation provides the protection to the children from such social evils.

In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss the factors responsible for proper development of children in Santal community. It is also discussed the role of the social organisation of Santal community to provide sustainable support to build the future of the nation.

Keywords: Character buildings, Santal Social Organisation, Parental Behaviour

Parental behavior has been regarded as a factor on the development of delinquent behavior among adolescents. The relationship between parenting behavior and juvenile delinquency in Indian urban boys from low-income families was studied in a matched control setting. It was revealed that there were higher levels of permissive parenting in the households to which delinquent adolescents belonged to. It was indicated adolescents from low-income families initiated the adolescents to take up different kinds of jobs to increase the family income. The job environment contributed in initiation of delinquent behaviors, but the parents had to allow those behaviors as the adolescents earned (Moitra, Mukherjee, & Chatterjee, 2018).

Investigation of the relation between state level juvenile crime rate related to property and the prosperity of different Indian states showed that the per capita state income had a non-linear impact on incidences of juvenile crime rate across Indian states. As a poor state became relatively richer, both opportunities to commit crime and returns from property crime increased. However, as the state became even richer, employment opportunities also increased. The state facilities including rehabilitation and redistribution also improved as the states got richer. Hence, the incidences of juvenile crime increased when the income started growing for relatively poorer states. But, when state income per capita increased further, diminishing rate in increase

of juvenile crime rate was observed. (Dutta, Jana, & Kar, 2019).

In a large scale cross-sectional study conducted in Goa, India, among rural and urban communities, suicidal behavior among youth (16–24 years) was found to be associated with female gender, low level of schooling, independent decision making, incidence of premarital sex, physical abuse at home, and life time experience of sexual abuse. Gender segregated analysis found that factors like independent decision making, rural residence, premarital sex were associated with suicidal behavior among females. CMD, physical abuse in one's, sexual abuse were significant factors for male as well as female youths. Alcohol use was an independent risk factor. (Pillai, Andrews, and Patel 2008)

The SAFE model is a rights-based, holistic model of child security. The SAFE model situates child protection within social ecologies of family, community and historical cultural context. The model examines interconnectedness among four core domains of children's basic needs and rights. These domains are: Safety/freedom from harm; Access to basic physiological needs and healthcare; Family and connection to others; Education and economic security. The most important idea under SAFE model is that the insecurity in any of these fundamental domains threatens security in the others. The model also pointed out that children and families demonstrate considerable agency in the face of child security threats by adopting survival strategies (Betancourt *et al.* 2010).

However, the survival strategies adopted by families may take risky forms or adaptive forms. Risky form of strategies is those strategies, which in turn create negative effects on other dimensions of child security and well-being. For example, a family facing economic insecurity may give their child over to bonded child labor contractor while another family may try to secure a loan to start a small business. The intention behind employing the SAFE model is to spot and strengthen adaptive strategies and to highlight risky strategies for designing preventive interventions and providing

alternatives for protecting the children (Betancourt *et al.* 2012).

Development needs of children are often ignored when families are pressed for household survival. The family's decision to migrate to secure their livelihood often had consequences for their children's security (Orellana *et al.* 2001).

Among the migrating families in construction site in India, sense of community solidarity and social support were important sources of risk alleviation and safety for children at the site. Conflicts among workers were insignificant despite difficulties with wages, poor living conditions, and lack of health care facilities, and access to other services. The crèche, if provided at construction site, serve as a protective role that had broader implications for families. The crèche provided secure and caring environment for small children during the day, allowing parents to work. Although not designed to replace school, the crèche provided younger children a chance to develop cognitive, motor, and language skills which were important for their school readiness (Betancourt *et al.* 2013).

Parental behavior and expression of emotions play an important role in children's peer relationship. Exposure to parental violence (EPV) and warmth of the parents were found to be associated in Indian parents. Even among impoverished families with high levels of EPV, parental warmth tends to be associated with peer relations. Observed harshness worsened peer relations (Narayan *et al.* 2015).

When children are brought up in vulnerable conditions, they tend to learn less. Consequently, their educational outcomes tend to be low, when compared to those children who did not face the disadvantage of dealing with vulnerability. Quality early childhood education and care can break the cycle of disadvantage and transform the lives of the individual child. In this perspective, the ideas and understanding of frontline service providers were instrumental in molding everyday practice which enables the children to transform their lives (Roberts 2015).

Self-report studies in Sweden have shown that almost 50 percent of parents fall victim to theft

and burglary crimes committed by their children. The risk of victimization varied depending on the parents and children's circumstances. The rate of victimization was higher among older parents who had children with severe drug problems and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The rate of committing crime was higher among children who were currently taking drugs, younger children and children were living at home. Parents of adult drug addicted children ran a higher risk of being subjected to property crime by the children (Johnson, Richert, and Svensson 2018).

Factors influencing low incidence of crime and Juvenile Crime among Santals

Value Education

The respondents felt that most of the Santals parents would appreciate the importance of education and they would send their children to nearby primary schools. Language barrier would be a challenge that most Santal children faced irrespective of their state or district or residence. Very few schools could use Snatali as a medium of instruction in West Bengal. Even though the children cope with this problem of language, fewer adolescents and youth could continue upto a higher level. Since colleges and universities were located in urban areas and almost all Santal habitations are in remote rural areas, it would not be possible for most of the adolescents to go to the college. Financial constraint is another challenge for most of these families. As a result most of the Santal children would drop out even before they complete the secondary schooling. Despite the inability of the Santal parents to provide high level of formal education to their children, there would not be any shortfall of value education for their children. These value education were embedded in the conduct of the parents and grandparents, in the daily interaction with other people, in the culture and festivals of the Santals. All these elements built the moral character of the Santal children. The value education the received develop their mind set up in such way that it would debar the Santal children or adults from committing nuisance in the society.

The importance of the value education was summed up by one Santal NGO personnel in this way. *"Mulya bodher sikha schooler sikshar theke onek besi kaj kore. Amader somaje parthib jinisher sunnota besi, kintu manasik sunnota kom. Refreshment, entertainment er babostha aache samajik prokriar madhyame.... tai crime korar jonno vabnar abokash kom."* (The value education functions much more than the school education. In our society, materialistic things are not in abundance, but mental emptiness is very less. The systems of refreshment and entertainment are in built in social processes hence people does not have much scope to think about crime).

Women's Position in the Society

It was pointed out by key persons that women were the driving force of a Santal family. They could work, earn and maintain their family even single handed even if the male members were not productive. So the women are more empowered in their family compared to the men. As the men found that their well-being was under the control of women, a concern about women was found among them. Men were not necessarily always active in their family but an inherent respect from the part of the men was naturally found for their women members.

It was also pointed out by key persons that the women's status of this society is much higher than men in comparison with so called advanced society. Girls would be welcome just like a male child in their society. No incident of female foeticide has been found in this society. There was no dowry system. Moreover, the bridegroom's family would pay a few pennies to the bridegroom's family during marriage as a symbol of gratefulness. The family would become isolated by other villagers if they accepted dowry. Even the unmarried elderly women would have the right over property in her family.

Due to such treatment of women, a Santal society could be treated as an ideal for others. One of the respondents, a Santal teacher, commented that "a tribal society deliver a message to the entire nation for the empowerment of women which may definitely be the remedy of a large number of social tensions".

All these systems minimise the chance of criminal acts against the women in the Santal society. As adults followed these rules the same were also imbibed in the behaviour of the children and transferred to next generation.

High Morale despite Economic Obstacles

According to the respondents, most of the Santal families were poor in terms of income or materialistic wealth. Although few individuals would get higher education and get employed in organised sector, most of them would have to depend on physical labour for income. Despite several economic and financial obstacles, their moral would remain always high. It was quite convenient for Santal community that they would largely depend upon their ability to work rather than showing themselves as helpless. They would seek assistance from others only in exceptional or extreme circumstances. They would hardly accept the way of theft or begging.

It would be better to quote the words of the Santal NGO personnel again : *“Adibasi somajer chelera khete khabeKintu churi kore khabe, vikha kore khabe ei tendency nei.... Ehkane economic poistion ke kom gurtto deoa hoy.”* (Tribal boys would be ready to give manual labour to survive. But they don't have tendency to steal or to beg. Here less importance is given to the economic position of a family.) Another key person, an Inspector of Police who served long time in areas having many Santal villages, mentioned, *“Panjabis don't beg, Germans don't want to lose the game, Santals don't think to steal other's property”*. He pointed out that the common reasons for Panjabis, Germans, and Santals was race-consciousness; to remain proud of one's lineage.

Another key person pointed out that the Santal society was driven by community consciousness. He mentioned, *“chapkiye barelatar...muchdo dunguth dungu”* (As the ants come together from a banyan tree, we'll also go all along throughout the life.) When they would go for hunting of animal or fish, the leader and the youngest child would get the same quantity of their share. It gradually grew the sense of racial distinctiveness.

It was pointed out that this type of morale actually originated from their own family. The Santal children observed that her or his parents, and, when they grew up, they also tried to follow the similar behaviour and attitude.

Distance from Mainstream Society

Key respondents also pointed out that Santals and many other tribal communities were one of the original inhabitants of India. They concentrated themselves in certain specific areas and continued to depend on nature. They loved living peacefully and had little expectation or demand unlike many other mainstream communities. Hence they could live without noticeable intervention from Government and the complex politics of the state. As they were conservative in nature, they tended to confine themselves preferably in the areas which were free from both social and political disturbances. Even in modern days, they would migrate to other places in search of job but would settle in a place if they would found the place peaceful.

On the other hand, another key person pointed out the so called mainstream communities thought themselves developed and never liked to interact with dark complexion Santals, who were simple and lacked lack of formal education. The notion, that whitish complexion were more developed and intelligent, actually strengthened the tendency of maintaining the distance.

The social and psychological distance between the Santals and mainstream society actually helped in reducing the tendency of crime. In the words of Mr M, *“Adibasira ekhono borno-boisoymyo -er sikar. Tai era opomaner bhoye nijeder unnoto omaj (jekhane siksha, crime o corruption besi) theke dure soriye rakhte bhalobase. Aar tai tara oporadh thekeo soriye rakche nijeder ojantei ”* Tribes are till date victims of skill colour based discrimination. They fear being looked down by the mainstream communities (who had higher level of formal education and crime), and hence prefer to be keep the distance. Therefore, the tribes, without realising the implication, kept themselves distant from crime.

Freedom from Competitive Mentality and Unrealistic Expectations

It was pointed out by the key respondents that Santals carried a culture which was far more advanced than the so called modern society in terms of thinking and spirituality. Like other communities, they would not want to grab the thing whatever they like, because they shared a faith on beauty over continuum, sustainability and natural balance. Hence, to meet up the scarcity, they did not think about committing theft or other crime. They would not force their children to have a competitive mentality nor would adapt to for them to be rich at any cost. They would also not compare one with others.

One of the key respondents pointed out that the Santals tended to be poor but each of them would helps others. They shared a feeling of equality among themselves. They were not greedy. During marriage ceremony if one had gifted a metal jug, the same would be given back by the earlier recipient during same occasion of the earlier donor. As a result, he told, "*Santal cheleder ambition khub besi noi. Chahida kom. Tai hotasha Santal der modheye kom. Atmasantushti besi*". Ambition of Santal children is not high. Their desire is not very high. Hence they suffer less from the despair and frustration. Self satisfaction is higher in them. Hence tendency to involve in crime and corruption is less among them.

Advancement of Society in terms of Sexuality

Some of the key respondents pointed out that Santals were much advanced than other Indian communities in terms of sexuality. Girls are married as adults mostly to men of their own choice. In Santal marriage, there is no restriction of age. The bride may be younger, older or of equal age with bridegroom. There are two types of marriage practiced by Santals- the marriage arranged by Raibar (match maker) is the regular form of marriage. Couple themselves arranges the other forms of marriages.

The example of Chata Parob / Baha Parob festival was cited by the at least two key respondents. During these festivals, young male and female

would be free to mix with each other. They would share their mind with each other. Many of them would choose their life partner during these festivals. But after marriage they would be expected to bind to remain responsive to each other. There remained no scope of adultery. If adultery was found then, then the person would be outcast from their society. Such marriage norms and festivals were seen by the symbol of advancement of a society in terms of sexuality.

These systems and norms allow the Santal youths to take decision on choosing their life partners responsibly. This was an important factor in reducing propensity of crime against women and also to deter the child to commit sexual offense.

Child Protection inbuilt in Santali Culture

One of the key respondents, a university professor, pointed out that the concept of child protection already existed among Santals. They used to follow a ritual of "*janan chatiar*", which the youngest member of the family, is given a name. "*Chacho Chatiar*" - is another ritual for protecting and taking care of a 4/5 years child so that the child may not deviate , spoil or become a criminal, offender or harmful or cause of social tension to the society. In this ritual, adult members of the family and the community members take oath by surroundings the child that they would be with the child throughout the life in a collective manner. This ceremony is very important as it enables the individual to take his place in Santal society and participate in its rights, rules and ceremonies. Without this no Santal can be married or cremated.

This ceremony enables the young child to take his place in Santal society and participate in its rights, rules and ceremonies. Without this, a Santal child would never be able to get married or cremated.

Thus it was found that the Santals were very much sensitive about the vulnerability of the child. They knew from their experience that children would be influenced by the adults and the social environments. They valued the human life and believed that the children had the right and potential to grow into a good and responsible member who would also

take care of their tradition and would protect the children of their community.

Social Monitoring System

The key respondents pointed out that the Santals followed a social monitoring system in their villages. Each of the Santal villages were almost independent social and political entities characterised by great cohesion. Each village had very well established socio-political organization. A secular headman called Majhi headed the village. He was a man of great prestige. The entire social system of the Santals was controlled by village council. Generally, the village council was headed by *Majhi* (village headman) who were assisted by *Jog Majhi* (Deputy village Headman), *Paranik* (Assistant to village Headman), *Goddet* (secretary to village Headman), *Jog Paranik* (deputy *Paranik*), *Naeke* (head village priest) and *Kudam Naeke* (Assitant to village priest). All the villagers were member of the village council. Female take part and place their opinion equally at council, village meeting.

Village council usually settled all the disputes of the villages. Santal community as a whole maintained certain uniform customs and rules with relation to marriage, divorce, birth etc. *Paranik* and *Jogparanik* would responsible to look after all the boys and girls whether they are going to face any difficulty or danger; they take care of their all round mental up-gradation. It was pointed out that Santals were comparatively open regarding mixing of boys and girls. If a girl became pregnant, the young man by whom she became would bind to marry her. Generally the boy would inform informs the *Jog Majhi* of his offence and the girl would confess it to wife of *Jog Majhi*.

Due to existence of social monitoring system, the children of the Santal families get better guidance. They would also understand the implication of criminal acts. This was pointed out as a factor in low crime rate among Santals.

Smaller Family Size

One of the key respondents, a NGO personnel, mentioned that the Santals had comparatively

smaller family size. He pointed out that average no of offspring of one couple is more or less three. This practice had been continuing for many generations which indicated a unique sustainability of family planning by primitive society and also a way of keeping natural balance. On the other hand, in many of so called advanced society the family size was much bigger even in current generation.

As a result, the parents did not have to be involved in anti-social activities, just to feed their child. As the financial worry was lesser, they could give much better quality attention and value education to their children. Thus, the smaller family norm had indirectly helped the Santals in reducing the chance of getting involved in criminal activities.

Less Influence of Media

As the key respondents pointed out, the Santal children and Santal families are less influenced by media. Due to poor economic condition, many Santal households also don't have TV. There are very few newspapers in Santal (Ol Chiki) script. The programmes aired in electronic media like TV or Internet in Santali language is still rare. As a result, Santal children's exposure to the media is quite less than other mainstream communities. It was argued by key respondents that less influence of the media is a factor in low rate of crime among Santals.

Oral Religious Tradition

One of the key respondents, a Santal Preist (*Naeke*), pointed to the religious tradition of traibals and non-tribal communities. It was argued that Santals don't have a book of religion like Bible or Quoran. They followed a religious tradition which was orally transferred from generation to generation. Their Gods were all present in Nature and they do not worship the Gods in places like temples or mosques which had many restrictive rules especially regarding entry and prayer. Compared to these dominant religions, the Santal's religion is quite simple. There existed little scope for reinterpretation and misinterpretation of their religious beliefs. So the scope for manipulation the mind of Santals in name of religion also got limited. They, naturally,

did not fight or get involved in crimes which could be instigated in the name of religion.

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