

DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CULTURE

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Culture is precisely the medium through which individuals express their ability to fulfill themselves and is therefore an integral part of development.

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Today we have gathered to celebrate the 25th year of new way of looking and acting in Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati. It all started with one man coming to know another man; One man narrating his story to another man. The listener thought he would visit and understand them more. He went there, began to acquaint with his family. He encountered a community; He deeply respected them. He allowed them to grow and walked with the community though he is a proclaimed individualist; his solidarity is exceptional and today the development speaks for itself.

Martin da's relationship and interaction with Sona's family set off a spark that keeps lighting individuals and community still today. Building up a community starts with the small relationships. Individuals so touched and developed become torch bearers of change to large numbers of people. Initially, Martin Da would have wondered aloud whether I have come to meet Sona or Sona's family, or Sona's extended clan. The web of relationship he came across may have intrigued him but also afforded the opportunity to have a closer look into values they attach to these relationships. Martin Da once had mentioned in one his article that ceremonies, community honour, often take precedence over what other society would call economic development.

The first lesson we learn is:

- (1) Our web of relationship that we call kinship is the first stair that we must step on in tribal society into our development journey. We among Santals first of all do not ask the name but inquire about the place of residence, and clan. An insider or outsider, a friend or well wisher somehow must be accommodated into this web. The normal gatherings, ceremonial gatherings are often occasions to dissect meaning of new proposals, new programmes and the new way of working that we want infuse for the development of the community. These must be meaningful to the clan and their way of life. In tribal society such kinship (sagai) extends to the realm of supernatural and ecological surrounding. A meaningful intervention to bring about a change always requires deeper, empathetic and indeed emic understanding of the complex web of meaning in relationships, belief systems and values that frames our relationship to the world. Ghosaldanga Trust has laid importance to this factor of the culture. Gaining confidence, understanding the meaning of relationships, honouring of kinship has been integral part of our development journey.

Let us explore the story further to draw more from the experiences:

One of the major features of Santal culture is the consensual form of government built on the foundation of ancestral heritage (Hapramkoak Dastur). Whenever people gather to discuss, deliberate on issues, happenings, the Dastur is both active and being actualized. In these moments, the council-in-five (more horko) embodies the Dastur and carry to the future. The process is important to feel a sense of belonging affirming one's own identity. Consensus is not merely intellectual assent to a present question but also a way to negotiate the challenges posed to the tradition. Hence gathering of a village community alone actualizes the dynamic presence of the Hapramkoak dastur.

Hence the second lesson is

(2) Development process not only affirms the consensual governance system but also interrogates the system's ability to face and negotiate the present. Hence, the way to development is to capacitate the consensual governance system. That is what has been happening though the last 25 years here. While the political Party system brought certain amount of economic benefits and political mobilization increasing the ethnic assertion it could not contribute to the reformulation of the ethnic governance structure. Santal community had to come back to its own mechanisms for resolving conflicts. The trust has been very active in promoting the traditional leadership in decision making process, organizational structure. The Santal culture says that process is as important as the final product. The process may slow down the decision making but it promoted high participation.

Once I was talking to Leena didi on her health work among women. Today the women's groups, various aspects of their development have attained manifold importance. Leena told me that a health worker has to have a deeper knowledge of the role played by women in building up of family and her status within the clan system.

Hence our third lesson is:

(3) Women's hours of work, possibilities of their playing greater role in the development, relatively higher status in comparison to their caste counterparts come into the picture while planning for women's development. In order to increase their status, accessibility to common property resources is very essential. Today all over Santal Parganas, women's group are flourishing and making marks in the development of the tribe. They carry bow and arrow, become more mobile with the cycle; play drums in the dance programmes thus assert their due social positions. Such developmental process shall become the countervailing power to their being branded as witch or spoilers of family etc. I think women's development programme will make our culture respond to the modern times.

Manotan Subhan Marandi, a retired school teacher from Pakur and a great exponent of Santal culture who died in the month of December whose Bhandan will be celebrated on 18th February used to say "aricali do arsigea" Our culture is the mirror. We look at the mirror not only to know how we look but also to correct ourselves; decorate ourselves. Two most important parts of this mirror are: parsi and paris (language and clan) it is claimed that tribal languages are only dialect and cannot cope up with the explosion of information. Now we know Santali is a highly developed one. One scholar puts it thus "Considering the fact that all these thousands of years

Santali has been mostly a spoken language, it is highly developed. Compared with it, some languages of Arian descent seem still adolescent” (George Muscate: Santali New Approach). Hence our fourth lesson is:

(4) Our RSV has shown that language could flower and indeed highly conceptual knowledge could be imparted through skillful handling of Santali. Dominant languages often stifle the flourishing of the languages. An individual is fulfilled in and through the mediums available in culture. Highly symbolic words, idioms often disappear due to the changes in the environment. RSV’s efforts and the group’s contribution will make a difference to the development of Santali. Song & dramas in the Delhi, innovative fusion of Baul and Santali tunes by Rathin, provides field for assertion of identity with dignity. Growing body of literature in Santali attests to the dynamic nature of the language. Debates on Indian civilization shall always remain inconclusive if tribal reality and the growth of the parsi and paris are not taken into account. The development of community then has tremendous influence on the larger society thus affirming the saying: the poor alone shall bring about transformation”

In one of our sharing with Gokul and Boro they pointed out that Santals were flocking to CPM because of their intimate relationship with land. We know historically Santals have been deprived of the resources which they nourished by their hard labour. Natural resources and cycle of agriculture is the core around which community has been built and cultural elements manifested. Sohrae and Baha, are the biggest and most sacred festivals. Hence efforts at resuscitation of natural resources, increasing production through organic methods point to creation of sufficient life goods. Such utilization of resources not only aims at maximizing productions but also secure a dignified way of life. But the best of all such resource mobilization acts as a protest against the faulty policies

The fifth lesson we draw is

(5) Ghosaldanga Bishnubati Adibasi Trust’s efforts to mobilize the Natural resources are commendable. There was a time 40 people were suffering from Tuberculosis. Their efforts have paid off. We have reached to this phase slowly and steadily with the full participation of the people. It is indeed a community developing itself. Such a development process stands in contrast to agricultural policies framed by the government favouring industrial agriculture. By increasing productions, looking after the food security, Sohrae has meaning and Janthar becomes alive to the community. They also stand as a protest to Macro policies marginalizing the marginal farmers followed by the government. 70% of hungry people are from marginal farmers, indigenous people and fishing community. Trust’s way is not only reduce the poverty but with dignity bring about transformation.

I would like to sum up:

Culture is a dynamic force, source of identity innovation and creativity. Santals show much appreciation if we respect kinship system to earn the confidence of the people, understand the relationality in the culture, promote consensual governance structure for participation; bring women to change negative attitudes, create atmosphere for the language to grow and develop and mobilize the natural resources to stand as protest and bargain for political power.

I congratulate all the functionaries of the trust and wish all the best in their future endeavours.