

Multiculturalism and Academic Libraries: a case study of Santal Tribe of West Bengal, India

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Abstract:

Multiculturalism is a very important concept in library and information science, and it has emerged recently. The Santal tribes are one of the largest tribal groups in South Asia and Santali female students are not much progressive. Therefore, to bring them in the mainstream, and to socially include them there, the academic libraries play an important role. A college library has been chosen to demonstrate how these students are helped by the librarian and his staff to be made socially inclusive. The role of this library in solving the multicultural issue is reflected in this paper.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Santal, Information need, Tribal habitats, Literate environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Santals are one of the largest tribal groups in South Asia and the largest tribe in India. Approximately 645 tribes live in India amounting to 8.6% of the total population as per census report 2011. In West Bengal, 5.5% of the total population is tribal. Among them nearly 51.8% are Santals.

FEMALE STUDENTS:

According to 2011 census report, India has a literacy rate of 72.99%. But among the tribal people only 58.96% are literate. Male – Female literacy gap is on 19.18 percentage points among tribal people. In male dominant societies, the scope of female study is generally limited by various social and economic obligations. Their voice is more or less suppressed always. Therefore we choose female students specifically to get their point of view. Student – stands for one who has completed 12 years of formal education and admitted in first year of her undergraduate study.

We have chosen the academic library called Netaji Mahavidyalaya (afterwards will be called 'the college'), Arambagh, Hooghly, West Bengal, India as our place of the study for some obvious reasons as follows: a). Geographical advantage: Many Santal students come to the college for their graduate level education.

b). Academic advantage: Apart from the geo-positional advantage, the college has an academic advantage also. The college has introduced a major in Santali language. Many Santal students from faraway places come here to study the course.

c). Hostel facilities: The College has two separate boy's and girl's hostel for these students. Apart from these two, there are two scheduled tribe hostels in the locality. So many Santal students live in these hostels for their study.

d). The college library, apart from regular services provides some community centered services to the students and other members of the community thereby increasing the chance of interaction among the members of the community in a great way.

2. Research Methodologies adopted:

1. Confidence building measure: As we were intending to conduct the survey among the tribal girl students, who were shy in nature, so we have to first win their confidence. Unless, we have won their confidence, they would not answer our questions.
2. A detailed interview survey method and discussion were adopted to get the detailed answers.

3. Components of interview:

Part I: Background information: Background information of the candidates consists of elements like family education, economic condition of the family, health and family planning awareness, distance of home from necessary facilities etc. These are important as they help to understand the nature of responses they provide regarding the perceived threat or problems.

Part II: Identifying the information needs: Survey population was asked to identify their major information requirements.

Part III: Identifying the channels or the sources of information:

4. Findings and Discussions:

PART I: Findings of the background study:

- We have chosen 30 Santal female college students for the purpose of our study. We have chosen two third of the total population (42) of female Santal students enrolled in the college.
- The sample was chosen randomly.
- The sample was divided into four age groups as 19 - 20, 20 – 25, 26 – 30 and 'Above 30' (Please insert Table – 1). In India the normal age when a student usually gets enrolled in college is 17 – 20.
- We have found only 6 students (20%) in the age group 19 – 20, 15 students (50%) in the age group 20 – 25, 6 students (20%) in the age group 26 – 30, 1

student (3.33%) in the age group 'above 30'. 2 students (6.67%) are not quite sure of their date of birth.

- We studied the distance from their home to the nearest point of essential facilities like primary education, secondary education, college education, health center facilities and market place.
- The minimum health care facilities are available at a distance of 3 km away from their place of residence. For major cases, they need to go at least 6 km for a hospital.
- The average distance for the market place is 5.2 km away from their place of residence. The market place is an important part and parcel of their life as used to sell their product at these market places and purchase their required commodities. (The concept of market place is different because it is not open all day a week. The market place usually opens only once in a week and called 'hat').
- Next, we have considered the literate environment, which usually helps a young child to be educated. We studied the education of the family especially of the parents of the respondents.
- In case of a literate environment, it is seen that 15 fathers (50%) are illiterate and 23 mothers (76.66%) are illiterate. 03 fathers (10%) attained the education in the primary level whereas only 1 mother (3.33%) attained the primary level education. 7 fathers (23.33%) attained the secondary level education and 06 mothers (20%) attained the secondary level education. 04 fathers (13.33%) reached the higher secondary level education but no mother received the higher secondary level education. Only 01 father (3.33%) graduated and received college level education but no mother attained the college level.
- We have studied the economic condition of the population as it is a very influential factor in determining the other things like education, standard of living etc.
- It is found that only 04 fathers (13.33%) are engaged in government service which provides a steady income. 12 fathers (40%) are engaged in cultivation, 09 fathers (30%) are engaged as agricultural laborers. 05 fathers (16.66%) died thereby there is no income from father's side. 27 mothers (90%) are home makers, 02 mothers (6.66%) work as agricultural laborers.
- We studied the house condition of the population (Please insert Table 5). It is found that 26 homes (86.67%) are mud walled and only 04 houses (13.33%) are brick walled. Only 12 houses (40%) are electrified and 18 houses (60%) are not electrified. Only 04 houses (13.33%) have some sanitation system at their home. 03 homes have their own drinking water sources at home. Television is considered as an informative as well as an entertainment medium in modern society. Only 02 houses have the television set in their home. 14 households have the radio. 22 candidates have their own mobile but only one of them can access internet.

Part II: Findings of the Information Need Study

- The respondents expressed their information need on nine areas which we renamed as follows: local information; financial and economic information; academic information; employment related information; advanced academic career information; sports related information; health related information and entertainment related information.

- 26 respondents out of 30 students studies in the college by staying in either hostel or other accommodations outside their house. They all expressed this type of information requirements. Primarily they seek information regarding availability of cheap stay options or subsidised stay options like government ST hostel or college ST hostels. Usually they do not prefer neither seek information of private stay options. After this stay option, they seek information upon local Santal habitats. It is often seen that they find out any of their distant relatives in these habitats. It provides them the psychological support in living outside their home. Once, these two are settled they become interested in local markets – from where they can get their food and vegetables. It is worth mentioning here that these students prefer cooking their food themselves.
- The second most sought after information area is the financial and economic information. In this segment, respondents mostly want the information on various social grants earmarked for the scheduled tribes and students – which can be easily availed. Apart from it, they used to seek information on general scholarship schemes which can be availed to all students based upon their merit. They also seek concession related information which can provide them cheap ride options in bus and train.
- The next information seeking area is regarding their academic area. In this segment, these students search for the syllabus, old question papers and available books in their subject area. All respondents responded positively regarding this information need.
- After satisfying their academic information need, the students are interested in getting career related information. These students are specifically interested in services in defence forces, teaching and lastly private jobs. All students responded positively regarding this need.
- A few respondents want information on further studies like Master’s degree or teacher’s training courses in regular and distance mode.
- Participants responded enthusiastically regarding the sports related information specifically regarding football and archery. It can be mentioned here that they have the all women football team comprising of the tribal students in the subdivision.
- A few students have their information requirements expressed in the health information area.

5. Qualitative analysis of the findings:

The information requirement regarding cheap stay out option is common to the all types of students, who are to live outside their home due to distance. But what we have seen that, students from non-tribal backgrounds also search for private stay or paying guest option which is rare for the students from tribal background. It may be attributed to their weak economic background.

The tribal students (irrespective of male or female) usually search for the local tribal habitats, which are not at all applicable to the students of non-tribal background. Apart from the psychological support, the local habitats provide the students the same culture, practice and belief systems.

The tribal students used to search for the foods of their own choice because these are not available easily whereas the students of non-tribal background can enjoy the foods everywhere as they are accustomed with these from their childhood.

Due to the weak financial and economic condition, the tribal students used to seek support from the various schemes of social grant available. Sometimes it is seen that the students have to support their families out of the grant.

The academic information need pattern of the tribal students are almost same with the students from non-tribal backgrounds. But the non-tribal students start these searches from their very first day in college whereas the tribal students engage themselves in local information need and economic and financial needs. For them, this academic thing comes after these two.

These students know very well that the social grants will continue only during their college days. So they start searching for jobs from the very beginning. A non-graduate physically fit student can get entry into the defence or police forces easily. It becomes their first choice of occupation.

The students from non-tribal background usually search for further academic courses like Masters' degree, which is rare for the students of tribal background. Few of them search for teacher's training courses as these are mandatory for getting a job in teaching sector.

If we study the gender gap among the population of Santal people, we can see that there are 1007 females per 1000 male. It is due to their social and economic structure where everyone is considered as an economic resource. For this specific reason, they are physically fit and resolute in nature. This nature is also reflected in their sports information need. They prefer archery – a tradition of their own and a body contact physique centric game football as their main sports.

Part III: Findings of the information sources study:

- We have identified several information sources like inter-personal communication, library and information centre, career counselling centre, central office as the chief sources of information.
- For the local information, the participants told that they predominantly depend upon general college office and interpersonal communication with their friends and peers of the same tribal community.
- For the financial and economic information, they depend upon informal communication with general office and library and information centre. It is seen that the informal communication among them is so strong that if one is informed about anything, everyone get informed about this within a very short span of time. They depend predominantly upon library and information centre for filling up their scholarship forms online.
- Regarding information on academic and advanced academic options, they depend upon library and information centre and teachers as the chief sources of information.
- For career related information, the participants depend upon the career counselling cell of the college, which is under the charge of central library.
- To meet the sports related information need, they depend upon the news papers, internet centres of the library and physical education department of the college.

Now, we will try to provide a tabular representation of information need and chief sources of information.

Information need area	Sub area	Sources of information
Local Information	Cheap stay options	Pre-dominantly Inter-personal communication with friends and senior students.
	Local Santal Community	
	Market	
Financial and Economic Information	Various government sponsored schemes for welfare of tribes	College office but fill up the forms in the library.
	Various private schemes for scholarship	College office but fill up the forms in the library.
	Concession	College office
Academic Information	Syllabus	Library and information Centre
	Past question papers	
	Availability of documents	
	Examination schedule	
Career related information	Police and defence services	Career counselling cell in Library and information centre
	Teaching	
	Private job	
Advanced academic information	Masters' degree	Teachers, Seniors and Library
	Parallel courses	
	Courses required for employment	

Conclusion: Shyness in contact, language barriers, psychological distance as well as cultural distance from people of non-tribal background are the major obstacles in the way of getting information for these tribal female students.

One of the characteristics of a tribe is that they are shy in contacting with the outside world. They usually live in their own information ghetto. But the exchange of information between tribal and non-tribal people is always at minimum level. If, we are considering the gender of the population, it is female. In the male dominated society, female is always considered as dependent. The Santal tribe is no exception. They always hesitate in seeking information even in compelling situations. They have found out one way of battling it. They usually stay in groups. When they visit the library, they visit in groups initially.

Language barrier is also a very strong barrier in the access of information not only regarding the language of the content of information but also about the language of expressing the information need. These students, due to their isolation and preference in staying within their own homogeneous group, used to interact in their own language – Santali. They, like all human beings, are quite easy in their mother tongue. They can express their information requirement in that language easily than in any other language.

According to the definition provided of tribe in various sources, it is common that they are psychologically isolated from non-tribal people as well as from people belonging to other tribes. This isolation can be attributed to the geographical habitat, cultural difference, lifestyle etc. they feel psychological obstacle from expressing their information requirements to people of other non-tribal background – which are predominant in the college as well as in the library.

6. Overcoming the obstacles:

Now, these are situations some of which can be controlled by the library staffs and some are out of bound for the library staffs. Now, let us examine some of our ways to overcome these obstacles.

Shyness can be overcome by continuous interaction with these students. We try to engage them in interaction. Whenever they step in the library, after fulfilling their need, we spend some time with them in interacting about their trivial matters like life in hostel, life back in home, enquiring about their study, scholarship schemes etc. We have found that this interaction- which may have no relation with their need in library, is very much helpful in overcoming the shyness problem in contact. Apart from it, this interaction builds a sense of trust and personal relation which can be termed as social network thereby forming social capital.

Language barrier is a real problem for the students. If the candidate cannot express her information requirement explicitly, then it will be difficult for the man in charge to know exactly what she wants. Not only from the information requirement aspect, but also the bonding between two same language speakers become much more concrete in nature than the different language speakers. To make the students at their ease, library staff learn the language Santali – at least learn to understand what she speaks of.

Through these efforts, the library tries to serve the multicultural population in the library. It has been seen that bringing these Santali female students in the main stream study , and allowing them to mix with the general population has been properly fulfilled by the above continuous effort of the library staff.

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Put acknowledgments here

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