

VARIOUS SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES AND SANSKRITIZATION OF SARAK COMMUNITY: SOME THEORETICAL ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The process of sanskritization can be seen in the changing religious and economic context even among the Sarak communities that once followed and patronized Jainism. The people of Manbhum i.e. Purulia, Bankura and adjacent areas of Sarak community with distinctive characteristics were forced to move away from their Jainism and assimilate into Hinduism in order to maintain their existence in the context of changing conditions and through this the process of sanskritization of this community began. Later, other communities followed various social norms to improve their place in the prevailing social system. As a result, if the people of this community follow the different social norms of other communities, the process of sanskritization is observed more and more in this community. Gradually, the change in the diet of this community can be observed, that is, along with the change in their position in the society, the individual customs and rituals of this community also change. Then the people of this community started a movement to improve their financial condition and take advantage of the preservation of the whole. As a result, the people of this community become interested in abandoning the previously followed religious customs, social norms and cultural traditions to improve their financial condition. As a result, the sanskritization of this community is clearly observed. Nowadays, the people of this community are more interested in their worldly development than their individual lifestyle, social norms and principles.

Keywords: Sanskritization, Sarak, Distinct, Community, Assimilation, Socio-economic, Culture.

Sanskritization is a sociological term that describes a process of social change in India. It refers to the process by which lower castes or tribes seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or dominant castes. M.N. Srinivas wrote Sanskritisation is the process by which lower castes, tribes or groups change their customs, rituals, ideology and way of life towards those of higher castes.

Sanskritization involves both cultural accumulation and cultural decline. The lower caste abandons rituals, customs, traditions and values. Therefore, there is cultural poverty; on the other hand there is also an accumulation of the culture that incorporates new values, traditions and customs of the upper castes. With the spread of modernity, this process of Sanskritization can be observed in different ways in different communities of society. The process of Sanskritization has also been observed in various areas of Purulia and Bankura, Burdwan and Birbhum districts of West Bengal and in some areas of Jharkhand state, a follower of non-violence, vegetarian Jain Sarak community.

In 1950, Suniti kumar Chattopadhyay eminent linguist and historian, talk about model Sanskritisation. However, Srinivas used the term in structural sense while Suniti kumar Chattopadhyay tried to unfold its cultural connection. A host of other scholar have worked on the theme, each trying to explore different aspects of the process. However, the central argument revels around what M.N. Srinivas in his book entitled social change in modern India has emphasized: Sankritization is the process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other groups changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice born caste. Two important points of the process of Sanskritization as outline by him should be taken note of in his connection.

First – he has indicated the necessity of bringing about changes in the customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of caste Hindu as prerequisite for the simple clam of being members of Hindu society.

Second- Acceptance of norms and values of the upper castes would certainly bring about important in their status, the reason for which they have been involved in the entire exercise. Needless to say, that would also entitle them to calm the rights and the privilege in the same manner as enjoyed by the members of upper caste.

Process of Sanskritisation:

Sanskritization refer to a process whereby people of lower castes collectively try to adopt upper caste practices and beliefs, as a preliminary step to acquiring higher caste thus, this indicate a process of cultural mobility that took place in the traditional social system in India. Sanskritization denotes the process of upward mobility. In this process, a caste is trying to increase its position in the caste hierarchy not at once, but over a period of times. It would take some times, a period of one or two generations. Mobility that is involved in the process of Sanskritization results only in ‘positional change’ for particular castes or section of caste and need not necessarily lead to a ‘structural change’. It means while individual caste move up or down, the structures as such remain the same. This process of Sanskritization can be observed on different communities of different regions of India. Similarly, I will try to understand how this Sanskritization took place on the Sarak community of the region.

The process of Sanskritization in the Sarak community began after the settled of the Panchokot Raja’s estate with the permission of Panchokot Raja around 1600 A.D. From the greedy eyes of Man Raja, the people of this community strategically left the Manbazar area and came to the state of Panchokot Raja in order to maintain their ethnic identity. In the Panchokot area, the people of the Sarak community continued to follow the various customs of Hinduism by alienating their non-violent Jain religion to protect their existence. Apart from this, the people of this community continue to follow their simple, monogamous lifestyle.

According to the popular legend among the Sarak community during the civil war of the Panchokot royal family, one of the Sarak community saved the life of Crown Prince Monilal and became a confidant of the Panchokot king. Then the king of Panchokot gave a large amount of agricultural land to the people of this community and gave them titles such as Majee, Mandal, Patra, Layek, Acharya etc. Nowadays people of Sarak community of this region use these surnames. By becoming the confidants of the Panchokot king and gaining various titles,

the people of this community gradually followed the various practices of Hinduism and tried to change their position in the society. But the people of this community were not fond of the Brahmins and in any of their social functions the Brahmins did not participate. Thereafter the king of Panchokot declared his priest as the priest of the Sarak community. As a result the people of the Sarak community sought water from the Brahmins i.e. henceforth the Brahmins were able to drink water in the homes of the Sarak community. Besides, Brahmins continued to participate in various social and religious activities of this community. As a result, this community changed its caste position in society and became equal to the Brahmins.

After getting the agricultural land from Panchokot Raja, over time the people of this community became skilled agricultural community in the region i.e. a radical change in the lifestyle of Sarak community people can be observed. Apart from this, various rules, rituals, and customs centered on agriculture in the region became the main part of the culture of Sarak community, i.e. the people of Sarak community, the bearers of non-violent Jain culture, adopted the agriculture-centered culture. Maa Lakshmi, the worshiped goddess of agricultural economy, became the main worshiped goddess of the people of this community. At present, Maa Lakshmi is worshiped as an adorable goddess by almost all Sarak community people of this region and various Hindu gods and goddesses are also worshiped by this community.

Various folk cultures prevalent in the region have also been adopted and contributed significantly by this Sarak community. Vaadu and Tusu Puja are important folk cultures of the region. This community also has important contribution in this Bhadu Puja and unmarried girls and older women of this community perform Bhadu Puja. From the cultural point of view, important changes have been observed in this community; after all, various aspects of the Brahmin culture of the region have been followed by the people of the Sarak community and incorporated in themselves.

Various Elements of Sanskritization:

In case of Sanskritization of the Sarak community or assimilation into Hinduism; occupation, education, political participation, economic and cultural factors as the variable for analysing the process of social transformation, modernisation and Sanskritization. Reservation has also been used as an important variable leading to Socio-economic and political mobility of Sarak community. But reservation as a factor affecting the process of Sanskritization on Sarak community. We will have analysed the role of reservation for Other Backward Classes in their process of Sanskritization and its implication on the Sarak community. The following analysis would help us to take some theoretical position that would be possible through the interplay between the process of Sanskritization and the provision of reservation.

Reservation and Sanskritization of Sarak Community:

It is true that economic and political power makes the process of Sanskritization possible. As various castes and groups are able to improve their social and economic development by the benefits of the constitution, the effect of Sanskritization can be seen in the course of economic and social development of different castes and groups. The concept of Sanskritization is a group process and help understanding group mobility. Similarly, the unit of reservation is a group or class through it starts from an individual unit. Thus, reservation creates the groups which

qualify themselves for the regulation of Sanskritization process among the Sarak community. So, with this kind of framework one can work out the kind of relationship between the process of Sanskritization and the provision of reservation.

The people of the Sarak community of this region are able to improve their financial condition by their skill and hard work in agriculture. Once the preacher of Jainism in this region, the people of Sarak community who follow the message of non-violence have gradually become the skilled farming community of this region. But the Saraks of this community considered themselves equal to the Brahmins in the conventional social system due to the qualities such as ethnic uniqueness, vegetarian diet, and frugality in daily life and simple lifestyle. In the traditional caste system, they considered their social position as a social honour. For this reason, there was a prevailing idea in this community that by taking advantage of the preservation of the constitution, they would improve their financial condition by improving their social status. Therefore, Saraks were against changing their condition through government benefits in the first phase of independence.

But since the 1980s, a part of caste groups such as Bauri, Suri, Dom, Majhi, Singsardar, etc., who are at the very bottom of the caste system, have been able to improve their financial condition with the benefits of government reservation. On the other hand, the financial condition of the agricultural Sarak community has been getting worse. In this situation, the educated people of this community can realize that through government reservation, a caste is able to improve the society along with its economic development. Over time, the educated generation of this community started to give more importance to their economic development than the social respect. Ever since the politics of reservation has come into existence in our country since the 1980s, there have been attempts on the part of different communities to sneak into the list of reserved categories. Many backward communities with distinct ethnographic profile wanted to figure in such lists of reserved categories for gaining social recognition and economic advantage. The urge to achieve these benefits and recognition became so intense among some communities that they began movements in the direction of achieving the status of SC & ST categories. In course of time, the already existed lists of SC & ST communities, already prepared during the time of the British have been revised periodically. This happened because the Government of India made further survey on the economic condition of people staying outside the list of SC & ST communities. It has been found that a large section of people, in addition to SC & ST communities are economically backward and socially marginalized. A further list has been prepared to bring them under the folds of reservation in order to bring improvement in their social, educational and economic status. Many economically poor agricultural communities have been identified to match the prerequisites of coming under the OBC categories. Several communities with agriculture as their chief profession made appeal to come under the OBC category and even launched movements in that direction. The Saraks also started a movement for inclusion in the OBC category in the late 1980s and have gained the status in 1994. However, the journey to get recognition in the OBC list was not all that smooth since the Saraks suffered from inertia and limitations of different denominations and the differences of opinion on the issue of gathering recognition in the OBC category was also strong at the beginning. All these difficulties were finally over and the much-desired recognition as OBC category came in 1994.

At present, the Saraks of Purulia and Bankura districts remain as an O.B.C listed caste. Today, people of this community are more interested in economic and social development by taking advantage of preservation of ethnic heritage and social respect.

Sanskritization Through Spread of Education:

The people of Sarak community were advanced in education, culture and mentality, the past Jain culture and archaeological sites of the region continue to bear its identity. Until about 1980, the financial status of the people of the agricultural Sarak community of this region was quite good compared to other communities. The people of this community did agriculture very sincerely. Therefore, there are several cases of Sarak community people who received education and gave more importance to agriculture than small government jobs. One such case is Harendranath Majee of Radhamadhab Pur village under Kashipur police station of Purulia district, who was appointed as a primary school teacher in his village. His family suggested that he take up farming at home instead of this low-paying government job. As a result, Harendranath Majee left his former government job and joined agriculture. From this it can be estimated that the people of this community were well educated and how much importance they attached to agriculture.

But later, the people of other communities of this region were able to improve their financial condition by getting education and getting various government and private jobs. On the other hand, the financial condition of the Sarak community, which depended only on agriculture, gradually worsened. In this situation, Sarak community people changed their thinking and they tried to educate their children in higher education. But in this case, their vegetarian diet created obstacles. Besides, there was no high school or university near the village. So they had to go outside the village for higher education and because there were no vegetarian hostels, the boys and girls of this community faced a lot of problems. So generally the people of this community were not interested in sending their children out of home for higher education. Not all of these communities had the financial means to educate their children in higher education.

At this time, the Gurudev of Kashipur Maharaja was a vegetarian, and there was a vegetarian hostel at the Bero high school established by them. At this time, the children of the rich family of the community were admitted to the Bero high school, and most of them were able to get higher education from the vegetarian hostel. But most people of this community do not send their children out for higher education to maintain their independent lifestyle and vegetarian diet.

Since the 1980s, the thinking of people in the Sarak community has started to change. From this time, some educated people of this community started sending their children away from home to get higher education and kept them in common dormitories or messes with children of other communities. At this time, a part of this community started to give more importance to their financial improvement through government jobs by educating their children higher than the rules and regulations in the society. As a result, the new generation of this community came out of the house to get higher education and got the opportunity to exchange their views with people of different communities. As a result, their thinking also started to change. Over time, the educated people of this community came out of the rules and regulations of the society and started socializing with people of different religions or different communities and followed the

rules and principles of their choice. Again, many of this community started taking non-vegetarian food products.

Again, many of these communities are establishing marital relations with other communities against their own family and social norms. As a result, such a devaluation of the norms prevailing in this community is observed; on the other hand, the new generation of this community developed in modern thinking has tried to make them modern and up-to-date through their progress in material and other fields with the help of government policies with their liberal or free thinking.

Reservation & De- Sanskritization:

The relationship between reservation and Sanskritization is not only paradoxical but it also to the process of De-Sanskritization. Economic backwardness and craze for power status lead to process of Sanskritization of those economically backward upper castes through aspiring for reservation benefits. But the mentality of accepting various opportunities of the government through reservation came much later among the people of Sarak community. Behind this, different social norms and non-violence religious principles of this community were definitely responsible. The people of this community began to notice that different communities at the lower level of the society are improving their financial status by employing themselves in various government and private sectors using the reservation. On the other hand, the economic condition of the agricultural Sarak community is gradually declining and the boys and girls of this community are gradually falling behind in terms of education and government jobs. But the people of this community are quite talented. In this situation, a group of educated people of this community applied for bringing the Sarak caste under the government reservation. After a long struggle, in 1994 the Sarak community was listed as OBC or Other Backward Classes.

Through this, the people of this community are able to take various facilities of the government despite the degradation of their social status. The children of Sarak community are able to get government jobs and various scholarships by taking advantage of reservation. As a result, the people of this community have gradually been able to improve their socio-economic status. Nowadays, the people of this community have been maintaining good relations with the Indian Jain Digambar society to identify themselves as Jains and to take various opportunities. That is, through reservation, the ethnic heritage of the people of Sarak community has been degraded, yet they have gained in various economic and social improvements.

Changes food habit and De-Sanskritization:

The concept of Sanskritization also led to De-Sanskritization in modern times. Nowadays there is spread of education, spread of modernity and change in economic condition among Sarak communities. At the same time, the traditional food habits of the people of this community have also changed. A section of the present generation of this community has moved away from their traditional food habits and distinct lifestyles. As a result, the traditional food habit and distinct culture of Sarak community has been devaluation. Also, nowadays some boys and girls of this community enter into marital relations with other communities through love without the consent of their parents is another reason for the social devaluation of this

community. Thus, on the basis of the above body of material we can draw the following conclusion:

Once the preacher of Jainism and carriers of non-violent culture in this region, the Sarak community moved away from Jainism and assimilated with Hinduism in order to maintain their existence in the changing situation. Later, the people of this community moved away from the traditional social position and took advantage of various opportunities of Government reservation for their financial improvement. Started doing in other words, the people of this community are more interested in their own worldly development than their individual social norms.

The new generation of educated children of the Sarak community are abandoning the traditional rules and customs of this community and getting married to boys and girls of their choice. As a result, the social ties and religious thinking of this community have also changed. The traditional culture of this community has also changed.

When a boy or girl of Sarak community is marrying a different community, the boy or girl of the Sarak community is adopting the customs and culture of that different community, but the boy or girl of the different community is not able to accept the ritual and culture of the Sarak community. Because the social system of Sarak community is very conservative, where any other community is forbidden to enter. With the change of time, the social customs and principles of other communities have changed, but the prevailing rules and principles in the social system of the Sarak community have remained unchanged. As a result, a conservative character of the social system of the Sarak community has emerged.

With the change of time, the people of Sarak community have failed to change themselves. Therefore, the people of this community remain trapped in a limited group where, a part of the highly educated people of this community have established relationships with other communities by ignoring the rules and principles of the society, taking non-vegetarian food. As a result, the once Jain religion and culture of this region, following the message of non-violence, the vegetarian Sarak community is becoming increasingly difficult to retain its own religious thoughts and ethnic traditions.

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