



# The impact of cultural diversity and globalization in developing a Santal peer culture in Middle India

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## Resumen/ Abstract

How it is to be an adolescent among the Santals, in a world still shaped by tradition but where local knowledge has been pervaded by political awareness and modernity.? The Santals, who number more than five millions, consider themselves as a «tribal» people speaking a different language (austro-asiatic) and sharing a way of life which implies values different from those of the Hindus. A central question , here, concerns the transmission of knowledge. In a tribal context, traditional knowledge is to a large extent endogenously determined. Differences in knowledge are no longer controlled by the elders, but still provide much of the momentum for social interaction. Since the colonial period schooling has been important but it has not succeeded to bring an equal opportunity of chances for all children.

In brief, I will analyze how the traditional model of transmission is influenced by exogenous factors, such as schooling or politics, and events which allow children to emerge as new agents, developing a peer culture (W. Corsaro & D. Eder 1990). In the context of tribal India, where educational rights are granted by the Constitution, schooling often implies the dominance of Hindu culture on tribal children who feel stigmatized. Discussing the system of education, we shall see how teaching in the mother tongue or using a Santal script have been a crucial issue. The high percentage of dropout at the primary level shows that the system of education is not well adapted to tribal children who, however, are often pushed into the labour market to help their families. Consequently, other social factors such as religious movements or, migrations towards the town provide children and youth with new arenas to develop a peer culture which formerly was institutionalized in the village. We shall see that social mobility, as well as the emergence of a tribal elite, are exogenous factors which impinge on the structuration of a tribal peer culture. I shall finally examine how Santal youth participate to the reinvention of Tradition through village theatre and militant activities I argue that Santal youth peer culture develops its shared meaning towards two opposite directions: the assertion of ethnic identity and the development of a Santal literacy outside «official schooling» as well as the opening towards globalization through education, social mobility and elite formation.

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**Palabras clave / Keywords:** peer culture, creative production, class formation

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The Santals<sup>i</sup> who number more than five millions, consider themselves as a “tribal” people speaking a particular language (austro-asiatic) and sharing a way of life which implies values different from those of the Hindus. Even if tribal children form an autonomous community of children, they establish their own rules and agendas in a certain continuity with the adult world. To-day, Santal adults deplore that “the knowledge of the ancestors” is not shared like it used to be (Carrin *in press*). In a changing corpus of knowledge, the distribution of knowledge, like the network of trust and identification, is changing, as well as positioning towards power and disempowerment (Barth 2002). To understand Santal childhood as a social and collective process we must turn, first, towards traditional culture mostly present in rural areas, and then ask how knowledge is transmitted today in Santal society, keeping in mind that Santals often live in multi-ethnic<sup>ii</sup> villages and sometimes have migrated to cities such as Kolkota<sup>iii</sup> or the steel town of Rourkela<sup>iv</sup>. Since the Independence of India, tribal culture has changed, and has been produced and reproduced through public negotiations. In brief, the model of cultural transmission is influenced by exogenous factors, such as unemployment, deprivation and marginalization of “tribals”, as well as events which allow children to emerge as new agents, developing a peer culture (Corsaro & Rizzo 1990). I shall consider the impact of education on Santal society and evaluate to what extent schooling has helped Santal children to participate in the production of new cultural routines<sup>v</sup>. These cultural routines are part of children’s socialization and must be understood as a collective process. In this view, the child makes his knowledge his own in a community who share his social sense of belonging, a peer community.

### **Tribal identities in the colonial period.**

The introduction of individual ownership by the British in 1770 was to result, later, in the alienation of tribal lands and in the migration of Santals to clear jungles or work as contract labour. The British allowed non-tribals to settle in tribal territories, which led to exploitation of the Santals by moneylenders and other intermediaries. The feeling of deprivation led the Santals to rebel in 1855 under the inspiration of two charismatic leaders who are still considered as heroes today, even if the rebellion was crushed by the British after two years.

After the Santal rebellion, various missionary societies established themselves in the Santal Parganas, and sustained colonial penetration by developing infrastructures such as schools. The Orientalism of the missionaries was oriented towards the noble savage and contributed to reinforce Santal identity (Carrin & Tambs-Lyche, *in press*).

Before Independence, the colonial government, as well as different Missions, started schools among the Santals in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. Children attending Mission schools were Christian or Hindu, while only Hindu children attended Government schools. There were fluctuations in school attendance, as epidemics and famines occurred. Missionary education helped the tribals to develop an egalitarian ethos and open their world view, though they had to comply with puritanical Christian influence. Inspired by the 1870 *Education Act* in Britain, the colonial Government tried to improve the system of education in India. The missionary system combined with the support of the colonial government implied that scholarships should be used to enable



*patshala* (school) students to study at higher levels. The *patshala* system which was implanted in many villages led to considerable expansion in indigenous education though it never touched the masses in tribal districts<sup>vi</sup>.

In Santal Parganas, the district where the missionaries were operating, there was a tremendous expansion of schools financed by the Government in the 1880s. The debate concerning education opposed those who wanted to promote an elitist education model in tribal areas, to those who like the Scandinavian missionaries opted for a more pragmatic approach, trying to avoid to give the Santals an education which would take them away from the village life. On the whole, the missionaries succeeded in introducing literacy to the Santals though they converted only twelve per cent of the Santal population in a single district of Bengal. As a result of education, knowledge was no longer controlled by the elders, and children's perspectives were widened through schooling and contact with missionaries, though the rigid and puritan ethos of missionary education was intended to discipline Santal children, who were used to live together grazing the cattle, hunting small animals or collecting tubers. According to the 1904 report, 15 % of tribal children of school age attended school, but literacy did not increase massively. According to the Census of 1911 the literacy rate of the tribal population of Bengal was 0.45 % for the males and 0,031% for the females (*Fourth Quinquennial Review*). Christian education developed considerably between 1905 and 1920, however, offering a way to climb socially. Christian ideals of justice seemed to fill the gap left in tribal society by the loss of ancestral values and chiefly authority. From 1920 to 1938 a Westernized class emerged, led by teachers and students. The leaders of the thirties wanted to promote egalitarianism. They decided to call themselves *adivasi* "indigenous people", a term which inspired a militant movement animated by the idea of resistance from 1938 to 1947. Later, this movement led to the formation of a tribal party, the Jharkhand, in the 50s. After Independence, the members of the Jharkhand party demanded the separation of the tribal districts from the rest of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. These demands were perceived by the Central Government as separatist claims. Still, after fifty years of struggle these demands resulted in the creation of the Jharkhand State in 2000. The tribals form only 28% of the population of the state but they do try to defend their identity and culture. The new state has not been able to implement radical reforms but it has been and is still influenced by the idea of granting educational rights to the *adivasis* (Carrin 2000; Prakash 2001).

### **Santal children in a changing world.**

To-day, Santal adults deplore that knowledge is not shared like it used to when grand-parents used to introduce grand-children to speech control. Riddles are taught to eight year old children and involve different levels of difficulty. Through riddles, children interiorize a natural cosmology which conciliates Nature and Culture, since answers concern domestic animals as well as wild animals and plants. But grand-parents also teach children body control, telling them the importance of sexual organs which should grant pleasure (*raskau*) to boys and girls. Traditional learning includes the code of manners which implies respect for elders and reverence for relatives who are greeted with special forms of salutation. Verbal abuse is also controlled as it is associated with witches. To control their speech, children should also control their emotions when they are disappointed by adults. Role-play during games allow children to distance



themselves from a mere imitation of adult roles as they usually parody<sup>vii</sup> adults performing daily routines. In brief, this allows children to induce a productive-reproductive process of reorganization of knowledge, what Corsaro (1992:161) calls the “interpretive approach”, implying a non-linear process of socialization through interaction with peer members. In that respect, Santal children culture is represented by the whole way of life specific to a generation group. Games offer a good example of what is specific of an age group, as children from four to six and from seven to nine do not play the same games as children do when they are ten or twelve..

The separate culture of children is exemplified in the model of the tribal child (Allison, James and Prout 2006). Gradually, children of the age group of twelve form a kind of community and develop common projects, such as visiting the next village during the festival or by helping adults when the work is pressing. They elect a *jog-manjhi*, a young man who is responsible for them towards the village elders and parents, and who sanctions offences. His authority<sup>viii</sup> extends to the children as a group, unlike parental authority which is limited to the extended family.

Children participate very early in gendered activities. While boys are grazing cattle and learn to trap small animals, girls take care of younger siblings or collect fuel along with the women. Children, moreover, are taught to cope with scarcity, and they often find their own food. Since knowledge has been changing through the introduction of schooling, children have found new niches to express their agency as a group. Schooling does not provide them with a unique model of reference able to generate new cultural routines, since it has produced divergent opinions. These divergences may be explained by class formation, a process which has led urban tribal elites to distance themselves from the rural masses. In urban centres, youth seem more vulnerable especially if they are unemployed. Though in traditional society, children agency centres on how to cope with scarcity and the deviance of adults expressed in witchcraft, their sphere of agency in contemporary acculturated society concerns their engagement in education and political activism. Santal children have not only been engaged in learning the values of the dominant society (Hindu or even western values), they have also been involved in the Reinvention of Tradition<sup>ix</sup>.

### Education after Independence .

After Independence in 1947, it was decided to grant a special advantage to backward groups, designed as *scheduled tribes* as well as *scheduled castes*. The politics of positive discrimination implied that individuals belonging to these groups were reserved seats in educational institutions and jobs in the public sector. The reason for such positive discrimination was that the caste system had privileged high caste people to an unfair degree in the past.(Carrin &Jaffrelot 2002). First, this policy has been and is still useful to fight economic exploitation and oppression of tribal people in India, second the acknowledgment of the category ascribed to the groups concerns the right to sustain an independent culture that is different from the majority. Of course, any cultural entity may be seen as a construction (Barth 1969, Anderson1989) but, in the case of the Santals, the idea of indigenusness has helped them to argue their demands for social improvement and education. To day, tribal groups in India claim the right to have access to education through their mother tongue<sup>x</sup>. Other demands concern cultural



identity as the Santals who worship their own deities (*bongas*) have been sometimes designated, against their will, as Hindus in the Census of 1981 or as animists, which often implies without religion<sup>xi</sup>.

After the reorganization of the States on a linguistic basis in post-Independent India, an important problem remained concerning the status of minority languages within the reorganized states. The languages are arranged in a hierarchy of official status, we find at the top Hindi and English, considered as official languages at the national level. At the next level, we find the regional languages, such as Bengali or Oriya. At the lower level are the languages which are not recognized as official languages. That is the case of Santali<sup>xii</sup> though it has been included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule in 2003 along with other 18 important minority languages<sup>xiii</sup>. Elementary education and language policies are implemented by the State Governments. The Constitution demands that the States ensure free education for all tribal children up to the age of fourteen, but the actual achievements do not come up to this requirement.

### **Teaching in the tribal language.**

The literacy rate for tribal children is still distinctly below the general rate of the respective States and is much lower for females than for males<sup>xiv</sup>. What is even more disturbing is the high percentage of school dropouts<sup>xv</sup> from the lowest levels onwards, which can reach high percentages (for tribal children in Orissa 72% at primary level, 89% at middle level and 93% at high school (Lotz 2004: 131). Among problems that are not specific to tribal education, but to education in remote areas, we may note the absenteeism of teachers, the non-functioning of schools, language problems and cultural oppression. Tribal languages, such as Santali, have nothing in common with the regional language which is used for primary instruction. In most of the cases, the teachers are not trained in speaking the tribal languages and often judge tribal culture as being *jungly*, “savage” (Ambasht 1970). For the children, the rejection of the mother tongue as inferior, gradually develops into an overall feeling of inferiority which deprives them of incentive later on. More recently, the *National Curriculum Framework for Education* has recommended that the use of the mother tongue should be implemented until the third standard, after which the regional (dominant) language should be adopted as a medium.

Santali ranges among the best documented tribal languages of India. Since 1870, the missionaries documented a vast corpus of words which resulted in a large encyclopaedic dictionary and a number of volumes of folk tales that helped an early standardization of language and inspired linguistic research. By the end of nineteenth century, religious movements, migrations and education were important factors of change. To-day, Santal literature is a living phenomenon expressing itself in a range of literary expressions, drama, poetry, novels, history, folk-tales, riddles, as well as newspapers. Santal writers emerge as charismatic figures able to frame traditional culture as a source of inspiration, contextualizing the different problems that Santals face when they feel engaged in a globalized world. Educational issues as teaching and promoting a Santal literature have become important platforms to voice the political concerns of the community. Children still participate in traditional society but they involve themselves to produce a diversified peer culture which is both pervaded by westernization and the reinvention of Tradition.



### **State politics in language and education.**

Before 2001, State politics used to treat education in the mother tongue as a transitional affair as all the tribal languages of Orissa remained in a minority position against the dominant Oriya, the same situation applying in Bengal and in Jharkhand. On the other hand, Indian educationists have always stressed that ideally the medium of education should be the mother tongue (NCERT 2000:76). To remedy the neglect of village schools, several measures have been implemented. In Orissa, for example, the *Orissa Primary Education Authority* (ORPA) has been in charge of revising the textbooks under the direction of the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIL) or the *Academy of Tribal Dialects and Culture* (ATDC). These institutions have adapted the curriculum to the environment of tribal children trying to be congruent with the knowledge expressed in tribal languages, where, for example, moral notions are less present but where a rich vocabulary captures the fugacity of body movements and emotions. The new curriculum, however, seeks to recognize different systems of knowledge transmission by songs, riddles, storytelling and memorizing which form the basis of the traditional learning. Special bilingual courses have been devised to help students to bridge the lack of scientific terms in tribal languages, while, on the other hand, Santal writers are trying to create neologisms to adapt Santali to any curriculum. Moreover, all authorities concerned have recognized the urgent need to train special teachers for tribal areas. The employment of members of the tribal community, who have received a basic education, has helped to cope with the demand for teachers able to teach in the mother tongue. For the Indian educationists, it is important to teach tribal children in the mother tongue for the three first years at least, to ensure their cognitive development (Saini 1980). But the parents, who feel the time spent at school should lead to quick results in terms of employment, view the concentration on the mother tongue with little enthusiasm. Thus, while the Santal elite tries by all means to give an English medium<sup>xvi</sup> education to their children, lower middle classes often decide that learning through Hindi, Oriya or Bengali mediums will give their children access to administrative jobs. The rejection of one's mother tongue is motivated by individual strategies, which often turn to disaster, however ( Sarangapani 2003). Some of the educated Santals, unqualified for proper jobs, remain unemployed or work in inferior jobs<sup>xvii</sup>. These youth, who have tried to assimilate themselves in the dominant culture, have dreamt of finding employment in a State institution or, at least, a white collar job. When they fail, they feel trapped in town as they do not want to return to the village, considering agricultural tasks as inferior.

### **Santal responses to the educational system.**

Most Santals are still attached to their own culture and consider most important to overcome the divide between the home and the school atmosphere, which co-exist as two separate worlds. Santal children who play an important role in their families, resent being confined in schools where they feel stigmatized by the teachers' condescending attitude. Children cannot feel concerned by a syllabus which describes the life of children from middle class, westernized families. Finally the Hindu teachers often impose the worship of Hindu gods and Goddesses on *adivasi* children who worship other deities at home. Moreover, the Hindu idea of impurity ascribed to subaltern



classes stigmatizes adivasi children who have a different conception of body and emotion, as pleasure (*raskau*) here plays a central role. The imposition of Hindu values regarding gender relations where girls must learn to be submissive, deny gender relations in Santal society where children are allowed pre-marital sex experiences (Carrin *in press*). Another important reform concerns a positive recognition of Santal children's culture of work, which is the only way to prevent their alienation from home. In urbanized areas, Santals often live in neighbourhoods at the peripheries of the city, where the adults have settled to find employment. Schooling in the slums is more informal, since the population is less stable, but the standards of teaching are not recognized by the Government.

It is difficult to evaluate the high dropout rate of tribal children as government's figures on the percentage of each age group attending school are often wrong. The 1981 census reported that there were 108.8 millions of children between the age of six and eleven were in primary school but they found later that 37.9 millions of them, from six to ten years olds, were not in school (Weiner 1991:71). One of the major reasons for dropout is that children are pushed into the labour market very early. The Government of India has adopted, at different periods, divergent policies regarding children's employment. It seems that to-day and despite the fact that India has officially accepted to ban children's labour the Government would instead prefer to ameliorate the conditions of working children. The Government has endeavoured to develop part-time non-formal education for working children rather than press for compulsory primary education. Other international agencies, such as ILO, suggested that due to the close link which exists in India between poverty and child labour, the best policy would be to prevent children from extreme exploitation. Income generating programmes would be necessary for eliminating child labour, though. Weiner (1991) concludes that children's income doesn't really change the economy of the family. In fact, to accept children labour means to subscribe to the hierarchical society where a more equitable distribution of economic opportunities is difficult to achieve because of the employer's resistance. On the other hand, higher education does not resolve economic inequalities as the example of Kerala shows: here the level of education is the highest in India but unemployment is also high<sup>xviii</sup>.

### **Santal responses.**

Santal society is becoming more complex as it has been exposed to Christianity, Marxism and BJP (Hindu nationalist) ideology, and modernity at large. The introduction of writing had the effect of pointing native thinkers in new directions of effort and creativity.

Through religious movements, new figures emerged as gurus who were followed by a great number of disciples. In the thirties, Ragunath Murmu, a teacher in Danbosh village in Orissa invented a new script to write Santali. Though the graphs of the script (Ol Chiki: writing script<sup>xix</sup> are ideograms used alphabetically they are inspired by Santal symbols, such as the earth, the leaf, the ear, or the drum. In 1976, Murmu explained to me that he wanted to translate in ideograms the basic gestures of life. He was also a dramatist, but what concerns us here is his stress on the importance of imagining a script which would embody the colour of village life, a script that Santal children could teach themselves to each other. This script is probably the only tribal



script in India which has been able to establish itself in teaching, printing and distribution. Murmu founded in 1950 an institution for the propagation of Santal culture and literature which has since developed into a large network, operating in several states under the name of ASECA (Adivasi Socio Educational Association). He hoped that all Santals would adopt his script. It has indeed been very important in Orissa, but has not been taken up by the Santals living in Bengal or Jharkhand, who prefer to use the scripts of the dominant languages. Murmu always professed to be inspired by the tribal deities and he also started a religious movement, calling youth to participate in cultural revivalism (Carrin 2000). His ideas are expressed in his plays where young heroes rediscover a forgotten script written in luminous letters on a rock. In Murmu's ideology, the script shows the youth a new way of life where they should get rid of the decadence of the present to renew with the values of the ancestors, who were content with austere values.

### **The participation of youth in reinventing Tradition.**

Ragunath Murmu taught the script to some teachers who then started to teach youth in Mayurbhanj. Then these youths worked as volunteers, and taught Ol Chiki in evening schools. For Santal children, this new experience was important, since it was young Santal volunteers who were teaching Ol Chiki, which helped children to develop a new peer culture centred around cultural revivalism and tribal solidarity. In the 1970s, the Government of Orissa sponsored the publication of school-books using the new script. After many controversies,<sup>xx</sup> involving Santal organizations and educational institutions, the government of Orissa decided from 1991 to introduce the teaching of Santali, using Ol Chiki, in the public school system. Santal teachers were trained in government institutions to develop a more pedagogic approach, as children were first to study in Ol Chiki before adopting another script. This initiative reinforced the coherence of the mother tongue and of *adivasi* culture for the children. But difficulties arose when the children had to adopt another system of writing along with Ol Chiki.. To day, the ASECA<sup>xxi</sup> promotes extensive teacher training programmes to propagate the knowledge of the script. These programmes aim at providing the teachers with a full literary cultural background based on Santal identity. Studies in Santali language and Literature have been devised in more elaborate curricula giving access to special degrees (Bachelor in Santal Language) leading to a relative standardization of literary studies<sup>xxii</sup>. These efforts have certainly helped social mobility by creating a niche for employment. ASECA has always demanded the official implementation of the script in the primary schools, which was first realized in 1992 on an experimental basis in 30 schools of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundargarh districts of north Orissa. ASECA<sup>xxiii</sup> and other organizations wanted to extend this experiment to all primary schools. A pilot study was organized by the Academy of Tribal Dialects and Culture (ATDC) with linguists, educationists and Santal leaders. But, as Lotz ((2004:135) concludes: "...no consensus could be achieved in this meeting. It was felt ...that the prestigious and controversial language issue had completely overshadowed all discussions concerning the practical levels of education for around 70000 children in Orissa". Though the ATDC supports the cause of the minority language it has sometimes been ambivalent towards the idea of introducing tribal scripts<sup>xxiv</sup>. This study, however, proved to be useless as the interested parties, the Governments officials, the Santal associations and the parents did



not agree. It seems there was often a confusion between teaching in Santali and using the Ol chiki script. Finally in 1998, the recognition of Ol chiki has taken prominence over the language question, but it has functioned as an ideology rather than to further the teaching of the script. This situation made the teaching of Ol Chiki outside Orissa impossible because Santals living in the neighbouring States were against the propagation of Ol Chiki.. One of the major objectives for supporting the script has been the creation of teacher's posts for unemployed youth. In 2003, when Santali was one of the 18 minority languages newly recognized the question became more acute. Would it be possible to implement a proper training of Santali children using mother tongue and Ol Chiki? I was told by different teachers in 2005, that the imposition of mother tongue plus script is often perceived as an instrument of further marginalization by Santal parents who fear that their children would be even more disadvantaged when they will have to cope with three languages: the official State language, English, and Santali each having its own script<sup>xxv</sup> ... Most parents feel that the additional effort is too demanding, if it is not recognized in the job market. It seems that Ol Chiki was very important in the 1970s and the 1980s as a tool of identity and resistance which sustained some of the symbolic and artistic expressions of the Jharkhand Party. But when the Jharkhand State was recognized in 2000, the tribal associations as well as the Government faced another problem: it became difficult to implement on a large scale what had been functioning as a tool of resistance on the basis of solidarity. No systematic study has been done on the problems faced by the implementation of Ol Chiki in Jharkhand since 2000, but it seems that the development of a tribal elite became an obstacle to the propagation of the script in Jharkhand, where the literacy rate was still weak for Santals and adivasis in 2001.

The Government of Orissa, these last years, has been active in developing a complete new stock of reading material in a range of tribal languages (there are 62 different tribal communities in Orissa). The status of Santali has always been strong in the public sphere, compared to other states where it has proved more difficult to compete with a language having a strong literary image, like Bengali. But, in all the States which have a sizable Santal population, Santali functions through a network of newspapers, organizations and various publications, supported by an urban elite which has organized conferences and cultural events since the 50s. These activities have involved children and youth who have usually participated in theatre performances, Santal dances, games and other festivities, like archery competitions which have formed part of the Jharkhand (the tribal party) political agenda the last fifty years.

### **The impact of language and script questions on Santal Childhood.**

In traditional society, children grew up under the authority of their parents but village groups of children enjoyed some agency. Child labour was not uncommon but it was usually organized by the joint family, though Santal youth also used to work as casual labourers along with their elders in the fields of Hindu landlords or in factories in urban areas. Though big Companies, like Tata, provided the workmen and their families with lodging and social benefits, and Santals were benefiting from them in the sixties, this was not the general picture and in many places, husbands and wives had to live separately. In some cases, it seems that urbanization and industrialization provided



employment but contributed to the instability of marriages and reconfiguration of families (Carrin 1997).

Schooling induced several changes in the development of a peer culture, as children from distant villages were sometimes obliged to sleep in the school where they also used to cook together, developing another kind of peer culture marked by resistance to Hindu teachers and school dropout. In some areas, the dropout was due to lack of facility: no water, no toilets, no midday meals, while in other places, it was due to family pressure since the help of the children was required for agricultural tasks. Nevertheless, children at school develop another kind of peer culture marked by solidarity and resistance. Schooling often helped the children to become more conscious of the oppression of the *dikus*, the Hindus or higher castes<sup>xxvi</sup> When joining college, Santal students often became militant while illiterate youth took their intellectual training from senior members of the tribal party, developing a culture marked by Marxist rhetoric. There was also a strong desire to revive their old religion through adhering to a movement called the Sarna Dhorom - the return to the Sacred Grove- a symbol of Santal ethnicity. Since the seventies, children and youth from rural areas have been engaged in the reinvention of Tradition, teaching *ol chiki*, performing in the village theatre, and developing a militant culture. In Bengal in the eighties, many youth joined the Bengali militants in the naxalite (maoist) movement. In the nineties, the picture changed as the Jharkhand struggles intensified while involving other political parties. Let us mention, here, the influence of the BJP, the Hindu revival party, which from 1997 decided to recruit adivasi youth systematically and organizing schools imbued with BJP ideology. With the formation of the Jharkhand State under the auspices of the BJP in 2000, the tribal struggle got swallowed up as the Hindu party tried to promote its own majority though it compromised with the tribal leaders.

The tribal elites were divided and several political youth peer cultures emerged. The recognition of Santali as a major minority language gave a new impetus to the idea of teaching in the mother tongue and learning Santali in *Ol'chiki*. The last proposal was never adopted in Bengal, where the Santal elite was already taught to write in Bengali script, or even in Jharkhand, where Santali was taught using Hindi script.

These contradictions have helped the Santals to negotiate their involvement in culture revivalism, politics and modernity at large. In these negotiations, children and youth have played a crucial role as they have been active in producing new cultures such as a new literacy through learning and teaching *Ol Chiki*<sup>xxvii</sup>. The introduction of the script has allowed children and youth to develop new cultural routines but also to recast “modern knowledge” using a script perceived as traditional. This referencing has been crucial because it has led to the establishment of shared frames of interpretation: how to use *Ol chiki* to produce a new Santal literature available to answer to all the needs of Santal speakers?

In this context, the production of a Santal peer culture has not been a matter of simple imitation nor a direct appropriation of adult work. The village dramas staged by children, for example, have included some criticism of adult deviance such as witchcraft or factionalism in politics. Similarly, Santal children living in slums have often parodied in sketches their parents' employers or the high caste Hindus, developing satire as a tool of resistance in a more systematic way than adults do. Such appropriation of the adult



world is creative, as Corsaro (1992) notes, when children “creatively appropriate information from the adult world to produce their own unique peer culture”. But the divide regarding language, schooling and culture issues has also pervaded youth peer culture which to-day reflects some of the tensions of the adult world. It seems necessary to go beyond the identification of these cleavages to study how children and youth use to-day the divided Santal culture to develop their own strategies<sup>xxviii</sup>.

## **Conclusion.**

Though the emotional identification of Santals with their own language is very strong, the job market has led to a pragmatic attitude towards language in a country where anybody moving to a neighbouring state has to adapt himself to a new linguistic situation. Despite the pressures of Santal traditional elites towards the recognition of Santali and Ol Chiki which have dominated the scene in Orissa, we can also see that another more urbanised elite is in favour of English as a medium of education. But as English medium schools are generally private, they cater for the children of upper middle classes. The large majority of adivasi families send their children to public schools as they are free. Teaching in the tribal mother tongue cannot in itself provide the solution to the problems of a schooling system which is based on the stigmatization of tribal children. Language issues are important, but one should not forget economic problems which are often the cause of children dropout from the school. The attempts of tribal leaders to promote tribal languages and script is a complex issue which has developed as a tool of resistance. The script has functioned like a restricted literacy (Scribner & Cole 1999) because it has not been adopted by all Santals. Using Ol Chiki has allowed the Santals to recast a lost memory in a glorious past but it has not helped the learners to open new bodies of knowledge and, for that reason, Santal youth do not always support it. As it is not even shared by all the Santals, the script though it allows a high degree of literacy, also reflect the tensions which pervade the Santal community. A larger question is at stake: does the implementation of a minority language and script prevent tribal minority groups from further marginalization? From a cognitive point of view, it seems important to teach children in mother tongue up to a certain level, and the use of a specific script reflects a way of asserting identity as Scribner and Cole (1999) conclude in their study of literacy among the Vai of Sierra Leone. In India, the language issue is highly political and of course the inclusion of Santali in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution has opened new prospects for the teaching of Santali and Ol Chiki. But the question of which language, or script, is to be chosen in education is highly influenced by the job market. Those who have learned Santali and Ol Chiki might be well equipped to practice and promote their traditional culture, but they also need to learn English. As a result, the lower classes have to be content with one of the State schools, where an Indian language is used as a medium, while elites can afford to send their children in private schools where English medium is used..

Elite formation has already divided the Santal community, though it has also allowed individuals for making novel contributions to the culture while pursuing a range of various goals, which were not necessarily present in traditional cultures. The emergence of a Santal elite also means that in a role-play situation, a Santal child can activate new social models, such as the doctor, or the nurse or the politician. Such



referencing has become crucial as it activates social dynamics: children can imagine themselves interacting in a world where they would not be marginalized.

Tribal elites have contributed to allow powerful constructions of Adivasi identity which are now circulating in influential ways in the public sphere in Middle India. Politicians, tribal parties and students organizations have contributed to voice the debate on tribal rights and education. Yet, many young Santals struggle to reconcile their tribal identity with their current urban lower middle class status, as their claims to represent the modern youth are challenged by young activists who prone the value of resistance. Nevertheless, imagining a new Santal identity is of political significance. Writers, old and young, participate to undermine the negative stereotypes attached to Santals. Yet, we note that some Santal authors are taken up by children memory, animal tales and village life. Will this creative process allow Santal children to reframe their childhood blurring the tensions between the conflicting identities of tribe and class ?

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<sup>i</sup> The Santals live in Middle India (Bengale, Jharkhand and Oriisa) as well as in Nepal and Bangla- Desh.

<sup>ii</sup> In Multi-ethnic villages Santals and other Munda groups live with Hindu castes. Tribal and low-caste often live at the peripheries of villages as they are considered as impure for the higher castes.

<sup>iii</sup> Santal police employees and cleark live in Calcutta (Andersen,2002).

<sup>iv</sup> Many Santals are engaged as workers in Steel plants factories in big cities as Rourkela .

<sup>v</sup> For the concept of cultural routine as structuring children's experiences see W.Corsaro (1992).

<sup>vi</sup> In 1881, Croft the Education Supervisor recommended to take separately the problem of mass education (Carrin & Tambs-lyche in press: p:114).

<sup>vii</sup> Games show us how Santal children are able to criticize adult roles mimicking mother, father or the headman or the priest (Carrin *in press*).

<sup>viii</sup> In case of pregnancy outside marriage, the *jog-manjhi* asks the girl to tell the name of the father who has to marry her. In case she is unable to name the father, the *jog-manjhi* helps her to find a husband who will give his clan name and deities to the child.

<sup>ix</sup> For an interpretation of the concept of reinvention of Tradition , see Carrin (2002:245-264).

<sup>x</sup> It is not the case that all mother tongues of tribals are tribal languages as some tribal groups have non-tribal languages as mother tongue(Khubchandani 1983).

<sup>xi</sup> Some of them converted to Christianity (11/00) and others to Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism (in Tripura).

<sup>xii</sup> Santali forms the largest tribal language group in the three States of West Bengal 74/00, Oraon 14,5/00 and undivided Bihar 48/00 (Abbi1997:14). There are 100000 Santal speakers in Bangladesh and 40000 in Nepal.

<sup>xiii</sup> The eighteen languages included belong to the Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Tibeto-burmese language groups. Santali is the first austro-asiatic language to be included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule.

<sup>xiv</sup> Santal literacy rate in Jharkhand is 20.8 for 27.6 in West Bengal and 24.5 in Orissa.

<sup>xv</sup> While some educationists in India attribute dropout to poverty others feel that it is due to the failure of an inadequate school system (Sarangapani 2003; Weiner 1991:71).

<sup>xvi</sup> The tendency to prefer English medium education has gained the middle classes all over India (Weiner 1991).

<sup>xvii</sup> Weiner(1991:90-105) shows how the government of R.Gandhi tried in 1985 onwards to challenge the Indian system of education to provide youth with qualifications which could lead to employment. But the reforms were too costly to be efficiently implemented (Behera & Nath 2005).

<sup>xviii</sup> The only issue for Keralese is sometimes to work as migrants in the Gulf countries.

<sup>xix</sup> It is also known as Ol Cemet "the script for learning".

<sup>xx</sup> In the seventies the Santal newspapers had become an instrument of protest against the arrestations of adivasi in different local conflicts like forcible harvesting in landlords' fields.

<sup>xxi</sup>

<sup>xxii</sup> Some Jharkhand Universities conduct examinations in Santali language and literature on post-graduate level: Vinoba Bhave Univ., Hazaribagh, Sidhu Kanhu Univ, Dumka , and Baba Majhi Univ. Bhagalpur.

<sup>xxiii</sup> ASECA was founded in 1964.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Two other tribal languages Ho and Saora have been given a script in the thirties.

<sup>xxv</sup> This was also confirmed by my student M. Claux who did field-work in Godda subdivision (Jharkhand) and in Mayurbhanj in 2004 and 2005.

<sup>xxvi</sup> This resistance is particularly marked in *ashram* schools which are organized by the BJP the Hindu nationalist party where Hindu religion is imposed to the children. (Behera & Nath 2005).

<sup>xxvii</sup> A number of publications deal with the history and development of *ol chiki*. See, S. Mahapatra (2001:74-88).

<sup>xxviii</sup> In this perspective, I have the project to study a gang of Santal youth and to be able to theorize their interaction as an interpretive reproduction (Corsaro 1990).

