

Influence Of Modernisation And Technology In Bringing About Change In Family Values; Case Study Of Amlasole Village

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Abstract

Amlasole Village, situated in the Jhargram District's BANSPAHARI Panchayat in West Bengal, is a rural community characterized by its tranquil way of life and agriculture-based economy. Despite its rich historical background, the village remains undeveloped, with key areas such as infrastructure, healthcare and education requiring significant improvement. The younger generation in Amlasole is increasingly engaged with modern technologies, including computers, laptops and mobile phones, yet the community's progress is hampered by limited access to financial support and insufficient medical services.

Historically, the village was a stronghold for Maoist activity, which led to periodic disruptions and a reputation for violence. The healthcare system, once bolstered by regular visits from Kolkata-based health workers, has deteriorated since 2004, with infrequent medical assistance now available. The village's 90 families from different communities make up the demographic, with the Sabar community standing out for retaining a unique way of life. Reports from 2004 highlight severe economic hardships, including deaths attributed to starvation among the Sabar people, who rely on collecting and selling ant eggs for income. This study aims to explore the effects of modernization on Amlasole, particularly how technological advancements and infrastructural developments are shaping the village's traditional way of life

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I. Introduction

The JHARGRAM District is the location of Amlasole Village BANASPAHARI Panchayat BINPUR II. This village's residents lead incredibly tranquil lives. This community has a rich and distinguished past. The primary occupation in this village is agriculture. This hamlet is still waiting for industrial growth. This village's top priorities are roads, power, drinking water, and education. These days, the younger generation is more drawn to computer, laptop, and mobile technology. If banks and other financial organizations provide the locals loans and other forms of financial help, this village will experience true progress. It is necessary to enhance medical and health services.

Because of the ideal geographic setting for their operations, the Maoists used to consider the area to be a "free zone." They made this their permanent sanctuary before moving to nearby locations to engage in military conflict. When word got out of police raids, they would often close the roads. This region was known as "blood-prone" during the time. The extreme left has slain numerous Communist Party of India (Marxist) activists and impoverished agricultural laborers. It wasn't uncommon to see faces obscured by a loose towel. Locally, they were referred to as the Bon police, or forest police.

After crossing Kankrajhor and Moyurjharna, we finally entered Amlasole and could see ripe paddy lying in the fields. There was one healthcare center. A woman told us that it was built long ago, when Upen Kishku was the tribal welfare minister of West Bengal. With his initiative, doctors and health workers from Kolkata used to visit the area every week and provide treatment. The government hospital is situated at Kokrajhar, 5 kilometers from Amlasole, and the primary health center is located at Belpahari, 30 kilometers away from this remote village.

However, no progress has been made in the government health care system since 2004, according to some residents. At the time when the voluntary health center was introduced in 2005, doctors and health workers would come here once a week; now they come once every two or three months.

Sabar Para is located at the end of the village. About 90 families live in the Amlasole village. Among the inhabitants, 14 families belong to the Sabar community, three are Kurmi, and the rest belong to the Mura (tribal) community. However, the Sabar community was found to be living a slightly different lifestyle, as they like to maintain a 'distinct' character.

In November 2004, there were reports of five Sabar deaths due to alleged starvation. Men and women from the Sabar community of Amlasole go into the forest at 5 a.m. to collect ant eggs. The red ants stick to Sal leaves, and if they are not careful, the ants can bite the whole body, especially the eyes and mouth. Sometimes

they get 500 grams or a handful. Right now, this is the only source of income for the Sabar community. With the meager income they get from selling ant eggs (said to have medicinal properties), the entire community runs their households.

Statement of Purpose

There are three ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) centers adjacent to Amjhor Gram, but only one helper and a worker look after the three centers (Bharati Murmu is the worker and Depali Mahato is the helper). It is not known how the two ICDS workers run three centers.

At Kokrajhar, about 5 km from Amlasole, there is a Madhyamik Shiksha Kendra (MSK) school. It started functioning several years ago. There are no adequate teachers. There is a high school at Belpahari, 26 km away. Information on whether the Sabar community's children attend the high school was unavailable.

Amlasole and its adjoining areas are surrounded by natural beauty and landscape. After 2004, many resorts have been built around the region. We met a team from Kolkata. They had not come here as tourists. A former journalist, who was the team leader, said they had come to take photographs of the beautiful landscape for a resort advertisement. "A friend of mine has opened a resort here, he needs these pictures for his resort advertisement," he said.

The question is: Do the Sabar people of Amlasole get jobs in these resorts? Most employees are from outside. "Last winter, some visitors asked if it was true that some people had died without food in this Amlasole village.

Hypothesis

A hypothesis is a conjecture or theory put forth as a basis for additional research that is supported by limited data. It serves as the focal centre of my investigation, and my analysis will determine whether or not this hypothesis is validated.

My hypothesis for this project is that:

THERE HAS BEEN A CHANGE IN THE LIFESTYLE AND VALUES OF THE PEOPLE OF RURAL WEST BENGAL THROUGH MODERN TECHNOLOGY AND MODERNISATION.

I shall try to support my hypothesis with the help of several interviews and a questionnaire.

Data

For my project, the data that I have collected for my research is from two sources:

- i) Primary
- ii) Secondary

The primary data that is being used is the first-hand information I have collected from interviews with various people in villages in Amalsol, in the Jhargram district.

The secondary data is collected from other secondary sources like magazines, newspaper articles, websites, etc. that I have utilized for my research.

II. Methodology

I have used interviews based on a structured questionnaire for the following reasons:

1. The questionnaire is relatively economical and inexpensive. It is possible to cover many people scattered over a wide area.
2. The questionnaire ensures anonymity. The respondent is free to express his views and opinions.
3. On the other hand, an interview can allow us to obtain in-depth knowledge of social issues.
4. Through interviews it is possible to secure relatively dependable information about issues, people and events.

Detailed Procedure

Government efforts to improve the lives of people in rural and tribal areas have improved a lot over the years. Both the Central and State governments are providing them with a wider range of relief measures and benefits to allow them to start on the path of modernisation and urbanization.

We visited the village of Amalsol, in the Jhargram district of West Bengal for this project. A closer, in-person, look revealed that these tribes are still very far off from what we call modern society. Mud huts with thatched roofs, and cramped living spaces however there were still signs of modernity as we saw there was a solar-paneled street lamp and multiple tube wells, all installed by the local panchayat. Most homes did not possess any LPG or gas connections or even the most basic electronic appliances. Most homes (with one or two exceptions) have electric fans. Most families used traditional 'chulhas' or mud stoves for cooking.

The family structure, on the other hand, was seen to be quite like one would assume. Not only were the families small but they were also very close to each other. The members of the tribe and village knew each other

quite well and the ‘anonymous feeling’ that exists in cities today was lacking among them. This shows the presence of close, unity and a ‘we feeling’ among the members of the tribe.

III. Challenges Faced By The Village Communities:

One of the most significant challenges faced by the villagers living in Amalsol was that, even if they had mobile phones and even laptops, they had no cellular network present or even internet access. Such facilities seem common to people in cities however for them it’s a privilege as they need to go inside the village to make calls. This is just one of the plethora of actual problems faced by these tribal people.

Another major problem is their geographic remoteness, which makes it difficult for them to receive basic medical care because the closest hospital is more than 5 km distant from the village. They also lack motor cars, thus they are forced to walk in the case of a medical emergency.

Also, for a variety of reasons, including lack of awareness, remote location, and administrative obstacles, the tribals and villagers are unable to take advantage of government and social welfare programs.

Although progress has been made in recent years to improve their living conditions, there is a long road yet to be traversed to bring them to par with living conditions in other areas.

IV. Modifications Resulting From Technology (In Amalsole Village)

With modernisation, there have been substantial improvements in the lives of the residents of Amalsole village. With the geographical remoteness of the village, it wasn't easy for the residents to access any medical centers or hospitals. They didn't possess any telephone lines so contact with the outside world was almost nil (there were NGOs however that came and set up a school). However, as time progressed and with the advent of modernisation, there came a flood of improvements. First off it was that of the mobile phone, with that, they were allowed access to the internet and were able to call other people around their village and cities. With this facility, the process of schooling in that village was revolutionized completely, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the availability of mobile phones greatly benefitted the residents.

Another form of modernisation that was seen by the villagers, was that of improvement in transportation. There was a major improvement in the conditions of the roads leading in and out of the village, this allowed the residents to the highways and essentially the medical center that was 5km away from their village on foot.

However, with the advent of modernisation, there were expectations of changes in the family structure or rather the traditional family values that were common in rural villages. Yet there were barely any such changes brought about. Through the detailed interviews, I understood the fact that even with the onset of modernisation, the younger generations were still inclined towards the traditional joint families rather than adopting the urban trend of nuclear families.

We interviewed the entire village to understand how and what the exact changes have taken place in the village overall.

Interview 1:

Translated from Bengali

Respondent – Anamika Mura

Q1. How many people live in your family?

A1. Four, my parents, my brother and me.

Q2. What is your occupation?

A2. I am currently not working; I am still in school however I do provide domestic help in the house.

Q3. How would you say that the village's way of life and living conditions have changed from a few years ago?

A3. Due to the government, our village now has access to electricity, and we can use light bulbs and tube lights more frequently now. We also have a cooler in the house that we use to cool the house during the hot summer months. These are new and recent additions to our house.

Q4. Do you possess any kind of modern technology such as a fridge, TV or even gas supply?

A4. No, we don't have such facilities, we use a mud stove for cooking purposes.

Q5. With the coming of mobile phones have you seen any benefit or experienced any benefit?

A5. Yes, there have been however there are no network towers in this area so we have to go inside the jungle to make phone calls.

Q6. Has the government provided any kind of technological development?

A6. We have been provided with solar energy light by the Gram Panchayat, however, when it rains it does not work.

Q7. Now that your area is modernizing, what changes have you seen that are beneficial for you?

A7. Now with modernisation, there are better facilities- food and water supply. Better roads overall, the government has provided housing facilities to other areas but we have not received any.

Q8. Do you feel that you now depend on technology for daily tasks?

A8. Not entirely, certain necessities like communication, or technology like fans and tube lights are present because of modernisation, however, even if they weren't there I think my family and I could survive without them since half the time we don't have electricity.

Q9. Which would you prefer: a nuclear family or a joint family?

A9. I prefer living in a joint family rather than a nuclear one because we already live in a small village so a joint family is better to live in also with modernisation, I would prefer a joint family.

Interview 2:

Respondent- Shyam Mura

Q1. How many people live in your family?

A1. 4 – my parents, my younger sister and myself.

Q2. Compared to a few years ago, how would you say that the lifestyle and living conditions have improved in the village?

A2. Access to mobile phones has revolutionized my lifestyle. However, there isn't a proper network connection here and I need to travel over 4 km to have a network connection strong enough to make a call.

Q3. How do the other families in the village play a role in your life?

A3. The other families in the village are very courteous and together all of us live like a family. I am good friends with many of my age and we often play games together in our free time which leads to further bonding.

Q4. You don't wish to work in the jungle, rather you wish to do cyber-security.

A4. In 2019, in India, there were a lot of cybercrimes and as a result, I wished to work in cyber-security, to prevent activities like bank fraud.

Q5. If you had the opportunity to work in metropolitan cities like Kolkata, would you go?

A5. No, I would not go – I would try and work from home (even with a lot of technological development yet to occur in your village).

Q6. Has the government provided any subsidies or funds for housing development?

A6. We had applied for it, however we haven't received anything so far.

Q7. Do you feel that your lifestyle now depends on modern technology?

A7. Previously there wasn't any kind of internet access but with modernisation and modern technology, I now possess a laptop with which I have done various online computer courses that have greatly benefitted me.

Q8. What is the infrastructural situation here like?

A8. Although infrastructure has improved here, like the construction of better roads, it is not enough to drastically change our lives. The lack of a cell network makes it impossible for us to call for emergency services or be in touch with the outside world.

Q9. With the advent of new technology has there been any kind of change in the family values/ is it better to be in a joint or nuclear family?

A9. I prefer a joint family since we live in a small community, a joint family is better to live with- even with the advent of modernisation, we prefer a joint family over nuclear families(opposite from what we see in cities).

Interview 3:

Translated from Bengali

Respondent- Amarnath Mura

Q1. How many people live in your family?

A1. I am married and I have one son and one daughter.

Q2. What is your occupation?

A2. I go into the jungle to collect wood and sometimes tall grass to make ropes out of it. I am also a seasonal farmer.

Q3. With modernisation, there has been a rise in the usage of mobile phones so according to you what are the benefits that you have seen with mobile phones?

A3. With mobile, it is much easier to call, and message, and overall, there is a change for the good. Communication has become much easier with mobile phones.

Q4. With your children studying in the local school, do you think with the mobile is there a change in the schooling system and has the local government made any effort to bring about change(modernization)?

A4. Yes, mobile technology has modernized education, and the local government in West Bengal has introduced digital tools and infrastructure to improve rural schooling.

Q5. Who is the main income earner in the family? Do women work to supplement their livelihood?

A5. I am. My son also helps me out sometimes in the field when I am out to collect wood. Also, my wife works as domestic help in the Dhitang Homestay.

Q6. How do the other families in the village play a role in your life?

A6. Having lived for so long here, I know all the elders in the village. I talk to them a lot and they provide great company for me. Moreover, we have been able to keep our family traditions alive and pass them down to the next generation.

Q7. What is the infrastructural situation here like?

A7. The infrastructure in the village is worlds apart from what it was in the past. When I came here, there were mud roads (which could not be used during the rainy season), the houses were mainly made from mud, and the use of electricity was pretty much out of the question. Now all of these have changed and so I would say that the lifestyle of the people has greatly improved over the years.

Q8. Do you feel that there is a change in family values due to modernization in the younger generation?

A8. Maybe there have been some changes in family values however I think that my children still possess their traditional values and have a sense of their culture.

Q9. Do you feel that your daily life now revolves around modern technology?

A9. I don't feel that my or my family's life relies on modern technology, however, they have been beneficial.

V. Case Study On The Village Of Amalsole

To have a comprehensive research-oriented project and stable conclusions I have observed and interviewed members of the Amalsole (as seen above). This was organized as a part of a field trip by my school's sociology department. The trip was a way to extend my horizons and allow us to experience a visit to Jhargram and Amalsole(an actual tribal village). I interviewed Anamika Mura(16), Shyam Mura(20), and their father Amarnath Mura(56), however, a survey was conducted for other members of the village and I received 5 more responses to the questionnaire.

The questions that were asked were kept straightforward for the people's understanding. However, they do give a good insight into their opinions about how modernization and technology have brought about changes in their lives.

Firstly, I asked how the introduction of mobile phones benefited them. To this, they gave similar answers. They said that with mobile phones there were massive improvements in communication which was essential due to the location being geographically isolated. However, all the respondents did agree that there isn't a proper network connection here and they needed to travel over 4 km to have a network connection strong enough to make a call.

Secondly, I asked the younger generation with the modernization and improvement in technology, if they would like to continue the profession that their father was doing or pursue something else. The younger generation responded by saying (Anamika) would pursue geography and eventually become a teacher and (Shyam) wanted to pursue cyber-security. This shows how modernization has brought about a significant change in the career mindset of the people in the village.

Thirdly, we asked the younger generation whether with modernisation they would like to live in nuclear families of their own (like in metropolitan cities) rather than continue with the traditional way of joint families. I asked if they would choose the former, however, it was interesting to know that (both Anamika and Shyam) would prefer joint families and rather stay in their village than move to metropolitan cities like Kolkata.

Thus, through these questions along with some direct observation of their lifestyle, it was clear that modernization and technology brought about a vital change in the social fabric, the form of family and the values that they represent were still clearly predominant agents and technology so far to say has had a moderate impact in their lives.

Analysis and Interpretation:

From the different responses that I received; several inferences can be drawn regarding the topic.

Villagers' Perspective

Questions were asked to the respondents how much, if at all, the conditions in the village had improved over the last few years and did modernization improve their rural society. Most of the respondents said that it had benefited, however, 3 responded with maybe and a no to the fact that there weren't any improvements brought about by modernization and technology.

Also, according to the responses from the villagers and the respondents of the interviews and questionnaire, most of them are unsure rather than uncertain about the fact whether their daily functioning relies on modernization.

Also, the respondents, in the questionnaire, have responded that with mobile phones their lives have become much easier. There is evidence to suggest this as all three interviews have recorded that mobiles are a boon for the people of Amalsole.

I also asked the respondents to the interviews and questionnaire whether the younger generation is losing out on cultural beliefs. Most of the respondents (since they are part of an older generation) have said that due to the impact that modernization has had they believe the above to be an undeniable reality. However, the interviews can still ascertain that some members of the younger generation still believe in their traditional values like Anamika and Shyam who prefer a joint family over the modern nuclear family.

Finally, I asked all the respondents whether they think that the younger generation is now more inclined towards a nuclear family because of modernization, I expected that they would be more inclined toward this trend. However, I received the opposite, the younger generation of the village is inclined towards a joint family and nuclear families.

A very comprehensive and detailed analysis of the interviews given above and my interpretation of the same led me to make the following conclusions:

- 1) There is still a long way for the tribal people to enjoy the fruits of modern technology and become assimilated into modernization as a whole. Mobile phones are the only major technology that is accessible to them, and other sources like fridges, fans, etc. are only partly available.
- 2) Family is the greatest form of socialization in the village since the members of the entire village are greatly dependent on one another and don't wish to separate into nuclear families.
- 3) The efforts of the government to empower the people living in villages are only reaching these people partially.

The Path Ahead

From the analysis, it is clear that despite the government enacting multiple benefits, like providing a solar-paneled street lamp, fixing roads, and providing tube wells, a lot of improvements like constant electricity and the provision of cell phone towers are quite essential to bring them up to speed.

Interdependence among the Members

A common feeling that I witnessed in all families during my visit to the village was that all the members felt a sense of dependence on the other family members. Sometimes, it extended beyond the direct family and into the village as a whole. Some members had established deep

bonds with others, leading to a sense of community in the entire village. Family members depended on each other for their sustenance—physical, mental, and social.

VI. Limitations

There are many limitations I faced while doing this project. Some of them are:

- The research was conducted with a small sample size, and thus it is not able to represent the views of the entire population as a whole but of a subsection only.
- There is no way to ensure that the respondents understood the questions in their intended meaning and responded with views that are true to their actual beliefs.

- The readiness and enthusiasm of the people to fill out the questionnaire and provide their views were relatively small, which acted as another hindrance.
- Due to the limited time in which this project was to be finished, it was not possible to interview a larger sample size from the village and make assumptions about the views of a larger group of people.
- The language barrier was a major hurdle to communicating effectively with the people in the villages. Moreover, their accent acted as a further hindrance.

VII. Conclusion

The development and upliftment of rural West Bengal, along with those in other parts of India, holds the key to the rapid socioeconomic development of the country. Development and progress are possible only when it is done in an all-round manner and not in a restricted manner and a limited area.

By leaving rural areas and tribal communities underdeveloped and vulnerable due to various barriers that plague the path of their progress, we only create a tomorrow where their development and empowerment are even more difficult.

Therefore, based on my analysis, interpretation, and comprehension of the questionnaires, beliefs of the respondents, several factors, and other sources of research, my hypothesis, which states that–

“THERE HAS BEEN A CHANGE IN THE LIFESTYLE AND VALUES OF THE PEOPLE OF RURAL WEST BENGAL THROUGH MODERN TECHNOLOGY AND MODERNISATION” Is DISPROVED.

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