

Socio Cultural Profile of Santal Tribe in Mayurbhanj District of Odisha: Role of Santal Women

Mayamani Hembram,

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of History, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.

Dr. Sishir Kumar Tripathy,

Lecturer in History, Department of History, KISS Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.

Abstract-Socio-economic condition Signifies an economic factors those affect their socio-economic conditions. Santal people are agriculture is their primary occupation. Their life is intimately connected with the forest and their economy. Santal people are like cultural programme music, song and dance different festivals activities, religious belief are highly prized in their culture.

Keywords- Santal, socio-economic, women, tradition, culture, festivals.

History of Santals

The Santals call themselves 'Hol' meaning 'a man or human being.' They are also known as 'HolHopon', meaning 'child or children of man or human being.' Literally it means 'Son of mankind.' However, it carries also the implicit meaning, 'the true men'- the only really human society. Their language is called 'holrol' which means 'man's talk or speech'. Only in the mouth of others they are regionally called Santal, Santhal, Saontar and Sotar. Generally, they are known as Santal or Santhal in the official and government records. Despite the variety of names, most of the anthropologists agree that 'Santal' is the name given to this tribe by non-Santals (*Diku*).

The Santals are the largest homogeneous Scheduled Tribe in India. They form the single indigenous community in the Indian subcontinent with the population of more than 6 million. They are largely found in the Indian States of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura and Assam. They are also found in Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Bhutan boarder areas. Some of them are found in Bhutan as daily wage labourers. The Santals have no recorded history and as one of them told, 'the mouth is our printed book'. Therefore, their past history is very vague. But their folklore reveals so much about their history and life style. Their myths, legends and folktales stress "standards and assert values and above all, they create solidarity and inspire confidence."

The Santals are represented by their folk traditions as a group wandering from one land to the other. The following verse from a Santali folk song speaks of the nomadic life style of the Santals.

*"Hihiri Pipirire bonjanamlen
Khoj Kaman rebonkhojlen
Harat rebon haralen
Sasan Beda rebon jatenaho"*

Which means:

In Hihiri Pipiri we were born,
In Khoj Kaman we were called for,
In Harta we grew up,
In Sasan Beda we became septs (clans).

These lines speak about the first part of the journey of the Santals from place to place. It is said that they have to journey further and further till they find a suitable place for their permanent settlement. "The traditions of the Santals represent them as a race wandering from one country to another until they found their present home in Chota Nagpur and the adjacent districts."

Tribal Ethnology and History of Eastern India wrote that the Santals are found at intervals, sometimes in considerable masses, but more generally much scattered, in a strip of Bengal, extending for about 350 miles from the Ganges to the Boitarni, comprising the following districts: Birbhum, Bhagalpur, the Santal Parganas, Hazaribagh, Bancura, Mednipur, Manbhum, Mayurbhanj, Singbhum and Balasore. The Santal Parganas or Santalia said to contain upwards of two hundred thousand Santals, may

now be regarded as the nucleus of the tribe, but it does not appear to have been one of their original seats. Buchanan Hamilton makes no mention about the Santals while describing the hill tribes of Bhagalpur and its vicinity. The aboriginal tribes he fell in with are called 'Malers,' the Rajmahal hill people proper and their kindred, a Dravidian people. This area had been the homeland of the *Mal Paharias* and the *Sauria Paharias*, notorious robbers and cattle lifters who often raided the villages in the plains. The Santals settled in the district around Dumka, the present Head Quarters of Santal *Parganas* in the later part of 18th Century and the beginning of 19th Century (1790 – 1810). The hill tract of Rajmahal lies fifty miles north of Dumka. The *Mal Paharias* and *Sauria Paharias* were the first recorded inhabitants of this region.

In 1832, a considerable impetus was given to the northward movement due to the action taken by Government to secure the Rajmahal highlanders and their possessions in the hills that form the turning point of the Ganges at Sahibganj. To prevent the encroachments of the lowland, Zamindars of the Bhagalpur district, which were constantly exciting reprisals from the Highlanders, a tract of country measuring nearly three hundred miles in circumference was separated and marked off by large masonry pillars, and of all the land within those pillars the government was declared to be the head proprietor, and the hill people were informed that their rights in it would be respected as long as they conducted themselves peaceably. But the hill people only cared for the highlands and the tract which was included within the pillars was called '*Daman-i-koh*', a Persian name meaning 'the skirts of the Hills.' It is a Government estate with an area of 1,356 square miles, the extreme length of which from north to south is 70 miles; its width near the centre of the hills is 30 miles, but to the north and the south it contracts to 16 miles. The valleys running into the hills were available for the settlers, and were speedily occupied by Santals. In a few years, the Santal population in *Daman-i-koh* had increased from three thousand to eighty three thousand souls, when the colony received a check by the Santal insurrection of 1854. "In 1847, less than 25

years from the time Ward erected pillars, 1500 Santal villages and townships, containing a population of about a hundred thousand souls, had sprung up within the ring." When Captain Sherwill visited the Damin in 1851, he found 1,437 Santal villages there with a total Santal population of 83, 625. The total land under cultivation was about 1, 62,560 acres or 254 sq. miles.

Dunbar, the Collector of Bhagalpur stated, by 1836 no less than 427 villages had been established in Damin areas by Santals and Bhuiyas but chiefly by the former. The Santals entered this region and spread far afield without much opposition from the *Paharias* and most of these *Paharias* slowly retired to the Rajmahal Hills. This colony '*Damin-i-koh*' played an important role in the history of the Santals. It became a place of self-preservation at the time of disintegration and ruin. At the same time, one cannot deny that the whole episode of Santal Rebellion from 1855 was centred on this place of Santal settlement.

Methodology

Both the primary and secondary sources have been utilized in the writing of present article on religion beliefs and practices. The study was conducted using a combination of primary and secondary methods. There are various methods of data collection such as multi-stage stratified purposive sampling, personal interviewing, observations, surveying, focus group discussion on santal society.

The Santal Identity: Santali Language

The Santals, like any other tribal community, have their specific ethnic identity which is clearly marked in their language. The ethnography of a tribe is never complete without reference to the ethno-linguistic aspects of their culture. The basic features of human verbal behaviour are preserved in the tribal languages and come out distinctly in the vocabulary, sound symbolism, grammatical structures and derivations. Santali, the ancestral language of the Santal tribe, is remarkably rich in sound symbolism. Many of its words have been produced in imitation of the natural sounds formed by the referent objects or actions. The goat, for example, is called *merom*,

the owl, kokor, and the wind blows sayan sayan. The natural sounds signal meanings which form the base of the language, the speech of the community.

It is understood from the research treatises that the Santals are pre-Dravidian and pre-Aryan people and belonged to 'Proto Austroloid sub family.' Their language is included in the greater Austro-Asiatic family, as also included in the Austric family. Linguistically they belong to Austro linguistic group and differ from Dravidian stock. Along with Santali language, Mundari and Ho languages are also known as Austric languages. The root of the language of these three tribal communities is one and the same and categorically called 'Hor' or Hor language. The Santals did not have a written language. It was the Christian missionaries who introduced Roman script with diacritical marks to write Santali. At present, Santali in large scale, is written in their own manuscript 'Ol-Chiki' devised by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925 Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam and Orissa. This script is also followed by many Santals outside India. Thus Santali has gone exceptionally much ahead of the other tribal languages in India and fulfils all the elements and qualify the parametres needed to be called a full-fledged language.

Santals are linguistically the largest tribal group in India and possibly in the world. Their mother tongue, Santali is lively in every aspect of their daily life. They are recognized as a separate community in India as they have the credit of a distinct language. The Santals continue to enrich their culture and traditions through their language which is very rarely found in other tribal groups. "Santali language, folktales, songs and ballads are important homogenizing factors, for they are a means of preserving the Santal heritage and customs."

Characteristics of Santals

There are some specific characteristics which distinguish the Santals from other tribes and non-tribals. As far as the physical characteristics are concerned, a Santal is a man of medium stature, but muscular and sturdily built, wiry and capable of great physical endurance. His complexion is dark and, varying from brown to an almost jet black colour. He is

beardless or neatly so, but has coarse and sometimes curly hair on the pate. It was an old custom for the Santals to wear long hair, but nowadays, it is rare to see a man with long hair. The cheek bones are somewhat prominent; the nose is generally broad and depressed. The mouth is large and the lips are full and projecting. The Santals are also known for some general characteristics. For reclaiming the land and clearing new jungle, the Santals have no equals. They like to retire in the backwoods, where their flutes sound sweeter, their drums find deeper echoes, and their bows and arrows may once more be used. They like to have small garden adjoining the house to grow Indian corn. They love roaming with hunting and fishing.

Socially, they are jolly, cheerful and contented with what they have enough to eat and drink and to spend on social and religious ceremonies. Unlike the Hindu neighbours, they enjoy their life in the casteless society. They love drinking and they live on both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food materials. They grew or made or found what they needed. They manufactured their own salt, wove their own cloths and made their own weapons, implements and utensils. Santals help each other very much, when there is any need. Both men and women in the Santal community very much to work in company with others and when they have no work, they look for each other up for a talk. These characteristics of the Santals strengthen the spirit of unity among them.

They are truthful, law-abiding and honest people; their word is their bond, and a knot on a string is as good as a receipt. Their manners are straightforward, simple and independent.¹ They do not display much endurance or interest for the work when the Santals suspect of evil spirit. Very often, they take things easy and for granted. Mutual suspicion between the husband and wife, envying each other among the young boys and girls, hating and taking revenge among the family people, buying and selling and debts and loans involving the *dikus* are growing rapidly among the Santals and these negative elements reduce their prestige to a large extent.

The Community Spirit of the Santals

The Santals are communitarian and they have a strong community bond. They feel completely secure only when they live among their own village people. They help each other spontaneously as their attitude to help others in the community is strong. "If a man has no cart, or he has too few, the village people provide him a cart and bullocks in building a house or when ploughing, planting, making rice field ridges, and harvesting they help each other and those who ask for help have only to give rice and curry." During the time of sickness, they visit and help each other without expecting any reward. All the socio-cultural and religious rites and ceremonies involve the whole community. Whenever there is a heavy task of an individual or of the community, the whole village is there to fulfil the task. In the times of marriage or when the agricultural operations are undertaken or at the death of a person, the whole village community is there with extreme generosity.

The Santals, men and women, work in company and when men go to the forest or to hill, the women also accompany. The cattle herd boys mostly herd in company to overcome any danger, by helping each other. The women accompany others for their daily works either in the village or elsewhere. When the Santals have no work, they go and look each other up a good deal. They talk together about their health and circumstances. In the evening, they come together at the *Manjhisthan* and they start some humorous conversation, they jest together and talk together without restraint about a thousand matters, to ease their mind.

While appreciating the community spirit of the Santals, P.O. Bodding observes the selfish people who are not other-centred: "Some people are so stingy; they will absolutely not give anything, they utterly refuse to help. But no one likes such heartless people, and if they themselves fall into difficulties, no one will look at them; they rather say: *Thakur* is punishing this man in retribution."

Joy Filled Santal Life

Santals are fully concentrated in the present life than their future. They have at least a dozen festivals every year and at every festival

men and women sing and dance together for many days and nights forgetting the rest of the world. The most important festivals are marriages, *Sohrai* or harvest festival, and *Baha* or spring festival. The Santali word for 'joy of life' is '*Raska*', a word that is associated with many things and a feeling that is considered most essential in any activity. *Raska* must be found even in the most routine work. Unless it is there, it is difficult to get much work out of Santals.

Main Festivals of Santals

Santals have a number of festivals celebrated annually by the community. The annual cycle of festivals is based on the economic life of the community connected with the agricultural operations. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the Santals. The agricultural activities are given a deep religious meaning, because the Santals are aware of the many dangers in their agricultural tasks. A drought or flood can cause famine and a good crop can bring prosperity. To get the best, they believe that their *bongas* have to be honoured with proper sacrifices. These take the form of public festivals. The following are the festivals associated with agriculture.

'Sohrae' (Harvest Festival)

This is the most significant festival of the Santals, celebrated in November, when the paddy has been fully harvested, threshed and stored. The feast begins with um *hilok*' (day of purification) when the members of the tribe cleanse themselves with a ceremonial bath. The houses and the courtyards are also thoroughly cleansed. Then in the paddy field two *khondsare* made, marking them with '*sindur*'. In one *khond*, the priest offers fowls to the major spirits of the village, asking them to bless the festival. In the second *khond* the assistant priest offers sacrifices to the malevolent spirits. The *bulmayam* ceremony is also performed, beseeching all the spirits to accept the offering and cause no harm. The sacrificial meal is eaten by all the villagers with rice-beer. Drumming, dancing, singing and rejoicing accompany the eating and drinking.

The second day is *dakahilok*' (food day), and is devoted to the preparation of food.

Starting from the headman's house, people dance and rejoice with the accompaniment of flutes and drums, and they refresh themselves with rice-beer. On this day sacrifices are made to the family spirits. Libations are also made in their honour. Large-scale rejoicing takes place all through the night and day. The third day is devoted to *khuntauhilok'* (day of animal), when the people play and rejoice with the animals which were also instruments at the cultivation. They are smeared with vermilion, and various games are played involving the animals.

The above festivals of the Santal are collective celebrations affirming their religious faith in the community. They express the Santals' belief in the supernatural world, friendship with the spirits and fellowship with the village community through collective worship accompanied by feasting, dancing and drinking. The religious elements are essentially connected with the festivals. The religious festivals of the Santals centre around the agricultural seasons. All these feasts enhance the economic, religious and cultural life of the community.

***Baha Porob*(Flower Festival)**

The *Baha* Festival of the Santals is celebrated in the beginning of the spring, in February - March, when the sal flower (*shoarjom baha*) and the *matkom* or mohua (*bassialatifolia*) trees begin to blossom. This feast indicates the renewal of life in nature and the renewal of creation. This festival marks the end of an agricultural year and the beginning of a new agricultural year ushering in a new hope and a new life as manifested in the natural phenomena. This feast is held on different days in different villages so that people may visit their friends and relatives. This festival is a massive propitiation of the major *bongas* who are asked to keep the village free from any sickness of witchcraft and to preserve the crops and cattle. It is also considered a fertility feast.

During this festival, *Naeke*, the village priest, offers to the benevolent *bongas* at the *Jaherthan*(the village sacred grove) sal and mohua flowers and sacrifices fowls as thanksgiving offerings and offers supplications to them to protect the village in the name of the whole village community. People express their

happiness with singing and dancing for the arrival of new life with new hope. They throw water at each other symbolizing washing away of past malice and hatred and entering into amity and unity. Since the festival is associated with forgiveness and reconciliation, it is their most sacred festival. People are allowed to collect *Matkom Baha*(*Basia Latifolia* blossoms), a cash crop used for food and drink and eat other fruits only after the festival was over.

***Erok' Sim* (Sowing Festival)**

The seed sowing festival is celebrated when the monsoon showers begin in June - July. At the *Jaherthan*, *Naeke* offers fowls and other materials collected from the people to the spirits, invoke them to send enough rain to make the land fertile to yield a bumper crop. They are also implored to destroy any evil power or malady. Black fowls are sacrificed to the malevolent spirits. The head of the family offers fowls to honour the family spirits. The festival ends with singing and dancing along the *kulhi* (streets). The sowing of the paddy is started then.

***Hariar Sim* (Offering of Sprouting of seedlings)**

HariarSim, the feast of the sprouting of the paddy seeds is held in July - August every year. On this occasion, the Santals offer sacrifices to the village spirits so that the paddy grow green. The *Naeke* offers fowls in the name of the whole community as an offering of gratitude to the benevolent *Bongas* at the *Jaherthan* for timely rain for the good growth of the plants. People start transplantation once the rites are over.

***Iri Gundli Nawai* (Offering of the first fruits)**

Iri - Gundli - Nawai, is celebrated in August - September. As the name indicates, it is connected with the offering of the first fruits (*nawai*) of millets called *iri* and *gundli*.⁴⁰ When the millet is ready for harvest, the *Naeke* takes some ears of millet and offers them on behalf of the village community to the benevolent *Bongas* at *Jaherthan*. Once the new corn is offered to all the spirits, the people start consume the produce.

Nawae Porob (Paddy Festival)

It is forbidden among the Santals to eat the first fruits of paddy before the ceremonial offerings of the first fruits to the spirits. This festival is celebrated in November – December, when the crops are yet to be harvested. At this feast, the first fruits of the land are offered to the spirits as an acknowledgement of gratitude for the good crops. The people then start harvesting and eating from the new crops when the sacrifices are over.

Santal Understanding of Principles

The Santals give much value for the behavioural pattern of every individual in the community. The parents, elders and the village leaders play a very significant role in guiding the younger ones in the society. They are very reserved with regard to their relationship or friendship with the non-Santals and any misbehaviour is taken in the community level. Among the village leaders, *Jog Manjhi* plays a vital role in maintaining strict discipline among the Santal youngsters. Morality for the Santals is, rightful doing and living; and remaining true and loyal to their tribal identity. Further morality is intimately linked with the issues pertaining to sex. Sex is sacred for them and it is intimately related only with marriage and it can only be done in secret. The Santals never talk about sex in public; and they use metaphorical language to express sexual issues.

In most *Mánjhi* Council meetings, sexual issues get priority to be resolved. The Santals often have marathon session to settle such issue even it takes more than a day. Since family and village community are the principal arena of moral education and formation, it is clear that Santal-morality is passed on from one generation to another in the living expression of the culture of the people.

Status of Santal Women

The Santal women are very much peace loving and kind hearted with cooperative nature. They hate quarrelling and slandering but like to remain self contained with own responsibilities prescribed by the society. They are very much self reliant and self supporting by nature and always like to remain master of their own mind. Though the Santal women are

recognized as laborious all through the year in the family, their economic worth is not estimated properly. More than 80% agricultural works are done by the womenfolk. Yet they are not the owner of the produce. They carry the produce on the head to the market but only at the desire of family headman. There is no dowry system among the Santals but at the same time the divorces are very frequent and women are victimized very much. A Santal male has some specific traditional rites and celebrations on his behalf. But a female does not have such privileges. In the practice of witchcraft, only women are identified as witches and in many cases such identified women are brutally killed.

“In the childhood, a girl gets little chance to play freely because she remains busy in looking after her younger brothers or sisters or helping her mother. In adolescence period, a girl’s movement is very much restricted. She cannot move alone anywhere. A girl after 12 years remain unmarried seems something wrong with her. Remarriage of a girl is more difficult than that of a boy, specially the girl having any issue or a girl child. A separated woman cannot have a best form of marriage or cannot marry a bachelor where as a Santal man can do so for several times. Remarriage of a woman reduces the bride price as well as her social status.” These observations reveal that the Santal patriarchal society does not function on the principle of equality as far as their women are concerned.

Santal Rebellion (1855 – 1857)

The Revolt of 1857 played a remarkable role in the history of India’s freedom struggle against the British rule. It was not a sudden event. But it was the climax of many coherent events of popular revolts against the foreign domination. The establishment of British power in India was a prolonged process of piecemeal conquest and consolidation and the colonization of the economy and society. This process produced discontent, resentment and resistance at every stage. The popular resistance took three broad forms: civil rebellions, tribal uprisings and peasant movements.

The Santal uprising or *Santal ‘Hul’* was the most massive one among the various tribal revolts. The Santals were furious with the

British interference and so they determined to free themselves. This was evident even in 1780s in the life of a great Santal leader, namely, *Baba Tilka Majhi*.

Baba Tilka Majhi was the first Santal leader who had taken up the arms against the Britishers (East India Company) in the year 1789. The English combed the Tilapore forest to arrest where *Baba Tilka Majhi* was operating but *Majhi* and his men held the Britishers at bay for several weeks. When he was finally arrested in 1784, he was tied to the tail of a horse and dragged all the way to the District collector's residence at Bhgal pur city. There, his lacerated body was tied to hung from a Banyan tree. A mammoth statue to the heroic leader was erected at the spot after the independence of the country.

The Santals who lived in the area between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, known as *Damin-i-koh*, rose in revolt, made a determined attempt to expel the outsiders – the *dikus* and proclaimed the complete annihilation of the alien regime. When the British started allowing the Santals to settle permanently in the *Damin-i-koh* region it took a new turn. The main aim of the British administration was to reclaim the dense forested *Damin-i-koh* region to use it for the purpose of agriculture and to do it the industrious Santals were invited to that region. A high amount of revenue was forecasted from that locality. James Pontet gave a practical view to that apprehension. The relevant records indicated that as early as 1851 the revenue collection of that area increased from Rs. 2000.00 to Rs.43, 919.00 and the Santals constituted there as large as 1,473 villages. The Santals tried their best to make the region highly productive and the villages reached all round progress. The development programme of the *Damin-i-koh* was aimed at the following principles:

i) It had not been possible for the British administration to bring the hill people of Rajmahal under the broad-based programme of settled cultivations. They were wild and preferred to live on the hill top villages. Thus the Santals, the laborious and more considerate tribe were sheltered in large numbers hoping that they would convert the jungle infested *Damin-i-koh* into an agriculture –oriented field.

ii) In arranging the settlement for the driven out Santals from the neighbourhood and far off places the British administration wanted to take possession of the concealed lands of the *Damin-i-koh* as retained by the unscrupulous Zamindar.

iii) Through the deforestation of the extensive forests of the *Damin-i-koh* and the adjoining portions, the whole country could be made healthy and populous one to exploit the resources of the region.

iv) To get the possession of *Damin-i-koh* through peaceful means. *Damin-i-koh* had been held for long years by the wild hill tribe as their hereditary property. The government issued a notification towards that effect (dated 17th July, 1823) which wanted a speedy process of possession of the said land.

Despite the various efforts taken up by the administration to make the above noted intentions fulfilled, there emerged many internal problems as a result of the entailment of gross injustice on the innocent common people of that area. It became acute to such an extent that the peace loving Santals revolted. When *Damin-i-koh* became economically very prosperous with the development of agriculture with tireless efforts of the Santals, there was an influx of non-tribal traders, money lenders, Zamindars and people with ulterior motives in the Santal villages. The Santals received them in a friendly way without malice. But these intruders pretended to be friendly, and in reality, they were venomous to the core to destroy their hosts. The innocent Santals were not aware of the inner and crooked motives of these *dikus* who would eventually rob all their properties and turn them their serfs and slaves.

The self sufficient tribal economy of the Santals, which was based on barter and exchange, got disturbed through the introduction of money economy brought by the intruders. The money lenders took advantage over the illiteracy and ignorance of the Santals, exploited them heavily. The Santal debtor would lose everything to the money lender for the money he had borrowed. The greedy merchants exploited the Santals in the markets with falsified weights and measures. The court of law became an instrument in the hands of corrupted Zamindars, money lenders and merchants who denied justice to the poor Santals. The police

also made the innocent Santals guilty of thefts and criminal activities. The British government took indifferent attitude. From all the levels the Santals had been receiving unjust and brutal treatment which made them frustrated with the whole administrative structure.

The Social conditions which forced them to revolt were pictured by a contemporary in the Calcutta Review as: "Zamindars, the police, the revenue and court alas have exercised a combined system of extortions, oppressive exactions, forcible dispossession of property, abuse and personal violence and a variety of petty tyrannies upon the timid and yielding Santals. Usurious interest on loans of money ranging from 50 to 500 percent; false measures at the haut and the market; wilful and uncharitable trespass by the rich by means of their untethered cattle, tattoos, ponies and even elephants, on the growing crops of the poorer race; and such like illegalities have been prevalent."

Some twelve years after the outbreak of the *SantalHul*, E. G. Man, in 1867, listed a few specific grievances as having caused the Santals to rise against an inefficient and lethargic government, totally inexperienced in dealing with the primitive tribals. Among the grievances the important were:

- i. The grasping and rapacious spirit influencing the mahajans or money lenders in their transactions with the tribe.
- ii. The increasing misery caused by the iniquitous system of allowing personal and hereditary bondage for debt.
- iii. The unparalleled corruption and extortion of the police in aiding and abetting the mahajans.
- iv. The impossibility of the Santals obtaining redress from the courts and
- v. The improvidence of the "happy go lucky" style of living of Santals themselves.

The Santals themselves declared that their grievances were the prevalence of falsehood, the negligence of the sahibs, the extortions of the mahajans, the corruption of the amla and the oppression of the police. All these grievances were due very largely to the absence of European officers and the presence of Bengali and other *Dikku*, (non-Santal) immigrants, who had flocked in to carry on trade and money lending among the Santals.

In addition to the oppression caused by the Zamindars, mahajans and the local administration, the European railway employees also harassed the Santals by simply taking their households away without paying anything, and lastly when they ill-treated two Santal women through abducting them, the Santals became furious and they immediately decided to teach a good lesson to all classes of oppressors and miscreants by erasing them from the Santali land. The Santals had grievances against the Indigo planters too. The planters had established some kuthis in *Damin-ikoh* area and forced the Santals to cultivate indigo. On the eve of the Rebellion of 1855, the Santals even issued a pamphlet in Hindi script against the planters on July 25, 1855.⁵⁶ To Oldham, the fundamental idea behind the Rebellion was 'the establishment of a Santal realm and Kingdom'. This idea gained ground at a time when there was an abnormal rise in the price adding to the resentment of the Santals.

Two other factors added fuel to the fire on the eve of the Rebellion of 1855 were: (i) the practice of cattle lifting by Mahajan's men and (ii) the rape of the Santal women. Pontet vividly described these two in his letter. When a Santal was not able to settle his loan taken from a mahajan, his cattles were lifted by mahajan's people. The cattle lifting were indiscriminate and this was as great a loss to the Santal as that of land. Without the bullocks or buffaloes he had nothing to do with his land.

The Santals were utterly exasperated. Not only their means of subsistence had been attacked from all corners, but also the chastity of their women had become an easy prey in the hands of darogas and payadas of the than as. This was too much for them. The Santals value most, even today, the chastity of their women folk. Though such things had not become a

general practice, the condition was pretty bad and the Santals reached the limits of their toleration. On the slightest opportunity the police men as well as the mahajan's men used to molest the Santal women and they had to bear the indignity silently. The impatient Santals could not tolerate any more the indifferent attitude of the government towards those atrocities of the *dikus* and unlawful harassment. All those circumstances adequately wounded the dignity and ethics of the Santals. The whole horrifying atmosphere of Damin-i-koh intensified the discontent of the dehumanized Santals.

The Santals always longed earnestly for freedom and for recognition as lords of the soil – a motive which inspired them with the idea of establishing a kingdom for themselves under their own Subahs or chiefs. They were greatly distressed that they started attacking some mahajans' houses at night in the spirit of unrest in 1854. The authorities caught them and treated them as ordinary dacoits. Though they protested against it, they were tried and convicted. In January 1855, the irritated Santals committed two gang robberies and the government released the convicted robbers thinking that the crime was because of the suppression of the mahajans. "It seems probable that this act of clemency was regarded by the Santals as a confession of weakness."

As a staunch believer in the supernaturalism the Santal community during the period of crisis in their existence level very naturally received a supernatural indication for the future course of action. This Supernaturalism bound all of them with the Santali movement—the feeling of ethnicity. Four young Santal brothers, namely, Sidhu Murmu and Kanhu Murmu, Chandu Murmu and Bhairab Murmu received divine indications through a miraculous happening by the sudden appearance of the Thakur (God) before them. As per indication, Sidhu and Kanhu prepared for the worship of Thakur within the boundary of their house. The news of this revelation was spread all over the region with the Santal traditional symbol of sal(Shorearobusta) twig. It was thus the first event depicting the rise of Santal ethnicity which was at that time became very meaningful. As per the inspiration of

Thakur, Sidhu and Kanhu fixed 30th June 1855 for the mega gathering of all the Santals at Bhagnadihi to challenge against the oppressors.

By 1854, the tribal heads, the manjhirs and parganites, had begun to meet and discuss the possibility of revolting. Stray cases of robbing of Zamindars and moneylenders began to occur. Under the direction of tribal leaders, about 6,000 Santals from 400 villages assembled at Bhagnadihi on 30th June 1855 to raise the banner of revolt, get rid of the outsiders and their colonial masters once and for all, the usher in Satyug, 'The Reign of Truth,' and 'True Justice.' The Santals believed that their actions had the blessings of God. Sidhu and Kanhu, the principal rebel leaders, claimed that Thakur had communicated with them and told them to take up arms and fight for independence. Sidhu told the authorities in proclamation: 'The Thakur has ordered me saying that the country is not Sahibs...The Thakur himself will fight, Therefore, you sahibs and soldiers (will) fight the Thakur himself.'

The leaders organised the Santals for huge processions through the villages accompanied by drummers and musicians. The leaders rode at the head on horses and elephants and in palkis. About 60,000 Santals had been mobilized. Forming bands of 1,500 to 2,000, but rallying in many thousands at the call of the drums on particular occasions, they attacked the manajans and Zamindars and their houses, police stations, railway construction sites, the *dak* (post) carriers—in fact, all the symbols of diku exploitation and colonial power. The Santal insurrection was helped by many non – tribal and poor artisans. *Gwalas*(milkmen) and others helped the rebels with provisions and services; lohars (Blacksmiths) accompanied the rebel bands, keeping their weapons in good shape. The washer men, barbers, drummers, potters, weavers and carpenters were part of the rebellious tribal groups.

When the government became aware of the strength of the rebellion, it arranged for a major army campaign against the rebels. It mobilized tens of regiments under the command of a major general, declared Martial Law in the affected areas and offered rewards of up to Rs. 10,000 for the capture of various rebel leaders. The rebellion was crushed ruthlessly. More than

15,000 Santals were killed while tens of villages were destroyed. Sidhu was betrayed, captured and killed in August 1855 while Kanhu was arrested by accident towards the end of the rebellion in February 1866. And Rajmahal Hills were drenched with the blood of the fighting Santal peasants.

It has narrated an incident which speaks of the exemplary heroism of the Santal rebels: 'They showed the most reckless courage. In one case Santals had taken refuge in a mud house and refused to surrender. Volley and volley was fired in, when their fire slackened, the troops entered the huts and found only one man alive. A sepoy called on him to lay down his arms, whereupon the old man rushed on the sepoy and cut him down with his battle-axe.' The high sense of ethnicity of the Santals could make possible their severe fight with simple bows and arrows against the British power which was armed with advanced warfare. The rigid ethnicity among the broad based tribal community gave birth to a new territory where their interest was promised to be kept through social legislation. The Santal areas were made into a separate non- Regulation district under the Act 37 of 1855 and were known as Santal Parganas. Thus the Santal Parganas were the outcome of the Santal Rebellion (1855 - 1857).

Socio - Cultural Life of the Santals

The Santal tradition reveals, the first human parents are *Pilchu Haram* and *PilchBudhi*. From these parents, the Santal tribe is divided into twelve septs or clans which have specific names and occupations and they are: Kisku (king or ruler), Murmu(priest), Soren (soldier), Hembrom (prince or noble), Marndi(wealthy person), Besra (lit. Uncastrated buffaloes lascivious ones), Tudu (Drummer), Hasdak (cultivator), Chore (the dirty one), Baske(cook / merchant), Pauria and Bedea. The first eleven clans exist today excepting the last one.

The violation of tribal endogamy and clan exogamy are greatest offences. Those who violate this rule are expelled from Santal society. This is the highest social punishment in Santal society. Those who break clan exogamy are sometimes readmitted in the society but those breaking tribal endogamy are not pardoned and dealt with before the Hunt Council. Previously

the orthodox punishment known as '*Bit laha*' (out casting or excommunication from the Santal society) was prescribed but this occurs rarely at present.

To the Santal belief, the universe is a vast arena in which man, woman, spirits and impersonal powers are constantly in contact with each other. Every house-hold, clan and village community must ensure its integrity and maintain the harmony. There is a collective personality with the strong sense of belonging one's clan or community. A Santal has identity in so far as he is an integral part of '*sagai*', the Santal pattern of relationships. It is a very specific cohesiveness among the Santals. The origin, ancestry, heritage, history, language, customs and traditions are all one and the same for all the Santals. The Santal community expresses its sense of belonging and fraternal fellowship when they celebrate the important stages in the life of an individual. These are marked by the performance of some special rites in which the whole village participates. Some of the important social celebrations are: '*JanamChatiar*', ceremonial purification after birth; '*CacoChatiar*,' ceremony performed for rendering full social rights, '*Bapla*,' marriage ceremony, death and funeral ceremony.

Through '*JanamChatiar*', a Santal child becomes a member of the family. The name-giving is an important part of the '*JanamChatiar*' ceremony, for giving of a name to a child, formally admits it into its father's clan and subclan. By doing this, the child is given protection of its father's *bongas*. In giving it a name, the father removes all traces of illegitimacy, if any, recognizing the child as his own. The child thus acquires a definite status in the village and among its kinsfolk. It is considered to be a Santal. The name-giving also emphasizes the social obligations of the household to its new addition.

The conclusion of the '*JanamChatiar*' ceremony is marked by the drinking of gruel made out of boiled rice-water (*dah' mand*) with nimleaves. This is why this ceremony is also called '*NimDah' Mandi*'. Though very bitter, this beverage is said to have a purificatory effect. The household head gives some of the gruel to Maran Buru and all the ancestor spirits, invoking them to give the baby a long and healthy life. All

the people present are then given *nimdahmandi*, after which everyone returns to his house. With the end of the ceremony, the village *bongas* are purified and the village and the house where the birth has taken place are cleansed.

The second critical stage in the life-cycle of a Santal is marked by a purificatory rite called, *CacoChatiar*. Though the word *Caco* literally means 'a toddler', the ceremony is performed when the child has grown up. In fact, it has to be observed before marriage. While *JanamChatiar* ceremony admits a child to the outer fringes of the tribe, the *CacoChatiar* ceremony is believed to give an individual all the responsibilities and privileges of a full-fledged member of the tribe. Through this ceremony, an individual enters into a new relationship with the *bongas* whom he can now approach with sacrificial offerings and also share in the sacrificial meal. The social rights are given later before the marriage through '*CacoChatiar*'. This rite is meant only for males in the Santal Society.

Judging the complexity of the ceremonies and the long period of time during which the complete procedure for contracting a marriage is gone through, it is obvious that marriage is the most important stage in a Santal's life-cycle. It is considered indispensable for every Santal, whose tribe members cannot visualize how a normal man or woman can remain unmarried. Bachelors and spinsters are looked down upon as unhappy wretches. As a result of this attitude, unmarried Santals are very rarely found. Adult marriage (*Bapla*) is the norm of the society. After '*sindurdan*' in marriage ceremony, the wife legally becomes the member of her husband's family. From birth to death, at every important stage of a Santal's life, the entire village community actively participates. Whether it is ploughing or transplanting or hunting, we find the whole village community actively participating in the events.

If we look into the customs of the Santals, we come to know many meaningful elements in the socio-cultural life of the Santals. After the birth of a child, the *Gaasibudhi*, the midwife cuts the umbilical cord of the child with an arrow and buries it near the door. The child is named on the day of the birth or on any odd numbered day following birth. The first- born

son is given the name of his grandfather; and second male child will be named from maternal side and he is also given another name for calling him. Birth is considered a joy filled occasion in the Santal society. It makes the couple fertile and washes the strain of barrenness permanently. It raises the status of the husband and wife as father and mother. After birth of a child, the family has to give a feast to the villagers.

Family is the smallest unit of social organization in the Santal society. Family is nuclear, husband-wife and their unmarried children. Married son establishes his own family and the married daughter leaves the house to lead a family with her husband. The ritual of marriage comes in the life of all the Santal boys and girls. Monogamy is the normal form of marriage. Premarital relation is not allowed within the lineage. Marriage may take place between boys and girls of two lineages but it is avoided. They generally follow village exogamy. Normal way of getting a bride is by bride-price and through the consent of the parents of the boys and girls. But marriage by exchange, elopement service and love may also take place. The Santals have many types of marriage. At the marriage, the bride money is collected. Divorce is obtained easily; however, some alimony has to be paid to the woman. Suppose, if the husband is found unfaithful to the wife, she can boldly seek for divorce. There is also a practice of the son-in-law staying in the wife's family.

When an elderly Santal dies, it is taken positively as the transformation of body and soul of a person. The dead body is buried or cremated. Only the male members participate the in death rituals. After the death of a respected person like, *Manjhi*(Village Headman), *Paranik* (Deputy Village headman), *Naeke*(Priest), *godet*(Messenger), etc, of the community, all the Santals participate and mourn the death. On the evening of the death of a person, a rooster is killed and porridge is offered to the soul of the dead. After seven days, the Santals purify themselves by bathing in a river. The last rites, namely, *Bhandan*, are performed at a convenient time after another seven days.

Music and Dance

The Santals love music and dance. Like other Indian people groups, their culture has been influenced by mainstream Indian culture and by Western culture, but traditional music and dance still remain. Santal music differs from Hindustani classical music in significant ways. The Santal traditionally accompany many of their dances with two drums: the *Tamak'* and the *Tumdak'*. The flute was considered the most important Santal traditional instrument and still evokes feelings of nostalgia for many Santal. Santal dance and music traditionally revolved around Santal religious celebrations.

Slowly these trends face much pressure by the dominant non-tribals and the various steps taken by the Indian government to bring the Santals into the national mainstream of life. This, today more than ever, is jeopardizing the social integrity of the Santals. The Santals face many social problems in their homeland and they are: poverty, seasonal hunger in some areas, lack of schooling and adult education, exploitation by non-tribals in the markets, drunkenness, indebtedness, mortgaging of land to non-tribal moneylenders, inefficient agricultural methods, lack of irrigation facilities, land holding fragmentation, lack of access to forest resources, lack of technical and managerial skills, lack of saving and income generating activities, easygoing attitude, alienating mentality of the educated Santals and urbanization and so on.

Education among Santals

Most Santals are illiterate and unskilled landless labourers who earn a very meagre wage which is not sufficient to run a family. Santal families have more children than they can afford. They hardly ever plan their family. In a family, four or five children are a common sight in a Santal village. Their poverty, lack of nutritious food and mal-nourishment lead to a high percentage of child mortality among the Santals. In such poor families, the education of the children is neglected. Parents are not motivated enough or they do not have sufficient economic means to educate their children. Many children drop out even before they finish their primary education. In the school, they are exposed to an alien language which is not their mother tongue and so they are thrown into an inferior status in front of the students and

teachers who come from the mainstream non-tribal communities.

The government runs schools for children and adults in the villages. Many schools are only in the paper and in reality they do not exist and the non-availability of motivated teachers is also another perennial problem to create an abnormal vacuum in the educational sector among the Santals. The attitude of the government towards the tribals is a strange mixture of manifest paternalism and diffused indifferentism, and even downright antagonism in some sections of the administration. This is explicit in the government policies with regard to tribal education. The syllabus is prepared in the cities by a non-tribal in alien language and it is forcefully dumped on the innocent rural tribal children and as a result, these children are not able to learn from the alien education which is unpleasant in the childhood itself. So, one find a small number of Santal students get through in going through these hurdles. Moreover, the vibrant tribal elements could be included in the syllabus for the educational institutions in the tribal areas. As "Certain tribal activities like agriculture, dancing, hunting, tribal games and archery must be allowed to find fullest expression in the extracurricular activities of the school, thus providing some continuity of the traditional values and forms of organization."

Medicine and Health hazards among Santals

Traditional medicine is highly developed among the Santals and implies a surprising range of botanical and zoological knowledge; more than 300 species each of plants and of animals are identified and used in the pharmacopoeia. There is even, in the organization of botanical knowledge, a hierarchization based on the morphology of plants. The making of remedies implies again a considerable practical knowledge of chemistry. This medical knowledge is described in a Santal text from the turn of the century, which establishes a complete pathology defining and ranking symptoms and disease according to consistent criteria. Recent fieldwork data corroborates the value of this work, though there is a tendency nowadays to replace such remedies by ritual invocations.

The diseases most commonly met with in the district of Santal *Parganas* are malaria

fevers, bowel complaints, influenza, ophthalmic, cholera, small-pox and skin diseases. Malarial fevers are prevalent before and after the rains in low-lying waterlogged areas. Epidemics of cholera break out time to time, beginning with the hot weather and ending with the rains. Attacks of dysentery are numerous throughout the year. Skin diseases like scabies are common among the young children during the cold season owing to want of care and cleanliness. Vaccination is, on the whole, regarded favourably by the aboriginal races – not that they have much faith in it, but because it is the wish of the Government. The Santals attribute disease to evil spirits. Without realizing the reasons for the sickness, they are at the clutches of the 'Ojha', the witch doctors who placate the spirits on payment of heavy fees. In most of the cases, they borrow money or mortgage their land to pay the fee. As a result, the whole family embraces poverty.

Apart from the Christian missionary hospitals, dispensaries and mobile clinics, the government is too slow to reach the medically needy poor people in the villages and so very often many suffer and die of leprosy, diarrhoea, malaria, malnutrition, kalaazar, etc. The shortage and reluctance of men and women of medical profession to offer their services to the rural and interior places where Santals live also causes health hazards among the Santals. Among the Santals drinking has been widely prevalent and they have sentimental attachment to it. The indigenous beverage prepared by fermentation of rice and millets, known as *Handi* has been the favourite liquor of the Santals. Though this indigenous and traditional liquor has its own socio-religious importance during the festivities and ceremonies, many of the Santals have been addicted to it and ruin their health. For the Santals, modern medicine sometimes provide an alternative for healing without in any way replacing or superseding traditional medicine. There are many Santals who have never used any registered doctor's medicines. They mainly depend on an *Ojha's* herbal treatment, because they have faith in him. P. O. Bodding, a Norwegian missionary and scholar on Santal studies, has written an informative book on the variety of herbal medicines used by Santals in their daily life.

Economic Life of the Santals

The Santal culture is basically a village culture centred round agriculture which is the back-bone of the village economy and the main occupation of the Santals. It is, in fact, the very foundation of the village culture. The Santals live in natural set-up and are closely related to forest. That is why, their economic structure is very much influenced by forest and natural environments which bring them close to the animals, birds, vegetables, fruits, wood, medicine and so on.

In the beginning the Santal economy was based on the practices, gathering, hunting, tilling soil and cultivation. These aspects used to influence the life of the Santals. Thereafter when the forests were declared reserved, that disturbed them and it became a great concern for them. They had no mind of saving or preservation because of their instant wealth from the forest for their sustenance. The Santals always understand '*joma – nuya*' as economy and it means earning bread. It involves two factors as 'earning and consumption' and their whole economy is centred round these things. The Santal economy was essentially a subsistent economy. In other words, the Santals produced not for market, but for direct consumption by the members of the family and to defray other expenses. So, the concept of saving for future was not in the life of a Santal.

It is a great irony, that while the Santals derive their livelihood from the forest, the state's forest area is greatly denuded. There is large scale deforestation on account of reckless felling of trees by the contractors under the prevalent leasing system. The British legalized forest exploitation with various forests laws and destroyed the forests, the habitat of the Santals to promote industry, commerce and colonial ambitions. Deforestation gets abnormally extended as the forest provides raw materials for forest-based industries and this has enormously affected the geological balance in tribal areas and soil fertility and climate have been disturbed abnormally. So, the Santals cannot follow their traditional hunting and fruit gathering. It is, therefore, their great interest in wet-rice cultivation and permanent agriculture that has formed focal economic interest in the Santal culture and almost 98% of the Santal

population is dependent on agriculture as cultivators or agricultural labourers.

The average annual rainfall in Santal *Parganas*, the natural calamities like, floods, the seasonal nature of the rivers, poor irrigational facilities have resulted in lower percentage of areas under cultivation and lower cropping intensity. Those who cultivate their own land possess holding sizes mostly within a range of three acres. Those lands are again fragmented and in most of the cases these are upland. Due to this situation rain water is drained out and storage facilities are negligible. As the cultivation depends on the rain-fed water and irrigational facilities are practically nil the crop out-turn is poor.

There is a trend that a majority of Santals are moving out of the cultivation class due to the fact that the land is passing hands from them to the non-Santals. Thus, the Santals are alienated from their own land. Like other agrarian societies, the Santals are very much attached to their land. Land is their life-blood and it has a great sentimental value. For a Santal, it is a dignity to possess a piece of land. So, anyone who lays hand on their land is taken to be laying hand on their own life. Among the major causes for land alienation, chronic shortage of cash has been enemy number one of the poor Santals ever since they came into contact with civilized world and its monetary institutions. They are always in need of cash for various purposes and needs. Due to poor and inadequate yield and uneconomic agriculture they have also to purchase food grains from the market. Thus their chronic indebtedness to the shopkeepers and moneylenders becomes the primary factor in land alienation. Mortgaging of land for a little money to a '*diku*' moneylender is prevalent among the Santals even today. There are Santal families cultivating their land for their '*diku*' creditor for many years for a little money they owe him is not rare in Santal *Parganas*. The inhuman exploitation of the Hindu moneylenders changed the mode of life and economy to a great extent.

Today the money value has replaced the Santals' barter system in the 'hats' and markets. Since Santals are not familiar with money, they are not aware of the value of money and so they are easily prone to the exploitation of the Hindu

merchants, moneylenders and government officials. Living the present in full manner, that is, 'consume now' is the basic principle of Santal economy and so they are not anxious about the future. The economic backwardness has accentuated the isolation of the tribe very much. The inadequate health facilities coupled with poverty have made the Santal population easy victims of disease and pestilence.

Religious Life of Santals

Belief in the existence of super human or supernatural powers is almost common in human life. Experiences of certain sudden happenings, of disease, death and the unexplainable, have led the tribal people into believing in other than the material visible world, that is, in the invisible spirit- world or supernatural power.

Religion is the term generally used to describe man's relation to the Supernatural powers and the various organized systems of belief and worship in which these relations have been expressed. The Santals have established a kind of close relationship between themselves and this power by adjusting themselves to it in two ways, first by controlling or over power the spirit by chanting or practising some techniques and canalizing the power, for good or bad, and secondly, by offering puja or worship to propitiate the superhuman power for acquisition of the thing or object desired. We call the former magic and the latter religion.

The religious system of the Santal society that gives meaning to the behavioural pattern of the Santals is in turn greatly affected and subsequently it undergoes a lot of changes. As Karl Marx said, religion today has become an opium of the people and the Santals are no exemption. God who is supposed to be with the people is being alienated from the people. Ritual practices reduce justice and righteousness. People are intoxicated with meaningless rituals that they even have become the burden to the Supreme Being. This only leads to doom and destruction: and that exactly is the case of the Santals. The Santals are non-idol worshippers. They have no temple, no images to stoop to, no holy books, no official founder of their religion and no regular worship services. Yet they hold a strong religious faith which is traceable through

their festivals, cleansing ceremonies that are performed from birth to death at various occasions and through the tradition of their creation narratives.

The aboriginal tribes of Chotanagpur and Central India see the world as being inhabited by invisible supernatural powers. To Santal belief, the world is inhabited by a large number of spiritual beings of various kinds. The Santals regard themselves as living, moving and having their being in the world of supernatural entities. The Santals live not only in their human tribal society, but in a greater society consisting of Supernatural beings as well.

The Santals believe in monotheism. Their supreme God is Thakur and their belief is centred on this supreme deity. The most common Santali word used for Supreme deity is Cando which also means the sun. Here *cando* is taken as a witness while the man is taking oath facing the east. Santals also use the term, *Thakur Jiu* besides *Cando, Jiu* is the Santali word meaning, 'spirit' or life principle. The santals believe that Thakur Jiu is the creator and sustainer of the universe and He is to be the benevolent deity. He has a court of supernatural spirits called '*bongas*' to help Him. The court consists of a hundred and seventy '*bongas*' classified into ten minor categories. These minor ones are regrouped into three major categories as follows

- i. The Spirit of the dead ancestors,
- ii. The house-hold and tutelary Spirits and iii.
- iii. Spirits known as village deities

Another traditional account says that the Supreme God of the Santals is known to be '*Sing Bonga*', and His entire court is divided into six categories and is headed by the following *bongas*: *JomsimBonga, Marang Buru, Moreko, Gossain era, Parganaburu, and Manjhi-haram Bonga*. The Supreme-Being is addressed as '*Chando Baba*'. The Santals believe that their world is inhabited by numerous spiritual beings, known as '*Bongas*' which occupy the central place in the religious consciousness of the Santals. Therefore, they are fully preoccupied with the *bongas* and believe that only by coming to terms with the *bongas*, they can be happy without any diseases and disasters.

For the Santals, the world is a vast 'sacred' arena in which men, spirits and impersonal powers are constantly interlinked. Their religion, therefore, involves in entering into relationship with supernatural powers and spirits. It is needed to create friendly relationship with the *bongas*. Every household, sub-clan and village community must cultivate good relationship with the *bongas* through supplications, rice-beer offerings, animal sacrifices and ceremonial sharing of sacrificial meal along with certain special observances and taboos.

Their religious rites show, the conviction that the supernatural powers can be exercised by the '*bongas*', secondly the *bongas* are invoked to earn the good will of the beneficial ones. Rites and rituals of the Santals signify the need of establishing an alliance with the benevolent *bongas* and through them control the harmful ones. Reverential fear, dependence, submission and propitiation are the signs of the Santal's relationship with the supernatural powers so that they can have land, cattle and children which are the prime concerns of the Santals. Sacrifice is something that is devoted to a deity and consumed either in his honour or by him alone, or by him and his worshippers. Everything good proceeds from good *bongas* and they honoured with sacrifices. The evil *bongas* are placated, lest they become angry and bring about vengeance. From Santal folklores, we come to know about the human sacrifices offered by the Santals to water and land deities.

Throughout the year the Santals are thus preoccupied with pleasing and placating the *bongas*. The foregoing practices were handed down to the present generation by their ancestors and are in vogue today. Under these practices lies the fear of '*bongas*' that chokes every man of the tribe that is caused by his ignorance. Witches are believed to be productive of the greatest misfortunes. Witch - craft is a deep-rooted evil practice among the Santals. It is a manipulation of malevolent '*bongas*' to bring destruction upon one's enemy. Witches are exclusively feminine. Santals do not tolerate any witch among them. If a witch is caught, she is thoroughly bashed or hanged to death. Haunted by their belief in witch-craft, the Santals believe that all the negative aspects of their

interpersonal relations, diseases and even murders were and are interpreted as caused by the malign activities of the witches. Many innocent women and widows are being victimized and killed by this brutal practice which completely denies human dignity and life to them.

A *Santal ojha* is a diviner and medicine man who is believed to possess special powers through which he is able to perform certain things that are outside the knowledge and power of the ordinary people. In sickness, the Santals go to '*Ojha*' for cure. By applying sacred oil on sal leaf the '*Ojha*' diagnoses the cause for the sickness. If he fails to restore the health of the ailing person the help of '*Janguru*' is sought. '*Janguru*' denounces the witch who is believed to be causing that sickness. Witch-craft as we see does not act as social restraint against aggression. Nevertheless, aggression acts here in the limited sense; that is, it is directed against women alone. So it appears as if the social root beneath witch-craft rests in the social constraints against women only.

D.B Kisku, the author of 'The Santals and their Ancestors' states that, "The *Ojhaism* and Witchcraft are two elements that stand against each other. Between them there is no reconciliation. Since death and agonism are associated with witches and their art, their power over the evil spirits cannot be accepted and appreciated by the society."

Political Administration of Santals

Every tribe has its own polity which is of great significance for the tribal world. The tribals have their own independent executive and judicial system to take care of the functioning of their society. The Santals also have three tier self administrative system. They are on the village level, *Pargana* level or on various village level and on area level. The basic unit of the Santal political system is the village. The village is represented and administered by the '*more hor*' (five men), a term originally signified the head man and the four other village officials. Now - a - days, they have a full-fledged village council consists of seven village officials, *Manjhi*, *Paranik*, *Jog Paranik*, *Jog Manjhi*, *Naeke*, *KudomNaeke* and *Godet*.

The village headman *Manjhi* is primus inter pares, being chosen by the people to

administer the rights, rules and ceremonies of the Santal village community. No public sacrifice, no festival, no ceremony, such as marriage – in short, nothing of public character – can be properly done without the *manjhi* participating or taking the initiative. The *Paranik* is the head man's assistant, like a prime minister, and when there is no *Manjhi*, the *paranik* rules the village. He is responsible to aid, advice and assist the head man in handling the functions. If the *manjhi* runs away or dies without having sons, and there also are no male relatives of his in the village, the *paranik* becomes *manjhi*. *Jog Paranik* is the assistant to the *Paranik* and in the absence of *Paranik* he is entitled to assist *manjhi* also. He has no independent jurisdiction.

Jog Manjhi is made responsible for arranging all tribal feasts including '*Handia*' (rice beer) on any common occasion of the village. He has some police power also. He also controls the tipsy folk, folk dance, etc. *Naeke* as village priest is responsible to celebrate all the religious festivities and rituals related to birth, marriage, death and so on. He is known as the spiritual head of the village. *Kudom Naekeis* assistant priest in the village. *Godet* is an orderly of the *manjhi*. The whole administration of the village is taken care of by the village panchayat consist the *manjhi* and his councillors.

In the second level, we find a group of villages forming an inter village organization, namely, *Pargana* under the leadership of '*DeshManjhi*' or '*Parganait*'. The head has power to look after the functionaries of various villages. This is the higher tribunal so generally grave or complicated cases like unmarried mother, cases of bigger social disputes of tribal customs in religious functions and etc. are used to be taken up. The *Deshmanjhi* or *Parganait* can stay in the office till his death. So, the *Pargana* court is the second appeal court of the Santals organized among a group of villages.

In the third and final level, there is '*ShikarParishad* or *Mokorbasi*', the Supreme court on area level. Generally this Parishad deals with grave issues of anti socio-religious activities like the case related to the payment of bride price, disobedience of socio-religious activities and etc. The assembly of the *Desh manjhis* elects the leader of this *ShikarParishad*

(Hunt – council) and he is known as 'Dihri' and his judgement is final. The Parishad judges the case and orders for punishment after hearing the statement from both the parties. Though the Santals have their own three tier level traditional panchayat system based on the democratic principles, the introduction of the Panchayat system and Panchayat Raj by the government is creating discrepancies though both the panchayat systems try to function, of course, with much confusion and conflict. Article 244 in the Indian Constitution is devoted to the Scheduled and Tribal Areas. Pursuant to this Article, the fifth schedule of the Constitution contains provisions with regard to the administration and control of the scheduled Areas. Bihar (inclusive of present Jharkhand State) is one of the eight states having scheduled Areas.

Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister of India stood for economic and social development of the tribal people in multifarious ways and so he laid down the following guidelines for government policy:

a) The tribals should develop along the lines of their own genius; there should be no imposition or compulsion from outside. The non-tribal should not approach them with superiority complex. Rather the understanding should be that they had an equal contribution to make to the evolution of the common culture and social and political life of the country.

b) Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected and no outsider should be able to take possession of tribal lands. The incursion of the market economy into tribal areas had to be strictly controlled and regulated.

c) It was necessary to encourage the tribal languages which must be given all possible support and the conditions in which they can flourish must be safeguarded.

d) We should train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.

e) There should be no over administration of tribal areas. The effort should

be to administer and develop them through the tribals own social and cultural institutions.

Despite all the above safe-guards, there have been changes in the political life of the Santal community in the independent India. As there have been changes in the social order, the traditional authority system is losing its original role. The traditional headmen and other officers in the villages come into close contact with petty Government officers, learn urban ways and try to live up to their new experience. They are no longer dependent for their position on the good will of their villagers. They cater to the caprice of Government officers who must be kept in good humour if the village officers are to retain their places. The traditional leaders are conservative and tradition bound and so in the Community Development sectors. The government authorities recruit young men with progressive ideas and train them to take up the functional leadership in the rural areas. This type of new leadership is a threat to the age old traditional leadership. By holding village leader's training camp, encouraging sports and cultural competitions in different villages and sending Santals on educational tours an urge has created among the people to move about and know more things. This has an effect on the people to make a choice between tradition and progress. The respect shown to the traditional leaders and the regard for the village panchayat have greatly diminished.

Conclusion

The Santal children in the village schools are exposed to non-tribal and western cultures by non-tribal teachers and this creates a strong attraction towards urbanization and hatred towards the native culture. The concept of 'election' is also a big threat to the traditional panchayat. The educated Santals prefer the police and the court for their speedy legal services rather than the traditional panchayats. The political leaders of the influential parties which are manipulated by the landlords are mostly against the tribal interests and such leaders many times make use of the Santals for their own vested interests. The interference of the politically corrupt leaders in the traditional socio-political set up of the Santal villages is an

intolerable pain which desperately looking for a remedy.

The history of the Santals, their identity with specific characteristics, community life expressed through their socio-religious festivities, their morality, the status of women, the spirit of liberation through the Santal Rebellion (1855 – 57), their socio-cultural life mixed with their health and medicine, peculiar economy, religion and political administration have been dealt with in this chapter. Thus the Santals present a very gloomy picture which speaks of their helpless, disturbed, troubled and alienated social life. The social, economic, political, cultural, religious, educational and environmental marginalization and deprivation create a strong threat to their survival and therefore they were desperately looking for some external forces and human resources to accompany them, empower them and liberate them with human dignity.

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