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# Golden Research Thoughts

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF SANTHAL TRIBES AND THEIR SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BIRBHUM DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL



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### ABSTRACT:

The Primitive inhabitants of India are known as the 'Adibasi'. They are indeed the original residents of Pre-Aryan India. Owing to the Pre-Aryan invasion and Aryan settlements they were driven out of their home stead and had to take shelter in woods and forest, hills and mountain.

**KEYWORDS:**Characteristics Of Santhal Tribes , Socio-Cultural Development .

### INTRODUCTION:

The santhals are the third largest group of tribe found in India after Gonds and Bhill. They are majority in Santhal Paragana region of Jharkhand. Their total population is about 42.6 Lakhs. Outside Jharkhand, they are present in Orissa, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Assam states. They are Proto-

Australoid racial group of people. Their mother-tongue is Santali. The Santhali language is a part of Austro-Asiatic family. In Santali, there did not have a written language until 20th century. A need for distinct script to accommodate the Santhali language combining features of both Indic & Roman script was felt, which resulted in the invention of new script called 'OL-CHIKI' by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925.

The Santhals are the majority among the Tribes of West-Bengal. They are scattered in almost all the district. According to census -2011 the population of Birbhum District are 35,02,387 and about 6% of the total population are belongs to Santhal tribes. According to Mr. Skrefsrud, the collector of Santal Myths the word 'Santhal' is a degeneration of the word 'Sawantar' and they adopted this name after setting for a few generations in this land. In the opinion of Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, the linguistics the word 'Santhal' probably originated from Sanskrit word 'Samantapal' or the border security. In the Mediaeval ages this 'Samantapal' broke into 'Samanta-Al' and later Sawanthal and ultimately became 'Santhal'.

According to Santhal heritage, they originated from the 'Kherwar' stream. Santals also introduce themselves as 'Kherwal'. Sir, G.A. Grierson in his book 'LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF INDIA' had mentioned the Santali dialects as 'Kherwari' language.

#### **AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The main aim of my study is to justify the role of education among Santal tribe and it's impact to their societal development.

#### **The major objectives of the study can be expressed by the following means –**

- i) To find out the characteristics of santhal tribe in the study area .
- ii) To find out the social morphology of santal tribes in the study area.
- iii) To find out the ritual and culture of the santhal tribe in the study area.
- iv) To find out the role of santhal people in small scale industry and related socio-economic phenomena in the study area.

#### **METHODOLOGY :**

Methodology for any kind of case study is very much necessary .Generally it is divided into three stages which are as follows-

- a) Pre-field work – Before going to the field work, I have to prepare some hypotheses and according to these, the rule of data collection should be framing and delineated in proper ways. Related maps are to be consulted.
- b) Field work – Different type of data should be collected from the field survey, identification of different characteristics of different zone of study area.
- c) Post field work – Collected primary data should be comparison with existing records. Then finally the data are going to process and then these data are represented in proper mapping process for create the final report.

#### **RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY AREA :**

Birbhum District of West Bengal is selected as the study area. The population of the district are 35,02,387 (census-2011) and about 6% of the total population are belongs to the santhal tribe. Though different types of Tribal Development Projects are working entire the district, most of the santhal people are poor and illiterate. Their culture & economic condition are also vary poor. Beside these

pictures it has also noticed that the education system of santhal is very different & difficult. Though their mother-tongue is Santhali, they have to take their education in other languages from their childhood due to the lack of Santali-Medium school in the district. As a result most of the santal-childrens are being deviated from their own culture since their childhood. Now a days most of the educated santhals are far from their traditional culture & rituals due to glitz and hectic schedule of urban life.

From the above discussion it is necessary to study the district for focus the present situation of social morphology and socio-economic development of santhal tribes.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION:**

### **General Characteristics Of Santals :**

#### **Habited and Dwelling**

Generally Santhals set up their villages in a high place near forest or a river. Almost in all places there is a road from one point to the other point of the village. On both side of the road there are rows of houses. The houses are build with mud wall and straw roof. On the entrance or outside the village there is a Teak grove – that is called ‘Jaher Than’. Worships are done here in the name of Marang Buru, Jaher Era and other deities. Another memorable place is ‘Manjhi Than’. This is situated near the village chief or ‘Manjhi’.

The santhal houses are very neat and tidy. Every day the courtyard and terraces are swabbed with cow dung. In some houses frescos are found on the walls. .They have a kitchen garden behind their houses. The husking pedal is placed in one side of the terrace. Cattles are kept in the cowsheds.

#### **Furniture, Ornaments and Clothing :**

Most of the furniture of santhals are made of with the natural products which are available in village areas. Palm leaf mats and rope cots are found in every house. The cot is used when guests or relatives come. They uses earthen vessels for cooking. They eat in Aluminium or Bronze dishes. Drinking water is stored in earthen pitcher. Bamboo items like basket, strainer or thresher are found in every house.

Their dress is very simple. The males used to wear towels or long coarse handloom clothes. The female used to wear coarse two piece sari, which is called ‘Parhand’. One piece was worn around the waist and the other half was hung behind over the shoulder around the chest.

The santhal girls love jewellery. They mostly use silver ornaments. Among these they used neckband, bangles, wristlet, earrings etc. Gold ornaments are found in those families who are well off. Women adorn themselves with flower during festivals.

#### **Occupation :**

Santhals earn their living by farming and collecting forest resources. Males and females work together in the fields. Those who do not have land work in other’s field. Many of them, after the harvest is collected, go to neighboring areas to work as ‘Namal’ on cash payment. They come back after the work done. A number of santhals work in coal mines and factories. Now a days a large number of santhal girls and boys are found working in offices, courts, hospitals and educational institutions.

Forest resources are important means of santhal living. At the time of adversity they run the house by collecting and selling fruits of the forest. Besides , they sell Sal leaves and Kendu leaves and by the commodities.

Once, hunting was their main occupation. But since they took up to agriculture, the importance



of hunting has decreased. Yet, once a year go out for hunting. If they hunt any animal, they equally share the meat.

### Clan

Santhals are divided into 12 clans. They are -1) kisku, 2) Hansda, 3) Murmu, 4) Hembrom, 5) Mardi, 6) Soren, 7) Tudu, 8) Baskey, 9) Besra, 10) Chore, 11) Pauria and 12) Bedea. These are regarded as their surnames also. At present 11 clans are found, Bedea clan is untraceable. Each of the santhal follows the taboos of his own clan and respects the Totem.

### Origin Of Santhals According To Their Myth:

Like other Tribes, they also have a myth about their origin. According to that myth the earth was drowned in the beginning. There was no light, everywhere there was darkness. In that primary stage 'Thakur Jiu' pervaded over that endless water. Santals believe that He is the creator- the Almighty. It was He who first created the aquatic animals like Raghav Boar Haku (a kind fish), Harro (tortoise), Dhiri Katkom (stone Crab), Landet (Ring worm), Sale Ichak Hako (Cry fish), Tayan (Crocodile) etc.

The Almighty wished to create man. He made two clay forms and as He was about to put life into them, a divine horse (Sing Sadom) came and broke those statues into pieces. God then took a part of his own bosom and create two birds – one male and other female. He named them Hans (Drake) and Hansil (Duck). Then He animated them with a blow from His mouth. The birds flew away, but finding no place to rest came back and sat on His palms. At that time the Divine Horse again descended from heaven to drink water. While drinking water foam came out of his mouth and began to float on the ocean. God told the birds to take shelter on that foam. They did so and went on floating over the ocean.

The birds again came back to God finding no food. He then ordered some of the aquatic animals to dig up soil from the submerged earth. But nobody could do that – the whole lump of the earth dissolved in water while bringing up. At last God called for the ring worm. The ring worm said – 'if the tortoise floating on water he could do this'. So God ordered tortoise to float. The ring worm placed his tail on the tortoise's back, and started eating clay underwater, thus excreting it on the tortoise's back. In this way water logged earth was filled with soil. Then he stopped.

God then tilled the land with a ladder while tilling some parts of remained high – those become mountains. Then God sowed the seeds and created trees and plants like Karam, Sal, Mahua and so on. The birds built their nest in the trees and laid eggs. From eggs came out two human forms – one boy another girl. According to the Santals they are the first father and first mother of the human race – Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Budehi.

### Village Organisation Of Santhal :

Santals give great value to the village organisation in their social, economic and religious life. Nobody disobeys the rules of the village organisation. If anybody behaves unsocially or breaks social laws, he can be made an out caste. They called it 'Bitlaha'. Each Santal village has its own Panchayet. The fixes the dates of festivals and rituals and maintain the law and order. At the end of the year (month of Magh) the working of this Panchayet are analysed and new Panchayet is formed. The members of this Panchayet are like this:

**a) Manjhi :** The all powerful leader of the village. All the responsibilities of the village are entrusted on him. In birth or death, in marriage or rituals nothing can be done without his instruction.

**b) Paranik :** The assistant of the Manjhi. He does all works in the absence of Manjhi. If the Manjhi resigns or dies, and if he does not have any successor, then the Paranik gets the post of the Manjhi.

**c)Jog-Manjhi :** He leads the youth of the village. His responsibility is to look after the moral character of unmarried boys and girls. He has to be very alert, so that, any illegal love affair does not take place. He conducts all the dances during the festivals. Without his instruction the youths do not dance.

**d)Jog-Paranik :** The assistant of the Jog –Manjhi. When the Jog-Manjhi is absent in the village it is the Jog-Paranik , who performs his duty.

**e)Godet :**The messenger of Manjhi. If a meeting is to be called, the Godet informs the villagers on behalf of the Manjhi. During festivals and rituals he plays a big role.

**f)Naeke :** The village priest. He performs all the rituals and worships. Apart from this, he has no other responsibility.

**g)Kudam-Naeke :** The assistant of the Naeke and the worshipper of forests and nature. If necessary, he sacrifices his own blood, so that evil spirits can not harm the villagers.

A pargana is made up of 10 -12 villages and the person on whom the responsibility of the local Santals is entrusted is called the 'Pargana'. Each Manjhi of the village is present in pargana session. The assistant of the 'Pargana' is called 'Desh Manjhi'. He keeps all the information about the Pargana.

### **Socio-Cultural Activities Of Santhal Tribes:**

#### **BIRTH RITUALS**

Santhal woman has to follow many restriction during pregnancy. She does not stitch leaves, make fireplace, cross river, spring or forest alone, join any festival without her husband. During Solar eclipse or Luner eclipse her going out of the room is strictly prohibited.

Just at the time of child birth, something is thrown on the roof to create a sound – as they believe the sound will make the child brave. This naval-string is cut in the case of a girl child.

The sanctification ceremony or 'Janam Chhatiyar' is performed on the 5th day in the case of boy and 3rd day in case of girl.

Next comes the christening ceremony. The first child gets the name of his father's lineage. The boy child is given his grandfather's name, and girl child is given grandmother's name. That day they cook agruel with unboiled rice and neem leaves and feed the villagers.

#### **MARRIGE (Bapla in Santali):**

Santhal community does not have any system of child marriage. The guardian choose the groom and the bride when the children are grown up. Marriage in the same clan is prohibited.

There are many types of Santhal marriages. The type is determined by the guardians or the groom and the bride according to the affordability of the family.

#### **The different types of santhal marriages are as follows-**

- a)Kiring Bahu Bapla
- b)Tungki Dipil Bapla
- c)Or Ader Bapla
- d)Nir Bolo Bapla
- e)Itut Sindur Bapla
- f)Sanga Bapla &
- g)Kiring Janwai Bapla etc.

#### **DEATH**

Like the Hindus the sandals also burn their dead bodies, but children and pregnant women are

not burnt. Before going to the burning ghat, the body is rubbed with oil turmeric paste and vermilion is applied on the forehead. This task is done only by the close relatives. This is the traditional custom of the Santal Society.

In the burning ghat the body is laid down on the funeral pyre with the head places southwards. A chicken is sacrificed at that time. They believe that this chicken will carry the soul upto the heaven. The eldest son of the dead person lights the pyre, then everybody else applies an ignition. After the cremations are over, the burn bone is collected in an earthen pot. Then they go to a pond or river to have bath. Before coming to home, they plant the pot under some tree.

After few days gone, the big ritual 'Bhandan' is observed. On that day the relatives come to the dead person's house. Everybody speaks about different aspects of the departed. Goats and hens are sacrificed in the name of Marang Buru and the ancestors for the peace of the soul. That day all the relatives eat together and the unholy period ends.

### Other Festivals Of Santal :

The Santhals celebrate different festivals in different seasons in different ways. These festivals were created centering around their day to day life. The santhal festivals and rituals are as follows -

- 1) Erok'Sim :They celebrate ' Erok Sim' festival while sowing the seeds in the month of June. This is the first agricultural festival of the santal.
- 2) Hariar Sim : The month of July sees the celebration of the 'Hariar Sim' when thanks are offered to the God as the paddy appear green and there are indication of good crop.
- 3) Karam Parab : This festival is observed in September to October. The males of the village go after nightfall and cut a branch of Karam tree (*Adina cordifolia*) which they fixed in the village lane and round which the young people dancing till morning.
- 4) Janthar : During the month of November when reaping the crop they celebrate 'Janthar'.
- 5) Saharai : At the time of the harvest of the crops Saharai' the most important festival is celebrated in the month of January.
- 6) Magh Sim : In the month of Magh (during February) in the end of the santal year it has got appropriate ceremonial with the cutting of jungle, when the servants are paid their wage and fresh contracts entered into, through this way Magh Sim is celebrated.
- 7) Baha : As the birds and beasts cheer up ,they also rejoice. It is in this season they celebrate their greatest festival 'Baha' (flower festival).

In this way most of their festivals are co-related with different incidents of their life. They are great worshippers of nature, because they are born and brought up in nature's lap. So they can not stay away when the earth is full with flowers and fruits at the advent of spring.

### Location Of The Study Area:

The location of the study area is Birbhum District of West Bengal. The longitudinal and latitudinal extension of the district is as follows....

**Latitude**-23<sup>o</sup>32/30// N to 24<sup>o</sup>35/00// N

**Longitude**-87<sup>o</sup>05/25// E to 88<sup>o</sup>01/40// E

The district is triangular shape with the river Ajoy forming the base of the triangle. In the southern part the river Ajoy forms the boundary between Birbhum and Burdwan district. The district



border on the west lies at the eastern end of the Chhotanagpur plateau where Jharkhand and Bihar states are located. The northern border of the district is associated with Murshidabad district and the eastern border of the district marked with the district of Burdwan and Murshidabad.

**Location Map Of The Study Area :**



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