Chapter V
Socio-Cultural Changes After Independence

This chapter seeks to highlight various aspects of the socio-cultural life of the Santals in the post independence period. But analysis of these aspects is not done here separately under different district-heads as is visible in the preceding chapter. It is indeed not possible to assess the cultural progress of a community in absolute terms through statistical figures as culture is more or less notional and cultural contours of districts often overlap each other. Moreover Bankura, Birbhum and Midnapore being densely populated tribal districts of the state, the cultural progress of the Santals in these districts seems to be greater than anywhere else in West Bengal. Different aspects of the socio-cultural life of the Santals are, therefore, analyzed here under a few broad themes to understand the cultural transformation of the Santals in the regions under study.

Changes in Social Structure of the Santals

The traditional family set up of the Santals has undergone immense changes owing to disintegration of their old social structure and increase in population. In the regions presently under study, three types of families are visible among the Santals. For example, (a) Nuclear families: This type of families generally includes husband, wife and their unmarried children in a single nuclear household. The number of such type of families is nowadays on the rise. (b) Pyramidal Families: This type of families is also found in great numbers next only to nuclear families. Families of this type are generally small extended families normally comprising of families of procreation of only one individual from senior generation but at least of two individuals from the next generation. (c) Extended Families: This type of families usually existed in the past but their numbers have been drastically reduced at present. Families of this type are large in size comprising of families of senior and junior members including those of near relatives.

In the Santal families almost everywhere husband and wife each look upon the other as helpmate, and partner in every sphere of activities. Wife has a say in every matter, domestic as well as other. Husband consults the wife on all matters, including the problems that may arise time to time in the family. No status difference exists in the families between the sexes in performing these activities. But, nowadays, a slight variation in the nature of activities is visible among the affluent and educated Santal families. Among this group the husband is found to play a more dominant role than the wife in the daily affairs and the role of the wife is restricted to acting as his mere subordinate assistant.2

Santals are nowadays settled agriculturists and agriculture is their principal occupation. Cooperation in agricultural activities is almost equal in both the sexes. The males mainly do ploughing and preparation of fields for cultivation. But women lend their hands in transplantation, harvesting and threshing of crops alongside the males. Both males and females in the family collect crops from fields. Santals keep a large number of domesticated animals in their household. Both the sexes look after these animals. Household activities such as preparation of food, cooking, carrying water and collecting fuel etc. are mainly done by the females but males also, at times, do these jobs. Young daughters generally help their mother, in daily activities. Boys generally work as cowboys and help their father in agricultural fields and in other activities. “It may be said that the economic cooperation in the Santal families is well balanced between the sexes.”3

Marriage

Marriage is the most popular occasion of celebration in the Santal society. ‘Bapla’4 is the term used for marriage, by the Santals. Monogamy is a general practice but polygamy is not rare. Santal men of wealth or high status sometimes indulge in polygamy but it is not preferred by common people.

Regarding arrangement of marriage, two forms are popular.5 (a) The marriage, which is arranged by ‘Raibar’ (marriage maker), is the regular form of marriage and is more

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2 Ibid., p. 7.
3 Ibid., p. 6.
4 Ibid., p. 5.
5 Ibid., p. 6.
common in the society. (b) The couples also sometimes arrange marriages by themselves. The incidence of this type of marriage is particularly popular among the rich and educated Santal families. A Santal never marries within his own clan including the clan to which his mother belonged. For example, there does not exist any marital relationship between the Kiskus and the Mandis, and again between the Tudus and Besras due to some quarrel between them in the past.\(^6\) Premarital sexual intercourse has become obsolete nowadays in their society.

In the marriages of the Santals material consideration has never been a serious issue though there exists the practice to offer a token bride price by the groom or his relatives to the kinsmen of the bride. It generally consists of cows, bullocks, ploughs, or other agricultural implements or a few pieces of sarees.\(^7\) However, a trend of accepting dowry is emerging, nowadays, among the richer and affluent section of the Santals. But it has yet to assume an alarming proportion in the marriage system of the Santals. After marriage a bride generally comes to live in the family of her husband though in a good number of cases the bridegroom settles near the wife’s kinsmen or even sometimes in the family of the wife after marriage.

Santals practised divorce in the past. But the incidence of divorce has come down at present. The old marriage customs of the Santals have also changed in recent times. Nowadays, different forms of marriages such as Itut Bapla, Nirbolok Bapla, Sanga Bapla and Baha dor Bapla are no longer in practice.\(^8\) Monogamy has remained an established practice among them. Customs of Hindu marriage system have now impregnated into the marriage system of the Santals. The practice of court marriage is not at all unknown in this community. Besides marriage, the Santals have also done away with the old customs in respect of death. “Santal tradition tells us how in antiquity the Santal met and decided


\(^7\) Ibid., p. 65.

\(^8\) Anadi Kumar Mahapatra., “Forces of Change Among the Tribes of Rural Bengal with Special Reference to Santals”, in *CRI Bulletin*, Vol. XIV, No. 3&4, 1980, p. 27.

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to adopt certain Hindu customs, in accordance with which the aboriginal way of disposing of the dead by burial was replaced by the Hindu rite of cremation.\textsuperscript{9}

Fairs and Festivals

Earlier the Santals performed rituals and ceremonies collectively in the Jaherthan (the Holy Grove). This kind of practices acted as a moral force in binding the households into a corporate productive organization of the village.\textsuperscript{10} But nowadays with the nuclearization of Santal households, their liking for collective participation in the rituals and ceremonies has deteriorated.

The festivals of the Santals revolve around various phases of their agricultural activities round the year. The first agricultural festival, Eroke Sim (Asharia) is connected with the sowing of paddy seeds in the month of June. According to the traditional customs of the Santals, they first worship their gods and goddesses like \textit{Marang Buru}, \textit{Jaher Era}, \textit{Gosain Era}, \textit{Pargana Bonga}, and others at the Jaherthan (The Holy Grove) before they start to sow their fields. During this festival each householder sacrifices fowls to \textit{Abge Bonga} (the god of the Santal males), \textit{Orak Bonga} (the household deity) and the \textit{Marang Buru} (the chief presiding deity). This festival ends with songs and dances performed collectively by the whole villagers.\textsuperscript{11}

In the month of July the Santals celebrate Hariar Sim, when germination of paddy seeds is completed and paddy seedlings sprout up. This festival is celebrated in the hope of good crops. However, only the village deities are worshipped in this occasion. Iri Gundli is connected with the offering of the first fruits of millet to the gods and is performed during the month of August. In this festival the Nayeke after a purificatory ablution goes to the field of a rayat where the crop has ripened and reaps some of them. Then he goes to the Jaherthan, cleanses the crops and offers them to all the gods of the Jaherthan (Holy grove).\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{9} Nabendu Dutta Majumdar., \textit{The Santal, A study in Cultural Changes}, Calcutta, Govt. of India Press, 1956, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 64.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 65.
Karam Parab is the most important festival of the Santals observed in the months of September and October. The males of the village go after nightfall and cut a branch of a Karam tree (Adina Cordifolia), which they fix in the village lane (Kulhi) and around which the young people dance till the morning. In the morning the Karam branch is thrown into a tank. No sacrifices are offered, but a libation of liquor is poured out in the name of the village chief and to *Marang Buru*.  

Janther festival is observed in the month of November and is similar to the Iri Gundli, but here the object of offering is paddy instead of millet. Generally in Janther the aman paddy is being offered. On the occasion of the celebration of the Janther, the villagers offer a hog or a ram in honour of the tribal deity, Janther and it is sacrificed before the Parganathan (the shrine of the village deity, Parganas) by a special priest called Kudam Nayeke. The remarkable feature of this festival is that the priest himself supplies the articles of worship, and only the male members of the tribe are allowed to eat the meat of the animals sacrificed.

Sohorai is the post harvest ceremony, which begins on the 28th of Pous (2nd week of January) and continues for five days till it ends on the 3rd Magh (mid January). It is the biggest village festival of the Santals, usually held after the maturation of winter crops. The festival lasts for six days and is also known as Bandna Parab. These six days are perhaps, the most joyful days for the Santals as they remain very relaxed and jovial during this time. The festival starts with an initial purification ceremony, when the Santals cleanse themselves with a ceremonial ablution. Houses and courtyards are also cleaned. During Sohorai a day is specifically assigned for collective fishing (Huko Katkom) and another for hunting. Another day is assigned for specific ritual treatment to their cattle. During this festival the joy of the Santals knows no bounds. They indulge in heavy drinking, feasting and all kinds of merry making during this time. This festival symbolizes collective unity of the Santals in performing rites and rituals in the village society.  

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13 Ibid., p. 65.
14 Ibid., p. 65.
Magh Sim festival generally starts in the month of February. In this festival various gods like Mareko Turuiko, Marang Burn, Pilchu Haram, Pilchu Buri, Jahar Era, and Porgana Bonga are worshipped. On the day following Magh festival, the village officials are ritually paid off for their services to the village. On that day the mahindars (annual contract labours) are paid and their contracts are also renewed.

Baha is the spring festival of the Santals. Towards the latter part of February, the Santals celebrate Baha when Sal trees are in full bloom. This is an occasion of total rejoice and merry-making for the Santals with performances of special songs and dances. The aim of the festival is to celebrate the advent of spring. After the worship of the gods and goddesses new Sal (Shorea robasta) leaves are used for eating and drinking purposes.\(^\text{15}\)

A brief reference to the importance of Sal tree in the past life of the Santals will be relevant in this context. The Sal tree had in the past enriched the life and culture of the Santals in a significant way. Almost all parts of the Sal tree (in Santali it is called Sarjam Dare) had multifarious uses in the lives of the Santals. Particularly Sal leaves and flowers were profusely used by them in their festivals. It had a great variety of uses in their domestic life as well. K.P. Chattopadhyay\(^\text{16}\) said that the old sources of food supply of the Santals were from the forest produce, especially from Sal tree, of which the leaves served to make cups and plates. Even now the Santals are in use of the different parts of this tree like root, stem, leaf, bark flower and seed / fruit. But the overall importance of Sal trees in the life and culture of the Santals has declined significantly owing to the deforestation carried out in large measure in their habitat during both colonial and post-colonial times.

However, an analysis of these festivals shows that the Santals observe these festivals as a mark of respect to nature with, whom they share a very deep relationship. Agriculture, which sustains their lives is considered as a gift of nature and therefore they worship nature before the beginning of every new phase of activities related to agriculture. But ever since the agricultural life of the Santals has undergone changes, there appears a change in the observation of these festivals as well. For example, except three main festivals such as Sohorai, Baha and Karam rest of the festivals of the Santals are no

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 65.
longer being observed with the same rigour as that happened in the past. Even some changes in the observation of Sohrai, Baha and Karam festivals are noticeable at present. These festivals do not occur everywhere at a fixed time as the festivals of the caste Hindus. Often the observances of these festivals get marred due to bad harvest or any other natural calamity that befall upon them. If the promise of production is not good enough, the Santals take little interest in celebrating these festivals. Moreover the ritualistic part of these festivals has nowadays become insignificant. These are observed more as convention rather than paying respect to tradition. Actually, these festivals mean license for heavy drinking, merry-making and feasting to the Santals of the present generation. They hardly bother for the ritualistic part of the festivals as they consider it a job of the senior members in the village.

A number of reasons are, however, responsible for this change in the attitude of the Santals. Firstly, nowadays Santals’ perception about nature has changed. Nature did not occupy the same place in the lives of the Santals as it did in the past. Secondly, agriculture has no longer remained the chief occupation of the Santals. A great majority of them does not find income from agriculture sufficient enough to see them through the whole year. They are forced to seek alternative sources of income by acting as contract labourers, factory workers, and by working in other capacities to eke out their livelihood. Nowadays, the relatively advanced and educated sections among them look forward to getting jobs in professions like banking service, teaching and in other sectors including administrative jobs of various kinds. Festivals related to agriculture bear little significance to them, as they have to reside in towns for their jobs. Thirdly, agriculture as a source of income too has become relatively uncertain at present. With the drop in the annual rate of rainfall and increase in their population, production from land has suffered greatly. As a result, agriculture as a profession has become less attractive to the Santals in recent times and the festivals associated with it, too, have lost its past sheen and fanfare. Indeed with the penetration of material culture and fascination for articles of

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17 This view was expressed by Dhiren Baske in an interview with the present correspondent. (Mentioned later).
consumption, the village society of the Santals has, nowadays, lost its dominant agrarian character.

**Witchcraft Among the Santals**

Witchcraft existed as an integral part of the religio-magico system of the Santals in the past. A.B. Chowdhuri has mentioned that the extent of the problem of witch killing including tortures of varying degrees practised by the Santals has been very widespread in West Bengal as well as in other states. Santals' belief in witchcraft emanated from their respect for and fear from, the Bongas. Among the Santals, the principal element in the assumption of supernatural power was the conception of the Bongas, the power that controlled nature. Santals believed that these Bongas, at times, could become wrathful and bring miseries in human life. The witches had liaison with these Spirits or Bongas and therefore, they also had the power to cause harm to mankind. This belief in the malevolent Bongas, and the possible relationship between the witches and these Bongas had, in fact, made the phenomenon of witchcraft in the Santal society very dreadful. Though Santals in general did not always buy this idea of wrathful Bongas since they had been worshipping these Bongas for centuries, some of them at least, shared the idea that the witches or the others might have actually turned the Bongas against them and the all-knowing-witch doctor could identify such witches.

However, there are other explanations with regard to the growth of this belief in witchcraft among the tribal communities. Apart from superstition, illiteracy, poverty, lack of modern medical facilities, technical knowledge etc., it is also believed that some vested groups like landlords, ojhas, Jangurus and even some political parties are the main instigators of this belief among the Santals and they do so for satisfying their selfish interests. Mahasweta Debi, the noted writer and social worker, has an altogether different explanation in this regard. She has remarked that since the tribals today have lost everything of what they claimed to be their own in the past, they are nowadays

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21 Ibid., p. 10.

22 Ibid., p. 33.
strongly sticking to some of their old beliefs and practices including witchcraft in order to preserve their self-identity. Some others have pointed out that the tribals have no notion of the germ theory of disease. When a child is ill or when some serious diseases attack a child, the tribals generally attribute it to witchcraft. When a normal healthy child dies within a few days of illness, the villagers believe that a witch has definitely killed the child.

In the society of the Santals after the identification of the witch or the evil power by the Janguru, the villagers in a full house meeting (Sholo-Annas) used to decide about the form of punishment to be awarded to the convicted person. Generally, the convicted person was fined, and the amount of fine was fixed by the ‘Sholo Anna’ or a group of powerful persons of the village. The amount of money, thus, earned was spent for the feast of the villagers or in the honour of those powerful persons. If the convicted person was unable to give the full amount of the fine or if the person denied to pay the fine, then he or she was tortured. The forms of torture varied from place to place. For example, his or her cattle might be taken away, or house ransacked or put on fire. The person accused also stood the chance of being beaten up severely or even murdered and sometimes all these might happen, despite paying off the whole amount of fine. The accused person or the members of his family might also face social ostracism as well as expulsion from the village.

It was a general belief among the tribals especially among the Santals, that only women could practice witchcraft. Various Santal folktales and folksongs including descriptions of the emergence of witchcraft stated in ‘Harkoren Mare Haapramko Reak Katha’ also corroborate this view. But, nowadays, men are also being convicted as witches. Indeed out of the 96 cases of witch-killing among the Santals that took place between 1951 and 1979 in Malda’s Barind and Gazole police stations, a few were found to be males.
A study conducted by LAMP (Liberal Association of the Movement of the People) during 1984-1989 has reported about fifty cases of witchcraft and related punishment meted out to persons accused as witches in Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore districts. Out of 50 cases, 31 cases were reported from different villages in Bankura district and one in Rangametya village under Binpur police station in Midnapore district while the rest 18 cases have been reported from the villages in Purulia district.28

Year-wise cases of killings on account of accusation as witches is given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Nos. of cases</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>07</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>13</td>
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Total No. of cases in six years = 50
Source: Pradip Bhattacharya., *Witchcraft Among the Santals*, p. 57.

In this survey, most of the persons accused as witches, were females (around 50 per cent) but a good number of them (around 28 per cent) also belonged to males.29 In the remaining 11 cases (22 per cent of cases) no person was convicted directly, as the witch doctors had identified the wrathful *Bongas* or the family deities as the evil-doers. However, in all these cases some families had been accused of not offering proper prayers to the *Bongas* and, therefore, penalized in the same way like those denounced as witches.

However, a trend to fight against witch hunting and consequent murder has been visible in the districts under study in post independent India.30 In Bankura and Midnapore districts in particular, educated Santals have come together to protest against incidences of witch hunting and have launched awareness campaigns among the Santals against it. These groups have composed songs and staged dramas for mobilizing people against this superstition. With people joining in greater numbers in these campaigns, these activities today have indeed taken the form of a movement in these districts. The movement aims at

29 Ibid., p. 25.
30 Ibid., pp. 37 - 43.
preventing murders of witches as well as to weaken the belief in witchcraft among the Santals. According to Mahadev Hansda, “Although many Santhals shunned us, many educated Santhals liked our ideas, and our songs and plays, and they too found the practice of torturing defenseless women revolting.” Mahadev Hansda again says, “The reformists have decided to continue their crusade regardless of the consequences. With a little support from the state government we could have rendered all witch-doctors jobless over-night; but now I suppose it will take a little longer. Once again, wily politicians look set to scuttle a much needed attempt at reform.” In Purulia district persons active in the campaign against witch hunting were Kalendra Mandi, Sudhir Tudu, Sarada Prasad Kisku, Mahadev Hansda and others.

The same survey reported that similar campaigns against witch hunting were also being organized in Bankura district during 1980s. Names of some organizations taking active part in such campaigns were: Surukuj Tilla Susar Samity, Maheshna Chhatna, Law-Mahal Lagchar Rasika Mandwa, LAMP (Liberal Association for the Movement of the People), Manjhi Mandwa Chhatna, Digi Migi Tilla Gaonta, Gramin Unnayan Sanstha, Rangmetya Chhatna. Among these organizations Law-Mahal Lagchar Rasika Mandwa has been still trying to create public opinion against witchcraft through various dramas not only in the district.

It was reported that LAMP and Bankura Zilla Adivasi Mahila Samiti jointly organized a state convention on “Awareness of Science and Impact of Witchcraft System” among the Adivasis on 28th and 29th September 1988 at Pratapbagan Bankura. More than 300 persons mostly tribals from different districts of West Bengal attended the convention. On behalf of the participants of the convention, a memorandum demanding some remedial action against witchcraft and signed by 214 tribals was sent to the Honorable Prime Minister of India, on September 29th 1988 through the D.M. of Bankura.

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32 Ibid., p. 39.
33 Pradip Bhattacharya., op. cit., p.40.
We have already discussed at some length Santal progress in the fields of Santali language and literature in the previous chapter. Now we shall discuss the creative involvements of the Santals with particular reference to their literary achievements in the post-Independence period.

There is, perhaps, little doubt that Santali literature is very rich and is certainly a prized-possession in the history of tribal literature of our country. But Santali literature for the first time attained expression in printing under the initiatives of the missionaries in the second half of the 19th century. Thereafter, the Santal elites came forward to take the reins from the missionaries to cultivate their own literature.43 Through their effort a written literature in Santali in Bengali and Devnagri scripts gradually took shape in spite of regional variations. But this indigenous initiative came not before the third and the fourth decades of the twentieth century. (details in chapter III)

Literary activities among the Santals have increased much after independence with the growth of the Santal middle class. As various educational, cultural and economic facilities have been accorded to the tribals in accordance with the statutory provisions of the Indian Constitution, a group of Santals have readily availed themselves of the opportunities of education and employment and raised their status in the society. Some of them have correspondingly become aware of the existing Santali literature and have also tried to improve it. A conscious effort has, thus, set in among the Santal intellectuals today to highlight their social and economic problems through writings in Santali journals and books.

Books

Santali books of different categories and types are nowadays available all over the country. According to a survey carried out in 1991, of the total books (728) covering different categories of Santali books 11.95 per cent of books are ‘Text Books and Rapid Readers’, 4.53 per cent are ‘Grammar, Dictionary and Vocabulary’, 3.02 per cent are ‘Language, Word Books and Hand Books’. Taken together, these three categories jointly

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share about 20 per cent of the total Santali books available in the market. The same survey shows that about two-third (66.35%) of the books deal with “History, Folklore, Poem, Story, Novel, Drama, Song, Translation etc. Books on ‘Biography’ and ‘Religion’ cover 1.92 per cent and 12.23 per cent respectively.”35

Regarding the script of these books it is stated that 26.51 per cent are written in ‘Roman’ script, 33.65 per cent in ‘Bengali’ script, 10.58 per cent in ‘Devnagri’, 5.91 per cent in ‘Ol-chiki’, 0.27 per cent in Oriya, and 0.14 per cent in both ‘Bengali’ and ‘Oriya’ scripts. In the case of 22.94 per cent of books, data are not available.36

On examining the place of publication of these books, it is reported that 61 per cent of these books are from West Bengal (33.24 per cent) and Bihar (27.75 per cent). Of the remaining 39 per cent about 5 per cent are covered by undivided Bengal (0.82 per cent), Orissa (2.88 per cent) Uttar Pradesh (0.24 per cent), Bombay (0.14 per cent), New Delhi (0.24 per cent), Norway (0.14 per cent) and London (0.24 per cent) and in the cases of 34 per cent of books data are not available. Most of these books have been published during post-Independence era (53.30 per cent), per-Independence era sharing is only 10.30 per cent. Data is not available for 36.40 per cent of books.37

The Christian Mission Presses (such as Benagaria Mission Press, Baptist Mission Press, Santal Mission press, Methodist Church Press, Santali Literature Board, Medical Hall Press, etc.), Santal Paharia-Seva Mandal, Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Macmillian and Co. Ltd., Text Book Education Literature Committee, All India Santal Writers Association, Santali Academy etc. has been taking the leading role in bringing out these publications.38 A few books have also been published under government and private initiatives. However, it is necessary to mention in this context that a good number of books, written by various Santal writers in Santali, remain unpublished every year due to paucity of fund.

36 Ibid., p. 7.
37 Ibid., p. 7.
38 Ibid., p. 7.
Journals

The report of the same survey shows that during 1890 – 1991, about 130 Santali Journals have been published. However, recently some of them may have stopped publishing due to financial difficulties. Of the 130 Journals, exact years of publication are not available in the cases of 18 Journals, though it is a fact that these are also published during the twentieth century.

During the pre-Independence era (i.e., 1890 to August 1947), only six journals were brought out from the Santal Parganas. The remaining 106 Journals (excluding 18 not available cases) came to be published only after Independence. (1947 August onwards). Names of a few of these journals are as follows: Tetre, Hudis, Sagen Saonta, Ar Tagam, Even, Kuhu, Kherwal Mahal, Hor, Sili, Hor Arang, Pachim Bangla, Jug Sirijol, Raly etc.39 Of these 106 Journals, 89 Journals were published during the period 1977 to 1991 i.e. within a span of 15 years.40 This rise in publication within a short period is due to the efforts of neo-elite class among the Santals.

These journals cover a wide range of topics in connection with the socio-economic conditions of the Santals including their political struggles of both past as well as present days. Some of these stories also highlight Santal folk tales, myths and fables and also lay stress on the rituals and customs of the Santals connected to their marriage, death and other important occasions of life.

Writers

Santali writers mostly belong to the educated middle class in the society. The survey mentioned above also shows that most of them are employed as service holders. Some of them hold high positions in different government offices and a good number of them are teachers.41

39 Ibid., p. 8.
40 Ibid., p. 11.
41 Ibid., p. 11.
Some of these writers have received awards for their literary as well as cultural activities from various non-official as well as official organizations. Some of these awards are – D.Lit., Ph.D., Naike, Lokacharya, Guru, Vidyasagar, Pandit Raghunath Murmu International award, Angadardh Sahityakar Kalakar award, Vidya Vachaspati, Navarang Sanskritik Puraskar, Hihiri Pipri Shiropa etc. They are also found to be associated with a number of cultural and literary organisations as members, activists, Office – bearers etc. Names of some of these organizations are Chottonagpur Unnati Sabha (Ranchi), Adivasi Mahasabha (Singbhum), Bharita Santali Sahitya Baisi, West Bengal Santali Writers Association etc.42 The subject matters of their writings include aspects of their socio-cultural life in the past as well as their heroic struggles during the colonial rule. Santali writers also highlight contemporary issues such as rising political consciousness growth of education, drawbacks of liquor consumption campaign against witch hunting etc.

However, this sudden surge in literary activities of the Santals in the post independence period is not only a testimony to their rising concerns for literary activities but also indicates their growing consciousness for tradition and culture including identity.

Today we find Santali literature well set on its journey towards achieving literary excellence in all its forms. But a deep analysis of the trends of writing will exhibit that, of late, there has been a change in focus in the writings of the present generation Santals. For example, the passion that existed among the writers of the 1930s and 1940s to build a new modern Santal society and the way they had welded their pens to mobilize people in favour of it through their literary activities, is acutely lacking among the Santal writers of

<table>
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<th>Type of Service</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Service</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Teaching</td>
<td>24 (Includes IDewan, 1 MLA, 1 Lecturer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Cultivation</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Doctor</td>
<td>2 (Homeopath 1, Allopath 1)</td>
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<td>5 Advocate</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Social Service</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Peskar in Court</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Not known</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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42 Ibid., p. 10.
the present generation. The literary genius of Pandit Raghunath Murmu, Gorachand Tudu, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu, are worthy of note since it was through their creations that Santali literature reached its pinnacle of success. It is believed by many that Santali literature has long passed its golden phase as the fine touch of creativity and literary style that featured in the writings of the past generation is remarkably absent at present. Today Santal writers seem to remain busy in highlighting social ills and exploitations in the society, including feelings of discrimination and neglect that the Santals had to suffer long under both colonial and post-colonial periods. Suhrid Bhowmick, a famous litterateur himself has given an explanation for this shift in focus in the writings of the Santals in recent times. According to him, one probable cause for this shift is that most of the present generation Santal writers had their childhood during late 1960s, a period when Ol-chiki movement hit the headlines in the state. Therefore, they became subjected to the popular sentiment of discrimination and neglect perpetrated on them by the neighbouring caste society. This sense of discrimination for a long time lies dormant in the sub-conscious level of their minds and finds expressions afterwards in their literary creation.

Santali Language

Santali language is generally classed with the Mundari group of language falling within the broader category of Austro-Asiatic family of languages. Austro-Asiatic group of language again forms a part of one big family of language group known as Austric, its other counterpart being known as Austronesian. According to Edward Gate, the language of the Mundas with their kindred dialects spoken by the Santals, Hos, and other allied tribes living in the Chhotonagpur plateau has been shown by Peter Schimdt to form a sub-family of the family called by him Austro-Asiatic, which includes Monkhemer, Wa, Nicoborese, Khasi and the aboriginal languages of Mallacca. There is another

43 Suhrid Kumar Bhowmick,, Shae Serma Renak Onorhe, Kolkata, West Bengal Tribal Welfare Cooperative Ltd. 1993, p. 28.
44 Ibid, p.28.
family, which he calls Austronesian, including Indonesian, Melanesian and Polynesian. These two families are grouped into one great family, which he calls the Austric.46

In West Bengal Santali has been the language of a huge mass of tribal people mostly belonging to Santal community, though non-Santal tribal communities like Munda, Ho, Mahali, Bhumij, Birhor and others also sometimes exchange their views in Santali. Apart from West Bengal, a great number of Santals living in other states of India like Assam, Orissa and Bihar also speak Santali as their mother tongue. In West Bengal, Santali occupies a place second only to Bengali language.47

Linguists believe that every language has its own style, phonetic system and regulation of grammar, which determine the basic character of that language. Language generally acts as a means of expressing thoughts, emotions, views, general conversations and all sorts of communications that people make with others to live in this world. Language never remains static. It changes with the passage of time and under influences of other languages. It also varies from region to region due to the difference in the regional climate and social environment. According to D.N. Baske “A language is like a river, it flows forward and its course never turns back.”48 However, example of some languages getting extinct in course of time is not rare. Particularly, the vocabulary and dialects of any language can undergo changes overtime. According to Grierson,49 the language of the Santals is a remarkably uniform language and it has only two dialects. Even these two dialects do not differ much from the standard form of speech. They are the so-called Karmali, spoken by the Kalha tribe in the Santal Parganas, Manbhum and Hazaribagh, and the dialect of the Mahles spoken in the central and southern portions of the Santal Parganas and the adjoining parts of Birbhum and Manbhum. Grierson finds influences of different mainstream languages on Santali in different areas. He says in the east, the language tends to come under the spell of Bengali and in the south the influence of Oriya

48 Ibid., p. 21.

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is traceable. The different sources from which the words have been borrowed influence to some extent the form in which they are adopted. In this way a slight difference has crept in Santali in Bengal districts as distinguished from that spoken in other places. The influence of Bengali, which Grierson thinks to be of a relatively modern date, has lately been gradually spreading. He observes, “the purest Santali is spoken in the north, especially in the Santal Parganas and in Manbhum. The dialect spoken in Midnapore, Balasore, Singbhum and Orissa Tributary states is more mixed; it shows signs of gradually yielding to Aryan influence... Locality to some extent causes differences in vocabulary, and this fact in recent times, has given rise to a slight difference in dialect between the east, where most known-words come from Bengali, and the west, which chiefly borrows from Bihari; and the south where the influence of Oriya is felt. On the whole, there is scarcely any difference in dialect from Bhagalpur in the north down to Manbhum and Burdwan in the south.”50 Campbell 51 has also stated that the northern Santali or that spoken in Bhagalpur, Monghyr, the Santal Parganas, Birbhum, Bankura, Hazaribagh and Manbhum, is the language of an overwhelming majority of the tribe and is more polished than southern Santali. However, it is true that the impact of residing in close contact with the Hindus for ages has practically made the Santals bi-lingual. In the regions under study when they talk with an outsider i.e., non-tribal people they speak Bengali and speak quite fluently. But among themselves they speak their traditional Santali, which has nowadays absorbed many words from Bengali and Hindi vocabulary. This linguistic contact has other effects as well. “Santals nowadays christen their children with non-tribal high caste names. Names like Subrata, Jayanta, Anil, Babulal of the boys and Sabita, Parvati, Jaba etc. of the girls are very often noticed.”52

Language Dilemma

It is unfortunate that the Santals have no script of their own. The missionaries at first used Bengali and Devnagri scripts to write in Santali. Thereafter Roman script aided with some diacritical marks came to be used. But scholars like Dhiren Baske thinks otherwise with regard to the issue of script. According to him, the Santals had some form of script

50 Ibid., pp. 30-35
in some distant past. The frescos and drawings in the outer walls of their houses closely resemble with the pictographic script of ancient period. Further, some old Santali songs contain evidence that Murmu clan in some distant past was entrusted with the responsibility of inventing a script. The song reads:

(The tentative English rendering of the song)

Murmu Thakurko do baba  Murmu thakurs read documents
Punthi babako parhaowa  Go to the fort of Badoli Kaynda for writing.
Badoli Kaynda gharte likhan chalakan. But for reasons unknown so far, either the script had been lost or it might have fallen into disuse due to negligence.

However, it is true that before the advent of the missionaries the Santals had not shown much preference for writing in their own language or recording their literature in Santali. During the second half of the 19th century, after the failure of the great Santal rebellion when there began the process of acculturation with the neighbouring religious faiths, particularly, Hinduism, they showed inclination for learning the languages of the caste Hindus instead of their own. Educated and affluent Santals, then adopted Hindu ways of life including their languages. The reason might be attributed to the progressive disintegration and deterioration of their community including lose of faith in their own religious system. Whatever be the reasons, it certainly inflicted immense harm to the cause of Santali language and literature as Santals’ efforts to work out an effective Santali script, as a result, could not materialize. In fact Hinduism and to some extent Christianity had left such an indelible impact on the lives of the tribals that some of the important symbols of their identity, such as language, communal landownership right etc. almost came to the verge of dilution. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay in 1923 has, thus, commented that the process of extinction of the language of the Kols and the appearance of languages like Bengali, Hindi, Bihari and Oriya in its place would at best, take hundred or hundred fifty years, if the present trend of absorption of Aryan languages by the Adivasis continue unabated.

53 Dhiren, Baske., op. cit., pp. 31 - 32.
54 Ibid., p. 31.
55 Quoted from Ibid., p. 28
This apart, another big problem of the language dimension of the Santals is that they are yet to resolve the issue of a single uniform script to be used throughout the country. In fact Santals are divided on this issue even today, as they cannot reach in agreement, which one of the five scripts already in use in different states would be appropriate for their language. In Bengal while a new script called Ol Chiki has come into existence and books in Ol Chiki are in the process of publication, a great majority of Santals still prefer Bengali script for expressing Santali language. Similarly in Orissa, Oriya script and Ol Chiki both are used in tandem to express the language of the Santals. In Bihar too, both Roman and Devnagri scripts are used by the Santals to write in Santali language.\(^56\) Indeed these disagreements among Santals on the issue of script have not only caused harm to the language of the Santals but also have bred forces of disintegration among them. This is evident in the remark of a writer “... thus the Santali literature instead of forming public opinion of the Santals on national and international context has just become a divisive force among them.”\(^57\) The problem, however, is not merely one of controversy over the issue of script but also hinges on undertaking appropriate steps to improve the language of the Santals.

**Language Movement**

It is true that the Christian missionaries and British officials first began working with the Santali language and literature in the first half of the nineteenth century. Special mention should be made in this regard of some great missionaries like Rev. E.L. Puxley, L.O. Skresfrud, A. Campbell, who first laid their hands on Santali language in a bid to collect and compile the rich variety of the traditional Santal culture. (See details in Chapter III under the heading Growth of Santal literature under Missionary initiative) But the initiative of the missionaries entailed little progress and it was not before the end of the nineteenth century that the Santals themselves woke up with an interest to work for their language and literature. However, during the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century Santali language failed to make much headway owing to a very low rate of education among them. Whatever little education the Santals had at that time, it remained an exclusive preserve of the Santal Christians who formed a miniscule minority in their society. A

\(^{56}\) Ibid., (See Introduction)


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large majority of Santals had neither any time nor any interest in cultivating the language, as they had to remain busy in earning their livelihood. It was also true that the Santals had been condemned and criticized down the ages by the relatively advanced members of the caste society and were relegated to the fringe in the society. The language of the Santals was condemned as 'thar'\textsuperscript{58} and a general feeling of hatred towards them always filled the air. This state of affair, however, continued for long until in the third and fourth decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century the Santal elite turned to write in Santali through different scripts. Cultivation of Santali language, thus, initially moved on via different scripts like Bengali in West Bengal and Devnagri in Bihar.

The linguistic upsurge of the Santals received a great impetus with the invention of \textit{Ol-chiki} script by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925. Of course, before Pandit Raghunath Murmu we get reference to another little known script known as “Manj-dander”\textsuperscript{59} which was invented by Sadhu Ramchand Murmu in 1923. But lack of funds had prevented the publication and popularization of this script among the Santals. Pandit Raghunath Murmu, born on 5\textsuperscript{th} May 1905 in an ordinary Santal village Dandbose in the district of Mayurbhanj in Orissa, for the first time felt the need for bringing cultural resurgence among the Santals through adopting a uniform language. He realized that until the Santals became conscious of their language, literature and other cultural traditions, they would remain fallen and neglected. He believed that the adoption of a single uniform script i.e. \textit{Ol-chiki} could unite the Santals of different regions belonging to Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Assam. He also wrote books in \textit{Ol-chiki}, such as \textit{Biduchastan, Kherwal Bir, Bakhen} etc. In 1953 Adivasi Kalyan Association was founded which brought out a periodical named \textit{Sagen Sakam} in \textit{Ol-chiki}. This organization was revitalized in 1962 in the form of Adivasi Socio-Educational and Cultural Association. (Hereafter ASECA)

It is necessary to mention here that this linguistic upsurge also found expression in the ongoing Jharkhand movement of the tribals. The leaders of the Jharkhand movement upheld the language identity of the tribals to strengthen their demand for a separate state and also to show that the movement for identity was not simply political but cultural as well. After independence, the language issue came to the forefront as a plan to form

\textsuperscript{58} Parimal Hembrom., op. cit., p. 17.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 31.
linguistic provinces was undertaken in 1949 by the government of India. Accordingly, States Re-organization Commission (SRC) was set up to organize the states keeping in view the issue of language and other aspects of the states. Santals clamouring for a separate state on linguistic ground staged several demonstrations during this time one being in the playground of Gunuria in Rairangpur district of Orissa. But their appeal seemed to have created little impact on the government. In January 1955 a memorandum was submitted by the Executive Committee of the Jharkhand party to the States Reorganization Committee (SRC) emphasizing the economic, political and cultural imperatives for the formation of a separate Jharkhand state. But this demand was turned down by the SRC who pointed out that the Jharkhand tribals did not have a common language.\textsuperscript{60}

However, the language movement of the Santals did not disappear altogether. A fresh spurt of activities ensued in West Bengal in the 60s of the present century led by some leading Santal organizations like ‘Abowa Gaonta’, Santali Literary and Cultural Society, ASECA (Adivasi Socio-Educational and Cultural Association) All-India Santali Language Front and others.\textsuperscript{61} It was from that time onwards that a movement for improvement as well as recognition of the Santali language began to surface. However, it is important to note that although these organizations had one avowed object i.e. to promote Santali language, they had differentiation in opinion in respect of the use of the script. For example, while ‘Abowa Gaonta’ preferred Bengali script to be accepted as the medium of Santali, ASECA stood for the use of Ol-chiki script and Santali Literary and Cultural Society supported the use of the Roman script.\textsuperscript{62} Despite these differences among various organizations, the language movement of the Santals experienced its first success when the government of West Bengal on 1st August 1965 gave permission to broadcast a programme in Santali language for fifteen minutes. On that day the speech delivered by Prafulla Sen, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, on the occasion of the inaugural ceremony was aired in Santali. The next historical step to push forward the language movement of the Santals was the decision of the government of West Bengal to air a Santali cultural programme for half an hour. It began from 15th August 1975 and the

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 251.
\textsuperscript{61} Parimal Hembrom., op. cit, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p. 20.
time allotted for the programme was from 6.05 pm and 6.35 pm. This half an hour programme in Santali consisted of programmes on Santali songs, poems, drama, and discussions on topics related to their social problems, including a brief spell allotted for news. Further, in 1977 Dr Surajit Sinha, then the vice-chancellor of the Viswa Bharati University introduced a certificate course on Santali language in Viswa Bharati.

However, from 1980 onwards the movement began to take a different course with ASECA taking the centrestage in leading the movement and its leaders laying more emphasis on the issue of script rather than on the improvement of the Santali language. The representatives of ASECA assumed leadership sidestepping leaders of other organizations, who were equally in favour of improving the Santali language but were against the idea of making Ol-chiki the sole medium of the language. Discussions with Santal intellectuals such as Kalendra Mandi, Sarada Prasad Kisku, Parimal Hembrom (their interviews recorded later) and others have revealed that the leaders misjudged the issue at stake during that time. They thought that introduction of Ol-chiki could provide necessary fillip to the language itself. But the introduction of Ol-chiki does not necessarily mean the improvement of the language. Therefore, the initiative to work for the improvement of the Santali language dried up during this phase and the focus of the movement was entirely shifted to securing government recognition for Ol-chiki and on how Ol-chiki could be incorporated in schools and colleges as the medium of Santali language. According to them, this change in focus had defeated the entire purpose of the movement that the early pioneers of the movement had so scrupulously set at the beginning. The support provided by the ruling Left Front Government to the movement and its acceptance of Ol-chiki as the script of Santali in 1979 however, should be reckoned with in this context.

The movement, which began essentially for the promotion of the Santali language, thus, changed into a script movement with the passage of time. Government efforts also facilitated the spread of Ol-chiki in the state. Sambhunath Mandi, the then Minister-in-
charge, Backward Classes Welfare Department, along with Upen Kisku and others organized teachers training programme in *Ol-chiki* in Bankura as well as in other districts of West Bengal. Several committees such as language committee, syllabus committee etc. were set up in course of time to design and develop syllabus and school books in *Ol-chiki*. But this entire exercise obtained little success as no book worthy of note written in *Ol-chiki* has come out during this period (1980 – 1990). Names of a few persons who had served as members in the last decade of the 20th century in different committees were Sri Kushal Baske, Sri Sirin Murmu, Sri Suprakash Murmu, Sribhusan Hembrom, Sri Bidhubhusan Hembrom, Sri Upen Kisku and others.

It is generally believed that in the 1980s several factors such as leadership crisis, internal schism of the representatives of ASECA and the rift that developed between ASECA and the other organizations on the issue of script had caused to undermine the movement to a great extent. Particularly, with the emergence of organizations like Santali Sahitya Parishad (1983) All India Santali Literary Association (1988), The Santali Literary and Cultural Society and ‘Abowa Gaonta’ which laid more emphasis on the cultivation of Santali language instead of script, the dismemberment of the movement seemed to loom large. However, the movement seemed to have gained strength once again when Salkhan Murmu formed the ‘Language Front’ in 1994 to bring back the passion for the improvement of the Santali language. This organization also bestowed importance to the introduction of *Ol-chiki* and incorporated in its demand the recognition of Santali language in the 8th Schedule, which was supported by ASECA and its other branches in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

Seeing the mass support behind the movement and hunted by the prospect of losing the credit of introducing *Ol-chiki* to Salkhan Murmu, the ASECA leadership in West Bengal took fresh initiatives since 1995 to mobilize people in support of the movement. The support of the government of West Bengal was forthcoming too. On August 1st 2000, the ruling Left Front Party placed an all-party motion in the floor of the West Bengal State

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68 Kalendra Mandi., op. cit., p. 45.
Assembly House for inclusion of Santali in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. The motion was passed unanimously. Then on August 22nd 2000, an all-party delegation of MLAs of West Bengal led by Shri Upen Kisku, honourable Minister-in-charge Backward Classes Welfare Department, met the then Union Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Hon’ble Shri L.K. Advani and submitted a memorandum for the inclusion of Santali in the 8th schedule of the Constitution. All these efforts finally bore fruit when on December 23rd 2003 in the 100th amendment of the Constitution the Santali language was awarded constitutional recognition. But the debate over the acceptance of Ol-chiki as the sole medium of expression of the Santali language continues to rage even today. Santal intellectuals in particular, believe that Ol-chiki is not a complete script and needs a lot of revision before it can be finally accepted as the script of the Santals. Moreover, as people are not familiar with the script, it will, at least, temporarily impede the progress of Santali literature and learning and also other creative activities in Santali.

**Santali Folk Dance and Song**

Santali folk songs and dances are inseparable from the life and culture of the Santals. These dance and songs have continued to blossom for centuries. Songs are sung in almost all festivals and celebrations of the Santals. The music and dance are attuned to the nature and are also associated with their popular customs and beliefs. Pandit Nehru has remarked, “They are extremely disciplined people who sing and dance and try to enjoy the life and not people who sit in the stock exchanges and shout at each other and call that civilization.” If one goes to the villages of the Santal, one can hear after dusk the sound of simple popular musical instruments i.e. beatings of drums and the soothing sound of fiddlers and flutes. Santali songs are not only meant for entertaining crowd but they also reflect the mood and merit of the ongoing festivals. Actually, songs cover a major part of Santali literature, which are being orally relayed from generation to generation. Santali songs are of different varieties and tunes. Some are traditional songs while most others are songs of non-traditional lyrical nature. There are some songs, which are traditional in tune but very updated in words. However, a recent trend of modern Santali songs

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69 Subodh Hansda., op. cit., p. 25.
70 Ibid., pp. 25-26.
composed in line with the popular Hindi and Bengali songs of the modern age is nowadays on the rise.

Santali folk songs and dances are performed in groups usually in marriages, religious festivals and social occasions. Some lines of popular Santali folk songs are reproduced below.

“Setta Bale Situng Tikin Darang Darang
Ayub Setera Saon Nute-chhana
Jhinga Baga Halma Sinj Billi Medda Asha
Din Hilohda Midda Bang Tahena
Setta Bale Situng Tikin Darang Darang
Ayub Setera Saon Nute-chhana
Bale Sagen Sakam Jhinga Baga Halma
Din Hilohda Midda Bang Tahena.”

The English rendering of the above goes as follows:

The sun-shine in the morning is warm and its intensity increases gradually and becomes maximum during noon. Thereafter, it decreases and finally fades away in the evening. Fruits, leaves and flowers of trees after blossoming and reaching a peak stage ultimately fall down. Similar is the life of man, from childhood to youth, youth to old age and old age to death. The meaning of the song is obviously thoughtful. 72

“Talam Tamadgate Likid likid Ante
Likid Talam Njelante Medah Ahab
Jahan Selinj Senah Jahan Seninj Lahab
Amah Talam Menre Letal Bahah”

It means that the lover being overwhelmed by the love of his/her beloved says that his/her gait is of very special nature and exquisitely beautiful. Anybody’s eye will be dazzled seeing the gait and this always reflects in his/her inward eye. 73

“Gali Aasen Serenj
Gupitha Pitay Me Sakratalang Manaoa
Jalkina Sermapuryu Nayagena Marang Parab
Jalkina Nate Nate Me
Jalkina Kecha Kecha Pita Kad Namatalang
Jalkina Tagaj Tagaj Me.”

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72 Ibid., p. 140.
73 Ibid., p. 140.
The Makar festival is a big festival of the Santals. On the eve of the Makar festival, the husband addresses his wife and says, “Oh Women, the Makar festival has come, but you are not making arrangement for it, are you not willing to take cakes on the eve of Makar which is a great festival in our community and comes only once in a year? You soon prepare good cakes and give me. You take the broken ones” – the husband says to his wife jokingly.  

The dances and songs of the Santals usually begin at dusk after they take some intoxicating drinks i.e. rice beer, which is popularly known ‘Handia’. In most cases, both men and women participate and form a round (circle). The beauty of the dance lies in perfect matching of the shuffling of feet to the exact drum beat and rhythmic movement of hands and legs. Dance is not to be understood as mere movement of hands, feet and limbs of the body. It is through gestures and postures, through which one’s feelings and purposes are expressed and conveyed to others.


Modern Santali Songs are believed to have emerged in the musical world of the Santals since the eighties of the present century. These songs, however, do not constitute any distinctive type but they are simply a remake of popular Hindi and Bengali songs in Santali. In these songs, the traditional musical appeal of the Santals is absent. These are cheap, vulgar and far removed from the traditional spirit of Santali songs. Their style and rhythm follow popular Hindi and Bengali songs of modern age and are, therefore, very attractive to the Santal youths. In these modern Santali songs the influence of western music is also visible. As a result of the popularity of this type of songs in the society, the practice of traditional songs by the Santals is on the wane. The popularity of traditional musical instruments like flute, fiddler, drums too have taken a beating over the years. Santals nowadays craze for audio-cassettes tape-recorder etc. and the popular imagination

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74 Ibid., p. 140.
76 Ibid., pp. 80-82.
of a Santal lad grazing cows in the field playing a flute in his hands has become a sight of the past.

However, another important change discernible in the musical world of the Santals is the rise of professional groups of musicians and dancers. These groups mostly perform on contract and are hired both by the government and private agencies in their attempt to promote the traditional culture of the tribals. Huge amount of money that is being spent every year by the government for the cultural improvement of the tribals also help to maintain and support these professional groups. With the rise of these groups, a corresponding change has also crept in the size of the traditional musical instruments of the Santals. On conversation, it is known that this change in the size of instruments is being affected for advantage of carrying.

It is important to mention that with the improvement of communication facilities and contacts with the outside world, introduction of modern movie and theatres in the tribal areas, the sophisticated tribal culture is fading out gradually. Educated Santals, nowadays, feel shy to exhibit their songs and dances. Charulal Mukherjee has long noticed this attitude of the Santals as he says, with reference to the Santals of Mayurbhanj, “During my last visit to Mayurbhanj, I found the air thick with these ideas, specially among the educated Santals and there was a noticeable tendency to give up dancing and singing in public. It became clear to us that aboriginal sets of value and philosophy of life were undergoing a perceptible change.”

Religion of the Santals

Religion like language is another area of major debate, which seems to have driven a wedge among the Santals. In the ancient texts of the Santals, there is hardly any reference to religion and the word ‘Kherwal’ mainly stands for their race name. However, we get the word ‘dharam’ but the word ‘dharam’ does not mean any religion in the sense that we know it to be. In Puran, there is the use of the word ‘dharam’ to uphold the name of a tribal deity called ‘dharam bonga.’ The word bonga is affixed to denote popular deities of the Santals like Sing Bonga, Cando Bonga etc. In fact the Santals do not have any

77 Animesh Mukherjee., op. cit., p. 140.
religion in the sense the Hindus, Muslims or Christians have because they hold religion and culture as a universal whole and therefore, inseparable from each other. Roughly it can be said that while ritualistic aspects of different fairs and festivals constitute important components of their cultural whole, observations of those rites and rituals with respect and discipline define what is called their religion.  

A great deal of confusion seems to exist with regard to the religion of the Santals as we come across references to their several dharmas, such as, Sari Dharam, Sarna Dharam, Baha Dharam, Handi Dharam, Javer Dharam, Marang Buru Dharam, Sadhu Dharam, Adivasi Dharam, etc. Even if we consider the above-mentioned ‘Dharam’ of the Adivasis as something unique, the question that calls for attention is: does it constitute a separate religion? There is much disagreement among scholars over this issue though a good number of anthropologists tend to believe that the adivasis are backward Hindus or that they exist in different stages in the process of assimilation with Hinduism. But this assimilation process with Hinduism has never been official nor has it ever taken the form of conversion as Hinduism does not have a definite wall or fence over which or through which the convert must go as in the case of Islam or Christianity.

The dilemma pertaining to religious determination of the Santals, actually, dated back to 1881 when the second Census operation under the initiative of the British government took place. We know that by that time the Kherwar movement had already started and under the leadership of Bhagirath Manjhi, Gyan Parganait and Dubia Gossain, the Santals flared up in arms against unprecedented transfer of land to moneylenders, illegal exactions and payment of rent in the Santal Parganas district. The later phase of the Kherwar movement was marked by the introduction of several Hindu practices giving birth to ‘Sapha Hors’, a sect more inclined to adhere Hindu norms and ways of life as against ‘Jhuta’ or mainstream Santals. In this atmosphere of excitement and unrest, when the Census operation began in 1880 the Santals became more violent. They were totally opposed to Census operations as they apprehended that the government had some sinister design for undertaking the Census. It is believed that Santals’ opposition to Census was,
actually, engineered by the Kherwars. In 1891 when the third Census operation began, the Santals again started to create trouble. Indeed during 1891 they opposed the term ‘junglee’ used to denote their category of tribe in the Census. “The Santals took serious offence at being called “junglee.” Mr Smith reported that a parganait “came and asked me why Santals were called wild people, and were looked upon as cattle.” 83 Indeed one probable cause for the Kherwar movement gathering momentum at the time of Census operations in the late 19th century was that they wanted to officially earmark their position not as ‘junglees’ or ‘animists’, which certainly was derogatory to their status. We know that the Kherwars openly declared themselves as belonging to ‘Baha Dharam’ during this time. J.A. Baines, the then Census Commissioner, also reported that during 1891 the Santals showed a tendency to profess Hinduism as their religion. In 1901 Sir Herbert Risley 84 said that the difference between Hinduism and Animism was marginal and the Santals were becoming Hindus gradually. According to Census Superintendent P.C. Tallents, 85 every time during Census operation, problems relating to determination of the religion of the tribals seemed to surface since there was confusion whether they belonged to Hinduism or Animism. The Census Superintendent of Bombay, further, made his stand very clear when he said ‘Animism’ could not form a religious category in the way other categories of religion exist today and that persons included under the category of ‘Animism’ should immediately be brought under the category of Hinduism. Census Commissioners of later periods such as Dr. J.H. Hutton and W.M. Yeats also opposed the idea of terming ‘Animism’ as the religion of the tribals. To prove how porous the fence between Animism and Hinduism was, the remark of W.M. Yeats, (Census Commissioner, 1941) is cited below.

“The fact is of course that while between Islam or Christianity and other religions there exists as it were a definite wall or fence over which or through which the convert must go, there is nothing between what is usually, though vaguely described as Animism and the equally vague and embracing concept of Hinduism but a very wide no man’s land; and the process by which a tribesman is assimilated to a Hindu is not that of conversion or the acceptance of a particular creed of joining in a definitely marked out section of the

83 District Census Report, Santal Parganas, 1891.
84 H.H. Risley., Census Of India, 1901, Vol. I.

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population, nor a more or less gradual traversing of this no man’s land. The traverse may and generally does occupy more than one generation and it would take an expert to say at what period and in which generation more than half the no man’s land had been crossed so that one could say that the assimilation was more than half completed.  

So, confusion seems to have existed with regard to the religion of the tribals since the colonial rule, which is yet to settle even today. Santal intellectuals of modern times, however, believe that the tribals were never Hindus and a deliberate ploy to facilitate their Hinduization process has been going on since the British period through different Census operations. They also lament that no serious effort has been undertaken ever by the tribals to check this process of Hinduization in the past. In 1938 Adivasi Mahasabha was established to prevent conversion to Christianity. But no such efforts were laid down to prevent increasing Hinduization of the tribals. According to Parimal Hembrom, even the S.T. certificates, contain references to their religion as Hindus.

However, the religious consciousness of the Santals took a different turn after independence. A great majority of the Santals during the Census survey of 1961 has enlisted their names as having a distinct religion i.e. ‘Sari Dharam’ or ‘Sarna Dharam’. But controversy seems to exist over the use of the word ‘Sari’ or ‘Sarna’. ‘Sari’ means truth. Saridharma may therefore mean either true religion or religion based on truth. It is reported that the founder of Saridharma was one Sadhuram Murmu of Kamarbandi village, Pargana Silda in the Midnapore district who subdivided the Santals in three groups, namely a) the Um-hor, i.e. the Christians b) the Saka-hor i.e. the followers of Lord Siva and lastly c) the Bonga-hor i.e. the followers of Saridharma. According to the Census of 1961, “Of the 35,928 tribals who have returned their religion as Saridharma, 34,177 are Santals, 1,152 are Bhumij, 587 are Karmalis, 7 are Koras 5 Mrus. In terms of percentages to tribal population Saridharma has the largest representation of 57.38 per cent among the Karmalis, followed by 2.87 per cent among the Santals.”

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86 Census of India, 1941.
88 Census of India, West Bengal 1961, Series 23 Spl. Tables for Scheduled Tribes, Part IX, (iii) p. XLVII.
Development of Dramas and Cinemas

For a long period dance and songs remained the major sources of entertainment of the Santals. Consciousness for dramas and cinemas in Santali was almost absent. Creation of Santali dramas and cinemas are therefore relatively recent developments in the society of the Santals. Santals became interested in writing dramas only after 1930s. Two famous writers in Santali namely Sadhu Ramchand Murmu and Pandit Raghunath Murmu had also left their imprints in the field of drama. The three most popular dramas in Santali written before independence were ‘Sansar Fend’, ‘Bidu Chandal’, and ‘Kherwal Bir’. Of these dramas, the first one was written by Sadhu Ramchand Murmu, while the other two were written by Pandit Raghunath Murmu. These dramas had become so popular that their remakes attract thousands of Santals even today. We get a few more names before independence like Subol Hansda and Sukhchand Baske, who were also known to have tried their hands in drama writing. Of their creations, two dramas namely ‘Mayamote Topo’ (Blood bath) and ‘Chai-Champa Gard’ (Fort of Chai-Champa) deserve special mentioning.89

However, after independence a new technique came to be introduced in the art of drama writing. This time the approach of writing was far more realistic than ever before. New subject matters particularly those related to the existential problems and social issues of the Santals now found places in their writings. The main exponents of this type of writing are Kaliram Soren and Samir Murmu. Samir Murmu’s creation ‘Towar’ (Orphan) topped the list in the drama competition organized by All-India Radio in 1978.90 This and other dramas of this period depicted hard realities and struggles of the Santals in their daily life.

It is necessary to mention here that earlier these dramas were performed in a very plain manner without much glamour and glitz of stage-decoration and light of modern times. There was no female actress at that time and the men had to perform female characters in the dramas. Use of microphones and other means of decorating the stage were also non-existent. Yet people thronged in hundreds wherever these dramas were being performed.

89 Manas Kamal Chowdhury, “Adivasi Natya Andolaner Dhara” in Adivasi Gunijan and Adivasi Natya Andolan, Calcutta, Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of India, 1997, p. 6.
90 Ibid., p.7.
In the 1970s a new element came to be introduced in the history of the drama movement of the Santals. The educated Santals who at that time were staying at Calcutta for the sake of their services formed an opera to promote the cause of Santali drama. This opera, which was established in 1975, was known as “Kherwal Opera Kolkata.” It is believed that this opera introduced female actresses to act in female characters for the first time in Santali dramas.

The real impetus in the drama movement of the Santals came during 1980s following great upsurge in Bengali dramas. Santali dramas in imitation of Bengali dramas depicted the real life experiences of the Santals including the stories of their exploitation, rising political consciousness, spread of education etc. As a result of increasing popularity of Santal dramas, gradually, there developed professional drama groups in Bankura, Midnapore, Birbhum and in other parts of the state. These professional drama groups have been performing in various places throughout the state and outside it as well. The popularity of these dramas has even spread to adjoining areas like Dhanbad, Chaibasa and Jamshedpur. The government of West Bengal has also taken the initiative to organize drama competition at various places in order to promote Santali drama in the state. In 1989 a state level drama competition took place in which more than 85 professional Santali drama groups participated at the initial phase. In the next phase 15 dramas from each district were selected for the competition. In the final round of the competition that took place on 7th March 1989 in the town hall of Calcutta, the drama staged by the professional drama group from Bankura stood first. The name of that group from Bankura was ‘Tilkou Mandowa’ and the name of the drama staged by them was ‘Doun’ (Witch). The popular focus of the dramas staged in the competition covered wide areas ranging from social reforms, educational progress, campaign against Witch hunting and other superstitions, down to the social and economic exploitation of the Santals and the tales of their heroic struggle in 1855.

Similar drama competitions both at the district and state level again took place in different years since 1989. Mention should be made of a few such competitions like

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93 Ibid., p. 9.
Santali dramas, nowadays, do not lag behind in terms of acting standard of the artists than the dramas of other communities. The preparations of stage, light and decoration have also improved a lot over the years. The efficiency of other persons apart from main performers, involved in staging dramas has also come of age. But what seems to be a major area of deficiency in Santali dramas is the absence of the thematic novelty. Most of the dramas portray conventional issues such as needs of social reforms, war against social and economic exploitation, hardship in daily life, campaign against witchcraft and superstitions of the Santals etc. These dramas mostly reflect the socio-economic reality of the Santals of the present times. But dramas on the historic contributions of the great Santal leaders of the colonial times are relatively rare. There also lays the scope to depict in dramas how some individual Santals have risen from their humble backgrounds to the position of pre-eminence in their society. It is also necessary to mention here that unlike literature, Santali dramas, however, did not flourish as it was expected. In fact ever since the emergence of professional groups in this field, people’s participation in the dramas have gone down significantly.

Cinemas

In India cinemas on Adivasis in general are scarce. The reason probably is commercial, as cinemas on Adivasis hardly have any record to attract crowds in India. However a few cinemas have been made on the exploitation of the Dalits and Adivasis since independence. There are instances of even some movies achieving national awards in the late 70s and 80s of the last century made on the Adivasis and lower class people of India. Mrigaya produced by famous film-director Mrinal Sen is one such film that deals with heroisms of a Santal lad. The film Achroosh directed by Govind Nihalini dealing with the exploitation of the harijans (lower class people) by upper class people has also bagged a national award. However, in Bengali we get two films prepared exclusively on the

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94 Ibid., pp. 8 -16.
Santals. These are ‘Aranya Banhi’ and ‘Mahul-baner Sereng’. In Hindi not a single film on the adivasis has come up so far. One very popular film made in Oriya language on the social ostracism (*Bit-laha*) of the Santals is often shown in Dooradarshan channel. But in general depiction of the life and struggles of the tribal communities has remain neglected in Indian cinema. However, scenes of poverty stricken daily life and struggles and exploitations of the tribals sometimes feature in parts in some movies. Mention should be made in this regard of two famous movies of Satyajit Ray i.e. ‘Aranyer Dinratri’ and ‘Aguntuk’ in which the director has shown that the Santals are not only the early inhabitants of Indian civilization but they are also far more superior in terms of cultural standard than any other so-called civilized communities in our country. Among the few tele-films that have come so far on the Santals mention should be made of ‘Sadgati’, ‘Sumi’ and ‘Birsa Munda’. However, initiative to create feature films on the life and culture of the Santals that have begun in the 1980s has so far led to the production of three feature films. These are ‘Chando-likhon’, (20th May 2001), ‘Mara-tukoure-Miru’, (2003), and ‘Dulour’ (2003). Despite several constraints more films on the Santals are expected to come up in near future.

**Growth of Political Consciousness**

As a corollary to over all socio-cultural changes, a marked change in the political desires and aspirations of the Santals can also be noticed in the years following independence. Santals today are taking active part in all political activities from the grassroots to the national level. As such, the issue of political consciousness of the Santals is a factor to reckon with.

It is necessary to admit that the Santals are no novice in the field of politics. Their participation in the historical battles against the Raj, itself lends testimony to the fact that they were very active in the field of politics long before the general political consciousness among Indian masses appeared in the horizon. A scholar like Dilip Soren even goes to the length of saying that the freedom movement of India and even the very consciousness of freedom were conceived in the womb of the Santal revolt. He thinks

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96 Ibid., p. 84.
97 Ibid., p. 84.
that the Santal revolt in actuality started in the year 1780 led by Tilka Murmu much earlier than the great Santal Rebellion of 1855-1856.98

But it is true that electoral politics is something that the Santals had not experienced much during the colonial rule. After independence ever since India has developed into a stable democracy, election at various levels seem to gather importance. Bidhan Sabha, Lok Sabha, and Panchayat are the three levels of Indian political system based on people's election. Tribals constituting an important section of Indian population have shown their increased level of political consciousness by participating in these elections.

Among tribals we generally find four categories of voters in the villages and in towns like apathetics, peripherals/ spectators, auxiliaries and politicians.99 Apathetics are literally unaware of the political situation around them. They do not even vote or show any interest in voting. These kinds of persons generally exist among landless agricultural labourers in the tribal society. Spectators or peripheral voters may have some interest in politics and some knowledge about it but their participation does not go beyond voting. Auxiliaries embrace those who vote and engage in one or two activities with medium level interest and information. Their activities include attending political meetings, campaigning in favour of a particular party and also to vote. The final category i.e. the politicians are the most active of all the groups during elections. They either stand themselves as candidates or remain busy in holding public meetings or doing other acts for mobilizing people in favour of a candidate of his party.

Anadi Kumar Mahapatra100 has worked extensively on the nature of political participation of the Santals in some villages in Midnapore district during Bidhan Sabha, Lok Sabha, and Panchayat elections of 1977 – 1978. In his study he has shown that the nature of participation of the Santals in all three levels of elections was not uniform. Even consciousness and interest with regard to political activities seemed to differ among different members of their community. According to him, political participation depends

on several variables like education, occupation, income, sex, age, and religion. Particularly education and income are considered to be most important ingredient for determining the degree of political participation. Further he states that the Bidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections of 1977-1978 had drawn little interest among the Santals as they were contested over issues and problems of international, national and provincial level. The candidates contesting in these elections too did not bear any direct relation with the people living in the villages. So it was the Panchayat election that really made the Santals interested.

This is supposed to be true to elections held in subsequent years as well. Since Panchayat elections are held at village level and the contesting candidates normally belong to the areas where elections take place, Santals are found to take part in these elections more actively than in other levels of elections.

Mahapatra seems to have touched the right chord in his investigation on the nature of participation of the Santals in the Lok Sabha, Bidhan Sabha and Panchayat polls. According to him, in the Lok Sabha and Bidhan Sabha polls higher the level of education of the people the better the level of their participation in political activities including casting of votes. But the situation seems to be different in Panchayat poll. In the Panchayat poll Santals with moderate level of education exhibit more interest in politics including the use of ballot box. Whereas highly educated among them are less likely to use the ballot box. The cause may be attributed to the fact that Panchayat poll took place in a highly charged and tense atmosphere. However, as in the case of voter’s turn out, so in case of making political talks or organizing meetings and associations similar trend can be noticed.

According to Mahapatra, occupational differentiation among Santals also affects their political participation. In the surveyed villages he has found the Santals who were in teaching profession, were the most active participants in politics. Since teachers like other government employees, find high and serious stakes in government policies they seemed to involve themselves into politics more than others. He has shown in his study that the cultivators ranked second in participating into politics. The Santal cultivators were found

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101 Ibid., p. 213.
to involve in large numbers in political activities. Compared with these two occupational groups the participation of the agricultural and other unskilled labourers in political activities was found to be less in the society of the Santals.102

The statistics furnished below is an extraction from Mahapatra’s study showing how education as an important variable affects the nature of political participation of the Santals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables &amp; Elections</th>
<th>Illiterate No Formal education</th>
<th>Some Primary</th>
<th>Finished Primary</th>
<th>Some Secondary</th>
<th>Finished Secondary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cast Vote</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Sabha</td>
<td>66 (79.52)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
<td>12 (92.31)</td>
<td>4 (80.00)</td>
<td>23 (92.00)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidhan Sabha</td>
<td>61 (73.49)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
<td>12 (92.31)</td>
<td>3 (60.00)</td>
<td>19 (76.00)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchayat</td>
<td>65 (84.42)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
<td>9 (75.00)</td>
<td>4 (80.00)</td>
<td>20 (86.96)</td>
<td>3 (75.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss on Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Sabha</td>
<td>60 (72.29)</td>
<td>2 (50.00)</td>
<td>8 (61.54)</td>
<td>2 (40.00)</td>
<td>19 (76.00)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidhan Sabha</td>
<td>48 (57.83)</td>
<td>2 (50.00)</td>
<td>10 (76.92)</td>
<td>3 (60.00)</td>
<td>19 (76.00)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchayat</td>
<td>55 (71.43)</td>
<td>3 (75.00)</td>
<td>6 (50.00)</td>
<td>4 (80.00)</td>
<td>11 (47.83)</td>
<td>2 (50.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended Meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Sabha</td>
<td>9 (10.84)</td>
<td>2 (50.00)</td>
<td>4 (30.77)</td>
<td>1 (20.00)</td>
<td>15 (60.00)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidhan Sabha</td>
<td>3 (3.61)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (7.69)</td>
<td>2 (40.00)</td>
<td>12 (48.00)</td>
<td>3 (75.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchayat</td>
<td>46 (59.74)</td>
<td>3 (75.00)</td>
<td>10 (83.33)</td>
<td>4 (80.00)</td>
<td>20 (86.96)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in Politics</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Sabha</td>
<td>60 (72.29)</td>
<td>3 (75.00)</td>
<td>12 (92.31)</td>
<td>5 (100.00)</td>
<td>25 (100.00)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidhan Sabha</td>
<td>56 (67.47)</td>
<td>3 (75.00)</td>
<td>10 (76.92)</td>
<td>5 (100.00)</td>
<td>25 (100.00)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchayat</td>
<td>76 (98.70)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
<td>12 (100.00)</td>
<td>5 (100.00)</td>
<td>23 (100.00)</td>
<td>4 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Anadi Kumar Mahapatra, p. 216.

The effect of income-level on the political participation of the Santals is also a factor to reckon with. In all the three elections (Lok Sabha Bidhan Sabha and Panchayat) under reference, the percentages of politically interested respondents as shown by Mahapatra had gradually increased with the increase in the level of income. They were also found to attend maximum numbers of public meetings than the rest. The reason is simple. Economic solvency helped them take time off to devote in politics. Poor Santals, on the other hand, had to remain busy in making their daily earnings and therefore can hardly think about politics.103

The views of Anadi Kumar Mahapatra, hold true to other areas and subsequent periods as well. In order to get a further picture on the rising political consciousness and

102 Ibid., p. 223.
103 Ibid., pp. 220-228.
participation of the Santals, a detailed analysis of the last three Panchayat elections held in 1993, 1998 and 2003 in the districts of our study is furnished below.\textsuperscript{104}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panchayat Election – Bankura District, 1993</th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>Zilla Parishad</td>
<td>Panchayat Samiti</td>
<td>Gram Panchayat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>3419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Women Members</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>159</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panchayat Election – Birtahum District, 1993</th>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>Zilla Parishad</td>
<td>Panchayat Samiti</td>
<td>Gram Panchayat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>2992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Women Members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>109</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panchayat Election – Midnapore District, 1993</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>Zilla Parishad</td>
<td>Panchayat Samiti</td>
<td>Gram Panchayat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1494</td>
<td>9040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Women Members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Bankura**

If we make a comparative analysis among all the three Panchayat elections in the districts under study, we can find that in Bankura district the total percentage of tribal candidates in the Gram Panchayat elections in 1993 was 16.14\% while in other two elections i.e. in the years 1998 and 2003 their figures in terms of percentage were 10.68\% and 12.84\% respectively. In Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad they were 17.44\% and 13.63\% in 1993, 10.48\% and 11.90\% in 1998 and 11.92\% and 12.19\% in 2003. These figures indicate that in all three tiers of the Panchayat election of 1993, the tribals performed better than the other two elections held in subsequent years. But a look into the nature of political participation of the women candidates will show an increasing trend in Bankura district. In 1993 in all the tiers Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Parishad while the percentage of women candidates out of total tribal candidates were 28.80, 31.95

and 33.33 respectively in the other two elections i.e. in 1998 they were 51.87% 36.53% and 20% and in 2003 their figures were 40.23%, 45.61% and 40% respectively.

**Birbhum**: Tribal participation in the elections of Birbhum district, however, does not show much variation in three tiers Panchayat election in different years. Here in 1993 the percentage of tribal candidates out of total candidates including caste candidates in three tiers namely Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Parishad were 7.31, 11.90%, and 10.48% respectively in 1998 they were 10.68%, 10.48% and 10.68% and in 2003 they were 7.83%, 7.76% and 8.57%. The percentages of women candidates out of total tribal candidates in the three Panchayat elections were 49.77%, 41.66% and 33.33% in 1993, 39.41%, 37.5% (no woman candidate in Zilla Parishad) in 1998 and 42.93%, 34.37% and 33.33% in 2003 respectively. Thus, as far as participation of women candidates was concerned, we find a downward trend from 1993 to 1998 but again there was a slight improvement in their participation in 2003.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panchayat Election – Bankura District, 1998</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>Panchayat Samiti</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>2742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>152</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panchayat Election – Birbhum District, 1998</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>Panchayat Samiti</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>2361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Women Members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panchayat Election – Midnapore District, 1998</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>Panchayat Samiti</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1295</td>
<td>7188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Women Members</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


7.33% and 7.89% respectively while their numbers in 1998 were 7.20%, 7.58% and 8.57% and in 2003 they were 7.83%, 7.76% and 8.57%. The percentages of women candidates out of total tribal candidates in the three Panchayat elections were 49.77%, 41.66% and 33.33% in 1993, 39.41%, 37.5% (no woman candidate in Zilla Parishad) in 1998 and 42.93%, 34.37% and 33.33% in 2003 respectively. Thus, as far as participation of women candidates was concerned, we find a downward trend from 1993 to 1998 but again there was a slight improvement in their participation in 2003.
Panchayat Election – Bankura District, 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>Panchayat Samiti</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>2632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.19%</td>
<td>11.92%</td>
<td>12.84%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Women Members</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45.61%</td>
<td>40.23%</td>
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</table>

Panchayat Election – Birbhum District, 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>Panchayat Samiti</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>2258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.57%</td>
<td>7.76%</td>
<td>7.83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Women Members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>34.37%</td>
<td>42.93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panchayat Election – Midnapore District, (East & West) 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>Panchayat Samiti</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>1337</td>
<td>7553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East + West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Members</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.14%</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
<td>9.06%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T. Women Members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.85%</td>
<td>35.65%</td>
<td>39.27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Midnapore

Tribal participation in Midnapore district, however, exhibits an increasing trend. In 1993 the percentage of tribal candidates out of total candidates including castes candidates in three tiers namely Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Parishad in the Midnapore district were 5.33%, 6.09%, and 6.48% respectively. The same figures in 1998 were 9.23%, 9.49% and 9.25% while in 2003 they were 9.06%, 9.64% and 6.14% respectively. The percentages of women candidates out of total tribal candidates in the three Panchayat elections here were 73.85%, 67.03% and 42.85% in 1993, 45.78%, 37.39%, and 20% in 1998 and 39.27%, 35.65% and 42.85% in 2003 respectively. Thus, while the over all tribal participation in the Panchayat elections in Midnapore district has increased over the years, the number of female participants has gone down remarkably.

However, it is necessary to mention here that the depiction of the number of tribal candidates who came out victorious in different Panchayat elections as mentioned above does not always reflect the real nature of political participation of the Santals in the villages. Because persons who work tirelessly for the success of the party, mobilize people, organize mass meetings and participate in campaigning to ensure victory of their candidates do not figure anywhere in the poll review or assessment by stalwarts. So we cannot get the exact figure of the persons involved in the entire show. Nor is it possible to
know what all maneuverings and mobilizations are resorted by people till the approach of the final day of election. Of course, a field survey as the one undertaken by Anadi Kumar Mahapatra (mentioned above) may reveal the ground level reality of Santal participation in the Panchayat elections. But since it is outside the scope of the present study, it can be presumed that repeated attempts of mobilizations by cadres of different political parties and their performances in the past years generally count in establishing the credibility of the contesting parties and the tribals are also influenced by these factors.

But what is striking is that Santals nowadays are showing signs of political consciousness in no uncertain terms than others in the society. They are quite conscious about their own welfare; class position and voting right, which get particularly manifest during election times. As Anadi Kumar Mahapatra states "Survey work on the eve of the Panchayat election revealed that class identity and class consciousness were very much prevalent among the respondents. Even an illiterate Santal woman respondent went to the length of identifying them as working class and the researcher and his associates as ‘babu class’ people."105 Needless to say, that this rising political consciousness has imparted a new dimension to their sense of identity.

However, there is one more side to this participation of the tribals in the Panchayat elections. The Planning Commission and the National Council accepted this statutory Panchayat system as an integral part of the community development programme in 1958.106 Now it acts as important machinery for implementation of various central and state government plans for rural and tribal development. The participation of the tribals in the Panchayat elections give them both knowledge and experience about various central and state government schemes for tribal development. It thus, ensures on the one hand their development as a community and on the other facilitates their assimilation with the neighbouring non-tribal communities. Modern Panchayat, thus, acts, apart from developing a power structure at the grassroots level, as a means to involve greater number of people from below for both setting and executing plans for rural development in the society.

105 Anadi Kumar Mahapatra, op. cit., p. 169.