CHAPTER – IV

SCHEDULED TRIBES IN WEST BENGAL

4.1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an overview of situation of Schedule Tribes (ST) in West Bengal. The researcher has tried to highlight various issues pertaining to their day to day activities that lead towards establishing their identity. The main purpose of this chapter is to understand the context of the study which can influence the socio-economic, religious and political situation of the schedule tribes and how these have shaped into their tribal identity. In this chapter, 2001 census data is used since data for other years are not available, but some of the latest data are also used.

India is the home to large number of tribal people, who are still untouched by the lifestyle of the modern world. Contrarily in the age of globalisation, the extent and intensity of the deprivations of the tribals has intensified. India has the largest population of tribal people with more than 84.4 million constituting 8.20 per cent of the populations as per the 2001 Census. They are known as the adivasi's (indigenous peoples) and they belong to the section of the poorest of the poor in the country who are still dependent on nature for their survival through hunting, agriculture and fishing etc. 437 groups of tribals have been scheduled under the Constitution of India. The major tribal groups who have been scheduled in India include Gonds, Santals, Khasis, Nagas, Garos, Mundas, Oraons, Kharias, Hos, Angamis, Bhils, Kols, Chenchu, Kondadoras, Kondakapus, Totos, Paharias, Bhutias etc. Each and every tribal people have their own distinct social system, culture, tradition, customs, values, language and lifestyle etc. and they maintain symbiotic relationships with the nature. In present day
context, almost all the tribal peoples are facing various kinds of problems to sustain their livelihood and hence they try to engage themselves in informal activities for their survival.

So far as the state of West Bengal there are forty one (41) schedule tribes and their concentrations is more in southern, western and northern parts of the state. As per the 2001 census, the scheduled tribe population of the state was 44,06,794 of which 22,23,924 males and 21,82,870 were females. On the whole, they constitute 5.5 per cent of the total population of the state in 2001 and most of them (93.9 per cent) reside in rural area. Among the tribes, the Santals constitute more than half (51.8 per cent) of the population. The Oraons, Mundas, Bhumijes and Koras constitute are 14 per cent, 7.8 per cent, 7.6 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively. Besides, Lodhas, Mahalis, Bhotias, Bedias etc. exist in small numbers. Even though Santals constitute the majority, they are concentrated in the districts of Purulia, Bankura, West Medinipur, Bardhaman and Hooghly districts of West Bengal. The decadal growth rate of 1991 to 2001 of ST was 15.70 per cent whereas India was 22.66 per cent and West Bengal was only 17.77 per cent respectively.

District wise population of the ST in West Bengal as per as per 2001 Census are given on the table No. 1
Table No. 4.1: Scheduled Tribe population in West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>22,23,924</td>
<td>21,82,870</td>
<td>44,06,794</td>
<td>41,36366</td>
<td>2,70,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan</td>
<td>2,21,773</td>
<td>2,20,059</td>
<td>4,41,832</td>
<td>3,47,072</td>
<td>94,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>1,01,831</td>
<td>1,01,296</td>
<td>2,03,127</td>
<td>1,98,612</td>
<td>4,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>1,66,732</td>
<td>1,64,051</td>
<td>3,30,783</td>
<td>32,9080</td>
<td>1,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medinipur</td>
<td>4,03,962</td>
<td>3,94,722</td>
<td>7,98,684</td>
<td>7,74,315</td>
<td>24,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howrah</td>
<td>9,959</td>
<td>9,209</td>
<td>19,168</td>
<td>8,543</td>
<td>10,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooghly</td>
<td>1,05,453</td>
<td>1,06,609</td>
<td>2,12,062</td>
<td>1,98,486</td>
<td>13,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North 24-parganas</td>
<td>1,01,488</td>
<td>97,448</td>
<td>1,98,936</td>
<td>1,68,686</td>
<td>30,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South 24-parganas</td>
<td>43,101</td>
<td>41,665</td>
<td>84,766</td>
<td>79,208</td>
<td>5,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolkata</td>
<td>5,471</td>
<td>4,339</td>
<td>9,810</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>57,475</td>
<td>56,416</td>
<td>1,13,891</td>
<td>1,01,911</td>
<td>11,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murshidabad</td>
<td>38,518</td>
<td>37,435</td>
<td>75,953</td>
<td>73,202</td>
<td>2,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Dinajpur</td>
<td>63,123</td>
<td>61,742</td>
<td>1,24,865</td>
<td>1,22,110</td>
<td>2,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakshin Dinajpu</td>
<td>2,22,063</td>
<td>2,10,597</td>
<td>4,32,660</td>
<td>3,97,599</td>
<td>35,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malda</td>
<td>1,22,442</td>
<td>1,19,875</td>
<td>2,42,317</td>
<td>2,36,271</td>
<td>6,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>3,24,250</td>
<td>3,17,438</td>
<td>6,41,688</td>
<td>6,25,585</td>
<td>16,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
<td>1,02,287</td>
<td>1,01,880</td>
<td>2,04,167</td>
<td>1,78,878</td>
<td>25,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cooch Behar</em></td>
<td>7,425</td>
<td>6,821</td>
<td>20,416</td>
<td>17,8878</td>
<td>25289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purulia</td>
<td>2,35,097</td>
<td>2,28,355</td>
<td>4,63,452</td>
<td>4,56,573</td>
<td>6,879</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Census of India, 2001

It is important to note that the districts of West Medinipur, Jalpaiguri, Purulia and Bardhaman have more than half of the total ST population of West Bengal; besides the remaining districts of Bankura, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur have
notable scheduled tribe population. Khonds, Paharia and Sauria Paharia are the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) residing in West Bengal and their socio-economic situation is worried some.

The concentration of ST population according to Census of India, 2001 is given below in table No. 2

**Table No. 4.2: Per cent wise ST population in West Bengal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage (%) of the total ST population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Santal</td>
<td>2,280,540</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Oraon</td>
<td>617,138</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Munda</td>
<td>341,542</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bhumij</td>
<td>336,436</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kora</td>
<td>142,789</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lodha</td>
<td>84,966</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mahali</td>
<td>76,102</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bhutia</td>
<td>60,091</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bedia</td>
<td>55,979</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sabar</td>
<td>43,599</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40,39,192</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 2001

From the above table, it is clearly shown that Santal, Oraon, Munda, Bhumij, Kora, Lodha, Mahalli, Bhutia, Bedia and Sabar concentration in the state of West Bengal are 51.8 per cent, 14.0 per cent, 7.8 per cent, 7.6 per cent, 3.2 per cent, 1.9 per cent, 1.7 per cent 1.4 per cent, 1.3 per cent and 1 per cent respectively.

The over all sex ratio of the ST population in West Bengal is 982 which is higher than their national average of 987. The child sex ratio among them is 981 and this is much
better (0 – 6 years) as compared to the national average of 973 among the STs according to 2001 Census.

4.2: LITERACY OF ST POPULATION

In West Bengal the literacy rate of ST population is 43.40 per cent, which is lower than the national average of 47.10 per cent. Gender disparity in literacy among STs is also evident as male literacy rate is 57.40 per cent as compared to female literacy rate of 29.20 per cent. Surprisingly however, the Bhutia have achieved the target of 72.60 per cent overall literacy, with 65.2 per cent female literacy. Among the Savars the rate of literacy is and female literacy is the worst (16.0 per cent). It is worth noting, here that advancement made in respect of literacy growth in West Bengal during the last few decades did not trickle down to backward communities like the STs. Thus, the literacy rate in West Bengal has increased from 48.6 per cent in 1981 to 57.7 per cent in 1991 and to 69.2 per cent in 2001. Hence, the gap between the literacy status of Scheduled Tribes and general population is nearly 26 per cent. More surprisingly around 17 per cent of ST literates is only literate at “below primary” level according to Census, 2001. In fact, literacy among persons of age 7 years and above in the ST households is uniformly lower as compared to all other social categories including Schedule Castes (SCs) and the Muslims. The problem of illiteracy is particularly acute among rural tribal women with 70 per cent of them being non-literate. The problem also has a spatial or regional dimension. ST households tend to concentrate in certain regions/districts/blocks with poor physical infrastructure lack of communication and the provision of basic public services including education.

The reasons for the relatively low ratio of attendance at schools in tribal areas of West Bengal include the sheer physical lack of schools in the vicinity. Besides, lack of
basic infrastructural facilities continues to be a serious concern for the proper growth of primary education. There are not only enough schools in tribal localities, even those that exist often do not have buildings to speak of, not to mention about other facilities and equipment including teachers. The following table shows the detail of literacy among the schedule tribes in West Bengal.

Table No. 4.3: Literacy rate among ten major STs in West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Name of the STs</th>
<th>Literacy rate above 7 years of age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>All Scheduled Tribes</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Santal</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Oraon</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Munda</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bhumij</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Kora</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Lodha</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Mahali</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Bhutia</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Bedia</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Savar</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India (2001)

Table 4.3 shows the literacy rate of ST population of male and female above the age group of 7 years of age. There is a significant variation in the rate of literacy among the ST population. The table clearly reflects that literacy rate is highest among the Bhutia and lowest among the Savars. It is also seen that the literacy rate among the ST is below national average and the average of population of West Bengal.
4.3: DISTRIBUTION OF SCHEDULED TRIBE POPULATION SELECTED DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL

As the present research is done in the three districts, viz. Purulia, Medinipur and Bankura of West Bengal, the details of Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in these districts are given in the following table:

TABLE: 4.4: Scheduled Tribes Population by Sex in selected Districts, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Districts</th>
<th>Male Number</th>
<th>Female Number</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Rural Number</th>
<th>Urban Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>2223924 (100%)</td>
<td>2182870 (100%)</td>
<td>4406794 (100%)</td>
<td>4136366 (100%)</td>
<td>270428 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purulia</td>
<td>235097 (10.57%)</td>
<td>228355 (10.46%)</td>
<td>463452 (10.52%)</td>
<td>456573 (98.47%)</td>
<td>6879 (01.53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>166732 (07.50%)</td>
<td>164051 (07.52%)</td>
<td>330783 (07.51%)</td>
<td>329080 (99.49%)</td>
<td>1703 (0.51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medinipur</td>
<td>403962 (18.16%)</td>
<td>394722 (18.08%)</td>
<td>798684 (18.12%)</td>
<td>774315 (96.95%)</td>
<td>24369 (03.05%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 2001

From the above table, it is clearly seen that ST population has a sizeable number in the districts of Purulia, Bankura and Medinipur and most of them live in rural areas according to 2001 census. In a nutshell, more than 36 per cent of ST population resides in the districts of Purulia, Bankura and Medinipur and more than 96 per cent of them reside in rural areas and a very negligible per cent of them live in the urban areas.

* It includes both the district of Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur of West Bengal.
area. The major occupations of the ST population are cultivation and agricultural labourers in the districts of Purulia, Bankura and Medinipur (West).

4.4: THE FOCUSED TRIBE: THE SANTALS

The Santals are one of the largest groups among the schedule tribe, next to Gond tribe. They are residing in the states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar and Assam; in present day context they have migrated to all the major cities of India. Besides, they are also residing in the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Nepal. The Santals call themselves as Horhopon meaning child or children of human beings. They are known regionally as Santal, Santhal, Saontar and Sotar but as the Government records, they are mostly called either as Santal or Santhal. The researcher prefers for phonetic elegance the name spelled as Santal who consider themselves Hor or Hor Hopon.

The Santals are considered one of the largest homogenous Scheduled Tribe (ST) in India. They are in India since time immemorial. It has been argued that the Santals are the only cultured people on the empress of the underlying philosophic speculation and order of the thought that was wide spread in India prior to the rise and social order of pre-Dravidian (Mohapatra, 1986). Ethnically the Santal, Ho, Munda and Kharia belong to the same family of Kolarian race and linguistically the Santals are grouped with the Munda family of language.

Their past history is very vague as they had only oral traditions. During the first half of the 20th century, documentations have been started by anthropologist, sociologists and interested Christians missionary. Majority of them are illiterates but still continues in oral forms in their songs and legends though with some omissions and additions (Hembrom, 2000). On the other hand, they are all one in the perspective of
their common assertion of their past, which may be considered as their primal
precedent doctrine, as:

Hihiri Pipiri rebon janam lena
Khoj Kaman rebon khoj lena
Harata rebon haralena
Sasanbeda rebon jat lena ho!

Meaning of the lament:

In Hihiri Pipiri (good land) we were born,
We were sought after (by Thakur Jiu) in Khoj Kaman
We were replenished again in Harata
We fixed our social orders in Sasanbeda.

This is the philosophy of the Santals in which they recall their history since their
inceptions. Belief based on mythology says that at the place Khojkaman, the first
generation of human beings became evil in the sight of God (Thakur Jiu). They
behaved like beasts did not recognise each other. Then, Thakur Jiu called them back
to himself, but they would not obey, so he destroyed them with fire from heaven
except one pair (Archer, 1974).

The philosophy of the Santals is preserved in a form of a lamentation and mourn:

Champa gar do lilibichi
Badoli Koenda likhon gorhon
Dayage Champa, Badoli, Koenda
Dayage gar bon bagiyada

(Meaning: Champa fort was ornamental and Badoli Koenda fort decorative
Oh dear Champa, Badoli and Koenda, Alas we left them our dear forts).
According to their mythological belief *Chae Chpama, Badolli* and *Koenda* forts existed and they had spent happy life over there. They dwelt for a long period enjoying undisturbed joy, peace and untold prosperity at these places. They believed that their happiest period is over; till now they cherish with nostalgia being shaped into their tradition. The tradition says that they were defeated by some intruder and were pushed away from place to place. Then they come to contact with some more civilised people and they were found and brought in the pages of modern history. At this period they were in Chhotanagpur, especially in the districts of Hazaribagh, Palamau and Singhbhum and neighbouring districts of Manbhum, Midnapur and Birbhum (Bodding, 1940).

**a. Origin of Santhals and history of the Santals:**

The history and origin of the Santal is not yet clear in today’s context. However, Bodding (1925, 1940) has argued that there is no definite link on the origin of Santals or rather of the race to which they belong. There is a need to examine and rely upon other materials, i.e. traditions, customs, language and anthropological features. However, as to their traditions, it is possible to accord them too high a value, but they feel sure on true knowledge of them will be distinguished from others.

Troisi (1976) has opined that there is no record about the Santals and their traditions; but there is record about facts consisting of tying knots in strings and who have no bards to hand down a national epic by oral tradition hardly be expected to preserve the memory of their past. It is not possible to memorise long enough or accurately enough for their accounts which has possessed some kind of historical value. He also highlighted that there was once a large and important Santal colony in Parganas of *Chai* and *Champa* in the Hazaribagh district. He has tried to establish his argument
that there is some evidence that a fort of the Santals was taken away by the Mohammadans who came to India long after the Aryans. It has been assumed that by about 1340 A.D, the forts of Chae Champa and the settlement of the Santals were taken away by Ibrahm Ali.

There is proper evidence about their history of their origin but they have very strong base on their oral traditions, mythological belief. George E Somers (1977) has surmised that the Santals lived successively in Persia, Afghanistan and Chinese Tartary, and entered India from the north-west, that they settled in the Punjab and made their way thence to Chotanagpur plateau. On the contrary Colonel Dalton alleged that the Santals came from North-East India, and found their way to the Chotanagpur plateau and the adjoining highlands near the Damodar River valley. Soren (2004) argues that there are various theories available on the origin of the Santals and their history. But he strongly believes that the documentation of their origin, customs and traditions were started by the Europeans during the colonial period. In 1795, Sir John Shore spoke of Santals in Ramgarh in Birbhum district and came to contact with them in Chotanagpur plateau in the districts of Hazaribagh, Palamau and Singhbhum and in the neighbourhood of Midnapore and Manbhum districts in the middle of Eighteenth century. However the Santals began to migrate to Rajmahal hills at the end of eighteenth century from the north eastern side of Chotanagpur plateau and Damin-i-koh was created in 1833 in this hill tracts occupied by adivasis of Paharia and Santals.

b. Society:

The Santal tribe is one of the largest ethnic groups in India. They are a non-Hindu people and they make a clear difference based on race between themselves and
Hindus. They have been classified as a "Pre-Dravidian'' tribe. Their language, Santali, belongs to the Munda (or Mundari) branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. There are dialectical variations in Santali from north to south. But Orans (1965) has argued that there is complete mutual intelligibility among the Santal throughout their population. However, this mutual intelligibility is the basis of their social cohesion despite of politically unified.

In present day context, the Santals are primarily agriculturists, growing rice as their main crop; besides they also grow millet, maize and some vegetable crops which is purely market driven. They have adopted various agricultural methods practiced by the mainstream people with little knowledge or application of crop rotation, irrigation, or fertilizers and pesticides etc. Hunting, fishing, and gathering are of little economic importance today. But they still practice the annual *dehiri / disom sendra* hunt and their male population in it. They also practice cattle rearing mainly cow, goats, sheep, pigs, oxen, buffaloes, cats and dogs.

Their social organisation is characterised by unity and equality among them. There is a lack of the caste cleavages so prominent in Hindu society, a patrilineal kinship system, and a relatively low level of political integration (Cushlow, 1949). The entire society seems to be divided into 12 clans and there are various sub clans which in turn are subdivided into local patrilineal lineages--the largest corporate kin groups. The basic family unit is the extended patrilocal family. Each village is usually composed of a number of lineages.

Each village is eventually the primary political unit, but the largest formally organized territorial unit is called *Pargana*, is a confederation of approximately a dozen villages bound together to settle various judicial problems. Bodding (1940) discusses the
Pargana and this seems to be the unit, describing it as an administrative grouping of villages headed by a Pargana.

However, the Santal society promotes the practice of democracy, take various decisions through consensus and respect every individual in the society.

c. Art and Culture of the Santals:

Culture is one of the important facets of human being. It also applies to the people of India in general and the Santal culture in particular. Many scholars and anthropologists have been attracted since centuries to know the various traits of their culture. The study of Santal culture was done during the period of Mughal emperor and followed by the Christian missionaries. Reverend Paul Olaf Bodding initiated to study the *adivasi* groups of the Indian subcontinent, particularly the Santals as they were preservative of their language and culture despite influences of Hindus, Mughals, Europeans, British and others. Their culture is depicted in the paintings and artworks in the walls of their houses and exhibited during the festivals and other social occasions. It mainly depicts the mythological stories of their ancestors i.e. *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Bhudi*¹.

They are very fond of music and dance. The most important aspect of their culture is that their culture has not been influenced by any mainstream Indian culture. Santali music differs from Hindustani classical music in significant ways. Prasad (1985) has done the most recent work on the music of the Santal but others preceded his work. However, Santal music and dance both retain connections to traditional celebrations. The names of many Santal tunes are derived from the traditional ritual with which

¹ First human being in the earth according to mythological belief by the Santals.
they were once associated with *Dong, Lagre, Baha* and *Sohrai* \(^2\) tunes etc. Their main instruments are *Tamak, Tumdak, Jhae, Kortal* \(^3\) etc. to perform their dances.

More than 150 spirit deities generally called *bongas* \(^4\) among the Santals. The deities include a large number of separate classes, impossible to enumerate here. Each village has a sacred grove called *jaher* where *Marang buru* \(^5\), *Jafer Era* \(^6\) exits who looks after the various problems of the Santals. Besides, many *bongas* are common to the Santal tradition. They are generally benevolent, but the forest *bongas*, however are malevolent as they include the souls of people who died an unnatural death. Religious practitioners, the village priest (*naeke*) are identified along with their wife, as representative of the original Santal couple. Their job responsibilities are mainly related to festivals and recurrent annual ceremonies. The Santal *Ojha*, a healer and diviner has several functions in Santal society. They practice their ayurvedic medical knowledge to treat the patients. There is evidence that Bodding had done extensive field work to corroborate the value of the traditional medicines on remedies by ritual invocations.

d. **Santhal Language and education:**

Santali language belongs to the sub family of austro-asiatic group and classified under the Mundari group of languages. The Santali language is spoken by more than six million people in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. It has its own scripts known as *Ol Chiki* discovered by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in the year 1920s. Initially “*Ol Chiki*” was regarded as copied one and also considered as one which doesn’t have any

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\(^2\) The musical tunes which is used by the Santals during the various festivals and social occasions.
\(^3\) Musical instruments used by the Santals during various joyous occasions.
\(^4\) Good spirits who takes care for their fortunes.
\(^5\) Supreme male deity.
\(^6\) Supreme female deity.
characteristic of language. But after lot of studies, it was found that “Ol chiki” is alphabetic and does not share any of the syllabic properties of the other Indian scripts such as Devanagari, Oriya, Bengali etc. It uses 30 letters and five basic diacritics. It has 6 basic vowels and three additional vowels, generated using the Gahla Tudag. Santals did not have a written language until the nineteenth century. Therefore, the script is a recent development. A distinct script was required to accommodate the Santali language; it does not combine any features of any languages. In the year 2003, the Santali language has been schedule in the 8th schedule of the Constitution of India.

In today’s context, the Santali language is taught at the primary to University level in the states of Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal. Besides, various ongoing research project are also carried over by the Universities and individual scholars. Through the written form of the language, there is plenty of scope to develop the same and prosper at par with the other Indian languages.

e. Festivals:

The Santals celebrate various festivals in different occasion through out the year. Keeping in view of the cycle of nature and agricultural term, they celebrate festivals. They celebrate these festivals to invocate the nature for helping them in getting whatever they have and increase their wealth and free them from all the enemies and diseases. They celebrate festivals like erok sim, janthar, karam, sohrae, saakrat, baha etc. The details of these festivals are discussed in bellow:

(i) Erok Sim (Paddy sowing festival):

The Erok Sim means ‘offer a cock to start paddy sowing’. The Santals celebrate this festival to worship the mother earth with religions flavour and enthusiasm

122
as they initiate the process of sowing paddy and other millet crops. The village priest ‘naike’ offer the black cock as sacrifice with adwa caole (non-boiled rice), flower, vermilion and incense sticks to propitiate mother earth for bumper harvest, prosperity, peaceful and disease free life. After completion of the rituals, they arrange a community feasts along with rice beers and dance in traditional tunes, beating of drums which makes the festival quite enjoyable.

(ii) Janthar Bonga (Janthar Festival)

The festival is celebrated with the aim of proper rain and growth of the crop properly. The priest (naike) offers male goat as sacrifice with a belief that propitiation of hill God will bring about bumper crops with sufficient rainfall. As they believe in the power of the nature God, they worship it with the expectation of proper rainfall so that the production of crop will increase. The Santals are fond of music and dance, they make merry and enjoy the same with traditional dance and songs.

(iii) Karam Parva (Festival of Work (karam):

This festival is celebrated with the aim to make them free from various ill thinking and prosper the village in right direction. During the month of 'Ashwina' or 'Kartika', the auspicious day is fixed by the village meeting. A Karam tree is planted on the altar in the middle of village. The village maids offer molasses, non-boiled rice, flower and vermilion with various rituals, then story of 'Karam binti' starts in which the story teller describe about the creation of the world and how the human being is created by Thakur Jie (Supreme God) and how the people are surviving in the world. The fate of God is recited and it continues amidst dance, song and beating of drums till morning and then Karam
Bonga is solemnized with the blessings that the life becomes enriched with health and this is their sincere belief. The villagers also invite the people from nearby villages and they are offered rice beer and also enjoy the karam don (karam dance). After completion of karam parva, the youth of the village enjoys the dance with lagre tunes.

(iv) Sohrae (Harvesting festivals)

Sohrae is one of the most joyous festivals among the Santals. It is celebrated for five days in the month of October- November. Its main objectives are to acknowledge the gift from the Chandobonga (God) for giving them enough foodstuffs to sustain their livelihood. As a process, they invite their siblings includes their daughters to celebrate the festivals. They offer rice beers along with pig, hen to recall their ancestors. They lamented as:

\[
\text{Sari sohrae porob redo neotan mese maran dada}
\]
\[
\text{Sari sohrae porob redo barte idin me}
\]
\[
\text{Mit kuti jil lagt gel bar buru parom khonak}
\]
\[
\text{Neota lidin maran dada}
\]

Meaning: The sister(s) expects invitation from brother(s) as it celebrates with great enthusiasm. The sisters feel great as they were invited with great honour by their brothers.

The sisters remember their golden days with their parents and they lamented as:

\[7\text{ A kind of dance, perform occasionally without any festivals.}\]
Hor ren ayo baba

Jari len bong

In ren ayo baba banku kotin do

Phatre prithimi patal samabo

Inren ayo baba bannku kotin do.

Meaning: The sisters feel nostalgic about their parents and their golden days with their parents. They recall their golden days as their parents absent now.

The sohrae festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm by the Santal brethren; during this festival, five days are observed with merry making.

(v) Makar Parav (year ending festival):

In the month of January the maker parav (festival) is celebrated. This festival lasts for three days and celebration primarily starts at night before Makar Sankranti. The first day is celebrated since morning by the burning of log of woods in the bank of river or near water reservoir and mainly the children and teens participate in them. On the day of Sakrat, everyone in the family will take bath early and wear new clothes. In every household 'Makar pitha' (cake) is prepared as delicious item. The head of the family offer food and drinks to ancestors and Orak bongas (house God) in the inner most part of the house. In this process deities are worshipped as they are also part of the family and their society. They enjoy the food like mutton curry, chicken, pork, plateble cakes and rice beers. After that male will participate in archery competition and female come to witness the same.
(vi) Baha (Spring festival)

It is celebrated during the period of spring. Through this festival, they take the permission to use various forest products and allow them to hunt in the forest. They offer flowers and other auspicious things so that they can enjoy the various forest products and start hunting in the jungles. As we have discussed that Lo Mohol Baisi is held during the period of hunting in which they can take the highest decision as far as their social problems is concerned. They recite the lament:

\[ Cete lagit ja gosae \]
\[ Tude doi rak let, \]
\[ Cete lagt ja gosae gutrut doi sahet let, \]
\[ Des con acur len ja gosae \]
\[ Tude doi rak let \]
\[ Disom con bihur len ja gosae \]
\[ Gutrut doi sahet let, \]
\[ Bare ma fare re ja gosae tude doi rak let \]
\[ Dhirir gor sini re ja gosae gutrut doi sahet let. \]

Meaning: The animals can understand the ill effects to the human being. The birds (tude and gutrut) warn the people about ill effects on earth and it also caution them to take precaution for survival.

f. Santal Religion:

The adivasi have their own distinct religion; but the mainstream people and the modern education has influenced them to a great extent. As far as the Santals are
concerned they have beautiful of socio-cultural montage in the present caste rifted Indian society. Santals have separate religion and it is called *Sarna*, but yet to recognise by Constitution of India.

At the time of worship, the Santals prepare pictorial boundary (*khond*) as a mark of the routine relationships with the nature. They do not believe in idol or image of deity. As a result they do not have any kind of traditional temple existence in their society. Based on their economic standard they have the practice of burial and cremation and a chicken is dedicated to the dead body.

The society is purely a casteless society. According to birth no person, family, clan group is superior or inferior and woman enjoys much more freedom than their counterparts in Indian Society. They have the practice of blood offering of animals. In fact, almost all the animals reared in the household are sacrificed in various religious occasions. The priesthood is not appropriated by a particular clan group or a sect.

Santals do believe in many Gods and Goddesses except common God and patrimonial one. According to them the Sun is omnipotent. He is the creator and father. The earth is believed to be their mother. She brings up all. Mother earth is the female and the Sun God is the male and all other are their off springs. Different clans of Santals worship the God with different names. The ancestral God is important and followed by some rituals in regular interval of time. Santals worship the powerful Sun God as ‘*Singabonga*’ in common. However, the modern education has some impact on their religion. If the person is educated, there is chance for him to establish elsewhere and he does not live in the village. Occasionally he comes to village and tries to consolidate the offerings with their own clan or sect (Bodding, 1940).
g. Customs

The customs are built up through long practice in the society. The Santals have also various tradition and customs in their society and practice them in their day to day activities. The customs and traditions practiced in the Santal society is an important aspect. From birth to death, they celebrate the occasions with great enthusiasm. The Santals celebrated every moment whether it is joyous or sorrowful with traditional rituals. However, the details of these are given below:

i) Birth: The Birth is an important joyous occasion in the Santal society. It makes the couple fertile and washes the strain of barrenness forever. It enhances the status of the husband and the wife as father and mother. After birth the parents have to provide feast to villagers.

Birth is an occasion of much sociological importance is Santal society. Barren women occupy lower position in the society and are treated as inauspicious. Birth is always welcome in the Santal society and a male child is preferred to a female child. After the birth of a child, the Santal midwife of hadibudhi cuts the umbilical cord of the child with an arrow and buries it near the door. The child is named on the day of the birth or on any odd numbered day following birth. The first-born son is given the name of his grandfather; and second a male child will be named from maternal side (Archer, 1974).

Birth is an important bio-social event in every society. It causes fresh alignments in the structural relations. The persons, on whom the birth as socio-biological events hinges, observe certain taboos and refrain from the performance of scared activities for varying periods of time. The birth customs are visible in the extent of pollution period, taboos, name giving, ear and nose picking, first shaving of head etc. As per tribal rules, pollution affects the mother, father family, kins, villagers and the period
extend from a day to that of a month. The male child is named after the father’s father and the female child after the father’s mother, in some of the tribal communities (Cuslow, 1949).

ii) Marriage: Marriage is a social institution determined by culture and is based on the complex of social norms. In other words, marriage is a union between a man and woman such that children born are regarded as legitimate offsprings of both partners. Marriage not only unites two persons of opposite sex but also two culturally defined groups in the wider content. Marriage is a cultural super structure upon the biological foundation of sex drive. Sex is a disruptive force and needs appropriate canalization and control for the organization of a healthy society. Marriage is not mating which is a bio-psychic phenomenon, but pre-eminently a socio-cultural institution.

Marriage is an essential ritual and several procedures are followed in a Santal marriage. Marriage by arrangement is the regular type of marriage among them. Marriage by choice is now prevalent due to impact of other higher castes/ adjoining society they are residing and influenced by them only.

The Santals have different types of marriage. Their marriages are exogamous and these marriages known as Bapla are of seven types namely Sanga Bapla, Kudam Napam Bapla, Kirin Bapla, Apangir Bapla, Tunki Dipil Bapla, Itut Sindur Bapla, Nir bolok Bapla, Diku Bapla etc. At the end of every marriage, the bride money is collected. Divorce can be obtained easily; however, some alimony has to be given whole divorcing. If marriages are undertaken within one’s own group, such couples are ostracized and chased away from society. There is also the practice of the son-in-law staying in his in-laws’ house.
iii) **Death:** The death during old age is taken with good spirit because it brings occasion of transformation of body and soul of a person. Only male members participate in death rituals. The dead are cremated as well as buried. After the death of a respected person of the community who occupies an important post such as *Manjhi*, *Paranik*, *Godet*, etc, all Santals participate in the death ceremony. The entire village has to mourn the death. On the evening of the death of a person, a fowl is killed and offered it to the soul of the dead. After seven days the Santals purify themselves by bathing in a river. The last rite (Bhandan) is undertaken at an appropriate time after another seven days. The last rites or purification are undertaken on the same day of the week as when the dead were buried.

iv) **Village Administration:** The history and evolution of the Santal society is based on their administration which would guide the way for a clear understanding of the economic and political stratification. In fact the philosophy, social-cultural system of the Santal has contributed towards modern Indian social system. The Santal society is characterized by democratic equality and importance is given to each and every individual in the society. The wealth is an important matter in the day-to-day life of human being including Santal. They have a system of clans which is regarded as equal to another clan and there is no class distinction either in status or occupation. Thus formation of village is generally multi clans and each clan has sub clans.

Every Santal village has social and political entities with great cohesion and stability among them. They have well established political organization with a secular headman called *Majhi* who is a man of great honour. The whole social system is controlled by the village council including birth to death. The village council is consisted of *Atu More Hor*, *Majhi*, *Jog Majhi*, *Paranik*, *Godet*, *Jog Paranik*, *Naeke*
and Kudam Naeke. The head of the family is member of the village council which can be transferred by wishes of the head. This institution settles all the disputes of the villages in their day to day life. The Santal community maintains various uniform customs, traditions and laws in relation to marriage, divorce, birth etc. All these traditions, customs are in the unwritten form but obey by all the members of the council. The Majhi presides over the village council meetings when they are held to discuss the matters related to village and their development. If disputes arises with different village, he acts as representative of village. The Paranik is the assistant to Majhi and representative of Majhi in official matter out side their own village. In the absence of Majhi, then paranik will get the office. There is no public sacrifice, no festival, no ceremony such as marriage can be done without Majhi taking initiative. The Jog Majhi dole out as the supernatant of the youth of the village and play a pivotal role as linkman between younger generations to older generation. However, all the office bearers of the village council have an important role to perform for smooth functioning of the village and society as a whole (Chaudhuri, 1993).

It is evident from the foregoing discussion on that like many other tribal communities of India, Santals have developed a very coherent cultural tradition of their own based on their language, customs, norms, institutions, values and practices. In this context, it is often argued that Santals are still able to hold on their traditional cultural symbols and practices. This is found to be true also in case of those who have migrated to the plantation industry during the early years of British rule. But since Independence, there have been several attempts to bring the Santals, along with other tribal groups, close to the non-tribal communities through developmental programmes carried out both by government and non-government agencies. Spread of modern education, market system, industry, technology, urban influence, media and other many more
have exposed the tribals to modern values and life styles. It is also expected that the impact of such modern influences would be more prominent in the life of those migrants who leave their natal village and stay close to non-tribals like Bengalis in West Bengal. It would be of much interest to critically review such changes particularly in the context of tribal identities. In the next chapter, we move forward to analyse the socio-economic profile of the Santal migrants keeping in view of our larger interest of locating changes in their identity.
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