

Historical Analysis Of Santals Tribe In India

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Abstract

In the era of Indian history and civilisation, tribals had from time immemorial has great role to play. Despite, they remain a neglected lot. Santals mostly number more than 5 million and shares way of live implying values different from Hindus. They live a very simple and distinct life depends mainly on subsistence farming. They belief in superstition which leads their life in backwardness from mainstream section of society. They are predominant mostly in Jungle Mahal area; Santals lifestyle is agrarian based but equally skilled in various arts and craft containing rich cultural heritage. They possess their own language and script belonging to austro-asiatic language group. Literature on their customs, tradition and culture are scanty. Individuals belonging to this community are deprived of education thus pass on traditions and customs orally from one generation to other. Their cultural performances and practices, their cultural festivals, religious sentiments and related rituals are unique and handcrafted. Their customary medical practices are one of kind. Despite industrialization, modernization Santals have stick to their traditional cultural practices and did not result in change in their daily lifestyle. The study tries to document the rich cultural heritage of Santals and their customary practices, laws and traditions.

Keywords: Hindus, Jungle Mahal, Tradition, Modernization, Customary.

Introduction

The Santals are one of the largest indigenous tribes in India. They exceed approx. 6.8% of nations total population according to 1991 census. They are spread over the eastern part of India in states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya. The land of Santals is between river Damodar and river Kasai. The Santals are originally Munda speaking people and took their name from geographical area known as 'Saont' or Samantabhum where they settled after separation from their mother stock. The word 'Saont al' meand the inhabitants of region of Saont or Samantabhumi. Chhant in Bankura district is held to be the Saont or Samanta land of old days. During its historical evolution, the Santals migrated from their original homeland Ahiri Pipri towards Chai-Champa where they remained for several generations. At Chai-Champa they faced some trouble and they went to Jhalda which was at that time under the possession of some Mundas. They were compelled to push on to Saont. The Santals are divided into twelve septs like Soren, Murmu, Mundi, Kisku, Besra, Hansda, Tudu, Baske, Hembrom etc. Each sept has a symbol of its own. The Santali society is patriarchal; the village organisation of their society has a great influence on their social, economic and religious life. The village headman is known as Manjhi. The general welfare of the community is looked after by Manjhi, the headman. The women hold a high position among the Santals; marriages are arranged by parents although love-marriages are not frequent.

Jungle Mahals

The system of Cornwallis introduced in 1793 ushered in a new era in the economic history of Bengal in late eighteenth century. Ther set up of 1793 introduced keeping in mind the conditions of lower Bengal and those in settled areas; but the set up was soon to penetrate deep in other distant areas inhabited by the tribal people whose structure, age old beliefs and notions, social and economic patterns were distinct from rest of people of Bengal. The impact of new set up introduced in 1798 on a predominately tribal area and study of tension it had produced among tribal would be a fascinating enquiry. The impact had presented a profound challenge to entire economic and social fabric of tribal people as a whole and it did not remain unanswered. The erstwhile area known as Jungle Mahals and Santals the major tribal group of people inhabiting area have been taken up for an enquiry into the impact of new set up since 1793. ¹

¹Sen (1984); Pp:1

History

The term Jungle Mahals was well known long before English penetrated the area. The area was known as Jungle Mahals at the time of Akbar formed a part of Circar Goalpar. At the time of Murshid Quli Khan, the area was transferred in 1722 to Chakla- Midnapur which was ceded to East India Company in 1760. Between 1760-1805 officially recognised administrative unit as Jungle Mahal was recognised, several jungle tracts in districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura, Midnapur and Purulia were known as Jungle Mahals. The administrative unit was dissolved in 1833 under Regulation XIII and the component parts were transferred to adjoining districts consequent upon Bhumji Revolt in 1832. The estates of Senpahari, Shergah and Bishnupur were transferred to Burdwan and remaining with estates of Dhalbhum which was detached from Midnapur came to form the district of Manbhum in 1833. After 1833 there was no such thing as district of Jungle Mahals as separate administrative unit, term retained to denote area which formed district of Jungle Mahals. The administration was not precise inconvenience was caused by vagueness of jurisdiction of area known as Jungle Mahals and the Jungle Terrai of Bhagalpur district is maintained no definite boundary all through the period.

The western jungle is an extent of country about eight miles in breadth and sixty in length. On the east it is bounded by Midnapur, on the west by Singhbhum, on the north by Panchet and on the south by Mourbhanj. A very small land is cultivated in its whole extent and very disproportionate part of it is capable of cultivation. The soil is rocky; the country is mountaneous and over spread with thick forests which round it in many places utterly impassable. It has been annexed to the province of Midnapur but from its barrenness it was never greatly regarded by the Nawabs Government and zamindars sometimes paid their rent or tribute and sometimes not. The districts of Birbhum and Bankura has a share of it; the word 'Bir' in Santali language means jungle and in the opinion of Hunter the tract derived its name from the physical aspect of this area. Birbhum was ruled by Raja Muhammad Asad Al Zaman Khan Bahadur when the Dewani was granted to East India Company in 1765.²

The zamindars of Jungle Mahals were armed with powers to maintain peace in their locality and stringent sale laws were not enforced arbitrarily for time. A general amnesty for all political offenders was declared but some of the Chuars were hanged to give lesson to the recalcitrant elements. The parganas comprising Jungle Mahals remained scattered in districts of Bankura, Manbhum, Midnapur and Burdwan. The splitting up of district was not done for any administrative convenience but to contain the rebellious elements in a homogenous administrative unit.

Physical features of Jungle Mahals

Topography-The district of Jungle Mahal was bounded by three natural divisions. In north and north-west it embraced portion of eastern fringe of Chhotanagpur plateau and consisted of hard laterite soil. The dense Salforests covered the plains offered an opportunity for the defenders of those Mahals to carry on guerrilla warfare and surrounding hills were the places of refugee. The country is open and presents appearance of series of rolling downs, dotted with isolated conical hills. The south eastern portion of Midnapur was known as Nimki Mahal, it has been formed out of alluvial deposits borne down to Hoogly and its tributaries. The British authority was attracted by agricultural products in area to settle lands on favourable terms.

River system-The river system in Jungle Mahals provided an easy means of communication which facilitated internal trade and agricultural productions. Due to absence of roads, the importance of rivers can be pictured. The important rive of the area is Damodar with which the Santal legend is connected. The river forms the northern boundary of present Bankura district takes its rise in hills of Chhotanagpur about twenty miles west of Ramgarh. It touches Bankura district after it received the waters of Barakar and flowing in south. The Damodar was liable to sudden flood known as Harpaban; this has been derived directly from the Santali dialect and used by other tribes and Bengalees as well. The Subarnarekha is another important river of Jungle Mahals. It enters the district on north-west and passes through south-west of Jhargram subdivision intersecting the Gopiballavpur thana. The highways also provide another mean of communication. It not only

²Ibid; Pp: 4

serves the purpose of easy movement of army from Orissa to Bengal but also of convenient transport of merchandise.

Rainfall-The climate of Jungle Mahals district was characterised by an oppressive hot summer, high humidity throughout the year and well distributed rainfall during monsoon. The district is liable to famine owing to dependence on rice crops and to absence of any useful system of irrigation to counteract the effects the failure of rainfall. Artificial irrigation was carried by means of tanks and embankments thrown across line of drainage. The Rabi crops were grown on small areas occupying less cultivable land. The Santals depend on rainfall for agriculture, and as drought was a regular feature the production has been hampered.

Soil-The district of Jungle Mahals formed the connecting link between Chhotonagpur and alluvial plains of Bengal. The soil of low-lying villages is productive from the detritus washed down from higher levels. The soil is divided into two classes- Sali and Sona or poor and rich. The former is restricted to cultivation of coarser kinds of rice and the latter is used for the cultivation of valuable crops such as superior varieties of rice, sugarcane, indigo and oil seeds. The richest soil of all is grown pan, tobacco, garden herbs and vegetables. Jungle Mahals has three types of soil- red, laterite and alluvial. As it proceeds from east to west, regular sequence from flood plain alluvium to purely laterite soil is found.³

Culture and Traditions of Santals of Jungle Mahals

Culture is a bond among human beings themselves, human beings and societies, humans with nature. Culture is specified into spiritual, societal, material aspects. Culture needs to be conserved, rehabilitation, development, transmission, promotion and exchange as it helps in gaining peace, happiness, freedom, the foundation of human civilization.

The inhabitants-The people especially the women tattoo their hands and neck with decorative designs, although the practice is not followed in recent days. Men and women are dependent on agriculture for their survival. Men plough with oxen in the field and women are involved in plantation and cooking during plantation seasons. During rains, a long structure made of bamboo protects them from rain. Structure that looks like a giant comb known as Kakri is used to clean up the field of weeds. Bidha another similar structure is used to scatter the seeds evenly after sowing by dragging it along by oxen.

Settlements-The house of Santals are made of bamboo walls cemented in clay or mud. The house consists of long verandah, two or three bedrooms, a common room and a kitchen. Toilets are situated at a distance from the house. Designs are painted on the walls using mud of by applying variety of colours. Structures of animals, birds or other familiar figures are made on the walls; the kitchen is spacious with an oven called Chulha made of clay. The Chulha is placed in such a way where other members of family can sit near it and get warmth during winter. The roofs are made of long grass found in forests. The walls are made from harvested jute stems plastered with mud or cowdung. Handmade Serum Jonak, Hatak, Patia, baskets etc are kept and are content with simple structure which may make themselves for their own use.

Dress and jewellery-Santals wear their own traditional attire. Women wear cloth to cover the lower portion called 'Parhan'. It is wrapped around the waist; a long cloth is wrapped in an X fashion to cover the top with a blouse. Men wear half shirt to cover the top and same material the women use to cover their top is worn by men to cover their bottom portion in a very systematic way. A piece of cloth is tied around the head and is has multipurpose usages. Women among the Santals wear silver jewellery; they wear necklaces, bangles, earrings, nose ring and a unique hair clip having a fish placed in a frame that moves when one walks called Sulak. Leg anklets are called Khaga, elbow straps called Phudana and toe rings called Batri are also among the ornaments. They also wear waist wrap of silver called Harhari.⁴

³Ibid; Pp:12-17

⁴Soren and Waluneba (2020); Pp: 93

Occupations-Santals are involved in hunting and fishing; their hunting tools include bow and arrow which is used to protect them from enemies. A long structure made with pointed metals called Khocha or bamboo partly cut into segments with tips sharpened is used to catch animals, kill snakes and remove soil while digging respectively. A traditional made catapult is used to hunt birds and other animals. Fishing tools involve structures made out of bamboo. Jhakais a triangular structure closed on all sides except front portion to allow fishes to enter. Saira is a long flat bamboo structure that has an opening to let fishes enter and is placed in a bund through which water enter and flow. Fishes are kept in bamboo made basket known as Khalai; fishes are caught by handmade fishing nets that are stitched and aligned by men folk of community. A colonial structure made of net called Cabhi is used to catch fishes.

Festivals-Santals live in association with nature and their festivals revolve around it. They celebrate Baha porob meaning flower festival; it is celebrated during February to March and is celebrated to rejoice the flowering. They do not cause any damage to any trees or plants. The festival is celebrated with music and dance throughout the village. Sohraeporob is harvested festival and popular. Rituals are performed in their fields and delicacies are prepared. The festivals of Santal are accompanied with traditional home-made rice beer; it is intoxicating and has a pungent smell and is a delicacy among community. Festivals are enhanced with singing, dancing, music and eating made of meat. Dance is an important part of their fairs and festivals. They have songs for every occasion, during wedding; they would sing songs related to it and those songs would have some stories like folklore. Women align themselves in line sequence as they dance and sing and men would all be in centre playing instruments made by them. Santals have skill in making musical instruments. They play music using Tiria, Tumdak, a wooden frame instrument with leather on lateral sides. Tamak, a wooden frame instrument with leather on the anterior side and posterior side is hollow. Dhatra, a fretless stringed instrument with three or four strings and Kat banam is similar to violin. Harmonium is a vital instrument in every dance and occasion; Kortal is a symbol used during dances and festivals, it can be wide as a plate and small as a cup.⁵

The festivals of dance for men and women and each festival distinct dance form and songs associated with it. Santal men and women perform dances individually and collectively.

- **Dong enech**- Dong dance is performed on day of wedding ceremony. The men and women dance separately but follow steps; men play instruments.
- **Mongri**- This dance is to celebrate and there are no restrictions on this performance. An exclusive dance performed to tide over hardships of life; men and women dance separately but follow same steps.
- **Baha Bonga**- This is performed during pujas. Both men and women participate but dance separately.
- **Dongelenech**- This dance is performed only by men in association with shikar or shooting and is performed any time during shooting season during Chaitra and Jaistha.
- **Dansaenech**- This is performed only by men during occasion of Durga puja. No instrument is played in this and participants dance as per the rhythm. Bow is tied with string to skin of gourd; the string is pulled as per rhythm and creates sweet sound. Dancers use a pair of bells.
- **Sardsaenech**- During occasion of Durga puja women perform this dance. Women carry two steel plates with spoons attached to them. Dancers beat the plates with help of the spoons.
- **Karam dance**- This dance is performed during the occasion of Karam puja. Men and women perform dance but separately.

Traditional rituals-The Santals have strong connection with tradition and treat guests with ultimate honour. The feet of guests are washed with water and oil is applied to their feet before they are fed or made to enter the house. They greet friends and relatives in a peculiar way. Younger boys close the fist of their right hands and place it on their forehead and left hand is made to hold right hand. In this position, the boy gently bows before his elders; a young girl brings her palms facing downwards together and bends before her elders. Elder people stretch out their hands and place it above the heads of younger ones. When two female members of in-laws meet, they raise their join hands each pulls one of hands towards their right once and left thrice, they hold hands and bend towards their right once and then left and then repeat the first step again. These make them maintain peace among themselves. These situations increase their bond of togetherness and

⁵Ahmed (2020); Pp:220

brotherhood. Weddings are conducted with great excitement and music. In case of such events members of village jump and excrete in houses of family where event take place.

Religious rituals and festivals-Santals do not believe in idol worship and even do not have any temples. They follow the Sarna Dhorom meaning 'religion of the Holy Woods'. The gods and goddess of Santals are Marang Buru, Jaherera, Manjhi than. They worship numerous gods, deities, spirits such as Kal sing, LakcheraBeudarang. They have numerous Bongasor male violent supernatural beings found everywhere. According to beliefs, these reside in hills, forests, rivers, ponds and other places. They also believe that supernatural beings have great capacity for doing harm to mankind. They are feared and sacrifices are offered to ward off any evil. ⁶

Political status of the Santals

The Santals are constitutionally designated Schedule Tribe in Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Tripura. The inclusion in Scheduled Tribe lists have been opposed by tribal activities organization. The organisation feared that granting Scheduled Tribe status to Santals will squeeze up the benefits of the natives, the original tribal people of the state. As a corollary to overall socio-cultural changes, a significant change in political desires and aspirations of Santals can be noticed after independence. Santals are taking active part in all political activities from grassroots to national level. The issue of political consciousness of Santals is factor to reckon with. After independence, India has developed into stable democracy, election at various levels seem to gather importance. Bidhan Sabha, Lok Sabha and Panchayet are three levels of Indian political system based on people's election. Tribals constituting an important section of Indian population have increased level of political consciousness by participating in these elections. ⁷

Social Status of Santali Women in Jungle Mahals

The key role in the economy of the Santal society is played by the women. Most of the domestic works are performed by them. They engage themselves in domestic works, collection of firewood, rearing of child and domestic livestock, selling and marketing for the family. They also always are busy with agricultural activities like sowing and reaping, fishing, gathering forest product along with performing wage labour as and when required. They are the head loaders. They pick leaves. Though the Santali women are worst hit by the effects of male alcoholism in their society one of the surprising things to be noticed is that the Santali women are predominantly engaged in the liquor trade. They brew handi and sell them as a mean of their tribal economy as limited resources are available for them for their survival. In the limited field of employment too they have to face the gender discrimination and wage difference. No special care regarding proper nutrition is taken even during the pregnancy. One of the big concerns of a Santal couple after marriage is to have no child. A Santal man can divorce a woman for her infertility and the vice versa and this infertility can lead a man to have a second wife with prior consent from his former one. According to the traditional belief of the Santal community a human being is more prone to come into contact of a supernatural agency at the mother's womb and during the time of birth. As such numerous restrictions are imposed to a woman to safeguard her womb. She is prevented from taking any life and she will not be allowed to see or touch a human corpse. She cannot even weep or cry in case a death occurs. She will not be allowed to cross a half ploughed paddy field. Under any circumstances she will not be permitted to go near a river or stream where "curins" (malevolent spirit) are believed to dwell. She is not allowed to lie down in the courtyard or in an open space because some malevolent Bonga (spirit) may have an evil eye on her womb or a bird called „Puni cere“ may fly over her which may cause harm to her womb. She is not entitled to walk over the straw ropes usually used for binding bandis(a storage made of bamboo for storing grains).

Other restrictions are also imposed to a pregnant woman. At the time of thunderstorm a pregnant woman should stay inside putting her fingers in her ears so that the child does not hear the sound otherwise the child would be born coward or deaf. If she makes "pitha" (bread) during her pregnancy it may wrinkle her child's ear. Fearing that her child in the womb may get an extra finger or the fingers may be forked she is prevented to plant or break turmeric root. The Santals living in the villages use leafcups for having handi (traditional

⁶Soren and Waluneba (2020); Pp: 94

⁷Mishra and Dutta (2012); Pp: 16-17

beer) but a woman in the womb will not be allowed to make leafcup because if she does so her child may be born with split lip. Fearing that her child may get a very long tongue and large and floppy ears she is not allowed to gaze at an elephant.

Santali Women in Patriarchal society- The traditional Santal self-governing system neither generally support polygamy nor it is in favour of divorce and, in fact, divorce was very rare among them. But in unavoidable circumstances three justifying reasons were socially recognized for divorce in favour of the husband: 1) if the wife is engaged in adultery; 2) if she is suspected to be practising witchcraft and 3) if she is infertile. In addition to that the extravagant way of a wife and permanent illness may also sometime lead to divorce. On the other hand, a woman is also entitled to seek divorce if her husband wants to have a second wife against her consent or cannot supply her with the necessities of life. As a general rule, the bride goes to reside with her husband after marriage, except in some cases in which the son-in-law goes to reside in his father-in-law's house. Like other patriarchal society in the Santal society also, the father is, in general, the head of a family and all the power of decision making is vested upon him. He is the owner and administrator of family property. As per the customary law the members of a family must obey him. In the absence of father, the elder son enjoys the position of the deceased father. The children of a Santal family acquire the clan status of the father and only the male children have the right to enjoy family property.

Due to the patriarchal family system, importance is given to the father, paternal grandfather and paternal uncle rather than to the mother, maternal grandfather and maternal uncle. Stereotyping male and female roles within the family is still prevalent. It is the duty of a husband to provide his family members food materials, shelter, clothing, health care, etc. On the other hand, a wife is responsible for the household activities. She also assists her husband in agricultural and fishing operations. The grown-up sons help their father, while the daughters help their mother in her household work. Although women are barred from certain religious and administrative functions, they have an important economic status in the family. It is evident from their place and role in the family that they enjoy certain amount of authority and independence within the family. The Santal woman enjoys an inferior position to that of a man in the Santal society but she also enjoys some rights along with obligations as per the Santal customary law prevalent in their society. A Santal girl is the property of her father until her marriage and as such he is to provide safeguard to her modesty and is solely responsible for her conduct. If an unmarried girl commits an offence, her father is fined or temporarily outcasted for his property has gone astray. Similarly, when a girl is married, she becomes the property of her husband and he has to take care of her. The labour is also divided between male and female but this arrangement is based not on inferiority but on convenience and propriety.⁸

Males are considered more fit than women for certain acts, while in others the performance by women would suggest a sexual deviation. Women, for example, are not allowed to plough. They cannot even thatch a roof or use a leveler. They are prevented from shooting arrows, using razor, chiselling holes, striking with an axe or fishing with line and hook. They are not allowed to weave cloth or string a cot. They cannot wear male clothes or play male instruments. All these actions are performed by male. Likewise, women are not allowed to sacrifice animals as well as to witness sacrifice. The Santal women are prevented from using drums, going to the Manjhithans (sacred place) or accompanying a corpse to the burial ground because these activities can be the cause of suspicion in the mind of menfolk as only the women are believed to be the witches in the Santal society. An outside woman and a married daughter are not allowed to enter the bhitar or private shrine of a Santal household because of the common belief that the sex of women will contaminate the bongas. But some household activities including the collection of fuel and the daily drawing of water along with cooking are almost exclusively a woman's task.

Participation of women in self-governing institutions- The Santals have been strictly maintaining a well-defined traditional judicial self-governing system. In the judicial system of the Santal community, three positions are generally reserved for women known as budhihadam. The word Budhi means "elder", not the old. These are the ex-officio posts reserved for Manjhi budhi, Jogmanjhibudhi and Naekibudhi, the wives of Manjhi, Jogmanjhi and Naeki respectively. But in reality, these female officials play their vital role mostly in

⁸Das (2015); Pp: 209

the social and cultural functions celebrated in the different occasions of the Santal life cycle along with various festivals and have nothing to do in the traditional governance system of the tribes. The women are not allowed to sacrifice and perform any task in the religious functions. Women also accept this conviction. As the Manjhi is the supremo of their traditional self-governing system and this self-governing system is intermixed with religion and faith, so entire community has faith in the post of the Manjhi. As such women normally are not accepted at the post of Manjhi. Accepting the woman Manjhi may cause inconvenience because the Santal women particularly are accustomed to the traditional governance system in the villages and do not dare to voice anything against the socio-religious system. Belief and practice of witchcraft among the Santals is very strong even today among the Santals. As per their belief most dreaded magical effects and incurable diseases are believed to be resulting from the practices of witchcraft. The Santals have always been obsessed by the fear of witchcraft. They believe that practice of witchcraft may destabilize society, cause harm to the life of human being and can be the cause of death. Among the Santals only women are believed to practice witchcraft in contrast to that of Mundas, Oraons, Bhils and other tribes in which both a man or a woman can practice witchcraft. It is a deep-rooted belief among the Santals that witchcraft empowers a woman to cause harm in a society. A woman of any age can acquire the magic power of witchcraft. They believe that the witches force girls to become their disciple so that the legacy continues after their death also. Their training is said to be done on very dark nights in a forest or an open plain, and it consists in the teaching of mantras, charms and songs. She is introduced to the bongas (malevolent spirit) only after a girl master over these things whose names she must learn. She is then married to a bonga from whom she learns the art of “killing”. At the end of her training, she is commanded by her witch tutor to practice what she learnt upon one of her own relatives. If she refuses, she is said to become mad and die. Thus, women are always looked upon with a sense of suspicion.⁹

Tribe signifies a race of people inhabiting in the core area of virgin nature. Their age-old tradition of reciprocation with nature is significant they consider nature as their mother and doctor. Since ages the ethnic people have acquired knowledge about nature and has left huge storage of knowledge based on first hand experiences about the healing potentialities of the plants, herbs and barks, organic and inorganic elements within our nature. Usually, the tribals live in remote and impregnable areas in the virgin nature far away from the modern high-tech civilisation. It is an age-old tradition to utilise nature at its best; they use natural objects for all requirements in life, even in healing themselves from different kinds of ailments. They are well versed about various natural elements containing high medical and therapeutic values. The modern allopathic medicines are based on laboratory diagnosis concentrated in cities and urban areas. The folk medicines and naturopathy have widespread impact on the rural and tribal belts, as its availability and cost-effective nature.

The tribals practiced using nature to cure themselves indicating the efficacy of the method of treatment with high degree of success rates through generations. The way of natural treatment with herbal medicines are utilized in modern therapy as its wide acceptability among the masses. The traditional ideas of truth, love, sacrifice and service, the mission has taken up the oath to serve the poor, local people considerable portion of whom belong to the Santal community. The Santals build their houses on a high land and surrounded by jungles. Their villages are uncrowded with huts and are well planned houses built on both sides of a Muccha mud road which is run by the centre of tiny village. The huts are made of mud, bamboo, hay and wood.

The Santals maintains a good health, since childhood they take proper care of their body. Their food habits and daily practices are healthy, they brush their teeth with a branch of neem or Babool. They also keep their surroundings and themselves neat and clean; they bath regularly, wash their hands and body to clean it and also use oil for their skin and hair. They wash their clothes with ashes from a burnt trunk of a banana tree and ritha. Among their food habits, they avoid some food items, among the animals the flesh of hanuman, monkey or ham, horse, flesh, hynas and among the birds eating dead bodies, insects and other dirty things like vulture, parakeet and full-grown crows are some of the forbidden foods.¹⁰

⁹ Das (2015); Pp: 211

¹⁰ Sengupta (2009); Pp: 73-74

Health treatment among the Santals- The Santals believe in ojha, gunin or priest. Yet they avail modern medicines and treatment, they mostly believe in using medicinal herbs. In different ailments of women, they prefer traditional methods for treatment. If children suffer from measles or chicken pox, they worship Maa Sitala, the goddess of relief and cure. They believe in rituals and methods followed by local priest. Many believes in witch, ghost and evil influence. Santals consult doctors in case of fever or other ailments. But if medicine fails to improve the condition, they take help of ojha who provides charms like maduli and tabji. He performs magical activities like jharfuk, the medicine is continued simultaneously. Santals drink potable water, problems of stomach ailments have come down. Consulting professional doctors and consuming medicines.

Role of the Ojhas- The Ojhas created a world of their own elected democratic council that ruled the society where they had their own unwritten code of conduct, trial court, tradition, folk lore and last but not least an independent and regarded medical branch for treatment of the ailing tribes. Santals knows the root medicine for a certain disease which they apply when someone in their family falls ill; when his limited knowledge fails to bring any result, they summon a professional medicine man known as Ojha. The difference between a medicine man and an Ojha. A medicine man has knowledge only about medicines and is known as Roranko whereas an Ojha has knowledge of medicines of various kinds and they even know about how to drive away the evil spirit by magic with assistance of his 'Bongas'. The word is derived from Hindi word meaning 'Platt', a soothsayer, a magician, an exorcist who pretends to cast out evil spirits, to cure sake-bites by means of charms and incantation. He is capable of doing something that an ordinary people cannot do. It is believed that Santals learnt to become Ojha from an outsider who was called Kambru or Karam Guru, a man from Kamrup. Karam Guru was a Hindu as the 'Bongas' the Santal Ojha invoke bear Hindu names. Tradition came to the Santal society from outside.¹¹

How does they function- When any of the Santals falls ill, the elder of the family applies the knowledge of medicines to cure the patients. As the Santals are very strong and can endure suffering, the medicines prescribed by the elders work with the patient. At times, when the medicines prescribed doesn't work on the patients, then they summon for an Ojha. The Ojha examines the patient, feels his pulse to be sure of ailments. If the pulse is felt at the thumb or index finger, the Ojha is sure that a house bonga is hungry and needs to be feed. They are experienced enough to read pulse in an arm of a patient. According to an Ojha, diseases are classified in four groups: natural causes that are easily cured by the application of medicines; human beings who are essentially woman; Bongas who are many in number and dwell in the outskirts of the village. They are considered as evil and are satisfied with sacrificial blood and the ancestors of family whose spirit bear grudge.

Santals unlike others lead a corporate life, they live as a community in Mandali villages. They believe in community identity rather than individual identity, they maintain a communal harmony among the members of the village. According to C.C. Hughes "folk medicine is a body of belief about the nature of diseases, its causation and cure and its relation with other aspects of group life. There also exists therapeutic and preventive practice, many of which are empirically efficacious by standard of modernisation but one common character is its close integration with other institutions of society, religion, medicine and morality".

According to O.P. Jaggi "an authority on folk medicine has described folk notions of cause and cure of diseases in two parts, supernatural and natural. The supernatural includes the wrath of gods and goddesses, influence of evil spirits, magic, witchcraft, fall out of law breaking and evil eyes. The natural causes are climate, infection, food poisoning, wanton habits and accident. These practitioners are known as Ojha, vaid, preceptor, gypsy, barber, priest, fakirs and witches and older members of the family practices folk medicine. The medicines are procured from local plants, animal and mineral products that are administered by all kinds of improvised physiotherapies. People are encouraged to were amulets and talismans made of metals and precious stones. The settlements of these doctors are special temples, mosques and religious preachers looked upon as folk hospitals by the rural population. The physiotherapy and incantations are close to modern psychiatric treatment. Ancient folklore fell victim to sanskritisation and westernisation, medical folklore was

¹¹Mitra (2009); Pp: 81-82

buried in Atharva Veda or dead knowledge. Ayurveda is a refined form of folk medicine. The knowledge was Sanskritised and became the stock in trade of the Ayurvedists. It got detached from people and culture.

The availability of Ayurvedic and Unani medicine was bleak. In the report of Campbell Brown's Report of 1870, it was found that centres of Ayurvedic treatment were reduced from 400 to its one-third; these traditional medicines were expensive. With this folk medicine survived and thrived. The positive and negative features of folk medicine that was more faith healing than scientific; It was a combination of psycho-therapy, physiotherapy, naturopathy and herbal medicine that made a common sense. Santal medicine is an offshoot of the whole range of folk medicine; the origin of Santal medicine can be traced back to Austro-Asiatic or Dravidian people of the Harappan times. In Atharva Veda the culmination of this knowledge is Sanskrit means dead knowledge; the Aryans refined it and Sanskritised it into Ayurveda. Ayurveda is the medicine of great tradition whereas tribal medicine or Santal medicine symbolized minute tradition and is now called local medicine.¹²

Supernatural world of Santals

The Santals have faith in balance and equilibrium between world of men and world of spirits. They believe that there are some supernatural beings that control their destiny; the world that comprises of 'bongas' of different orders, spirits of dead ancestors. These bongas have interest in matters of next generation. The bongas wander about and interfere in affairs of human beings. Bongas are of different types: forest bonga, mountain bongas, spring bongas, tree bongas, home bongas and underground bongas. There are benevolent bongas as well; they wish well-being of village people, they are sort of strength, valour, prosperity, peace and harmony. Some benevolent deities are Maran Buru, Jaher Era, Moreko-Turuiko and Sima Bonga. They are propitiated for good agricultural products and trouble-free harvesting; they are worshipped at family and community level.¹³

Maran Buru gives life to people for definite time; the Sun god caused day and night. He brings rain and bestows sunlight. He helps people to get good crops. He punishes too with starvation and deficiency if someone breaks rules of conduct and goes against social taboos. Bongas are propitiated on several occasions or they would go for destruction. Santals believe that they are hungry, thirsty, angry and discontented so sacrifices are offered to them so that they do not ruin health and happiness of people. They believe in rakhas and bhut. The Bintiies of Santals, the oral compilations passed on to successive generations, the sun considered as male God, the moon as his wife and the stars as their children. Santals distinguish constellations in sky with local names.

Conclusion

The Jungle Mahals was chiefly dominated by tribal settlers for which the area did not offer any lucrative portrait either to the Mughals or the Marathas. The tribals possessing their own customs and way of life remain contented with small returns of jungle and hilly areas. The Santals were an industrious and innocent people fit for reclamation of jungle land and make it cultivable. The Santals of Jungle Mahals turned into agricultural labourers or subsistence in neighbouring coal fields. With regard to the Santali women, they are still under shadow of darkness. With the influence of Christianity and awareness towards education has contributed lot to engage them mainly in educational and medical field but there is much more to empower them to give them a dignified status in tribal society. The sociological theory of Sanskritisation of tribal people being the genesis of tribal discontent may be the facial generalisation of their problem. The agony was and will be because economic and present study attempts to draw out the mute facts of history to support contention.

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¹²Palit (2009); Pp: 53

¹³ Rao (2012); Pp: 46-47

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