

Topic:-Tribes of India: Santal/Santhal

Name of the Guest Teacher:Somrita Sinha

Dept. of Geography

Introduction:

- The **Santal**, or **Santhal**, are an ethnic group native to India and Bangladesh in South Asia. Santals are the largest tribe in the Jharkhand state of India in terms of population and are also found in the states of Assam, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal. They are the largest ethnic minority in northern Bangladesh's Rajshahi Division and Rangpur Division. They have a sizeable population in Nepal and Bhutan. The Santals mostly speak Santali, the most widely spoken of the Munda languages.
- The word 'Santal' is derived from two words; *Santa* meaning calm and peaceful and *ala* meaning man. In the past, the Santals were leading a nomadic life. Gradually they came to settle down in the Chotanagpur plateau.

History:

- According to linguist Paul Sidwell (2018), Austro-Asiatic language speakers probably arrived on coast of Odisha from Indochina about 4000–3500 years ago. The Austroasiatic speaker spread from Southeast Asia and mixed extensively with local Indian populations.
- British officials intended to enhance the revenue by expansion of agriculture. They encouraged the Paharia people of Rajmahal hills to practice settled agriculture but they refused to cut the trees. Then British officials turned their attention to Santals, who were ready to clear the forest for the practice of settled agriculture. In 1832, a large number of areas were demarcated as Damin-i-koh or Santal Pargana. Santals from Cuttack, Dhalbhum, Birbhum, Manbhum and Hazaribagh migrated and started cultivating these lands as peasants. British collected taxes from these Santals as revenue. The imposition of taxes, exploitation by Zamindars and money lenders sparked the Santal rebellion. Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu, two brothers led the Santals against the British but were defeated.

People:

- Santhals have long head and flat nose. Their complexion varies from dark brown to black in colour. Santhals usually have curly hair.

Settlement and housing:

- The Santal village is surrounded by agricultural fields, pastures, ponds, graveyard and a common place of worship known as jaher era or jaher in short. Located at the village outskirts the jaher is the sacred grove comprising of sal trees within which their deities are believed to be residing.
- Usually, the Santal villages are large and the number of households vary from fifty to hundred. Their houses enclosed within boundaries are arranged in a linear pattern on both the sides of a wide village street.
- Santal houses called olah are large, neat and clean as well as attractive with multi-coloured paintings on the outside walls. The bottom of the wall is painted with black soil, the middle portion with white soil and the upper portion with red soil. The houses are multi roomed and thatched with local tiles (kharpar) or straw (busub). The walls are made of wooden planks plastered with cow dung and mud.
- Each house has a long verandah. Rooms are very spacious. Towards the corner of the main room, there is a sacred place known as bhitar where the ancestral spirits are worshipped. The main room is partitioned with a mud wall, which is used for storing grain and other agricultural products and kept on a wooden platform.
- The kitchen (dakaolah) is found at one side of the main room.

Household articles:

- The household objects like string cots, husking lever (*ukhud*), winnowing fans (*hatah*), gourd ladles, earthen pots (*hulutukuj*), bamboo baskets (*tunki*), paddy containers (*bandi*), broomsticks (*janah*), different types of musical instruments like flute (*tiriau*), horn trumpets (*sakua*), string instruments (*banam*), double membrane drums - *tumdah*, *dhak*, agricultural implements like plough (*nahel*), yoke (*aran*), leveler (*angam*), sickles (*datram*), hunting implements like bow (*aah*) and arrow (*sar*), spear (*barchi*), sacrificial axe (*kapi*), knife (*chaku*), fishing traps like *jhimiri*, *tardang*, *janjih* and dhokra objects are found in a Santal house.

Dress and Ornaments:

- The traditional dress pattern and personal adornment of the Santal distinguish them from the other communities. The male members wear hand loom loin cloth (*kacha*), banion, shirts and napkin (*gamchha*) and women wear green or blue check saree (*jhelah*). But now-a-days they are using the mill made clothes.
- The Santal women are fond of wearing ornaments like *pankatha* (hairpin), *sikimala* (coin necklace), *baju* (armlet), *sankhachudi* (wristlet), *satul* (bangles), *painri* (anklets). Previously they were using heavy silver ornaments but now under the impact of modernization the new generation likes to wear plastic, glass and light silver ornaments.
- Tattooing has become an obsolete past tradition.

Food & drinks:

- Rice is their staple food. Usually they take watered rice (*baskemandidaka*) with boiled green leaves (*alahkorha*) and vegetable curry. They consume vegetables like brinjal (*bengal*), pumpkin (*kahanda*), papaya (*jada*), ladies finger (*bhundi*), tomato (*bilati*), sweet potato (*sankarkenda*), etc. and the non-veg foods like fish (*haku*), meat (*zil*), crab (*katkom*) and dry fish (*rahalhaku*).
- During rituals and festivals they prepare and take rice cake and mutton or chicken curry. They are very fond of eating fish.
- Rice beer (*handia*) is a very popular drink among the Santals. The women usually prepare *handia* out of fermented rice. During festivals and rituals both male and females love to take *handia*. As a matter of tradition they entertain their guest or relatives with this drink. Besides, they also drink *mahua* liquor and date-palm juice.
- The Santal males like to chew tobacco and are fond of smoking by rolling the tobacco inside a sal leaf locally called *pongi*. Now-a-days, the young Santals like to smoke beedies or cigarettes available in the market.

Haat (weekly market):

- The local weekly market or *Haat* occupies an important place in the socio-economic life of the Santal. This is the place where they purchase their necessities by bartering or selling their surplus agricultural and forest products.
- It is also the meeting place where the people, friends and relatives of different villages meet, exchange their feelings and socialize with each other.

Religion:

- In the Santal religion, the majority of reverence falls on a court of spirits (*Bonga*), who handle different aspects of the world and who are placated with prayers and offerings in order to ward off evil influences. These spirits operate at the village, household, ancestor, and sub-clan level, along with evil spirits that cause disease and can inhabit village boundaries, mountains, water, tigers, and the forest. The *Bonga* are intermediaries between *noa puri* (visible world) and *hana puri* (the invisible reality), the abode of a Creator. This creator is variously called *Marang Buru* (great mountain) or *Thakur Jiu* (life giver), and is the "cause of all causes," making the Santal religion, in a deep sense, monotheistic as well as pantheistic.
- A characteristic feature of a Santal village is a sacred grove (known as the *Jaher* or *Santal Sthal*) on the edge of the village where many spirits live and where a series of annual festivals take place.

- A yearly round of rituals connected with the agricultural cycle, along with life-cycle rituals for birth, marriage and burial at death, involve petitions to the spirits and offerings that include the sacrifice of animals, usually birds. Religious leaders are male specialists in medical cures who practice divination and witchcraft (the socio-historic meaning of the term, used here, refers to the ritual practice of magic and is not pejorative). Similar beliefs are common among other tribes of northeast and central India such as the Kharia, Munda, and Oraon.
- Smaller and more isolated tribes often demonstrate articulated classification systems of the spiritual hierarchy less well documented, described as animism or a generalised worship of spiritual energies connected with locations, activities, and social groups. Religious concepts are intricately entwined with ideas about nature and interaction with local ecological systems. As in Santal religion, religious specialists are drawn from the village or family and serve a wide range of spiritual functions that focus on placating potentially dangerous spirits and co-ordinating rituals.
- According to the 2011 Indian Census, majority of the Santal's from Jharkhand follow Hinduism at 54%, with 37% following "other religions and persuasions". Christianity is practised by 8.3% present of the population. Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism are followed by less than 1% of the population.

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santal_people)

Ethnic Language of Santal :

- Santali language belongs to the sub family of Austro-Asiatic cluster and classified under the 'Mundari' group of languages.
- They have their 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 characteristic of language
- In the year 2003, the Santali language has been included in the eighth schedule of the Constitution of India.

(Source: Biswas,2018)

Culture:

- Santhal Tribes enjoy and love dancing. Dancing is one activity which is in their blood. It forms an important part of the Santhals fairs and festivals.
- Santhals relax themselves with the light music and dance after the long day hard work. Santhal women dress up themselves in the red bordered white sari and dance in the line sequence.
- Apart from dance, Santhals have fun , enjoy & also play great music using Tirio (bamboo flute with the seven holes), an open chest(korom), a short neck(hotok)and a head(bohok), Phet banam (a fretless stringed instrument with three or four strings), Tumdak, Tamak, Junko and Singa. Dhodro banam (which consists of belly called lac covered with an animal skin on which rests the bridge(sadam, lit, horse).
- Santhal Tribal Community have no temples of their own and they even do not worship any idols.

(Source: www.indianmirror.com/tribes/santhaltribes.html)

- The Santals have also a choice of tradition and way of life in their society and practice them in their day to day actions. The customs and ethnicity practiced in the Santal society is a significant aspect. From birth to death, they rejoice the occasions with great eagerness.
- The Birth day occasion of a baby is much more sociological importance is Santal society. Because, Barren women dwell in 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. Birth is a significant bio-social happening 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. (Source: Biswas,2018)

- Marriage not only unites two persons of reverse sex but also two culturally distinct groups in the wider content. Marriage is an essential ritual and several procedures are followed in a Santal marriage.
- 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. in the Santali society, girls are married as adults mostly to men of their own choice.
- Polygamy is not favoured by the custom of the tribe. A man may take a second wife if his first wife is barren, or if his elder brother dies, he may marry the widow. But in either case the consent of his original wife must be obtained to the arrangement. Divorce can be obtained easily; however, some alimony has to be given while divorcing. Divorce is a common sequel to Santal marriage.
- The death during old age is taken with good courage because it brings event of transformation of body and soul of a person. Only male members partake in death rituals. The dead are cremated as well as buried.

(Source: Biswas,2018)

Occupation:

- The occupation of the Santhals revolve around the forests in which they reside. Their basic needs are fulfilled from the trees and plants of the forests. They are also engaged in the hunting, fishing and cultivation for their livelihood. They possess unique skills in making the musical equipments, mats and baskets out of the plants.(Source: www.indianmirror.com/tribes/santhaltribes.html).
- The Santals are primarily agriculturists, growing rice as their main crop; besides they also grow millet, maize and some vegetable crops which are 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.
- They practice cattle rearing mainly cow, goats, sheep, pigs, oxen, buffaloes, cats and dogs. Their social organization is characterized by unity and equality among them. (Source: Biswas,2018)
- The women prepare leaf plates (patrakhali) and cups (phuluhdana) out of sal leaves and make brooms out of the grass and sell them in the local market to supplement their income.
- The Santals occasionally hunt wild animals for flesh.
- During the lean or post-harvesting season, they go to the neighbouring industrial, mining and urban areas for wage earning. They are expert in carpentry works and this skill also helps them to supplement their livelihood.

Festivals:

- Santhals mainly celebrate the Karam festival which falls in the month of September and October. They celebrate this festival to please their God.
- It is the tradition among the Santhals to grow the Karam tree outside their house after the purification process.
- Other festivals of the Santhal community include Maghe, Baba Bonga, Sahrai, Ero, Asaria and Namah. They also celebrate hunting festival called Disum sendra on the eve of Baishakhi Purnima.

Creative Culture of Santal : Arts and Crafts :

- The Santals have natural talents in art and crafts which is reflected in their beautiful wall paintings, housing architecture and wood works. Their doors are bejewelled with colourful drawings. Inside walls are also decorated with beautiful drawings by the Santal women.
- They keep their houses neat, clean and decorative to appease the Gods and Goddesses and get their blessings.

(Source: Biswas,2018)

Judicial System:

- The judiciary system is well organised in traditional manner. It manages and gets solution to the problem inside the community. They make every effort to solve it among themselves within in the society.
- The Santhal Tribe head is called as Manjhi Hadam. He is considered as the chief of the judicial, executive and other function of society. Manjhi is helped by various others like Jagmangjhi, Jagparanik, Naike and Guditi who work in the other fields in diverse areas.

(Source: www.indianmirror.com/tribes/santhaltribes.html)

Change and development:

- The Santals are considered as one of the most progressive tribes of India. Urbanization, Industrialization and frequent interactions with the Hindu castes have changed their life style to a great extent.
- Now-a –days, many of the Santal youths are moving towards town and urban areas for education and in search of jobs. Occupational mobility has also brought a drastic change in their living pattern. There has been a continuous effort since independence by the government to raise their socio-economic standards. For their social and economic upliftment, Government has launched a number of development programmes which have brought a drastic change in their way of life by improving their status of education, economy, communication, health and sanitation etc.
- Emphasis has been laid on their educational development. As a progressive tribal community, the Santal avail themselves of the maximum facilities provided to them. The opening of residential schools and hostels, and the provision of scholarships, have provided ample opportunity for the Santal to educate their children. Being educated, many Santal persons have now occupied high positions / posts in the Indian and different Government and Non- Government Sectors.