

## THE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE SANTALS

### A. Name, Identity, Origin and History

#### 1. Name of the community, other name, name referred by other communities, meaning associated with the name.

The name of community is *Santals* or Shantals. According to Sreiferud (1968) is a corruption of *Saontar*. This was adopted by the Santals when they lived in the area around *Saont* in Midnapur district of West Bengal. The word Santal is an English word adopted from Hindi which corresponds with *Saontar* used by Bengali speaking people.<sup>1</sup> Ordinarily they call themselves as *hor* (man). There is another similar term as *hor* which stand for the way or means. A *hor* (man) is in search of *hor* (way or means) and effort continues till he finds a satisfactory result.<sup>2</sup> They also call themselves as *hor hopon* which means child or children of human beings.

### Language of the Santals

The Santals have their own independent language known as *Santali* which belongs to the Munda, Ho, Mahli, Bhumij, and Kharia family of languages. Peter W. Schmidt has classified these groups as the Austro-Asiatic language group. As the Santals belong to the Munda family of languages, they have been classified by Anthropologists as Pre-Dravidians, Kolarians, Dravidians, Proto-Australoids, Nishadies and Austrics.<sup>3</sup> But in the recent year they also have developed their own written script which goes by the name *OlChiki*. Many books have been printed in *OlChiki*. The Santali script, or *OlChiki*, is alphabetic, and does not share any of the syllabic properties of the other Indic scripts such as Devanagiri. It uses 30 letters and five basic diacritics. It has six basic vowels and three additional vowels, generated using the *GahlaTudag*.<sup>4</sup> Physically, the Santals are characterized by short to medium stature, dark-brown skin, scanty beard, large mouth provided with thick lips, a broad flat nose and wavy to curly hair.

<sup>1</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 27.

<sup>2</sup> P.C. Hembram, *SariSarna: Santhal Religion* (Delhi: Mittal Publication, 1988) 5.

<sup>3</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 27.

<sup>4</sup> N. Patnaik, "The Santhal World of Supernatural Beings" in *Santal World View*, 135.

## **The Origin of the *Santals* community**

The Santals have no recorded history and therefore all that is known of them came down through words of mouth handed down from generation to generation. Therefore the origin of the Santals is not absolutely certain. The Santals tried to explore the mystery of creation, history and life by means of myths and legends.<sup>5</sup>

As regard to the creation of human beings they have no written tradition but oral tradition. According to their oral tradition, one duck and a dark were flying in the firmament in search of some place to land, but the vast sheet of water cover the surface of the earth. And at the bidding of *ThakurJui*, *Marang Buru* created the land for them and covered with Binna grass. There the duck laid two eggs and from the eggs sprang *Pilchu Haram* and *Plichu Budhi*. The first human couple from them the whole *horhopon* (human beings).<sup>6</sup>

The Santals are the largest homogeneous scheduled tribe in India. According to the 1991 census of India, They numbered approximately 6.8% of the nation's total tribal population. Of the major tribal groups of India the Santals stands third next to the *Bhil* and the *Gonds*.<sup>7</sup> They are largely concentrated in the four Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Orissa. A large number of them are also found in Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Santals folklore describes this tribe as a wandering race.<sup>8</sup>

### **Myth and legends, if any, associated with the origin and migration of your community.**

For Myth and legends associated associated with the origin and migration of your community refer J .Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals* pages 31-37.

## **B. Habitation pattern**

### **1. Type of village**

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<sup>5</sup>Marcus Murmu, "The Santals: Their Traditions and Institutions in Bangladesh" available at: <http://www.ling.hawaii.edu/faculty/stampe/AA-pj/murmur-santals-bangl-desh; santmarcen files/ santmarcen.html>. accessed on 11th August 2011.

<sup>6</sup> A. B. Chaudhuri, *The Santals: Religion and Rituals* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1987) 15.

<sup>7</sup>N. Patnaik, "The Santhal World of Supernatural Beings" in *Santhal World View*, ed., Nita Mathur (New Delhi: Concept Publishing company, 2001) 135.

<sup>8</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1979) 27.

The Santals cottage stands on the both side of a straggling *Kulhi* (village road). Each cottage consisted of two or three rooms. The walls of the house are made of bamboos or Sal logs and are generally plastered over with coat of mud on the both sides. The frames of the roofs are of *polas* and *asan* made of Sal planks, and the roof is supported on Sal post. But people use different material to make house in different places according to the availability of the materials. The village is always situated near to the forest where natural resources are available for their living. The Santals always try to live together in group and therefore the houses are built close to each other.

**2. Whether mixed with other communities/religious groups etc.**

Some area the Santals are mixed with other communities and religious groups etc. But the Santal prefers to live in group them with other community. For they do not mixing with other groups.

**3. Neighborhood pattern**

**4. Dwelling unit. Ground plan of the dwelling unit i.e. Rectangular/ square/ oval/ circular/ any other.**

**5. Any other information.**

**C. Food and drink**

**1. Type of utensil used for preparing and serving food and drinks.**

The Santals uses utensils like pot (*kanda*), *lota*, plate (*kasa tari*) bowl (*bati*) for drinking water.

**2. Staple food.**

Boiled rice is the staple food of the Santals like the rest the neighboring population.<sup>9</sup>

**3. Food items.**

They eat almost all available kind of fish and crabs and have great relish for meat, which they preserve in a way of their own. Added to these many worms and insects like red ant and termite, the flesh of various animals like tigers, bears, crows, mice, frogs and snakes constitutes their menu and suit their palate. Different varieties of cakes are prepared like

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<sup>9</sup> Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santal: With illustration* (Calcutta: Mukherjee & Co, 1939) 70.

*Jil-pitha*, *chor pitha* and rice power mixed with meat and placed on a sal-leaf and place on the pan and thus baked. Various kinds of edible leaves are eaten by the santals among them *Sin arak* (a small tree, *Baubinia*) *Purai arak* (Beng. Pui Sang, *Basella Alda*), *Kedok arak* (The supper pot-herb), *Matha arak* (a pot-herb), *Munga arak* (drum stick leaves) etc. They also prepare different kinds of food items made of various food grains.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Drinks and types of drinks.

The drink they prepare is the rice-bear. This is use for all function in the village, the ritual purpose and in offering to the bongas.

#### 5. How many meals take everyday.

A well to do Santal family has meal three times a day, while the poor, who is a daily wage earner have twice a day.

### D. Dress and Ornaments

#### 1. Type of dress worn by a) Adult male/ Adult female – i) head gear, ii) Upper garment, iii) Lower garment. b) Male child/Female child – i) head gear, ii) Upper garment, iii) Lower garment.

The Santal **women** now generally wear bordered saris not less than seven cubits in length. Half of this serves as the lower garments being knotted at the waist; the other is passed over the left shoulder and hangs in the front. They use no veils for their heads of raven dark mass of wavy hair. They keep them combed in a nice knob at the back of their head and decorate them with flowers of all hues and frequently with tufts of red silk.

The **Female children** up to the age of five wear a very short loin cloth, worn around a coulered string tied at the waist (*danda jbinjibir*). They call this cloth *gendre*. Girls after ten years wear a thick cloth called *panhand* in Santali. Some of these have a bright violet border. Such saris reach only up to the knee as they measure three cubits in length and one and half cubits in wide. But they take care to cover the upper part of their bodies with another part of measurement called *gamcha*. But the dress of santal women varies from place to place. But women still retained their primitive style intact, makes several pleats in the portion bound round the waist at the front and the end thrown over the shoulder from behind falls over the breast, and the edges are tucked in one either side into the portion round the middle. A second dress is of *katntha* cloth ( pices of old

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santal: With illustration* (Calcutta: Mukherjee & Co, 1939) 71-75.

cloth sewn together) which is bound by women round the waist and completed with other piece of cloth thrown over the shoulder and covering the breast.

**Men** are scantily dressed. One generally sees them wearing a short cloth tied at the waist, the end being passed on and secured near the end of the spine to free movement. Santals wear loin cloth, which they call *Panchi* at home but they put on long sheet of thick cloth five cubits in width which they term *kutchu*.<sup>11</sup>

**2. Uniqueness of the dress pattern.**

**3. Type of dress worn during festivals/special occasion etc.**

**4. Type of dress used by the Priest, Headman and Medicine man.**

There is as such no special dress used by the priest, headman, and person practicing medicine.

**5. Ornaments worn by male and female and parts of the body where worn.**

The **Santal women** struck colourful flowers to their hair, and over their ears but those who can afford use ornaments of various kinds, the special features mentioned are as follows. These ornaments are made of nickel and silver, which are frequently used. The average woman wears convex-shaped anklets (*paina*). They also use on their feet ornament called *kharua* and with a ring on her first finger of the toe. Their wrist has ornamented wristlets called *phora sakom*. They use several varieties of rings like *taka mudam*, *tunki mudam*. While some well to do santal wear a head ornament called *jhip-jhipi* a silver tiara-like ornament, with a crescent moon glimmering a locket. Next is the *danda jhinjhir* decorated on the wrist. They decorate their ear lobes with *jhinka*. And the upper ears sparkle with *khutla* with five chains of silver swinging from it. Whereas the necks have beautiful aids in the shape of *hansulis*.<sup>12</sup>

**6. Materials used for preparation of the ornaments.**

The materials used for preparing ornaments are brass, bronze, silver, nickel and gold.

**E. Family, Clan and other Analogous division**

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santal: With illustration*, 83-85.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santal: With illustration*, 85-857.

**1. Type of household**

The types of household that is seen among the Santals are join family and single family.

**2. Where a couple does usually reside after marriage**

When a couple gets married usually they live with the parents of the bride groom or if it is divided then they have to live alone and start a new family of their own.

**3. Traditional practice of descent.**

Son is considered as a blessing for the family for the family descent is to be carried on by him. He is the heir to the property of the family. But in same case the right to heir may be the daughter when the family has no son as heir. They usually look for a son so that he may carry out the work of the father after him.

**4. Role of family members.**

The head of the family (Father) is has the important role in the maintenance of the family. He along with mother is bread earner. The father is the main decision making member of the family. The mother takes care of the household activities. The children help their parents in both house and in the field.

**5. Traditional occupation of sub castes/ sub-tribes.**

The traditional occupation of the tribe is sub divided as follows:-

The kisku become the royal tribe and assume the title as king. Murmur as the princely tribe and were named as Murmur Thakur. Hembrom was ennobled and known as kuar. Marndi were appointed the king's treasurers and stewards and name as Marandi Kipisar. The Tudu took to music and received the title as *Tudu mandariya*. There is no offices conferred upon the others.<sup>13</sup>

**6. Clan/ Gotra of the community.**

There twelve clans among the Santals, they are Hasdak, Murmu, kisku, Hembrom, Marndi, Soren, Tudu, Baske Besra, core, and pauria. Among these clans the last two have been lost. The marriage with besra and core are avoided by other clan since they were considered as inferior. But today this thought paten is no more.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 30.

### **7. How clan regulates marriage.**

The main function of the clan organization is to regulate marriage relationship within the tribe. A Santal cannot marry a member of the same clan. If he or she does then they are committing clan incest. They are both cast out of the community and the village. A Santal was also prohibited from marrying a girl belonging to his mother's sub-clan.<sup>15</sup>

### **F. Economic activities**

Most of the Santals in Assam and West Bengal are settled agriculture community. The Santals being agriculturalist their religious rites have a social urge of fertility, fecundity, generation and all that is connected with their very existence. Above everything land is considered as more precious than their own life. For Santals the land not only provides economic security but it is also a powerful means of link to their ancestors or in another words the land is part and partial of their spiritual and economic life.<sup>16</sup>

About 95% of the Santals are involved in agricultural operations. Collecting, hunting and fishing were once very important sources of living but now they have been reduced to a subsidiary status. Animal husbandry is common but plays a comparatively minor role in maintaining the food supply. In fact, the Santals depend mainly on paddy cultivation as their chief source of livelihood. In Assam only 5% of the Santals are in the tea garden.

### **Main crops produced.**

The Santals generally cultivate rice, maize, and certain winter legumes, and beans, different varieties of millet, pulses and vegetables. In agricultural operations, oxen and buffaloes are employed. Most Santals use cow dung and ashes for fertilizer. They mainly depend on natural rainfall for their agricultural products. The Santals are known as industrious and hard working people. Even though there is a division of work on the basis of sex, both men and women take part in agricultural operations.

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<sup>15</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> N. Patnaik, "The Santhal World of Supernatural Beings," in *Santal World View*, ed., Nita Mathur (New Delhi: Concept Publishing company, 2001) 136.

Collecting, **hunting and fishing** play a very important role in the Santals economy. The collection of wild plants, fruits, roots, young shoots, tubers, flowers, mushrooms, etc., not only subsidise food supply, but also ensure against the recurrent scarcities during summer and help in warding off famine that may result from crop failures caused by natural calamities. The collection is mostly done by women in groups; participation of men is also not unknown. Bows and arrows, swords and clubs, nets and traps are used for killing and catching animals and birds. They enjoy fishing in streams, artificial ponds and water reservoirs using rod and lime, poison, fishing nets, various types of traps and hands. Most Santals work as day labourers. This has become their principal occupation and means of subsistence. Some households earn their living by ploughing the land for others, some work as unskilled labourers in tea-gardens and factories and very few are engaged in various modern jobs. The Santals for any cultivation they perform sacrificial rites to the *bongas* at the *Jaherthan* or the house *bongas*. Among the crops the rice is the most important crop of the Santals; they depend on it for their livelihood.<sup>17</sup>

### **1. Traditional occupation, main occupation pursued now a days and other occupation.**

#### **Months of the following activities i.e. Ploughing, sowing, weeding Y& harvesting.**

Annual Important Rites and Festivals showing their relation with Agricultural Operations are as follows: *Sohrae* is celebrated in the month of Dec.-Jan (*Pous*). It is also called harvest festival. Pigs, goats, fowls and eggs are offered by the village *naeke* (priest) in the *jaherthan* (sacred grove).

*Baha* is celebrated in the month of Feb.-March (*Phagun*). The first fruits of *matkom* (*bassialatifolia*) and other wild fruits and flowers, mainly the *sarjom* (*shorearobusta*) flower are being offered. The *naeke* and the *kudam naeke* offer sacrifices of fowls at sacred grove in honour of *Maran Buru*, *Jaher Era* and *Moreko-Turuiko*.

*Erok Sim* is celebrated in the month of *Asar* (June-July). Sowing of rice seeds in the field. The *naeke* sacrifices the fowls to the *jaher bongas* and the *manjhi bonga*, invoking each one of them to make the earth fertile.

*Hariar Sim* is celebrated in the month of *San* (July-August). It is the time when the Paddy seeds start sprouting. The *naeke* sacrifices fowls to the village *bongas*, namely *Maran Buru*,

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<sup>17</sup>Siru Soren, Interviewed by Author (Village elder, SantalNogaon: 27<sup>th</sup> December 2010).

*Jaher Era, Gosae Era, Moreko-Turuiko, Pargana bonga, Manjhi bonga and Sima bongas* for a luxuriant growth of paddy.

***Iri-Gundli Nawai*** is celebrated in the month of *Bhador* (Sept.-Oct.). The first fruits of the millet (*panicum millaceum*) and *gundli* (*panicum frumentaceum*) are offered to the *bongas*. The *kudam naeke* along with the fruits of the millet offers sacrifices of goat or ram to the *pargana bonga* to protect their crops from rats or other pestilence.

***Janthar*** is celebrated in the month of *Aghar* (Nov.-Dec.), The first fruits of the winter rice crop offering. The *kudam naeke* offers sacrifice of goat or ram to the *pargana bonga* along with the first ears of paddy to protect from stomach disease, to multiply the paddy and also to protect their grains from harm.<sup>18</sup>

***Magh Sim*** is celebrated in the month of *Magh* (Jan.-Feb.), when the *sauri* (thatching grass) is being cut. Fowls are sacrificed by the *naeke* to the village *bongas*, invoking them to multiply their *sauri* crop.

#### **Activities usually performed by adult male, adult female, male child, female child.**

The adult male work in the plough the fields, build huts, go for hunting, performs all the rituals in and outside the house to the bongas. And the male child also follows the activity of the adult male members. The adult female member is ask to look after all the household activity.

#### **Fishing & Hunting**

##### **1. Where & how do you fish?**

The fish are caught in the rivers and streams and even in the deep water. They use nets, *broom* ( kind of instrument made of bamboo, Assamese it is called as *chapa*).

##### **2. Implements used for hunting.**

The implement used for hunting are bows (made of bamboos) and arrows (Made of iron to kill animals and made of bamboos to shot birds) and various types of traps. They also use the battle axe, commonly known as *tangi* ( Santali *kapi*) and a spear called *Borolong* a trident like weapon fitted into the solid bamboo, about five feet in length.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 51

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santal: With illustration*, 88-89.

## G. Life style

1. **Beliefs associated with conception. Barrenness, prolong delivery, delivery of dead child & maternity death.**
2. **Restriction imposed on mother during pregnancy on – Diet, Work, Visiting any place.**

The pregnant woman must observe following two categories (i) those meant to protect the mother and the child from the unsatisfied soul of the dead. (ii) Those enjoined because of their physical appearance of the child. The pregnant women must not take any life, nor must he look upon or touch human corpse. She must not weep when a death occurs. She must not walk over straw rope. She must not lie down in the courtyard or any other open space. She must not put flower of *kanther* tree (jack fruit) in her hair etc.<sup>20</sup>

3. **Who provides assistance during delivery?**

During delivery of the child the midwife assist the women in child bearing.

4. **What type of instruments is used to sever umbilical cord?**

When the child is born the umbilical cord is severed by the midwife using a sharp iron arrow.<sup>21</sup>

5. **How placenta is disposed off.**

The placenta and the after birth are buried near the main door of the room where the delivery has taken place.<sup>22</sup>

6. **Duration of confinement of mother after delivery.**

## Marriage

1. **Age of marriage**

The average marriage age of a Santal boy is twenty and that of the girl is sixteen.

2. **Type of marriage (elopement, capture, service etc)**

**There are seven traditional forms of marriage present among the Santals:**

1. *Kirin bapla* takes place when a man brings his son a bride (*bahu*) for whom he has paid (*kirin*) the bride price.

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<sup>20</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 157.

<sup>21</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 158.

<sup>22</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 158.

2. *Kirin Jawaë bapla*, when a husband is acquired for the girl who is made pregnant by a man and who either does not want to marry the girl or because of the same clan. Here the cost of the acquiring a husband is borne by the offender.

3. Tunki Dipil bapla: This is also called the poor man's marriage because here there is no bride price. The bride takes all her belongings in a basket and she is brought to the groom's house with the basket in her head.

4. *Sanga bapla* is the contract made by the widow or a divorced woman, and widower or the divorced man. Here the bride price is half of the *kirin bapla*.

5. Ghardi Jawaë bapla: it is the marriage that is arranged by the girl's parents, where the *Ghardi Jawaë* is brought in to help in the work of the household, when there is no son or son is minor.

6. *Itut bapla* it is the boy who takes the initiative. When the boy is not sure whether the girl accepts him as her husband or when the parents refuse. The boy forcibly applies *sindur* in the public place claiming her to be his wife.

7. Nir bolok bapla: it is the girl who takes the matter in hand. By intruding into the house of the boy, who after having a sexual relationship and forces the boy to take her as his wife.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Whether following practices are prevalent – Child marriage, widow marriage, widower marriage, remarriage, polyandry, polygyny, levirate, sororate and divorce.

Practices of widow marriage, widower marriage, remarriage, and divorce are prevalent still in the community. But practices of polyandry, polygamy, levirate, sororate and Child marriage are not prevalent presently.

### 4. Custom and practices associated with marriage.

There are various customs and practices associated to marriage and the Betrothal is one of the customs. There are various forms of marriage traditions among the Santals. Here let us see mainly the procedure and customs of ceremonies observed in the *kirin bapla*. In this type of *bapla* the bridegroom parents start the procedure by commissioning a *raebaric* (marriage-broker) to try and find out a suitable bride for their boy. They make

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<sup>23</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*,

enquires as to where an eligible maiden be found. When he has found the discussion between the two parties take place.<sup>24</sup>

Once the boy and girl are regarded as suitable match, they arrangement for the first meeting between relatives take place. Next, a day is fixed for the informal inspection of the house of both parties (*Orak-Duar- Nepel*). On the appointed day the *raebaric* is accompanied by the girl's father, village headman and other relatives to the boy's house. On the way ominous sign are strictly noted. If there is a bad omen on their way then they will return back but if the omen is a good then they will proceed to the boy's house accompanied by headman and Jog *Manjhi* of the boy's village. Then there is the ceremony of greeting and washing of the feet of the guest. Next the girl's father inquires for the behaviour of the boy. They have discussion of bride-price (*gonon*). Presently sum of fifty five rupee has been fixed as the amount of bride-price but it may also differ from place to place. When both parties come to an agreement and pleased then the day of betrothal is fixed known as *Horok Cikhna*.<sup>25</sup>

### 5. Dowry and Bride price.

Among the Santal there is as such no practice of dowry but there exist some kind of bride price, which exist even today, the bride price differs from place to place. This bride price is called *gonon*.

## Death

### 1. Beliefs associated with death.

For the santals does not natural death, they attribute death to the malignancy of certain bongas, impersonal power and witchcraft. There belief about the future life is rather confused but they also belief in the life after death.<sup>26</sup> They also believe in the existence of heaven (*svorog*) the abode of the righteous and hell (*norok*) the place where the sinners are punished.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> P.O. Boddington, *Traditions and institutions of the Santals*, 35.

<sup>25</sup> For further reading confer, J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 166-175.

<sup>26</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 189.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santal: With illustration*, 228-229.

**2. Rituals performed and ritual objects used at the time of disposal of the dead body.**

The body of the deceased is anointed with the oil and turmeric, dressed in new cloth and laid in a *parkom* which is brought out into the courtyard. In the case of the a woman whose husband is still alive, vermilion is put on her forehead by a female relatives. A piece of cloth containing some money, a brass plate, drinking vessel and other gifts are donated by the family and near kinsmen as a token of mourning, are placed on the cot which is carried by four of the deceased male relatives or friends. Women do not go to the burial place.<sup>28</sup>

**3. Place where dead body is disposed off and the manner in which dead body is disposed off – Cremation, Infant, accident death.**

The dead body is disposed out skirt of the village, where grave is dug facing the north to south. All the ornaments are removed from the body and the entire gift placed on the cot. These are taken by those present and sold, buying *handi* and *paura* in return. A cloth is laid in the grave and the dead body is carried around the grave three times. The chief mourner put burning embers into the deceased's mouth. The body is lowered into the grave facing north and south. Branches are put into the slot prepared. The cot is broken and the wood is placed on the top of the branches. The chief mourner followed by other villagers throws mud into the grave. An earthenware water pot and a winnowing fan containing some paddy are left beside the grave. The mourner goes for the purification bath, after which they anoint themselves with the oil and turmeric. The chief mourner has his head shaved completely.<sup>29</sup>

**4. Who prepares the site for cremation?**

No cremation only burial.

**5. How the dead body is placed in the grave.**

(See the answer in the above question in No. 3)

**6. What are the offerings made to the deceased.**

See answer to question No.3 above.

**7. Rituals performed at the time of disposal off.**

<sup>28</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 192.

<sup>29</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 192.

See answer to question No.3 above.

**8. Duration of pollution period.**

**9. Restriction observed during pollution period.**

**10. Who officiates in performing death rites?**

As a rule the eldest son is the chief mourner in the case of the deceased being a man. If the deceased has no male children then the right of placing the burning embers into the corpse's mouth, descends in this order on the following persons: father, brother, senior kinsman on the male side. In the case of a woman, it is the husband who performs this ritual. If she is widow her eldest son does it.<sup>30</sup>

**H. The Religion of the Santals**

Traditionally, the Santals are non-idol worshipers, they have no temple, no image too, no holy books, no official founder of their religion and no regular worship. Yet they have a strong faith which is traceable through their festivals, cleansing ceremonies etc., and have fully developed culture.<sup>31</sup> According to the Santals belief the world is inhabited by invisible supernatural beings of various kinds and benevolent spirits of the dead ancestors who continue to have interest in the affairs of their survivors. The Santals believe that they are living, moving and having their being in this world of supernatural entities. In other words the Santals live not only in their tribal society but in a greater society consisting of supernatural beings as well.<sup>32</sup> The Santals relation to these spirits is one of reverential fear, dependence, submission and propitiation. Communion with these spirits is concretely manifested mainly through supplications, rice-beer offering and animal sacrifice made on behalf of particular group. In course of time there gradually developed recognise of supreme deity whom they attribute as the source of everything that exist both in the visible and invisible world.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 192-193.

<sup>31</sup> T. Hembram, *The Santals: Anthropological Theological Reflection on Santali and Biblical Creation Traditions* (Calcutta: PunthiPustak, 1996) 34.

<sup>32</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 71.

<sup>33</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 74.

According to the Santal traditions, the Santals had been worshipping only the **Thakur-Jiu**. They then started worshipping the *Maran Buru* and later at *Campa*, they adopted the *Moreko-Turuik*, the *Jaher Era* and the *Gosae Era* and enshrined them in the *Jaherthan*. Among the Santals, the term *bonga* is used for various categories of supernatural beings. For the creator, ghosts, individual tutelary spirits, spirits of deceased relatives, witches, etc., and even Hindu deities. The Santals' belief originally centred on a supreme deity called *Thakur Jiu*. He allots a term of life to every living being and is one who is not considered as a *bonga*. They also use the term *Cando* (Sun) for the supreme deity.<sup>34</sup> *Thakur-Jiu* is the creator and sustainers of the universe and a benevolent spirit. But the *Thakur Jiu* has no specific worship but is reverentially remembered in every important religious festival and in other important occasion such as marriage and death.<sup>35</sup> Apart from *Thakur-Jiu* there are some principal *bongas* (spirits) in Santals' *pantheon* who are regarded as the spirits of the village community.

#### **Maran Buru (Great Mountain) as village deity.**

*Maran Buru* (the great mountain) is believed to be the leader of the *bongas*. He is also referred to as *Lita*, with far-reaching powers by which he associates with both good and evil spirits. He is also supposed to have introduced the Santals to the sacramental rice-beer (the drink that is first offered to the supreme deity and only then taken) and told them that this drink should be taken only on ceremonial religious occasion and not as daily habit. It is believed that he instructed the first couple, *Pilcu Haram* and *Pilcu Budhi*, in sex and taught them how to brew rice-beer exhorting them to offer rice-beer whenever they invoke his name. Thus as a grandfather *Maran Buru* is regarded as a good old fellow and is presumed to be a benevolent *bonga*. The village *naeke* or priest worships *Maranburu* on behalf of the village. Offerings are also made at the family worship in the *bhitarkhond* (family worshipping place).<sup>36</sup>

#### **Jaher Era (goddess of the Sacred Grove)**

The *Jaher Era* is the Lady of the Sacred Grove (*jaherthan*) over which she presides. There is no idol of *Jaher Era*. She is considered to be the benevolent spirit who tends the other spirits at the *Jaherthan* and look after the interest of the village and never does any harm but is mainly concerned with

<sup>34</sup>N. Patnaik, "The Santhal World of Supernatural Beings" in *Santal World View*, 143.

<sup>35</sup>J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 76.

<sup>36</sup>J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 80.

their bodily needs. She is usually worshiped at all festivals for the general welfare of the village, especially for obtaining good crops and for the health of the villagers and their cattle.<sup>37</sup>

#### **Gosae Era (Benevolent Spirit of the Sacred Grove)**

Not much is known about Gosae Era. She is represented by a *matkom* tree (*bassialatifolia*) in the sacred grove. This *bonga* is also regarded as a benevolent spirit and is worshiped at all the *Jaher* worships by offering a fowl as sacrifice by the village priest. Usually, the Santals worship her to be spared from sores. At the time of *Bahaor* Flower festival, one of the two booths erected in the sacred grove is meant for the *Gosae Era*. This spirit is mostly worshiped by the murmur and the Naekekhil as their *abge bonga* (subclan spirit).<sup>38</sup>

Apart from the *Jaher bongas* there are many other *bongas* who are associated with the Santals at the clan and household level. They are *abge bongas* who are worshiped as *subclan bongas*. Next are the *Orak bongas* resides in the inner chamber of the house called *bhitar*. Married women have ritual relationship with *Orak bongas*. These bongas save the household from disease and distress.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Ancestor worship:**

Ancestor worship among the tribe is very strong. They have great reverence to the spirit of the ancestors.

### **I. Traditional system of social control**

#### **1. Traditionally recognized agency/traditional/political organization (eg Customary law,**

**Panachayat, etc.) If yes, are there any permanent set of office bearers.**

The political organization and administrative unit of the Santals village are mostly governed by councils of elders who regulate the life of the people within the village and the order of the village outside world. The political organization and administrative is generally is democratic in nature. The Santals govern by their own laws and have their own method of treating different kinds of offences. The offices of the political organization were generally hereditary and passed patrilineally but now days the offices are not only hereditary but are conferred by selection of person. These officials are responsible to the community for their functions.

<sup>37</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 81-82.

<sup>38</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 82.

<sup>39</sup>N. Patnaik, "The Santhal World of Supernatural Beings" in *Santal World View*, 145.

The village council of every Santal village usually consist of seven officials: The *Manjhi* (a headman), *Paranik* (a deputy headman), *Jog Manjhi* (an overseer of village morals), his assistant *Jog Paranik*, *Godet* (a messenger), *Naeke* (a village priest) and his assistant *Kudam Naeke*. These officials have to perform their functions in accordance with the tribal system and that is why they are expected to be well acquainted with the Santal traditions, customs, religious beliefs and practices.<sup>40</sup> These traits are still prevalent in the village, where the community live.

## **2. Functions of traditional/political recognized agencies**

### **Manjhi (Village-Headman)**

The headman of every Santal village is called *Manjhi* and he is elected by the entire village community. He is the representative of the village both in the external and internal affairs. Nothing of public character can be performed with out the presence and consent of the headman. He is to be informed and present at the name-giving, initiation, marriage and death rituals and ceremonies. He decides the date for the village festivals and also the nature of the *Sohrae*. He is also to see the maintenance of the law and order of the village.<sup>41</sup>

### **Jog Manjhi (guardian of tribal morals)**

He is considered to be the village guardian of tribal morals behavior and is held responsible for the observance of the tribal endogamy and clan exogamy rules. He is also call to investigate allegations of immoral behavior. The Jog Manjhi also acts as the master of ceremonies at the birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies. He is assisted by the *Paranik* (assistant).<sup>42</sup>

### **The Godet (the messenger)**

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<sup>40</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 59-60.

<sup>42</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 61.

The village messenger at the instance of the village headman, he summon the villagers for any things to be discussed. The Godet also act as the village prosecutor of the village council. He also carries the message such as birth, death and marriage to the villagers.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Village Priest**

The *Naike* (priest) and the *Kudam Naike* (assistance priest) are the elected officials of the community to perform religious rites and ceremonies. The most important function of the priest is maintaining the right relationship with the tribal spirits at the *Jaherthan*. They are to satisfy the *bongas* at the *Jaherthan* and also to see that the community functions are observed smoothly.<sup>44</sup> The *Kudam Naike* of the village has a special function: to offers sacrifice to the *pargana bonga*. The spirit who is regarded as the guardian or personification of the wider territorial unit into which groups of Santal village are formed. During the festival he offers drops of blood which he produces by pricking his own arm with a thorn, to the boundary spirits or the spirits of the outskirts of the forest.<sup>45</sup>

Traditional practice of descent of the Santals is that they have great regard for the elder member of the society. They greet each member in the society according to the relationship that is developed in the family through marriage and the village relationship.

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<sup>43</sup> J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals*, 61.

<sup>44</sup> A.B. Chandhari, *The Santals Religions and Rituals*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> LokhiramHembrom, Interviewed by the Author (Elderly man of 65 age, Shillong: 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2011).