

# Socio-Cultural Profile of Santhal Tribe in Lakhimpur District

Tarali Das, Research Scholar, Sociology, USTM.

*Abstract* : Santhal, also spelled Santal, also called Manjhi, also ethnic group of eastern India, numbering well over five million at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. the third largest tribe in India mainly habituated in the states of Jharkhand, west Bengal, Assam, Bihar, and Odisha. They have migrated in north-east India during colonial period, with a hope of economic prosperity they settled in different tea-garden in north-east India. In Assam also number of Santhal are residing, like other tribal people, Santhal are also rich in culture, This paper is an attempt to study the socio-cultural profile of Santhal tribe in Lakhimpur District.

*Keywords*: Santhal, Tribe, Sarul, Hariya.

## Introduction

Santhal is one of the largest tribal community in India and their principle settlement mainly consisting in the state of Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tripura and Orissa. Santhal belongs to pre Aryan period. They were the great fighters during the British regime in India. They waged war against the permanent settlement of Lord Cornwallis in 1785. Many call them as 'the tribes at extreme', they have their own script called Olchiki. Apart from Santhali, they also speak Bengali, Oriya and Hindi, in Assam, They have a typical lifestyle. Basic needs are fulfilled by forest trees and plants and are also engaged in fishing and cultivation. This tribe of India also poses a magnificent skill of making musical equipment, mats and baskets out is worth watching. With a hope of economic prosperity they migrated to Assam to work in tea gardens as wage labourers during British period, after arrival in Assam.

The Santhals have been classified as belonging to the Dravidian race, and this classification has been based on anthropological measures; linguistically there is absolutely no connection between the two, except a few words borrowed. The features are very much alike, and the anthropological measurements give very similar results. But a good many races in this world would in that case have to be classified as Dravidians. Both may have a common origin in the unknown past; but apart from these measurements we know nothing to connect the races with any certainty. Besides Dravidian type, although the prevalent one is by no means the only one found, but too few to be taken into account. All this proves mixture of blood at some time or other. (Drdhuni)

According to Hembrom, 1948, Troisi 1976, it has so far been impossible to determine conclusively the origin of the Santhals. Santhals have no written records of their own. On the basis of their tradition various conjectural views have been advanced regarding the origin of the Santhal Pre-Dravidian aboriginals who, according to their traditions, are represented as a race wandering from one country to another. But whatever their original habitat might have been, authentic records reflect that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century many Santhals began settling down in Chotanagpur and in the neighbouring districts of Midnapore (now East Midnapore & west midnapore) and Birbhum. These people who were endowed with essential skills of clearing of jungles for cultivation began to migrate to the Rajmahal Hills on the North-Eastern side of Chotanagpur plateau. Skreftsrud (1887) is of the opinion that the Santhals entered India from North-West and first settled in Punjab and then made their way to their present habitat- Chotanagpur plateau.

*A. Mishra (2017)* in his article 'shift in tribal food habits'; have discussed about two tribes the santhals and the pahriyas, how they shifted their food habits with the time and how the non-tribal people influenced on them, the santhals and the pahariyas were the hunterers and gathereresin earlier time, but after banned on hunting, its become difficult for them. They now have to collect green

veggies from jungle, and these tribes were eating the watery rice but gradually they have adopted to eat rice like other non-tribal people. They feel inferior to have watery rice in front of other non-tribal people.

**A R Sarkar**, Santhal have faced so many changes in their economic, financial, religious and cultural life due to expansion of education, market penetration, technology, bad political culture and increasing interaction with the mainstream population. They are mainly hunter and gatherers. They largely depend on the common pool resources like forest, beels, and haor.

**N.K Das (2016)** 'making of tea tribes in Assam' discussed about the exploitation and assertion of Adivasi rights how they were exploited by the Britishers and continued till independence, they didn't get their own identity, they still included in OBCs, they were the tribe in their original place. They are called as tea-tribes here in Assam. They are fighting for their tribal identity from long back.

**Subhash Chandra K.(2009)** the *Santhals of mayurbhanj*- a study on their original homeland" states that- there are numbers of Santals live in Odisha, here he mentioned that how the 'sal' tree, 'mahua' and karam trees has the importance among Santals, for their sustenance, these trees has quite significant from two angles socio-religious and economic. How they used to collect various kinds of roots, leaves, flowers, fruits, stems, and resin from the forest, which were consumed by them either as food or as medicine in their day-to-day life.

**Study Area:** According to statistical report there are 11,000-13,000 approximately. Santhal resides in Lakhimpur district. Bordoibum tea garden is situated in Ghilamara town of north Lakhimpur District, this is a beautiful, peaceful place, Dhemaji is on the east, Gogamukh is on the north, Brahmaputra is on the south and Subansiri River is on the west of it. Total population is 700, It has 108 are permanent and 108 are temporary workers.

### Methodology

The study based on both explorative and descriptive Research Design'. The data collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary Data collected through using non-participant observation, interview schedules, group discussion. Secondary data have collected from various books, journals, govt records. Hence this study confined to Santhal Tribe only, sample were drawn randomly from 40 households.

### Results and Discussion

#### Religious practices of Santal Tribe

##### SARUL PUJA

Sarul literally means worship of 'SAL', (year) it is dedicated to mother earth. The festival is celebrated in the state of Orissa, Jharkhand, Bengal. And Assam. It is celebrated on Chaitra Shukla tritaya, the third day of bright half in Chaitra month. Here in Assam, the Santhal people celebrate it during colorful festival holy, but from last five years they have been celebrating it during mid of April, because they cannot manage the holidays for children separately. The oldest Man in the community described the Sarul puja - in the first day, a group of people will go to one of the oldest man of their community and bring him to the place where ritual will perform. On this day this man will play the role of priest. They worship in forest area, therefore first of all they light the lamp and inaugurate the festival by offering some meal to the earth. To satisfy the mother earth, they sacrifice Hen and also 'Hariya' the local drink. After the worship, they dance and sing their own. Group of women dance in a circle and man will play different types of their musical instruments. They have their own musical instruments, i.e- TUMDAK(drum), SAKHUWA(horn), and nagara. After the dance performance they prepare the food and also cook the chicken and serve with Hariya. After the food, they go for playing mud like others play during holi. Santhal celebrate SARUL puja for one week. They perform dance in every

household irrespective of caste, tribe and religion. They collect a little amount of money during this week and use that money for their society development.

**Political life of Santhal:** The Santhal community in this region has a strong feeling of unity amongst them, any decision regarding the community will be taken by the head of the community, i-e; Gudia and it will be the final decision. They do not allow to enter any outsider in their matter. If any dispute occur between the Santhal and Non-Santhal then the Gudia will discuss with other party and resolved the matter. Nowadays the awareness of the people has increased about village panchayat and gram sabha with people participating in voting. With the increasing of such awareness the Santhal community has become more liberal with their rules. i-e; marriage with other Non-Santhal, now the gudia's son has married a Rabha girl, after that the strictness doesn't remain same in their community. According Mr X- they will try to solve the disputes if something is happen among them, and if the situations is out of control then only they prefer to go the law and police.

**Marriage of Santhal:** marriage in Santhal community is sign of a prosperity and beginning of new life. In spite of some social upheaval in social norms during the past century in Santhal Communities, one can find the institution of marriage is very strong. Marriage has significant place in santhalsociety. Different categories of marriage in santhal are as follows: SanghaBapla, kadaBapla, Kirin Bapla, UpagirBapla, TunkiDipilBapla, Itut-SindurBapla, nirbelokBapla, DikuBapla, Haram Bariyat or sange, Ghardi-jawain ([tribalIndia](http://tribalIndia.com), [Adivasi.ozg.in](http://Adivasi.ozg.in)) But in case of Assam only few are found, i-e; arrange marriage, love marriage, captured marriage. In arrange marriage, the head of two family fix the marriage date and it continue for three days. On the very first day three or four person visit the brides house by making a temporary temple at the brides place and bride has to take a bath a bath. After sometime bridegroom also has to come to brides house and himself put black gram and turmeric on brides face as a ritual. Then the bride has to wear the clothes gifted by the Bridegroom after that bride is being carried on a Daura( basket) by her brother on his head and groom also has to carry away in the same way by their respective brothers and when at a point they face at a point the groom has to put vermilion on brides head. There is no ritual of taking any Dowry except a silver bangles on grooms hand which cost not more than rs 500 or 600rs. Which signifies that the boy got married.

In love marriage, their society have some prominent member, the bride's family will have to give a big treat to the whole village. Then they will accept the bride to their own community. If anyone fails to give them treat then the whole family will boycott from the community.

*Case study 1: earlier there was no intercaste marriage in our society but few days back I was in love with a Rabhatribes girl and she ran away with me. As my father being the head of the village no one can question him and as I was the eldest son in our family my father didn't say anything to me but I have to through a huge party. We also didn't oppose it and gave the party. Now the relationship between the two family is quite good*

Another type of marriage is also present in their society that is called *Captured marriage*. In this type of marriage, the boys will take the girl without any prior consent. In this marriage, if the girl is unhappy with husband, then she is free to leave the husband after fifteen days. She can give divorce the husband and free to marry anyone of her own choice. But only a few Santhaltribe practice such type of marriage. Widow remmariage is applicable.

**Language :** Santhals speak *Sautali* and Hindi. In Assam they speak Sautali and 'Bagania' which is a mixing of Bhojpuri and Assamese languages. In the field area, it is found that the Santhal group organize conference call "*Sautali Manyata Bhasanmilian*" in every year. It discuss the development of the language.

**Food habits:** In ancient time, Santhal were the hunters and gatherers. They mostly depended on forest and jungle, they used to hunt and eat the flesh of animals. But as time changes, their livelihood also changed and gradually they entered into the agricultural occupation and started to eat rice and other agro products. They have the practice of drinking rice beer from time inceptions. They

also used to offer the rice beer in their Religious and other rituals . They have the habit of smoking weed. In santhal community, there is no restrictions on drinking and smoking among women. Everyone has the right to drink. In Assam they called it Hariya. It is found that lots of emotions are attached with Hariya.

**Dressing pattern:** the Santhal women wear a saree having a border, they wove their own clothes, and in Assam they use different colour combinations for their clothes. Women also make Assamese traditional Gamusa and the male use to wear it on their neck or waist. The male use the Gamusa every time and carry with them. They called it **GAMCCHA**. Male also wear a lungi- a rectangular cloth at bottom and a vest or shirt on top. children wear pants, shirt.

**Sources of livelihood:** The economic source of the Santhals are mainly teagarden. But Santhal people view that the wages of the tea garden are not enough to maintain their daily expenses. In such a situation they are bound to engage in other activities like- woodcutter, carpenter, and construction worker. The women goes to work on the nearby villages during harvesting time. They also sell local rice beer.



*Picture captured during Sarul puja.14<sup>th</sup> april 2019.*



Girl wearing Santhal traditional dress.

### References

A mishra, '*shift in Tribal food habits: from sustainable to non-sustainable*'; newsreach; sep-oct2017.

'Santhal tribe', 'art and culture of santhal tribes'; [www.indianmirror.com](http://www.indianmirror.com)

Subhash Chandra karua; '*The santals of mayurbhanj- a study on their original homeland*'; santal resource page;july 2009.

NK Das, '*making of tea-tribes inAssam: Colonial Exploitation and Assertion of AdivasiRight*'; journal of Adivasi and Indigenous Studies (LAIS); vol.III,No.1,February 2016:1-16.issn-2394-5524

Statistical handbook n.lakhimpur.

Verrier elwin, '*The Baiga*'; Wyman & sons, ltd ;London, fakenham and readings;**1939**.