



Changing Society and Culture of the Santal Tribe in Jhargram District of West Bengal

Mr. Sukanta Murmu

Bankura University Assistant Professor (contractual) in Philosophy, Bankura, Purandarpur, West Bengal

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19875187>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 16-04-2026

Published: 10-05-2026

Keywords:

Family, Culture, awareness, Change, Elit class influence.

ABSTRACT

Santals are the predominant tribe in India and also in different state like Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Assam. It is the third largest tribe in India. Santals are Primitive tribe has settled in a well-organized manner with farming as their primary source of income. They are more concentrated in the village and have observed all of the village judicial rituals and rules, as well as some blind belief practices. On the other side, some educated people have their own outlook towards the outside world, having the knowledge to differentiate between right and wrong, which directs people thought and society towards a new dimension.

Introduction:

The Santal tribe is one of the largest tribes in India, mostly found in Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Assam. In West Bengal, we found about 40 kinds of tribes, and santals are mostly found in Jhargram, Purulia and Medinipur District. In Jhargram district, they are mostly found in Binpur I, Binpur II, Jamboni, Nayagram I, Nayagram II blocks. Santal belongs to Protoaustraloid group Speak Austric language as they are called as aboriginal and now these Aboriginal are known as “Scheduled tribe”, Adivasi. They call themselves “Hor”. Which means “Human Being” and identified as the Kherowar Community; This title is not new in use, as it was used by their forefathers. There are various Theories about the origin of the word santal was derived from the modified word “Saontal”. In Ancient times, one part of Medinipur district was known as “Sawant” or “Samantabhumi”, and according to linguist Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay. The word “Santar” has been derived from the Sanskrit word “Samantapar”, which means protector of borders. Later this word was transformed to “Samanta aal”. Then “Saontal”, Then finally “santal”. But there is no evidence to prove that they were working as the protection of borders.



As other tribes Santals lived in the forest by clearing it and turn it into agriculture land and settled there beyond the connection of another world. The Tribals and non-tribals people of the land began to suffer during the arrival at the British in India. Particularly when they Captured. Bengal and obtained the right of Diwani in 1765 by Robert Clive, and the Santal was “Hull” rebellion in 1855 which was led by two brothers I.e. Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu and as result of the revolt was consider of land for the Santal, create market to self the forest product and safe ground of them. That was the first measure was taken by the Britishers for the development of the sandals.

Changing pattern of Family

Changing attitude towards fair and festivals

Changing in aesthetic life Reform initiative gainst witchcraft.

Family: Family is the base of any village, more or less family system of any village are same people choose their family formation according to their needs. The traditional family system of Santal family has gone through the various changes, now a days they have formed different type of family generally included husband, wife and children.

Pyramidal family: this type of family includes at least one or two members from senior citizen and two from next generation.

Extended family: This type of family generally indicates joint family system which number is reducing now a days.

Marriage System: Through they are very attached marriage system can be seen as a result two forms of marriage that are prevalent in their society; one is by the Raiber (Marriage maker), which is very common and the other is by the couple getting married by themselves. Their marriage System is called “Bapla” and in their society, different kind of marriage are prevalent, like **Itut Bapla, Sagun Bapla, Nirbalok Bapla, Kiring jaway bapla, Kudum Bapla, and Bariyat Bapla** but marriage like Itut bapla, Sanga bapla and Nirbalok bapla are no longer practiced.

Change in Festival:

The Santals celebrate their festivals with agriculture activity because work is God for them and provide them with food of agriculture, they perform worship and a festival and the place where they perform their festivals and ceremonies is called “**Jaherthan**” (The scared Holy Grave). In every festival they worship



their goals and goddesses, which is called “**Bonga**” and offers sacrifices to please them. Their Supreme deity is “**Marang Buru**” which means “**Big hills**” who is their protector. They follow the “**Sari**” religion which means “**truth**”. Their first agriculture festival is “**Erok sim**”, which is celebrated for sowing paddy seeds. In this festival, their priests offer fowl to each of their Gods, like **Jaher than, Marang Buru, Jaher era, Pargana Bonga, Bahare bonga** and **Simma bonga** at the Jaher then. The next day **Abge bonga, Arok bonga** and **Marang buru**. At this observed when winter party sowing begins.

They still celebrate festival like **Sohray, Baha, Mak more** and **Karam**, but there isn't as much gathering as there used to be. There is various reason behind their changing thought about the festival.

Nature no longer holds the same place in their lives as it once did. As their participation of it has shifted. Now people are not totally dependent on agriculture they are getting involved in banking services, teaching profession, administrative profession and medical services. These festivals how seem insignificant to them because they reside in town for their job and do not have time to celebrate.

In agriculture, income become uncertain because sometime heavy rain and less rain effected production. Forcing farmers to choose that tradition is still alive, and people enjoyment as they are also busy earning their livelihood.

Transformation in song and dance:

Santals are fond of dance and music; without dance and song, their festival is incomplete. Their music and dance are attained to nature and associated with popular custom and tradition. They are extremely disciplined people who sing song and dance and try to enjoy life, not people who are in the stock exchange and seek at each other and call the civilians, Pandit Nehru once said, they perform dance to various songs, such as the **Dasai song**, The **Sohray song**, the **Karam song**, and the **Baha song**. In early time, they played Their Traditional instrument like, **Tiriyo, Tamak, Tumdak, Banam, Sarpa** etc. They used these Traditional instruments to sing song and dance festivals, but they never used them in musical albums. Now they are influenced by modern Hindi and Bengali music. Modern Santali songs emerged in the music world of the Santali in the 1980s. another important change that has been seem in the music world of the santal in the rise of professional groups of musician and dancers who generally performed on a contract basis during festival and are hired by private agencies. These group are also invited by the government as were as NGOs to perform in cultural programs. They are also making films in their own language as a result of the influence of modern films which will aid in the development and spread of



their language. With the improvement of communication and contact with the outside world and the introduction of theater. They feel reluctant to exhibit their songs and dance in public.

Rise of Santal Elite class:

Santals have their own judicial system and a village headman named Majhi who oversees all rules and regulations in order to keep the village peaceful and orderly. However, over time some educated and career minded individuals have began to live in the town or near the town area and have actually settled there because they have jobs in the town and their number is slowly increasing their attitude towards life is not so different from the other people in the town. Nobody can tell them apart based on their behavior and way of life. In many places like in Jhargram district, there are many Santals who have settled in town because of their jobs. They have made their own society and observe every festival together. This is similar to community harmony because santal people come from different village but live in the same place and have formed friendly relationship with people from their own community as well as non-tribal people. It indicates that they are gradually moving to weeder the mainstream of society, which is dominated by non-tribal people.

Though people are in good financial condition, there is no different as appear or lower class as do other non-tribal people who defined themselves by class. There are certain circumstances that have forced them or provided them with a choice of life, as we know that agricultural has been the primary occupation of the santal from the time of their origin but now the situation is changing according to the outside forces and them through regarding occupation. When India gained Independence and constitution was drafted, some provisions were made for the compliment and encouragement of tribals.

In agriculture, income become uncertain because sometime heavy rain and less rain effected production. Forcing farmers to choose that tradition is still alive, and people celebrate all festivals with more or less enjoyment as they are also busy earning their livelihood.

Reforms against blind belief:

Blind belief existed as an integral part of their religious belief in the past. This belief stemmed from their reverence for their Gods, which blinded them to ojhas orders to follow these orders, sometimes suspected had to pay the changed amount and sometime people were killed on his advice. In the past. People were ignorant and superstitions, which led them to adopt to belief in **Ojha, Jang guru** and **witchcraft**. This ojha took advantage of their ignorance and it became a source of income for them because they took money for the identification of the witch and a meeting held in the village with all the villagers to decide



the punishment. With the help of educated people awareness, the situation is slowly changing. Education and awareness brought an end to this blind belief and educated santal people become aware of the truth behind this blind belief. The government has also taken steps to spread awareness about the blind belief. In a study conducted by the liberal Association of movement of the people many people were changed with witchcraft. There have been murders for the witchcraft in the past independence period, but the situation is changing due to public awareness, through this superstition still exists in rural areas. People composed songs and staged dramas to create awareness among people against superstition. A campaign against witchcraft was organized in Jhargram district during 1980. Some of the organization taking steps to rise public awareness were the **Gramin Unnayani Songstha**.

Script:

Linguistically the Santals are classified as Mundari languages, with their dialect belonging to the austric speech family's Austro-Asian group. Prior to the introduction of the **ol-chiki** script, the Santali people express their emotion through regional language. The effort was made by Pandit Raghunath Murmu. Who had taken imitative to create the "**Ol-chiki**" script, which was accepted by the whole santal community in 1920. He also wrote three books in **Ol-chiki** script. **Bidu Chandan, Kherwal bir and Bakher**, to demonstrate this effort a Santali organization called **Adivasi Kalyan Association** published a Periodical call '**Sagen Sakam**' in Santali.

To get recognition of the Ol-chiki script there was several group formed by the santal people, like '**Aboyah gaonta**' the Santali literature and cultural society which Preferred Bengali script to express the Santali language with only **ASECA** standing alone in support at the Olchiki script. **ASECA** had held a meeting for language recognition, which was supported by the state of the **West Bengal, Odissa, Jharkhand** and **Assam**. Delegates from these states had attended the meeting to voice their demand from the government.

As a result, **the government of West Bengal had already recognized Ol-chiki as a Script for Writing the "Santali" language in 1979.**

Finally on December 22, 2003 the Santali language was recognized in the 8th schedule of the constitution, bringing the language agitation to a close with a huge victory.

Conclusion:

The Santals social structure and every sphere of life have changed, through it took a long time for changes to occur, whether in a less or more drastic manner, regarding their profession festival, script,



belief system and Identity. They are attempting to live a wellmannered life with their own identity with the assistance the government provision and outside sources such a Education, Migration, Acculturation and awareness. With the emergence of educated santal people, their attitude towards their profession and life is changing. Through they value agriculture, with the passage of time and the need for government service, many often work in the private section or as labors to support their families.

They are fond of dance and music, and in today time everyone tends towards modern Santali song. In every festival they sing traditional songs because that is their root. Though we can see that in town also they have made their own society where they observe festival like **Sohray, Baha, Makmore** and more. This is the good sign of cultural value, because although they do not know more they are in touch with their culture and its show that change are occurring with their cultural value Modern song, Video song and films are also spreading santal language and culture around the world, giving them a sense of identity in society, state and Nation. With the spread of modality and education, they become aware of blind belief and superstitions. So we can say that santal society is going through a changing process, which is really a good sign towards their upgradation.

Reference:

- Baske. D. 1987 *Pashcimbanger Adivasi Somaj*, Kolkata, Baske Publication, P-186
- Hembrom, T, 1996 *The Santhal – Anthropological Theological Reflection on Santali and Biblical Tradition*, Calcutta Puthi Pustak
- Panda. H. 2017, *History of India*, New Delhi, Kalyani Publshihres
- Chattopadhyay, Pradip. 2014 *Redefining Tribal Identity the Changing Identity of the Santals in south West Bengal*, New Delhi Primus books.