

Editorial Correspondence

The Chief Editor

IJRMS

Garhbeta College  
Garhbeta, Paschim Medinipur  
West Bengal, India, PIN-721127  
Mob: 9434652406

Email: ce.ijrms@gmail.com / ce.ijrms@rediffmail.com

ISSN 2348-2524



Price: Inland ₹200 • Overseas US \$ 30

Edited by Dr. Santimoy Patra and Published by Dr. Mantu K. Das, Teacher-in-Charge on behalf of Garhbeta College, Garhbeta, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India & Printed at Shreeilpi, Midnapore.



ARTICLES

- 117-120: STUDY ON THE EVOLUTION OF SUPERCONDUCTIVITY IN THE POLYMER COMPOSITE (RE-EPAN) MATERIALS
- 121-124: EFFECT OF CONTROLLING THE POWER OF DGP INSIDE OPTICAL FIBER
- 125-128: EFFECT OF VIBRATION ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF A MASS SPECTRUM UNDER STRESSFUL
- 129-132: ENVIRONMENTAL USING SELECTED CHEMICALS
- 133-136: GEOGRAPHICAL AND EXTERNAL MONITORING OF INDIAN FLYING FOX PTEROPUS GIANTUS BRUNNUS, 1752 OF ASSAM
- 137-140: TRENDS IN COST STRUCTURE OF TATA STEEL LIMITED: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS
- 141-144: CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS BUYING FRESH PRODUCE FROM UNORGANISED RETAILERS IN BANGALORE
- 145-148: FORMING SELF-HELP GROUPS, EMPOWERING WOMEN: A STUDY WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO NARAYANGARH BLOCK OF PASCHIM MEDINIPUR DISTRICT
- 149-152: RURAL NON-FARM EMPLOYMENT: A STUDY IN BROUGHT PRONE BLOCKS OF PASCHIM MEDINIPUR DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL
- 153-156: NATIONALISM IN THE POETRY OF HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZD
- 157-160: SOCIO-CULTURAL MILIEU OF R. K. NARAYAN'S 'MALGUDI': SCREEN CONFIRMATION OF NARRATIVE AND GENRE AND GUIDE
- 161-164: BEYOND THE CANON OF MAMMON: AN ECO-CULTURAL READING OF SANTAL FOLKTALES
- 165-168: SABDA IN THE VIEW OF ANCIENT INDIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION
- 169-172: INDIAN AND EUROPEAN UNION: IN THE FRAMEWORK OF MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER
- 173-176: ACHIEVING THE GOAL OF SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH EDUCATION
- 177-180: HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION
- 181-184: PATTERN OF SOCIAL RELATIONS AMONG INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) PROFESSIONALS: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION
- 185-188: FARMER BONDAGE AND LIBERATION OF SOUL IN HUMAN PHILOSOPHY
- 189-192: MANAGEMENT OF STRESSES AND STRAINS IN OLD AGE
- 193-196: TRADE AND COMMERCE IN EASTERN INDIA BETWEEN PERIOD 5TH-7TH CENTURY A.D.: A REVIEW
- 197-200: A STUDY OF UNREVEALED REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY OF GARHBETA & MARAKOLE HIGH SCHOOL IN 1930

GARBHETA COLLEGE

Garhbeta • Paschim Medinipur • West Bengal • India  
Website: <http://www.garhbetacollege.com>

BEYOND THE CANON OF MAMMON - AN ECO-CULTURAL  
READING OF SANTAL FOLKTALES

Arpita Raj\*

ABSTRACT

Formerly, Folklore studies was usually considered as a supporting discipline of subjects like Sociology, Anthropology etc. But Folklore studies is now gradually becoming an independent discipline. The aim of this paper is to focus on eco consciousness of Santals as reflected in select santal folktales. Santal lifestyle and culture are closely related with nature. In fact, the Santals live their lives with Nature. They celebrate their festivals according to the different seasons of nature. The Santal myth about the origin of earth and mankind is also related to nature. The various parts of a Santal musical instrument too represent five important elements of nature? earth, sky, air, fire and water. Even the consciousness of the Santal people about the natural world has been reflected through the formation of some letters in Olchiki script. Thus the paper will explore how Santals have integrated their lives and culture with nature. Against the backdrop of ecological disaster caused by the mainstream consumerist culture, the pristine eco-friendly worldview of this indigenous group offers an alternative non-confrontationist way of life for the sustainable development of human society. The paper focuses on this significant conflict between two cultures-mainstream and indigenous.

The modern decade has witnessed a change in culture. There is a sudden arrival of materialist trend which has given birth to urban culture. Gradually the shift in culture was from traditional to modern, from natural to materialistic, from old to new. That change in culture creates multidimensional crisis in every aspect of human life-in society, culture etc. And the mainstream literature has faithfully reflected the modern society and its transition of culture. The modern urban culture is gradually losing its root or tradition. It has lost its connection with the course of nature. On the other hand, the study of indigenous literature focuses on the cultural values and traditions of some tribal people. Santals are one of the largest tribal communities in India and they have understood the basic interrelatedness of nature and culture which is very much traditional in their life. The aim of this paper is to make an eco cultural study of various Santal folktales. To make an eco cultural study it would be quite helpful to give a little description of materialist culture which has been presented through the mainstream literature of modern era.

\*Research Scholar, Department of English, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India

Arpita Raj

The mainstream literature shows that due to arrival of this consumerist culture the present day generation has lost its social and cultural roots. People in modern age are suffering from despondency and one kind of hopelessness due to this loss. They feel that there is no light and hope in their life. He is in no man's land. There is no meaning of his existence. A thought of alienation comes in their mind. They think that they have been alienated from the world. The society is filled with obscurity, chaos and helplessness. Life has turned to futile and meaningless existence. Their mind is surrounded with disillusionment.

Another offspring of materialism is the appearance of urban culture. This kind of culture characterizes the moral degradation and spiritual bankruptcy of human being. The morally degraded modern world has been compared to a barren land in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The poem shows the barrenness of man's spiritual existence. In modern culture man is devoid of any real purpose. He is always haunted by fear. The picture of modern culture is also available in another poem of Eliot, *The Hollow Men*. The loss of any kind connection with nature has deepened the inner spiritual crisis of man. Consumerist culture has also given birth to social inequalities in the present society. The rich becomes richer. The gap between rich and poor is growing more and more. One section of people begins to feel insecure in so called urban culture. Anxiety and fear grasp the human mind. This creates a kind of frustration also.

In contrast to this modern urban culture the Santals, an indigenous community has, sustained their original eco friendly culture. It is also able to remain connected with culture and tradition. They think that human beings are an integral part of nature. To them nature and culture are not two different things. Santal people know this basic relation of man and nature without any imposition of literary theory.

Santal culture is full of folktales, legends, myths and folklores. They reflect their culture, tradition, customs, belief systems, values, ethos etc. Santal worldview reflects the interrelatedness of nature and their culture. Santals are very much close to nature. The study of some select Santal folktales from P.O. Boddling's *Santal Folktales* and Cecil Henry Bompas's *Folktales of the Santal Parganah* shows the dependence of Santals on nature. Santals believe that a good relation with nature may help them to be blessed with a prosperous life. The aim of this paper is to make an eco cultural study of Santal folktales.

In Santal folktales there are lots of references to *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi*—the first Santal man and woman on earth. The myth about the creation of human being on earth justifies the Santal belief that they are a part of nature. It is quite different from other myths prevalent among other tribes and is very much associated with nature and natural elements. According to this myth, God has created two birds from his hair-*has* and *hasil*. Two of them were flying in the sky. Then the earth was full of water. As they were flying, it was possible for them to mediate between the two opposite worlds of

nature—earth and heaven. Santals believe that these two birds then started flying below the sun and above the earth and created a contact between these two worlds. In this way the two birds created a whole universe. The birds then built a nest and laid there two cosmic eggs out of two creatures – first male and female were born whom Santals call *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi*. This myth used in many Santal folktales reflects Santal belief that the two birds—*has* and *hasil* who were part of nature helped to create first human beings on earth. Therefore, these two birds are their ancestors. So the Santal concept of life begins with nature. That's why from the very beginning of their lives they take nature as the inseparable part of their life and culture.

There are references to different types of Santal clans in Santal folktales which they have named after the name of various natural objects like birds, animals, plants etc. Naming the clans after natural elements hints at the ecological consciousness of Santal mind from the very beginning. The name of the clans derived from natural elements is as follows:

**Hansda:** Hansda claims that they hold the highest status among other clans of Santal society. The term *has* means wild goose and *dak* means water. Therefore, Santals believe that Hansda are directly connected with their first ancestors because the wild geese were the birds (*has* and *hasil*) which build nest on earth, walk on earth and fly in sky.

**Murmu:** After Hansda comes the clan of Murmu. *Nilgai* or antelope represents the Murmu. Antelope is the first animal sacrificed by Santals. Since then they started hunting. Santals are very much fond of hunting and it is one of the important aspects of their culture which differentiates them from others.

**Kisku:** Kisku are the third clan in the hierarchy. Kingfishers are the totem of Kisku.

**Hembram:** Hembram comes fourth in order and takes betel nut as its totem. It is believed by Santals that they were born with a betel nut. Some of them also believe that they were born under a betel nut tree.

**Marandi:** They are linked with grass or one type of weed.

**Soren:** The Sorens are linked with constellation of stars.

**Tudu:** The Tudu accept owl as their totem.

Santals have a very strong feeling for these totemic species. They respect them very much. Santals take these natural objects as own members of their group.

Santals are most remembered for their rich cultural heritage. In Santal folktales it is often observed that Santals celebrate their festivals with some musical instruments. One of these most important instruments is *dhodrebanam* and there is a myth behind the formation of this musical instrument. The myth tells us that Santal culture has relation with nature from ancient times. The myth is:

Once an old couple lived in a village with eight children—seven boys and one daughter. The couple

died and now the girl had to do household things and the boys went for hunting in the forest. One day the blood of the sister was mixed with vegetable which makes the food very tasty. Then the six boys except the youngest decided to kill their sister and eat her flesh. When the sister climbed a tree the brothers killed her with arrows. The body of her was cut into pieces and each brother ate them except youngest. He was weeping bitterly beside pond. All the creatures of water—crab, fish, came out and asked him sympathetically the reason. He narrated the story and the creatures suggested him to put the flesh inside the mound of white ants.

Few days later, a beautiful gulioic tree was born there. It had beautiful flowers. The tree produced melodious sound. A boy often came to pick flowers and was astonished hearing the sweet music of the tree. He cut off a branch of the tree and constructed a musical instrument—*dhodrebanam*. Since then Santals create *dhodrebanam* from a gulioic tree. The myth points out the man-nature relationship. This myth has come down from generation to generation in Santal society which makes Santal people conscious about the importance of nature in their culture. The Santal culture is quite different from the culture of other tribal communities and even mainstream culture in the sense that the nature is very closely associated with Santal culture.

The morphological meaning of the word *banam* means towards yourself (*aam* or *am*—self or you, *ba*—draw towards). Santals consider this musical instrument as an extension of physical self of human being. So they divide it into various important parts of human body and connect them with nature.

The various parts of the *banam*, according to Santals, represent five primary elements of nature. The head remains on the top like sky. Thus *bobok* or head means space or sky. *Hotok* (neck) and *koram* (chest) suggests air because neck and chest are connected with respiration. The stomach which is connected with hunger represents fire and the womb (*lac*) as an organ of discharge suggests water. The *banams* a whole represents a body or earth. The string is the most important part of the whole body of the musical instrument. It unites all the parts of the body of *banams* the earth does.

Santals believe that *banam* has a great power which can connect them with supernatural world because it is made of natural element which can control the supernatural beings. Santals take *banam* as earth which being female is a symbol of fertility. As Santals take *banam* as the embodiment of their own self they hold the similar attitude towards the natural elements. This attitude suggests an ecological concept of Santal community.

That the nature is very much connected with Santal culture is reflected through the formation of some letters in Olchiki script. In *Santal Worldview* by Nita Mathur there is a reference that Santal script bears the influence of nature to a large extent. The Olchiki script was discovered in 1920 by Pandit Raghunath Murmu. He had discovered some letters from nature and its frequent activities. Santali letter which sounds *o* has been modified from the picture of the burning flame. The letter *O*

which has the pronunciation of *o* has been taken from the shape of earth. The letter which has the sound like *ak* has been derived from the bird which sounds *ak-ak-ak* that is a sound of a swan. The letter which sounds like *I* or *E* has been derived from the modified picture of a bended branch of a tree with fruits or air. A letter of Olchiki script looks like a plough and it sounds like *iss*. The letter which has the sound of *ir* has been modified from the picture of a sickle by which grass or paddy is cut. The letter which is pronounced with a sound like *uch* has been taken up from the picture of the peak of a mountain. Letter which has the sound of *ud* when pronounced exactly looks like a mushroom. The letter which sounds like *unn* has been derived from the picture of a bee hive. One letter that has the sound of *E* or *A* has been taken from the picture of soil followed by water. Letter with a pronunciation of *en* has been taken from the picture of threshing grains by a person with the help of two legs. Letter which sounds like *oot* exactly looks like a camel.

Santal people observe many customs which are available in Santal folktales. In P. O. Bodding's *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals* there is a detailed analysis of various Santal rituals and also the reasons of why Santals take help of nature while celebrating their ceremonies.

During *Janam Chatiyar* (Birth ceremony), *Bapla* (marriage ceremony), and *Nai-te-idi* (death ceremony) Santal people celebrate nature around them in various ways.

*Janam* means birth and *Chatiyar* is the process by which the new born baby is socialized. When Santals celebrate this occasion they take the help of various natural elements. Santals like many others believe that the birth of a child is a natural phenomenon. The child is formed and nourished in a mother's womb by natural law. They are very much conscious about the usefulness of nature. They know that turmeric oil is very much useful as ointment after the birth of a child. The midwife gets the child to bath and anoints it with turmeric oil. Then the family makes a gruel mixed with *margosao* (neem) leaf and garlic and applies it on the body of the mother of the new-born baby.

The modern civilization is gradually forgetting all these natural medicines. But Santal people still practice all these natural products as useful medicine in their life.

Santal people are very much conscious about the importance of nature in human life. That is why their customs and traditions are all performed in the lap of nature. In Santal folktales water is taken as one of the important five primary elements of nature. It is very much interesting to analyse why Santals have conceived water as the most important element of nature. Water (*dak*) plays an important role in Santal life because they think that the child comes out from the world of water i.e. womb (*lac*). The midwife who helps in delivery is called *dakdulabuthi*. By birth the whole village becomes unclean. The mid-wife performs a purification ceremony and sprinkles water on the gathering of the village. At marriage ceremony (*bapla*) good omens are judged through water. The main ritual of marriage (*dakbapla*) is performed by water.

After death the whole village and the house becomes unclean as it becomes by birth. The funeral

pyre is lit only after the potful of water is broken. The purification process again goes on and villagers bathe in the village pond. *Nai-te-idi* means to immerse the remaining bone into the river.

Santal people celebrate their festivals throughout the whole year. In Santal folktales there are huge references to various kinds of festivals. They follow the cycle of seasons and name most of their festivals according to their agricultural terms. Santals celebrate their each and every festivals to their heart's content. When the season shifts from one to another, it also brings changes in natural surrounding and beauty. Santals get attracted to the beauty of the varieties of nature and engage themselves in enjoying festivals according to the change of nature. Like others, Santal festivals too are an important part of Santal culture. The following festivals, in a word, show the influence of nature on Santal culture.

**Erog:** Santals enjoy this festival in the month of April and May. At that time they showed paddy in their field. So it is also called paddy sowing festival. On the day of Akshirtruti Santals worship earth as mother with great enthusiasm and enjoy the Erog Festival.

**Jamtala Bonga:** Santals celebrate their festivals when the paddy is hung downwards and is destroyed due to scanty rainfall throughout the year. They treat field as God and offer Him Puja. They think that this will please their God and provide them with good wealth.

**Makar Parab:** One of the important festivals which Santal enjoy with grandeur is *Makar*. The reason behind that is at that time the reaping of crops half done and their mind is free from all types of worries and anxieties. *Makar Parab* is celebrated in the English month of January and Adivasi month of *Paush*.

**Karam Parab:** *Karamparab* is celebrated by the Santal people in the month of *Aswin* (October) or *Kartik* (November). A village meeting is held and on an auspicious day *Karam* is celebrated. Santal people bring two bough of *Karam* tree and plant it on the middle of the village. Santals have a belief that planting a tree in front of their house will bring them good fortune. The reason is that Santals take nature as very important part of their life and they are willing to worship it. This ritual brings in focus the eco consciousness of the Santal people.

**Maghe:** Santals worship each and every activity of nature which helps them in their daily life. They enjoy the *Maghe* festival when the trees and plants are dried up in the last of February. To bring the wood, bamboo tree etc from the forest they worship nature.

**Namah:** Santals celebrate their *Namah* festival when they bring their newly cut crops from field. Through this festival they worship nature to give them good health and wealth.

**Asaria:** This festival is celebrated by Santals to start replantation. They worship nature to get rid of grasses and weeds in the field. Through this festival Santals start cultivation.

**Baha:** The meaning of *baha* is flower. *Baha* festival comes in spring season. At that time flowers

bloom all around, new leaves are sprouted from trees and plants. The whole nature catches hold of sight. Santal people generally live adjacent to forest which bears blooming flowers and leaves at Spring. Mainly the *saland mahua* flowers blossom and the whole atmosphere is perfumed with sweet fragrance of flowers. Santal minds are intoxicated with such beauty of nature. The chirping sound of birds, the song of cuckoo fill the air with romance. Seeing this beautiful and attractive appearance of nature Santals cannot hold themselves and start celebrating *baha* festivals with great reverence to nature.

*Baha* festival adds another significance to Santal life and culture. At that time of *baha* festival the whole earth is full of flowers. They invite bees and flies to cause pollination. And the earth looks like a beautiful young maid. Therefore, to Santals, *baha* means the attainment of adulthood of a young lady who can now be married away. "The earth perhaps undertakes similar form like a girl who enters the state of adolescence, during this season" (Hembram, 86).

**Sohorai** : Another important festival of Santal community is *Sohorai*. It is celebrated in the month of October or November. Santals celebrate this festival mainly for proper care and welfare of domestic animals. Santal livelihood is mainly based on agriculture. The domestic animals like cow, buffalo etc help them in harvesting. *Sohorai* festival, therefore, is important for harvesting.

Santal paintings in most cases are found on the wall of their mud houses. Their painting reflects their closeness to nature. As Santals are mainly dependant on nature for their livelihood, themes of their paintings are mainly drawn from nature—birds, animals, plants, harvesting materials and five basic elements of nature etc.

Here a folk tale from the *Folktales of the Santal Parganah* may be mentioned to focus on how and why Santals have related nature with their lives. In *The Beginning of Things* there is a description that at the very beginning nature was very much friendly with them. Rice was ready for them to eat, clothes were ready to wear. Everything was so easy for them. But some dirty habits of Santal women made their God, Thakur Baba angry and he deprived Santals of all His blessings of nature. It is clear in this folk tale that Santals believe that their God always live with them.

But He will no longer be with them if they betray nature. So they try to please nature and that is why nature is connected with them in every aspect of their lives.

Santal culture consists of their customs, rituals, belief systems, festivals, music and musical instruments, song, dance, tradition etc which are very much connected with nature. These are the essential parts of their life and culture. Santal people, in a word, live their lives with nature. It makes an aspect of Santal literatures. But these aspects of literature have not yet been highlighted like other mainstream literature. A very important part of modern literature is the impact of materialistic culture. The picture of various kinds of modern urban culture has come from the pen of T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, W.H. Auden and many other writers. Their works have mainly focused on modern philosophy

and culture-spiritual and moral bankruptcy, alienation of mankind, confusion, despair and despondency of modern man. This culture which is merely a reflection of metropolitan culture has no connection with nature. It is gradually removing from natural world. But the indigenous literature makes it possible to go back to nature. The study of indigenous literature makes us remember Wordsworth's concept about nature. They are as important and significant as mainstream literature. Santal folktales, myths, legends and many other oral narratives represent their culture, traditions, values, ethos and more and more-a variable aspect of literature altogether quite new and different from modern mainstream literature. That's why the folklore studies is gradually becoming an important discipline of English literature.

#### References

1. Archer, William George. (2007). *The Hill of the Flutes: Life love and Poetry in Tribal India*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. London.
2. Bodding P.O. (2007). *Santal Folktales*, Gyan Publishing House. New Delhi.
3. Bodding P.O. (2008). *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals*, Gyan Publishing House. New Delhi.
4. Bompas, Cecil Henry. (1909). *Folktales of the Santal Parganah*, David Nutt. London.
5. Hembram, P.C. (2002). *Santhali: A Natural Language*, Setu Printers. Ranchi.
6. Mathur, Nita. (2001). *Santal Worldview*, Concept Publication. New Delhi.