

RELIGIOUS LIFE AND BELIEF SYSTEM OF THE SANTALS-A CASE STUDY IN SOLAGERIA VILLAGE

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I

Today, the Santals are one of the largest ethnic groups in India with an estimated population of 4. 2 million. They primarily occupy the Chotanagpur plateau with their settlements distributed over an area of 350 miles that covers the area from the Ganges to Baitarani, Politically, they stretches across the states of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh. Focusing on the religions practised by the Santals, according to the 2001 census only 21 per cent of the Santal had listed Sarna (i. e. their traditional religion) as their religious belief;another 62 and 4 per cent respecticely had proclaimed Hinduism and Christianity as their principle religion.

The Traditional Religion of the Santals

The traditional Santal religion is called the “Sarna” or the Sari dharma or bongaism. According to the 2001 census, 21 per cent of the total Santal population have recorded their religion as the Sarna. Traditionally, the Santal religion did not have a temple or for that matter neither did it worship idols. Religion among the Santals is “very much an institution that consists of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings, carried on in consonance with the desire of the superhuman beings so as not to evoke their wrath and influence them to satisfy the needs of the actors” (Banton, 1966). According to a Santal, the world is inhabited by a large number of spiritual beings of various kinds called “bongas”. Any kind of ethereal, non-corporal being ranging from the creator, individual tutelary spirits, evil spirits hovering around the habitats, witches, ghosts of deceased relatives to even Hindu dieties are seen as bongas. One needs to take into account the bongas, if one has to understand the traditional religion of the Santals for it forms a dominant part of the latter. The Santals hold the belief that these bongas are directly connected with the welfare of particular persons of groups. Such is the intimate relationship between the bongas and the Santals that, the latter beliefs that each bongas have individual attributes and is much more than abstraction. Bongas are believed to be constantly manifest themselves to men and intervene in the latter’s affairs. A Santal’s attitude towards such supernatural beings that inhabit his world is one of awe, reverential fear, dependence, submission, propitiation, taboo,

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secrecy, mystery and fear. Communion with these spirits are often concretely manifested through offerings (such as rice-beer or animal sacrifices) alongwith, their ceremonial sharing that are often made on, behalf of the group. Troisi (1979) points out that there are two aspects in the worship of the bongas which are-instrumental and expressive. While, the instrumental aspect deals with alliance that are entered into with the bongas by the people to avert any ill-effects; the expressive aspect deals with the special manner in which rites, festivals, feasts are organised as a means to acknowledge in an emphatic manner that the bongas are indeed the lord and the protector of the people. Thus, it can be seen that eventhough the Santals share relationships of different kind and degrees with their bongas, all of them are sacred to them. However, this view of sacredness that is shared among the insiders has not always be shared by outsiders. For example, while some consider it as all-pervading energy (Roy, 1925; Majumdar, 1942); others believe that they do not have any personal attributes. Also, some believe that the Bongas are either highly personate (Culshaw, 1939) or evil agencies, malevolent and enemies of man (Bodding, 1925). There are also others like (Hunter, 1975) who brands this bongaism of the traditional Santal religion as worship of malevolent spirits whose aim is to cause drought, disease, death. In the following paragraph I shall mention some of the important bongas and few diesties that are worshipped by the Santals.

The supreme deity in the traditional Santal religion is centered around the "thakur jiu". Infact, the supreme being in the eyes of a Santal is not a bonga but stands above all (Bodding, 1932). The Santals hold that the Thakur Jiu is the creator and sustainer of the universe and is a benevolent spirit. Although, there is no specific worship for Thakur Jiu yet, he is reverentially remembered in important religious festivals and occasions. Also, during natural calamities he is specially invoked upon whereby a white fowl is sacrificed in his name. Sometimes the supreme deity is also referred to as the Cando.

Speaking of bongas, the spirits that are recognised by the Santals can be classified into ten categories. Under the first category falls the tutelary spirits such as the Maran Burru, Moreko-Turiko, Jaher Era, Gaosae Era, Pargana Bonga, Manjhi Haram Bonga. The Maran Buru is the chief of bongas who is suppose to have taught the first couple the art of reproducing and who is venerated as a genial and kindly grandfather of the tribe. Whlie, Moreko-Turiko is said to preside over the welfare of the village and to have control over rain, crops and epidemics whereby at times of natural calamities Santals offer special sacrifices in a ceremony called the Mak More;the Jaher Era is the old lady of the Sacred Grove who is concerned about bodily needs. Santals believe that these three spirits inhabit the sacred grove whereby three sarjom trees are planted and among who the tallest symbolises the Maran Buru and the other two trees the Jaher Era and the Muriko-Turiko. The Gosae Era is propitiated by the Santals against sores. The Pargana bonga is believed to have special healing powers over sickness caused by witchcraft and to whom,

the kudum naeke (priests assistance) propitiates through a sacrificial offering called the Bul Mayam. The Santals follow the notion of purity and pollution very closely in relation to the bongas so as not to displease them so much so that purifying rites are always followed either after birth (Janam Chatiar) or death (Tel Nahan or Nai Gada). Under the second category falls the subclan or abge bongas. These abge bongas are held as tutelary spirits of sub-clans. The abge bongas are seen as personal spirits of the Santals and because of this a formal name-giving ceremony takes place whereby a newborn is recruited to his father's clan and is thereby given to the protection of the abge bongas. They are the most guarded household spirits. Under the third category, there are the Orak bongas that are also seen as personal to the household members and protecting the latter from any malevolent spirits. Under the fourth category there are the ancestral spirits or the Hapramko bongas. The basis of this worship is the belief that even after death, a person's social personality is not annihilated but, transformed and that ancestors are believed to be 'living' with the living and at times assisting with birth, wedding and household problems. Under the fifth category, there are the tutelary bongas of the ojhas who are also called the Saket bongas. The ojhas are supposed to have retained bongas that aid them to counter the forces of evil and sorceries. Examples of such bongas can be seen in the bonga Luri Lora that is invoked in case of smallpox. Most of the Saket bongas are of Hindu origin. The Jom Sim bongas fall under the sixth category. There are around forty-four Jom Sim bongas. Although, there is no time for holding a special feast in honor of the Jom Sim, a Santal must hold it within his lifetime. Under the seventh category are the Hindu dieties or the Deko bongas where by, some Hindu dieties are include in the Santal religious pantheon. Most of these bongas are invoked by the ojhas. These dieties include-Kali, Dibi (Durga), Gaanga Mai and others. From time to time, feasts, fetivals and fairs are arranged in their honour. Next, we have the spirits that are malevolent and spiteful and from whom the Santals hope inaction. These bongas are the-village boundary bongas (Sima bongas), spirits of village outskirts (Bahre bongas), mountain and water and hill spirits (Rongo Ruji and Baghut bongas). Under the eighth category are those who through ojha divination are found to be the cause of disease, mischief and who have to be exorcised by the ojha himself or else the mischief will continue. These include-the nachar bonga, kisar bonga, thapna bonga and the bonga of the husband of the witches. Next we have the stray mischievous spirits and the impersonal spirits that are not the objects of worship but has to be scared away through magic or exorcism. Among them we find the curins, bhut, rakas, ekagudias.

Focusing on the important seasonal rites and festivals of the Santals, The Santal religious beliefs are an attempt to make sense of the world in which they live in. Seasonal rites and festivals have been from time to time arranged by a Santal, to ensure protection and prosperity of their village community. The traditional Santal religion is very closely related to agriculture, so it doesn't surprise one when one

sees that the Santals have a vast numbers of ceremonies and rituals that mark the different stages of the agricultural year. They perform inaugurative and concluding rites before and after the main agricultural activities. During these rites the village priest beseeches the benevolent bongas to shower their blessings on the village while, the kudum naeke (assistant priests) appeases the malignant bongas so as to avoid calamities. The annual community festivals of the Santals are-Baha, Erok Sim, Hariar Sim Iri-Gundli-Nawai, Janthar, Sohrae and Magh Sim. The Santal sees in the festivals an occasion to forget his worries. The Sohrae or the harvest festival is the principle public event held in the month of Pus (December-January) after the paddy has been reaped, threshed and stored. During this festival the cattles are blessed, a fishing expedition held and a village hunt organized apart from rituals that are performed to appropriate the village and ancestral spirits. Next we have the Baha or the flower festival that is held after the full moon in the month of Phagun (February-March) when the shorea and the mahua trees begin to blossom. The festival is a massive propitiation of the major bongas who are asked to keep the village free from sickness and witchcraft and to preserve the crops and cattle. It is also considered to be a fertility feast. An important part of this festival is the 'spirit –possession' ceremony that whereby baha songs are sung and three young men enter into a trance impersonating the Jaher Era, Maran Buru. In the Erok Sim festival which is celebrated in the month of Asar (June-July), fowls are offered on the occasion of sowing the winter paddy. The naeke and the kudum naeke offers the fowls to the Jaher Era and the Moreko-Turuiko, imploring them to make the earth fertile and protect the village from all evil. Another festival is that of Hariar Sim in the month of San (July-August) whereby a prayer is made to all the village bongas for a luxuriant growth of paddy. In the Janthar festival the first fruits of millets called iri and gundli are offered to the spirits to acknowledge their lordship over the land and crops.

These are some of the important elements that constitutes the traditional religion of the Santals.

Contact with Hinduism and its Impact

Since 13th century, the Santals have been living in close contact with the Hindus. The Santals usually call the Hindus as the "diku", i. e. outsiders, who they see with distrust, hatred and contempt because of the years of exploitation that they have suffered. Since a long time both the traditional Santal religion and Hinduism has been engaged in reciprocal borrowing. However, the adoption of Hindu socio-religious practices became more prominent in the post-Santal rebellion period when the Santals had held the belief that doing so was the only means to improve their economic status. The most significant movement in this process of conscious acculturation of the traditional Santal religion with Hinduism took place in 1871 with the Kharwar movement. Under this movement, a certain Bhagirath Manjhi

announced that the golden age of the Santals would only be restored if the Santals worshipped the true god-the Hindu diety Ramchandra or Chando- and cleansed themselves of their sins. According to him, the oppression of the Santals was a result of the punishment for abandoning the worship of one true god and turning to the worship of other minor and evil spirits(Hembrom, 1996). Bhagirath Manjhi also propagated the ideal of purity and pollution that is a prominent aspect of Hinduism. In decades after the Kharwar movement, Hinduised sects did come up like Sapha Hor, Samra Babajiu. Among them it was the Sapha Hor who propagated the following of a more exclusive and sanskritized lifestyle based on strict commensal norms that prevented eating in the house of those of did not belong to the sect and abstinence from drinking handi and eating fowls and pigs, eating their morning meal only after a purificatory bath and worshipping Mahadev. However, the lifestyle of this sect forced the individuals out of ordinary Santal community life aggravated more by the belief that the other Santals were unclean or Besapha Hors. Today, the ever-increasing contact of the Santal community with the Hindu community have led to the introduction of a large number of Hindu gods and goddesses in the Santal pantheon. According to the 2001 census, Hinduism is the religion of the Santals with as many as 62 per cent of the total Santal population taking it up. The Santal have no objection to the inclusion of new gods and goddesses in their pantheon alongwith, addition of festivals to their annual calendar as long as it doesn't require the Santal to give up their traditional beliefs and practices. As such, wherever Santals have converted to Hinduism, this change of religious affiliation did not necessarily entail a complete break from traditional practices. Infact, many of the Santals hold that believing in these new bongas would help them tide over the crisis alongwith their belief in their of their own spirits and bongas to protect them from exploitation and economic ruin. Much of the influence of Hinduism on the Santals has been through concerted and intentional efforts of various Hindu organisations such as Mandir, Arya Samaj, saints and sadhus and adivasi politicians functioning under the umbrella of Hindutva nationalism.

Now we shall focus on those particular religious practices that the traditional Santal religion have adopted from Hinduism. The constant intermingling of Hinduism and traditional Santal religion has often been expressed in a variety of ritual performance including life-cycle ceremonies, magico-religious practices, seasonal festivals and others. According to a Santal, each of the Hindu festival is associated with a bonga and all these gods are clubbed together under the category of Hindu festival bonga. In spite of the hostile relationship with the diku, a number of Hindu gods and goddess have been propiated by the Santals from time to time, such as the -Kali, Durga, Ganga Mai, Laxmi, Mahadeo, Parvati, Rama, Krishna and Monsa. Also the Chhat (whereby a huge fair is held in the village), Pata (is a corrupt form of charak puja whereby, the Pata Parab or the Hook-Swinging ceremony is held) and Jatra (whereby the future is predicted by the chatyas) festivals

that are observed by many Santals has been influenced by Hinduism. The most striking influence on the traditional Santal religion can be seen in the very name given to the supreme deity—i. e. “thakur”—in the . This a result of syncretism as Datta Majumdar (1956) explains that occurred when the language of the Santals came in contact with that of the others and, was influenced by it. The institution of ojha or the spirit healer has also been imported from the Hindu villages (Mathur, 2001). Most of the saket bongas that are invoked by the ojha, are of Hindu origin. Not only has the term ‘ojha’ been adopted from Hinduism but the mantras that are recites are of sanskritic origin and is a corrupt from of Hindi and Bengali. Another adoption is seen in the special festival of Karam has been taken over from the Hindus. During the Karam festival, the Santals offer belaonja flowers, sun-dried paddy, dhubi grass, oil and sindur to Karmu and Dharmu and place on the karam branch a piece of cloth of two cubits long. Among the Santals just like their Hindu counterparts, Durga puja also involves a big feast followed by new clothes being bought for household members and servants. Also, following the Hindu tradition of worshipping Shiv and Parvati, the Santals too worship them with much gusto so much so that in many of the Santal inhabited areas large fairs are arranged during Shiva Ratri, symbolising the marriage of Mahadev and Parvati and all Santal marriages are only solemnised after this fair has taken place. As Troisi (1979) points out that the Maran Buru has his counterpart in the Hindu Shiva while, the worship of the orak bongas can be said to have been influenced by the Hindu belief in Griha-Laxmi and Jaherthan from the Hindu Panca-Vati. Also, the Santal belief in bhuts, rakas, curins and other impersonal powers have been adopted from their Hindu neighbours. Another, area of Hinduism’s influence on the traditional Santal religion can be seen in the use and ritualistic importance attributes to articles like cowdung, vermilion, turmeric, cowrie shells. Blood sacrifice that is a much integral part of Santal worship has also been adopted from Hinduism especially, the Hindu Sakti cult. Therefore, it can be pointed out that through the process of assimilation many aspects of Hinduism have been adopted by the traditional Santal religion. However, what is of significance is that the traditional Santal religion have accommodated and indigenised many of the Hindu festivals. Accomodation of many Hindu festivals within the traditional Santhal fold can be seen in recent times. For example, Santals celebrate the festival of Sohrae during the time of Hindu Kali puja or in case of the Pata festival in respect of Mahadev (that has its Hindu counterpart in the Charak puja) that has been completely Santhalized with the worship of Moreko-Turika bonga at the Jaher Than. However, what needs to be understood is that during all the Hindu festivals (except the Karam) only those Santals who have converted to Hinduism worship and celebrate it and the non-Hindu Santals merely go to look at the festival. As such, most of the Hindu festivals that are observed among the Santals are only done by individual households. Infact, many believe that Santals do not act rightly by offering to the bongas of other races

and this displeases their own bongas. Apart from the above mentioned influences, a striking influence of Hinduism on the Santal religion is associated with the observation of purity and pollution regarding birth and death. Examples of observation in purity and pollution can be seen during the cleansing ceremony after birth called the Janam Chatiar whereby until the house and the village is purified from the defilement no festivals or rituals are held in either the household or the village. Another ceremony is that of the Tel Nahan or oil washing whereby, a purifying ceremony is performed for the dead man to release him from his shackles.

Thus, it can be pointed out that the engulfing tendency of the Hindu social structure has created a perception among many Hindus as well as Santals that the latter belong to the Hindu fold. The Santals have been accommodated in the lower rungs of Hinduism. However, unlike Christianity the Santals who have taken up Hinduism as their principle religion have not given up their traditional practices.

Contact with Christianity and its Impact

Christianity among the Santals is a relatively modern phenomenon. The first efforts to bring the Santals into the Christian fold was undertaken by Protestant missionaries of the American Free Will Baptist Mission who took up the first ever mission work among the Santals in 1838 (in the Santal Parganas). Soon after this the Church Missionary Society of England started their missions among the Santals. However, the main missionary activities among the Santals took place after the Santal rebellion. The prevailing socio-economic climate during this period of bonded labour, exploitation and the failure of the Santal rebellion to gain economic and social relief set a ripe ground for missionary activities among the Santals. In fact, it was only after this rebellion that the bulk of missionary activities among the Santals could be seen as, efforts were made by various missions like the United Free Church of Scotland, American Methodist Episcopal, the American Seventh Day Adventists, the Wesleyan Mission, the Bengal Baptist Dipti Mission among others to bring the Santals under the fold of Christianity. On the other hand the Catholic Missions started among the Santals a bit later (in the district of Purnea), between the years 1900 to 1925 under Fr. L. Knockaert, a Belgian Jesuit. Soon after this the Foreign Mission of Milan started its missions among the Santals. One cannot understand the impact of Christianity on the Santals religious beliefs and practices without taking into consideration the influence that the Christian missionaries had on the other spheres of Santal life (Troisi. 1979). When the Christian Missionaries started their work among the Santals, they started it with a aim of final conversion of the people as that was the only path to salvation. The Christian Missionaries thus not only tried to understand the people they were trying to bring within their fold by studying their language and culture but they were also responsible, for the spread of education, healthcare and social welfare service in the Santals inhabited areas. The immense benefits acquired out of such educational and philanthropic activities

of the missionaries made a deep impression on the Santals and it was acted as an impetus for their conversion to Christianity. Thus, a number of Santals became Christians as a result of their contact with Christianity in the mission schools and this made many Santal parents realise that Christianity could bring about improvement in the economic opportunities and prospects through education that were imparted in the various mission schools. However, what is significant for understanding the impact of Christianity on the Santals was that most of the conversion to Christianity were made in order to gain freedom from oppression as the missionaries had defended the poor Santhals against the extortion of the landlords and the moneylenders and the latter had thought that to keep the patronage of the influential missionaries it was better to convert into Christianity. However, what was striking that inspite of all the inducements that conversion to Christianity had to offer, a very small proportion of Santals actually converted to Christianity. Infact, today constitutes the principle religion of only 4 per cent of the total Santal population. Hembrom (1996) had pointed out that the Santals orthodoxy might have been the main factor for the less number of Christian converts. Today, there are only 300,000 Christians among the Santals, i. e. around 4 per cent. Also, the impact of Christianity on Santal religion was very extremely limited (Troisi, 1979).

The main reasons for the limited impact of the Santals and their religion will be examined in greater detail in the following lines. Foremost among these reasons was the puritan spirit of Christianity whereby, the Santals were prohibited for drinking rice-beer and take part in the traditional dances that they had taken part in for years. Not only these they were also asked to stop playing the traditional instruments that are used during these dances such as the tumdak lest they tempt the converts. In the eyes of the Christian missionaries these dances were seen as obscene along with the free sex and drinking that was prevalent in the traditional Santal society especially during certain occasions. However, the underlying fact was that the missionaries tried to identify Christianity with their own particular culture and evaluated the Santal customs and laws against this background which they tried to impose on the Santals. Thus, often the Santal objected to conversion to Protestantism saying that this would lead to their giving up of raska (dancing, singing, drinking and eating) that is part of their right way to live and is not merely a source of pleasure but a thing to turn to during difficulties. Also, the very fact that Christian evangelisation involves an effort to draw out the Santhal from his traditional group thereby posing problems of solidarity and making the converts insecure. Infact, many of the Santhals saw Christianity as a threat-a disintegrating force- for their traditional society and also as a source of loss of identity. Conversion, for many thus meant de-tribalisation and coerced alienation of converts from their indigenous cultural milieu and religious universe. To separate a Santal from his traditional society and lifestyle is like taking away a man's life from him because, for a Santhal his village and tribe provides him security and, the traditional customs

that he follows not only is beneficial for the tribe but also for the individual. Another reason as to why Christianity failed among the Santhals is that Christianity demanded of Santhal converts a complete rejection of their traditional belief system especially, their believe in the bongas. Infact, the principle diety of traditional Santal religion-Maran Buru was seen as a form of Satan and in similar lines all bongas were seen as devils as well. Infact, at the time of baptism, a Santal Christian is required to formally renounce his belief in Maran Buru. The missionaries set up strict norms to control the behaviors of their converts in all spheres of life and thus the latter were cut off from any traditional ceremony that revolved around the worship of bongas or even the ojha. This was especially true of Protestant branch of Christianity and this explains why Protestantism was quite unpopular among the Santals. However, compared to this Catholicism was popular among the Santals because it was more liberal and accommodating towards those traditional customs that were not in direct conflict with its beliefs. However, what was unfortunate was that the missionaries believed that in order to covert the people they had to separate from their traditional way of life, norms and customs. Therefore, this made change unidirectional and adaptation if any minimal (Troisi, 1979). The efforts of the missionaries thus, tended to take away the Santals from the moral and social sanctions under which they had grown and flourished for ages. We can understand the nature of the efforts of the missionaries when we take into account, P. O. Bodding's remark into account when he had pointed out that the "Protestant missionaries had tried to make Christian Santals into Santal Christians. "In other words what was important for the missionaries was that a person be Christian first and then a Santal. What the missionaries failed to understand that is in the words of J. H. Hutton (Ghurye, 1995)that the "beliefs held by the tribals were not vague imaginations or superstition of the untaught or amorphous mind" and needed to be understood in terms of their symbolic significance for the tribals themselves. This attitude to evangelise the Santals through a "substituting" approach tended to disrupt the unity and cohesion thereby alienating the Santal from his own tribe. . Therefore, it can be pointed that Christianity demanded of a Santal a total abandoning of his belief, customs and traditions. In this context, a very crucial impact which one needs to take into account is that Christianity was successful in creating a gulf between the Christian Santals and the non-Christian Santal (Culshaw, 1949) alongwith, the creation of tension. Whenever, a Santal became a Kristan, the whole village resented it and some degree of social stigma was attached to him/her and eventhough, the convert continues to be subject to the tribal authority yet, they often lost their authority and right to participate in special occasions of the village. However, escape from this is only possible when the new converts establish their own fringe societies outside the villages. Due to the rigid norms of behaviour that were expected of them, the Christian Santals soon came to be alienated from the rest of their community. For, a Santal as Bradley Birt points out being an oucast

required a lot of courage and belief. Often one could see in a Santal village the cultural and geographical segregation of the converts from their non-tribal counterpart in the form of Catholic bustees and Christians having minimal interaction with the non-tribal Santals. Not only did Christianity bring about a change in the belief system among the Santals but it also brought changes to other spheres of life such as in food habits, dressing pattern, attitudes to education and health and sanitation alongwith visible changes in the level of aspiration. Infact, according to Vidyarthi (1976), it was Christianity that had first provided the model for westernization for the tribals in the form of the 'Church organisation', western education and western morals. As such, the subsequent Christianisation of the converts led to a superimposition of a foreign ritual system on the indigenous tribal universe alongwith, a restructuring and redefying their cultural and social life(Raj & Dempsey, 2002). Also, Christianity brought with it a marked change in the sacred, social, educational and economic status of the converted tribals thereby, leading to an unevenness in social change that lead to a large amount of internal stress between the converts and the non-converts and a disruption in the course of integration with the age-old traditional processes. The new converts became a part of a larger Christian community that extended beyond their village and centred on the church and its pastor. However, a significant point that one needs to understand was that less normative branches of religion were more successful among the Santals. This could be seen in case of Catholicism among the Santals whereby, its less normative, liberal and tolerant attitude had an appeal for the Santals. Infact, Catholic missionaries tried to attract the Santals by blending tribal customs with Christian liturgical rites and made efforts to include many of the Santal festivals and agricultural activities like Baha, Erok and Hariar into the Christian annual festival cycle (Troisi, 1979) and, upto a large extent such efforts were successful. Such efforts can be seen for example, during the Sohrae festival whereby, converts are encouraged to celebrate Christmas week as their Sohrae festival. However, inspite of the success of Catholicism and many of the Santals appreciating the socio-economic and religious benefits of conversion, many others Santals were reluctant and refused to renounce their tribal heritage and indigenous identity. The converts most of the time faced two contradictory forces –firstly, that of the Santal society that expected of them not only to respect their parental tradition but also to follow some of the traditional practices and customs and secondly, that of the Catholic church that expected the converts to be faithful to the norms and prescriptions set by it. This attitude thus led to a distinct form of Catholicism which could be especially seen in case of urbanized Santal Christians who not only belonged to a world of newfound religion of Catholicism but did not totally abandon their involvement with the traditional religion and their life involved constant commuting between native ritual system and adapted foreign ritual system (Raj & Dempsey, 2002). Often the converts were pressurised by the non-Christian community who

often included family members and relatives.

Thus, the distinct form of Christianity that emerged among the Santals emerged out of an urge to not only protect their cultural heritage, and tribal identity but also, an attachment to indigenous practices and proven efficacy of the tribal practices. This distinct form of Christianity among the Santals thus emerged out of the processes of acculturation, i. e through inclusion and supplementation or parallelism. According to the process of inclusion, local tribal ritual and practices are incorporated into Catholicism without major changes in the meanings. Under this process often the tribal rites that are seen as harmful to the Christian belief are neutralise. Examples, of inclusion can be seen in case of substitution of bonga puja during the bhandan ceremony and baha festival with a mass accompanied with prayer service (Troisi, 1979). On the other hand, under the process of supplementation, the indigenous and Catholic rites co-exist together. Therefore, under the emerging distinct form of Christianity among the Santals, today many of these” born againers” are making efforts to reverse the demonization of many of their traditional dieties. For, example today many of these Santal Christians remember with love the grandfather of the tribe in Catholic liturgical hymns. Also, many of the converts have pointed out that ‘ojhaism’ is not an evil practise as initially the missionaries had thought but it is an authentic tribal curative system and a process of healing that often yielded fruitful results. Infact, due to a growing awareness the Santal Catholics often realised that conversion needn’t entail a total renunciation of time honoured tribal practices and customs. The contact with the Christian religious traditions eventhough, fruitful in certain aspects of life had unfortunately undermined the traditional Santal culture and today we see a new movement among the converts to bring back the lost glory of their traditional religion. Thus it can be pointed out that the Catholic Santal community today is in a cycle of liminality.

Santals a Socio-cultural Group

Religion is such a part of social organisation within which interaction has taken place upto a certain extent and which has led to social change. Thus, in this paper, our main objective shall be to examine closely the features of the traditional religion among the Santal tribe and impact of forces of Great Tradition such as Hinduism and Christianity on the Little Tradition seen in this paper in terms of the traditional religion of the Santal tribe and whether, it has brought about a total change in traditional practices or whether these have been accommodated alongwith, the age-old traditional practices. Also, we shall be examining the features of continuity, if any in the religious practices of the Santal tribe.

The Santals belief to origin from ‘Pilchu Haram’ and ‘Pilchu buri’. They were brothers and sister. From Pilchu Haram, the descendent of Male came and from Pilchu Buri, the descendent of female came out. Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Buri

gave birth to 7 sons and 7 daughter. They married each other and 7 pair went in different direction which gave rise to 7 lineage (bansho) among the Santals- 'Hasda', 'Saren', 'Besra', 'Murmu', 'Mandi', 'Tudu', 'Khisku'

The conversion to other religions among the Santals have taken place out of some pressing urgency such as, disease, death or economic crisis. Infact, the influence of both Christianity and Hinduism can be said to have been associated with the failure of the Santal rebellion and the weakened belief of the own bongas and deities to improve their conditions. We shall be examining the religion of the Santals in greater details in the coming lines.



II

Methodology

The study of the religions among the Santals is conducted in Solageria, Kharkeria, Visindipur village of Sabang block, under 'Debhog Gram Panchayat'. The area is near to the Balichowk railway station of Paschim Midnapore. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to conduct this particular study.

The distinctive feature of the Santals family of 'Solageria' village, is that they are migrated from one particular region i. e Gopi Ballavpur, which is under Jhargram

block. The migration took place about 2-3 generation ago. The major reason of their migration is in search of occupation. As topographically and geographically Gopi Ballavpur is not so fertile, the area has scanty rainfall and there are presence of barren land, mostly unproductive.

A views from field

1. Santals religion play a vital role. The traditional Santal religion still holds appeal for millions of Santals. The main Goddess of Santals is '*Marang Buru*' and '*Jaher Era*'. Marang Buru represent Lord Shiva. Other than it there is also group of Goddess around 5-6 name '*Maruk Turuk*'. The belief sysytem among the Santals also came out of religious faith. Here we would point out certain festival explained by the locals in their own words:
 1. After child born, dai visit to the house to check. The placenta is removed the next day, and a grand feast is serve, where the village is invited after the day of the child birth. A puja takes place after 6 days, then '*annaprashan*' takes place(hair cutting festival), it is quite similar to the Hindu practise, but santals practise is distinct as they have no fixed schedule, it can take place any time in a year. After 10th days of the puja, another puja '*Hoyarvar*' is a ceremony is also takes place. This ceremony case can be done even before marriage.
 2. Dashai festival-It happened during Durga puja for 15 days sometimes 4-5 days.
 3. Badna festival-It carried during Kali puja for 15 days sometimes 4-5 days.
 4. Sakrat festival-It takes place during pos sakranti for 3 days.
 5. Mamra-It happened during Chaitra month (march-april), where the sacrifice of two goat and hen is done. The goat one need to be white and another red. The animals after sacrifice a khichri is made with the meat and its serve to the whole village. To use Durkhiem concept '*the religion act as a source of 'solidatory' for the village*'.
 6. Baha-It's a festival that takes place during '*phalgun purnima*'that is during month of March.
 7. The totemism which is still practise among the sandals;it is beieved as the career of God. The totemic belief among the Santals come out of faith and it represent the clan. Each clan has particular totem(eg:Shal, pepeel, '*bakul*', '*arjun*' and animals such as elephant, horse, '*shol mach*'.). During the festival, they worship this totems. And particular totem of each clan cannot be consume.
 8. During the festival the country liquoir (haria) is consume. Haria is very symbolic. The Haria is made in the house by the women and is consume by both sexes of the whole village. In the festival women are supposed to sing songs and men plays on the '*badal*'. And the other local folk dance is done.

9. Among the Santals, the right to do puja, that is the priest is done by men and women has no part in puja its similar to the Hindu practise. Along with it, there are no concept of regular puja in house done by them. But only during crisis(illness, monetary problem, and other) they does puja in the house, but those can be done by the women of the house also or sometime by pujari. The concept of pujari is not restricted to any particular community as like in Hindu system by Brahmin. Rather, the occupation as 'pujari' is inherited through generation. For example-If a 'Munda' community does puja in anyones house/ community;this Munda communities future generation will continue to do puja in their house when require.
10. There is no class stratification among the Santals. But we can't escape to say there is no division-the division is there on basis of occupation. Their are seven community among Santals, each represent different occupation and division are created on basis of it, as like Hindu 'caste stratification'. But there is no sort of inequality on the basis of difference persist among Santals unlike Hindu. The '*Mandi*' represent 'landlord', '*Kisku*' represent '*Raja*' i. e king, '*Soren*' represent '*Shipai*' i. e police, '*Hazra*' represent '*Judje*', '*Tudu*' represent '*recreation*', and '*Mur mur*' represent '*jogare*' i. e act as a helper during various ritual.
11. The concept of 'witchcraft' or rather '*Tantrik sadhona*' is done by ojha is very much visible among Santals. Each ojha has their own set of 'guru' who teach them. Some technique the present researcher came to know while engaging in a talk with a elderly man in village. They are as follow-
 1. The oil is kept in a jackfruit leave and the leave is folded once horizontally and verticially in a alternative way. Then kept in ground for 2-3 min, then it open. After opening the ojha tell the particular person the problem he is facing and the precaution need to be taken.
 2. A slate and chalk is taken then the ojha criss cross on the slate, this way he diaognise the problem and give remedial meassure.
 3. To remove the witch from any women, to remove the evil spirit of the house, the ojha take a lamp filled with oil and lighten it and burn the charcol and show it to the very corner of the house, that lead to remove of evil spirits.
 4. To remove the ghost the 'groom stick' is used.
 5. During the 'amabarsha night' certain peg is kept in an earthen pot and is put underground of the house that removes all evils.
 6. The majority of Santals, especially the elderly people has blind faith in supenatural power(sun, moon, earth and water). The faith on 'chadmaga' that is power of moon in their day to day life.

7. The Santals do not offer puja to any idol. They remember 'Bonga' and have faith in them, but never does any ritual or worship Bonga. The two main Bonga are-'Baha Bonga' and 'Chad Bonga'. The Chad Bonga is mostly remembered in time of danger.
8. The respondents interview were mostly Hindu, and they stated those change to Christianity are isolated from village.
9. The role of ojha, even in the era of modernization still seen in the village. As one discusses, that her wife was suspected appendices and was asked to operate, which require high cost, so as second option they show to ojha of the village and its cure, and 8years since that time she is perfectly cure. So this small incidents create blind faith on ojha by all the villagers. But its wrong to say all go to ojha only. As during major illness or any other illness they visit govt or private hospitals. Only as a second choice, (during crisis in the family or in case of prolonged sickness) the ojha is preferred.

Tables and Discussion

Demographic Structure

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

<i>Age structure</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Frequency percentage</i>
16-26	15	8. 82
26-36	30	17. 65
36-46	49	28. 82
46-56	33	19. 41
56-66	24	14. 12
66-76	15	8. 82
76-86	4	2. 35
Total	170	

TABLE 2

<i>Income</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Frequency percentage</i>
1000-2000	1	0. 005
2000-3000	8	4. 70
3000-4000	0	—
4000-5000	15	8. 82
6000-7000	57	33. 52
7000-8000	37	21. 76
8000-9000	21	12. 35
9000-10, 000 and above	31	18. 23
TOTAL	170	

TABLE 3

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Frequency %</i>
Agricultural labour	100	58.82
Animal husbandry	17	10
Service	2	1.18
'moote mazdur' (labour)	24	14.11
Primary school teacher	16	9.41
CRPF	1	0.59
Unemployed	10	5.88
TOTAL	170	

The major trend among the villagers is that they want to stick in their own locality. Along with it, the people in village are more influenced by NREGP (national rural employment guarantee skim), where being a unskilled labour they are getting 136/ per day.

TABLE 4

<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Frequency %</i>
Married	110	64.71
Widow and widower	60	35.29
TOTAL	170	

No divorce case was found. And the respondents are married or widower. No unmarried case is taken in the study. But Divorce within Santals community takes place on the basis of judgement that takes place in a convenient place. The five member from husband and wife family respectively meet in a particular place. The couple are requested first to settle down their fight, if still it doesn't work the divorce is granted to them and accepted in the society. But no paper work in a legal manner takes place.

In the time of divorce, the girl family asked for the return of the money that was spend in time of marriage. While the boys family in some cases ask for the return of 'bride price'. After divorce both are allow to remarry.

The concept of widow remarriage is widely prevalent. The girl is allowed to marry the younger brother of husband. Whereas marriages with the elder brother is strictly prohibited. There is no concept of polygamy is present.

As like Hindu community, a girl marrying another community is not socially appreciated. But the norms is not so rigid in case of boys. The concept of free sex or extra marital affair is there in Santal community. Especially the relation with the younger brother of husband. But, the relation with elder brother or father-in law if found is taken as socially offensive. A severe punishment is given. Both are made naked surround with net, black colour is painted in the face and both are made to roam the whole village, in some cases throw away from village.

Religious Character

TABLE 5

<i>Religion belief</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Frequency %</i>
Hinduism	158	92.94
Christianity	2	1.18
Santals religion	10	5.88
TOTAL	170	

The majority of Santals population shifted to Hinduism, few are still Santals. And a negligible population was found christain. But the population converted to Hinduism still practise their own traditional religion. But they participate in Hindu festival such as 'Durga puja' and 'Kali puja', doesn't take part.

TABLE 5

<i>Religious character</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Frequency %</i>
Ojha	15	8. 82
Supernatural power	20	11. 76
Totemism	135	79. 41
TOTAL	170	

Taking account of the religious character, it is found the majority of the Tribal population of the two village is deeply inclined towards Totemic belief. Each clan (gotra) has particular totem whom they worship, what it is, already discuss in the title 'view from the field'. The concept of ojha still persist but it is mostly popular among the elderly. The young educated population doesn't practise ojha. Whereas the supernatural belief especially the faith in 'chad maga' is deeply present. some even belief all sort of sickness is controlled by the power of wind. What they stated in own dialect as 'Bod hawa'i. e certain particle present in the wind which create bad.

The task of priest is done by the men and not by the women. The difference in belief pattern among men men is no such of the age group 20-40. But the age group 40 and above, women has more deep belief.

Case Study

Case 1: Khogen Saren, 49 years has 2 daughter (married) and 2 son (married). The major source of income of their family comes from service, agriculture, teaching. The religion practise he engaged is Hinduism, along with it he also has faith in spirits that came out of fear of supernatural being. Because of this the faith in ojha. Even though he shifted to Hinduism, the worship of totem and other local festival of Santals practise still persist in his family. The totemic animals is elephant, horses and totemic plant include shaal, arjun. Khogen wife Bharati Soren, does 'jogar' in pujas. And she also make Hanria for the family. She has done twice the puja in the house for the family crisis and her faith in ojha is very strong. She believes a 'jhar poch' of ojha can cure everything.

Case 2: Malati Mur mur, 26 years, was found to be most educated and modernize outlook among all the respondents that the present researcher studied. She is Masters in Bengali. Now she works as a primary school teacher. Her education made her conscious And she is not into deep faith in religion, to use Marx concept 'religion as opium of the masses' is best to describe her case. It is because when the present researcher went to take her interview she was pregnant and when was asked does she have faith in ojha or any other super natural power she rightly said that make a human being more weak, I believe in myself and my deed. And during her pregnancy month or any other sickness, she always go to visit doctor. But on other hand she particiapte in their traditional festivals.

Case 3: Phulmaria Hazda, 30, is illeterate. She has 2 son who study in class 6 and 7 respectively. Her belief in religion is full of superstitious and prejudice. Whether it supernatural power or totemic belief. She gave birth to child in home itself, with the help of 'dai'. Her faith in ojha is also tremendous, it is because she was suspected 'appendices' by the doctor of private hospital and was told to operate, but poor women she is and does not have much money. So when she went to ojha, she became perfectly ok. She even added its God will how our life will be- 'whatever I do, is God wish, I have no control'.

Case 4: Sunil Mandi, 64years is the head of his family. He is the agricultural worker. He completed her education upto class 8. Sunil practises Santal religion and has not converted to Hindu. The totem of his clan is 'hari'. Sunil have faith in God but not so deeply in spirit, quite surprisingly this disbelief came in his latter life, the person behind this is his son Mangal soren, 37 years, who is a primary school teacher. But Sunil belief in ojha, this days in severe illness he goes to private hospital. Sunil does the puja of his house when requiere. Everyday he does 'arati' under 'tulsi' tree. This reflect certain Hindu idea is within their belief.

Case 5: Gurbari Soren, 70 years has two son who are married and are educated. Gurbari is the head of the family. Gurbari is quite well off. He has its own farm land and he still continue as a agricultural worker in the field. Gurbari was the richest in that village. He also has animal husbandry (2 goats, 7hens). Gurbari is very religious person. Both he and his wife were present during the interview, both have a very rigid attitude regarding faith. Gurbari consult ojha in any problem. Even when asked about 'witchcraft', he stated his grandfather used to practise, and he know little about it. He was also trying to motivate how this supernatural power really exist, which development of science can't change.

Case 6: Phulmaria hazda, 61, is a widow. She lost her husband few month before and now stay with her daughter. Phulmaria was bit emotional when intervied rather at first she hesitate, this might be due to sudden loss of her husband. When the present researcher first visited her place, Phulmaria was found making country liquoir ('haria'). The villagers latter said us, after she loose husband, most of the time she stay by taking this liquoir. When asked she said this is her income. And she blame God, In her own words she said "Bhagban (God) has taken my husband, I have nothing left and she left me to do this liquoir and sell. Without selling this, I would die in poverty". In case of faith, she actually acted too emotional and was lamenting "What else shall I pray for, I have nothing left. Now I don't do any puja. I do belief, without which what else I am left".

The various case studies that the present researcher potraited, each reflect the life from different background. But what interesting is that, the religion life of Santals is very similar to Hindu belief. The various practises in the above various paragraph reflected that. what can be seen is that, even the adoption of new religion among the Santals have not always resulted in transmutation for, the converts do

continue to follow much of their traditional social and cultural practices and contribute and participate in their traditional rituals and sacrifices. The Along with that the religion play a mark in their day to life, be it during illness, crisis, family problem, welfare of the village and so on. The religion is great sort of solidatory to the village. However, what is indeed important for understanding is that all this shows the Santal's liberal attitude and open-mindedness towards the religion of its neighbours and that the expectation of a peaceful coexistence with respect and dignity with others is a part of the invisible code in the hearts of all Santals.



III

Conclusion

Thus, what can be seen is that the Santal religion has not lost its distinctive identity inspite, of the fact that it has come in close contact with major religions such as Hinduism and Christianity. Whatever changes have taken place in the religious sphere have been associated with process of acculturation or syncretism or accommodation. Indeed much of the traditional beliefs have today been merged with newer ones. Today, the traditional Santal religion still holds appeal for millions of Santals. The belief in the Bongas is still strong and the festivals are still cherished by all. A Santal is still bound to his community with the traditional practices and

customs are still being observed alongwith, the relationships with the spirits and ancestors. Thus, inspite of changes in the traditional religion, many Santals have remained true to their original faith. Therefore, one can say that that worldview of the Santal is charecterized by both continuity and change and a resilience has been manifested in their values, attitude and behaviour. Therefore, as S. C. Dubey(1977), the Santals have sought to produce a new world view of their own in the form of a Great Tradition rather than blindly following a ready-made tradition of their neighbours.

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