

Yugal Jha<sup>1</sup>, Sharad Suman Mishra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Asso. Professor, Deptt. of Pol. Science, K.K.M. College, Pakur.

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar (NET), S.K.M. University, Dumka.

**Correspondence to:**

Mr. Yugal Jha, Deptt. of Pol. Science, K.K.M. College, Pakur.

**E-mail id:**

yugaljha@gmail.com

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# Social Cultural Institutions, Political Thinking and Governance in Jharkhandi Indigenous Literature

## Abstract

The present article explores the horizons and depths of political thinking in the indigenous literature of Jharkhand. In order to establish the idea of political awakenings, I have put a forward insight study into the folk literature and folk arts of the indigenous communities of Jharkhand, especially Santhal community and Munda community which come from the proto-Australoid group linguistically that covers the spirit of political awakenings and thought ever since its existence in the life abode of this region. My best effort is to explore the so far unknown facets of their heroic roles of the communities preserved in their oral literature, arts and culture comprehensively folk songs, folk tales, proverbs and creative narratives, story telling which have had the brilliant past of two great revolutions like 'HOOL' and 'ULGULAN' that brought forth the concept of the village republic in the form of 'Hind Swaraj' in the mind of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Indian Nation.

Mahatma Gandhi collected the philosophy of HOOL (1855) of the great revolutionary like Sido Kanhu and the philosophy of ULGULAN (1895) of Bhagwan Birsa Munda in their oral language and literature which became the source of the finest replica of Hind Swaraj with its traditional set of institutions like Manjhi, Parganas, Munda, Mahato, Pahara, Pahan in the lap of mountain, river and long range of forest cover for the Panchayati Raj Institutions of Jharkhand particularly and India as a whole in the present time.

The indigenous literature reveals the identity in oral heritage and tradition. It enmeshed intricately immersed in its cultural folklore, tradition, heritage and memory which support and complement each other is an art form of immemorial time.

The most important step is to present the folkloric research for the best presentation of their pragmatic, native categorization of the creators and second, the abstract, universalizing categorizations of the scholarly traditions. It has been traced in their long narrative songs (Karam Binti), proverbs and particularly the rich traditions of riddling into order in accordance with academic conversations and then the closer with brief considerations of their symbols, decorative arts, dance and drama. So a fine attempt has been put forward to arrange this thought of political thinking through the materials of their oral literature rationally and to shift forward cultural interpretations.

**Keywords:** Indigenous, Oral Literature, Narratives, Sacred Grove, Binti, Folk Songs, Feminine, Hul, Ul-Gulan, Heritage.

## Introduction

This tribal society is culturally literate and is rooted in its own value-system, social dynamics and perennial virtues. It is well grounded in a communally structured ecologically sound model of growth, so much so that contemporary ills of the so-called civilized urban world, such as crass materialism, violence and greed, are absent. In all these respects, a tribal community is far more balanced and developed. Our discourse used the word 'tribe'<sup>1</sup> in a positive sense.

They live in the Santhal Parganas, Dhanbad, Hazaribag and Singhbhum districts of Jharkhand, and an entity as a state carved out from Bihar. Although Santhals have a language of their own but because of their physical distribution, they write in different scripts like Oriya, Bengali, Roman and Devnagri. One of the experts of Santhali literature Sri Raghunath Murmu revolutionized the newsprint and invented it as 'Alchiki' with his innovative skill. Gradually, it is gaining its wide range in the field of writing and publications. Santhals are a homogenous group both biologically and linguistically and to a great extent even culturally. Like the ancient oral tradition of Vedic India, the santhals too nursed and preserved the system of folk songs to their habits, habitations, description of their journey through time, record of their agricultural life, information about various occasions when these songs were to be sung either in private or in community life<sup>2</sup>. All ancient civilizations have expressed their history in the form of oral modes reflected in their folk songs which also provide rich materials to know how they acknowledge their political, social and cultural togetherness with the co-existence of the ecology as an integral part of their philosophy of life<sup>3</sup>.

## Objective

My purpose is to search out a micro level analysis to gain insight into the vast oral heritage and culture to shape their history and political awakenings which have been expressed in the form of oral modes which have been reflected in their folk songs, slogans, proverbs, creative narratives and storytelling.

## Descriptions

The oral literature is the creation of antiquity in the different form of narratives which reflect the varying moods of the population to which they belong and functions as a rich evidence upon which we can build our knowledge of their heritage, culture, politics and ecology. This indigenous society has their own way of social, political and cultural system for governance. These representative sketch is as follow:-

Moral Institutions: - Binti- The Santhali narratives of moral consciousness by the feminist clot of maternal power in the divine presence. The acceptance of the natural order constitutes an integral element in santhals' view of life. The significant categories of santhal consciousness are running hold in their daily walk of life. First, the Binti, the creative narratives and the Jaher-than. Central to the santhal consciousness is the motion of Jaher-than, the sacred grove which

reflects the women/ nature complex in the santhal world view and worship. Both these need considerable elaboration for a full focus of self- system of governance of the village republic of the tribal society<sup>4</sup>.

These narratives define the individual's social, psychological, cultural and gender position in a community. It focuses on a myth and presents a mechanism of self-representation and also includes the cosmic and trans-cosmic world of the gods, spirits, super-sensible beings, cosmic spaces and their total world view.

Legends hold that Marnag Buru while wandering on the earth (Monchapuri) at different places from Harata to Chai-champa for more than one decade, he has to face hard ships and sinful living. Their narratives known as 'sangal-jari' rain fire destroying sins and 'Sangal Dha' to recover the burnt jungles, trees and animals. The next narrative's 'Thakur' includes as 'sausabonga' where he observed 'the earth becomes dry and the sky red' due to the undue producing system on the earth. After the great destruction they entered the seven river valley called champa where the soil was fertile and the plants and seeds thrived and the birds sang. After that they made this place their abode for twelve years<sup>5</sup> and named this blessed and prosperous region chai-champa. It was the land of light and happiness where the seed could be sown. Whenever the santhals identify a settlement, they must locate the presence of a tree (sarjom), a bird (sim) and grass seed (erierbe) in a forest as an auspicious sign.

Thus, the narrative creation unfold the story of the history of earlier migration and unsettled life. Several versions of the narrative have been recorded. The reading of the myth do not reflect the theological variations but is limited to descriptions and episodes. Traditionally, santhals' belief centered on a supreme deity whom they called Thakur<sup>6</sup>: By the order of Thakur, Lita (Supreme Goddess) informed him that earth (monchapani) is a beautiful place for the consort to live in. After that Thakur descended on earth with the help of gossamer thread (toresutam) and began to live there. Thakuran (goddess) on her part created a pair of male and female geese/swans and named Has and Hasal. After some time they laid two eggs in the care of Jaher-era and from which a pair of men and women called pilchuharam and pilchubuddhi were born. They became the ancestors of human race. Seven descendants of the earliest couple were the fore-fathers of the seven santhal clans. Some of the place names that find mention in their myths of migration and folklore are Khos Kaman, Harata, Sansabeda, Jarpidisom, Ayrondisom, Kayandaydisom and chai-

champa disome. Legends hold that an important occasion is in times of crisis when the community recovers its collective memory to reaffirm clan solidarity. As the legends define that this clan was a short of demarcation of the domain as divided on the basis of their vocation. Each of them is assigned a geographical location.

1. Kishku-who enjoyed the status of a king located in Chmpanagar.
2. Hembram-the noble man given the region of Pouwagulin.
3. Marandi-a wealthy person whose shelter is Ajodya.
4. Siphahi warriors who are not allotted any particular region.
5. Tudu-whose shelter is Dusianagar.
6. Hansala-the agriculturists who have their abode as Tatijhari. Besra-famous for performing dances, are given Bethlnagar.
7. Basky and Murmu are known as Thakur. The Murmus are blessed with the power to read and predict human destiny. They are assigned Sagarpuri as their abode.
8. The last three groups, Chore, Dodika and Pouria, adopted forbidden practices in family life. They inhabit Gagichowri, Diyen, Buru, Sitapuripara Pachitareas. It is well recognized that these groups enjoy their equal status in the cell of their systems. God Moreiko<sup>7</sup> (five primal of males) established the santhal village. Turuiko (six males) are responsible for the succeeding generation of santhals and Gosai-era, the spirit of motherhood.

Thus these are three santhal female figures who play a significant role in the Jahar. One of the expert of santhali literature, C.R. Manghi refers that 'Jahar is the symbol of memory as women in the santhal society. The relationship to nature is perennial and can be traced in many ancient cultures of the world. In the case of the santhals, this relationship is exposed as the adoration of the feminine principle in the form of a grove with Jaher-era, the lady of the grove with presiding deity. This jaher is the residence of four other deities. Apart from Jaher-era, there is Marangburu (literally the highest mountain) who is regarded as this creator God, a source of knowledge, water and human acts. With the help of Jaher-era the presiding mother goddess is consistently involved throughout the year for protection, abundance and for good fortune of the community, animal kingdom, forest, plants, rivers, mountains and the whole of nature. The whole of nature is holy and sacred. This perception of wholeness is echoed in the invocations and prayers to the mother

goddess in the santhal literature, the translation is as follows:-

"May you take this offerings?

And also feed those whose

name I do not know;

Accept this offerings

And accept it with Joy"<sup>8</sup>

### Traditional Institutions

The santhals have a well-organized social political structure which is responsible for the discipline in the community. It is widely known that the British administration was highly impressed by the well-knit social organization of the santhals. The smallest social organization of the santhal village consisting of five persons was responsible for regulating day-to-day life, each with a distinct function. The headman of the village is known as Manjhi. He is assisted by Pramanick. Then comes the village priest known as Naika who is the ritual specialist responsible for conducting the yearly rituals and other celebrations; the next is Joga Manjhi, who guards the conduct and morals of the tribe, the last is Godet, the messenger whose job is to inform the villagers, the place and time of the meetings.

The next level of the administration is known as pargana, consisting of ten to twenty villages, with the Parganait at its head and several Manghis below him. The third and highest level of administrative unit is the Shikar Parishad or Lobir which is the sheet of the traditional form of Supreme Court of the santhals that mainly deals with cases of break-down of morals. The agency has the authority of 'Bithlaha' or pronouncing as a santhal from their community as an out-caste a punishment usually granted to over-indulgent men or women who have entered into an illicit relationship with an alien.

This well-established long standing system of authority has undergone changes under the police administration of the Indian Constitution. The santhals as the citizens of the state have had to adhere to government rules with local panchayats having judicial powers. The traditional structure of the village councils is sometimes under cut and even rendered inefficient due to the mal-practices of British administration. The independent India has revised the preamble of the constitution with the brilliant structure of the traditional institutions of the indigenous society. These indigenous institutions have played the role of a unifier and an integrator to build a

self-reliant village republic in the tribal society. But after three decades, the persisting nexus of the present administration has disappointed and ruthlessly crushed the legacy of 'Jal, Jungle, Jameen' for which the newstate of Jharkhand paid their great sacrifices and contributions.

Today, Jharkhand is a classic case of paradox of economic development and social decay due to the political and cultural lag which continues to prevail even after almost more than one decades of its creation in November 2000 as the persist of Jharkhand movement for the development of the tribal people in the state of its image of Jharkhand. Legends hold that Jharkhand witnessed cautious imperialism coupled with a number of religions, reformations and reformative movements. The mantras of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu 'Haribol' 'Krishna-Krishna' has earned the longimpress on the people of west best Bengal and Jharkhand. The Sapahar movement orKherwarism laid by Bhagirath Manjhi got electronic spell on the Indigenous people of Jharkhand. The Tana Bhagat movement alsobound a spell to the people of Jharkhand for the purification of day-to-day life and the people of India have been arrested in soothing bam of the great epics like Gita and Ramayana, the great historical myth which enthralled the ecstasy of the cultural mosaics of the thought process of Indiannation by the great poets likeAdikabiBalmiki, Maharshi Vyas, Tulsidas, Surdas, RavidasandKabirdas. Kabirdas has revolutionized the Indian people for the new order of the society which prepared the ground of thought 'consciousness'in the Indian mind for the new set of Indian society. In brief, the Indian society was emerging as a nation for their politicalthinkingand democratic rights- the credit goes to these poets, philosophers and saints for preparing the Indian soil for the regeneration of society as a whole.

Infact, the Vedic culture of India depicts the indigenous approach of the Indian village system where the community life has been the backbone of the society. The feminine system of governance in the perception of wholeness for the complete configuration of the village autonomy for good fortune of the community that can be an example of an after alternative knowledge system from which we can learn something about the reorganization of the society and a reorientation to sublime thought of life.

It is interesting to observe that in time of need, these indigenous women have shown a remarkableresilience and have risen to the occasion. The santhal women have been the part of reformation movement. The Abua Raj (Self-Rule) which has been the manifestation of santhal rebellion of 1855<sup>9</sup>, nearly 50 percent were women and

children. Many of them fought the British, some of them acted as informers. In the tribal tradition of 'Janishikar', there is a custom where women in men's guise<sup>10</sup> go for hunting, or to fight enemies. The story of Saini Dai, Kaili Dai and Debayanisisters who gave brilliant fight to Britishers was the great victory of Jharkhandi women in escorting the fort of Rohtasgarh during the British period. Not only were that womenthe part of Birsa Movement- the vibrant phase of UI-gulan which became the part of liberty on the broader past of Jharkhand movement. The great participation of those women in the tribal cultural movements linked to the preservation of adoption of santhali language and script has played an active role in the social, political and cultural breakthrough of the Jharkhandi society.

## Conclusion

We have seen earlier that nature has strong presence in santhal life-the role of the Jaher, the sacred grove, and the ethos that pronounced a prudent and sustainable resources. The santhal traditions represent a harmonious partnership of men and nature with the feminist consciousness of the survival of the golden age of ecological balance which is fast dis-appearing under the impact of rapid industrialization. After six decades of independence this region of Jharkhand has been running in the same nexus of exploitations over the forest resources. Thus the political thinking of the indigenous society claims to an alternative knowledge system from which we can start the process of social engineering<sup>11</sup> for the entire domain of Jharkhandi society particularly and for the nation of India as a whole. The modern paradigm values individualism, while the santhals believe in the shared partnership and participation of men and women in all spheres of life. The Idea of complementarity between male and female forming one entity, perhaps the smallest integral unit of social organization<sup>12</sup> is intrinsic to their faith and identity. This adding features appeared in their myths, rituals, songs and dances and is echoed in their social and economic roles<sup>13</sup>. My observation is that the santhal systemofsocial relations, as expounded in the institutions of marriage, divorce and widowhood are unbelievably flexible and lendsitself to considerable number of optionsand choices. In this respect, the santhal women appear to be relatively free than her urban sisters. The santhals are given to natural sense of order and go about their respective jobs mutually sharing responsibilities. Clearly, women seem to have a sense of themselves. The contemporary paradigm of empowerment which holds true in an urban setting, thus runs counter to the tribal ethos. The search for a

model to make an assessment has to come from the roots of the tradition which is being explored<sup>14</sup>.

Not only India but the state of Jharkhand has been in existence by revolt, revolution and with the help of chain of formative movements. But their sacrifices, sufferings and martyrdom which have been sketched in the folklore, songs, rituals, arts, culture and oral traditions has been the matter of great concern for the present generations of the state of Jharkhand.<sup>15</sup>

The santhal folk songs studied for this article were traced in different anthologies selected by Padmashree Bhagwat Murmu, the Rev. P.O. Bodding, Sahadev Marandi, Babulal Murmu, Adiwasi Baburam Hembrom, Mangal Soren, Satyadhan Mishra, Bhaiya Chasa Hansdak and others. The song collected by such anthologists will open a floodgate to our ancient wisdom preserve in them. A study of the songs, proverbs and narratives in translation mirrors that these collection of songs were meant to be recited on different occasion. But these collections reveals the legendry chivalry and valor of their past generations at the set of their cultural vibrations for their new image of present generations in the Jharkhandi society.

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