



# ASECA CHANNEL

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## Editorial

Stage plays, traditional performance, folk dance and traditional instruments have played an important role in shaping the life and social milieu of the tribal communities. Some are very rich in their cultural side and some are able to retain their's albeit in a less scale and spread. In all formats of expression, tribal communities all across India have integrated the participation of their womenfolk unlike many other communities who have and continue to keep their womenfolk in a state of less emancipation and freedom. In comparison, the tribal women enjoy a better status in all spheres of the society. The openness and freedom granted by their respective society have made them more productive and participative. They form backbone of the tribal society in terms of development, propagation and preservation of individual as well as collective values.

The participation of women in Santal society in particular has been outstanding. They have been the active participants in all spheres of social life and in particular the cultural aspects. This unique arrangement in the society has made this society culturally rich and enduring. The spread and dissemination of cultural traits and values have been possible through women as they are the messenger and carrier of these aspects in the society. As per the arrangement in the society, they migrate from one place to another due to their marriage and carry along with them the richness of culture from one place to another. This channel for continuous transmission of culture was in place then and is still continuing.

When society in general started exhibiting art form in public, tribal communities were also not left behind. They also pursued methods and forms in articulating and expressing themselves. As conservatism was the order of the day, females were not allowed to openly express themselves and as

per social morale and practice, they were not allowed to pair themselves with the opposite sex although were allowed to watch the plays and various art forms. The role of a female was also being played by a male. This trend was continuing and it took considerable period of time till woman started participating and were paired with a male other than his life partner to express and depict a role.

The Santal society has witnessed introduction of female in the drama opposite a male more than three decades ago. This particular development may not have been documented vividly, but is significant due the sheer fact that it is the heroic and indomitable attitude and solid mental frame of such individuals who dared to enter this arena and sustained their existence through uninterrupted, bold and applauded efforts. It is not quite simple to come out from a protected environment and venture into something which is full of challenges and hard work. It is not only the talent which shapes such determination but also requires enormous sacrifice to bring life to characters in a play or performance. In the process, many have sacrificed their youth and also remaining period of their life by pursuing this career. While it is quite adorable and commendable to see someone portraying some role, character but it is the opposite when it comes to acceptability in the society in the matters of matrimony. The person who is applauded during some play is not acceptable in the society with dignity so easily. They had to sacrifice significant part of their life in pursuit of excellence in acting and had to face many odds in their daily life. The perception and approach of people, society have changed now and it is considered as a career option. It is time now to remember and honour such individuals who were instrumental in carrying forward a vital and rich legacy.

## Unraveling Indian Census Data on Santals (Religion)

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In another instance, “Sambad” the regional newspaper in Odia, has recently published some derogative items on Santals and Adivasi religion as well as their god, goddess and their method of worship and project it as very primitive in nature. There was lot of hue and cry amongst the educated and economically better off Santals and they have vociferously objected to this publication and expressed their unhappiness in various ways, means & forms.

### District wise RELIGION profile of Santals in WEST BENGAL

Sl. No.	District	All religions	Hindus	Hindu %age	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Budhists	Jains	Other religions & persuasions	Religion not stated	
1	Medinipur	503,899	285,391	56.64%	769	9,816	22	16	-	206,271	40.93%	1,614
2	Barddhaman	349,276	299,775	85.83%	1,171	4,107	386	17	1	41,823	11.97%	1,996
3	Puruliya	303,321	123,496	40.71%	409	1,044	29	29	1	177,605	58.55%	708
4	Bankura	269,477	55,414	20.56%	577	811	7	10	80	212,165	78.73%	413
5	Birbhum	176,789	168,544	95.34%	344	5,973	6	3	12	1,604	0.91%	303
6	Dakshin Dinajpur	153,634	133,089	86.63%	421	15,110	21	28	1	4,878	3.18%	86
7	Hugli	149,199	100,723	67.51%	456	988	28	5	-	46,544	31.20%	455
8	Maldah	146,723	119,992	81.78%	354	6,701	9	13	1	19,525	13.31%	128
9	Uttar Dinajpur	94,304	80,339	85.19%	351	7,809	1	113	4	5,510	5.84%	177
10	Murshidabad	45,562	34,878	76.55%	203	9,309	3	2	-	1,101	2.42%	66
11	Jalpaiguri	33,312	22,558	67.72%	140	10,446	9	32	-	89	0.27%	38
12	Nadia	15,578	12,780	82.04%	21	375	1	-	-	2,373	15.23%	28
13	Darjiling	14,709	11,617	78.98%	117	1,210	3	19	-	1,735	11.80%	8
14	North Twenty Four Parganas	11,825	11,001	93.03%	54	289	5	-	6	389	3.29%	81
15	Haora	5,765	4,767	82.69%	43	364	-	-	3	573	9.94%	15
16	South Twenty Four Parganas	4,201	3,827	91.10%	36	53	1	-	-	156	3.71%	128
17	Kolkata	1,967	1,664	84.60%	18	171	-	-	-	108	5.49%	6
18	Koch Bihar	999	704	70.47%	6	268	-	13	-	8	0.80%	-
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,280,540</b>	<b>1,470,559</b>	<b>64.48%</b>	<b>5,490</b>	<b>74,844</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>722,457</b>	<b>31.68%</b>	<b>6,250</b>

The Table above depicts the district wise Santal population with their religion recorded, as per Census 2001, in the state of West Bengal. It may be noted that out of total 22,80,540 Santals in West Bengal, 14,70,559 (64.48%) have mentioned their religion as Hindu. Only 86,716 Santals have recorded their religion as “Sarna” and 619,847 Santals in West Bengal have recorded their religion as “Sari Dharam”, which are clubbed under other religions &

persuasions in the above table. In West Bengal, Bankura is the district where lowest percentage of Santals has recorded their religion as Hindu i.e. 20.56%.

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## Supreme Court Judgment on atrocities to a Bhil woman in Maharashtra

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*(The Text of the judgment is reproduced below for the readers)*

*{Continued from February 2013 issue...}*

30. We may compare India with China which is larger both in population and in land area than India. China has a population of about 1.3 billion whereas our population is roughly 1.1 billion. Also, China has more than twice our land area. However, all Chinese have Mongoloid features; they have a common written script (Mandarin Chinese) and 95% of them belong to one ethnic group, called the **Han Chinese**. Hence there is a broad (though not absolute) homogeneity in China.

31. On the other hand, as stated above, India has tremendous diversity and this is due to the large scale migrations and invasions into India over thousands of years. The various immigrants/invasers who came into India brought with them their different cultures, languages, religions, etc. which accounts for the tremendous diversity in India.

32. Since India is a country of great diversity, it is absolutely essential if we wish to keep our country united to have tolerance and equal respect for all communities and sects. It was due to the wisdom of our founding fathers that we have a Constitution which is secular in character, and which caters to the tremendous diversity in our country.

33. Thus it is the Constitution of India which is keeping us together despite all our tremendous diversity, because the Constitution gives equal respect to all communities, sects, lingual and ethnic groups, etc. in the country. The Constitution guarantees to all citizens freedom of speech (Article 19), freedom of religion (Article 25), equality (Articles 14 to 17), liberty (Article 21), etc.

34. However, giving formal equality to all groups or communities in India

would not result in genuine equality. The historically disadvantaged groups

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must be given special protection and help so that they can be uplifted from their poverty and low social status. It is for this reason that special provisions have been made in our Constitution in Articles 15(4), 15(5), 16(4), 16(4A), 46, etc. for the upliftment of these groups. Among these disadvantaged groups, the most disadvantaged and marginalized in India are the Adivasis (STs), who, as already mentioned, are the descendants of the original inhabitants of India, and are the most marginalized and living in terrible poverty with high rates of illiteracy, disease, early mortality etc.

Their plight has been described by this Court in **Samatha vs. State of Andhra Pradesh and Ors.** AIR 1997 SC 3297 (vide paragraphs 12 to 15).

Hence, it is the duty of all people who love our country to see that no harm is done to the Scheduled Tribes and that they are given all help to bring them up in their economic and social status, since they have been victimized for thousands of years by terrible oppression and atrocities. The mentality of our countrymen towards these tribals must change, and they must be given the respect they deserve as the original inhabitants of India.

35. The bravery of the Bhils was accepted by that great Indian warrior Rana Pratap, who held a high opinion of Bhils as part of his army.

36. The injustice done to the tribal people of India is a shameful chapter in our country's history. The tribals were called 'rakshas' (demons), 'asuras', and what not. They were slaughtered in large numbers,

and the survivors and their descendants were degraded, humiliated, and all kinds of atrocities inflicted on them for centuries. They were deprived of their lands, and pushed into forests and hills where they eke out a miserable existence of poverty, illiteracy, disease, etc. And now efforts are being made by some people to deprive them even of their forest and hill land where they are living, and the forest produce on which they survive.

37. The well known example of the injustice to the tribals is the story of Eklavya in the Adiparva of the Mahabharat. Eklavya wanted to learn archery, but Dronacharya refused to teach him, regarding him as low born. Eklavya then built a statue of Dronacharya and practiced archery before the statue. He would have perhaps become a better archer than Arjun, but since Arjun was Dronacharya's favourite pupil Dronacharya told Eklavya to cut off his right thumb and give it to him as 'guru dakshina' (gift to the teacher given traditionally by the student after his study is complete). In his simplicity Eklavya did what he was told.

38. This was a shameful act on the part of Dronacharya. He had not even taught Eklavya, so what right had he to demand 'guru dakshina', and that too of the right thumb of Eklavya so that the latter may not become a better archer than his favourite pupil Arjun?

39. Despite this horrible oppression on them, the tribals of India have generally (though not invariably) retained a higher level of ethics than the non-tribals in our country. They normally do not cheat, tell lies, and do other misdeeds which many non-tribals do. They are generally superior in character to the non-tribals. It is time now to undo the historical injustice to them.

40. Instances like the one with which we are concerned in this case deserve total condemnation and harsh punishment.

41. With these observations the appeal stands dismissed.

(Markandey Katju),

(Gyan Sudha Misra)

New Delhi; 5th January, 2011

## ANNOUNCEMENT

ASECA Odisha, Rairangpur is organizing its 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference scheduled to be held on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> April 2013 at ASECA Office Premises, Rairangpur, Odisha. The programme schedule is given as below:

**20.04.2013**

7AM - 9AM -Flag Hosting and Bonga Buru.  
 9AM - 1PM -Delegate Session.  
 1PM - 2PM -Lunch Break.  
 4PM -5.30 PM -Massive Rally.  
 5.30PM -Public meeting.  
 9PM Onwards -Cultural Programme

**21.04.2013**

9AM - 1PM -Delegates Session.  
 1PM - 2PM -Lunch Break.  
 2PM - 5PM -Delegate Session.  
 5.30PM Onwards-Cultural Programme .

Many dignitaries have given their kind consent to attend the conference. All are cordially invited to attend the conference for making it a grand success.

*Gopinath Majhi, General Secretary, Mob-09438059651*

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