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Editorial

Regulation is integral and essential part of human existence. Santal community is not an exception and as such it has developed rules, discipline, conduct and has been managing its affairs from time immemorial to maintain a social order. The primary unit of Santal community is a village council (mone hor) consisting of majhi (Headman), jog majhi (assistant headman), nayke (priest), kudam nayke (assistant priest), godet (public relation/messenger), paranik (assistant to headman) and in the modern times co-option of a gentleman is seen in the council. It is pertinent to mention that these posts are being filled up through unanimous decision of the villagers during the Santal New Year and as such the persons holding the posts can be called as true representative of the people. In some places, position of majhi is continued on hereditary basis. Traditionally, these people are being assigned with the responsibility of helping people whenever need arises, maintaining social order and discipline in the community. The elected people also contribute more than their ability in order to make the society flourish and prosper through peaceful co-existence and with a sense of caring and sharing. Roles, responsibility, duty, authority and remuneration should be discussed to know about them. There is no concept/provision of remuneration or earning opportunity but as per society's requirement the responsibilities are abundant and immense. It can be appreciated from this angle that people are continuing to contribute selflessly for the continuance and better future. It is because of this primary arrangement in the society for which till now the society is existing and continuing.

As per the traditional arrangement the involvement of village council is required on all occasions – birth, marriage, death, dispute settlement, religious rites and practices. The arrangement is not isolated in the sense that whenever any dispute or reaching to a conclusion on a complex issue becomes difficult, the provision of engagement of other

neighbourhood village councils is preferred and they are involved in sorting out the issue(s). The decision making is through democratic process and wherever required village councils also solicit the views of the female members of the society to arrive at a conclusion. There are other institutions to take care of the interests and concerns at the level of pargana (sub-division), district, state and the whole country. The arrangement though is there but they are not integrated through an organisational structure with identified roles, responsibilities, authorities and resources etc.

The weakness of this primary system (village council) is lack of maintaining records and registers. The decisions are not recorded as has been the practice of modern process/system. Till now barring some villages others are still following the oral practice/tradition and delivering judgement and the same is being obeyed and respected by the people. As has been narrated above, in case of grievances the same can be addressed in a larger forum and the participation is open in that larger format of the council. It can thus safely be said that once a village council delivers a judgement can be challenged by the aggrieved party. The non-availability of records has been a weak point to show the flow/stage of decision making when it is being further analysed or reviewed. The irony is that solution or decision to a problem area may differ from person to person or institution to institution. The decision of a village council cannot be equated with the decision of a modern court or institution. But the consolation is that the decisions always emerge from the collective wisdom of the people. The correctness of the verdict or decision of the modern institutions or a village council on any issue is always a subject that can be revisited and there is arrangement in both the formations. The people having experience and knowledge in the modern legal system and the santal village council find many similarities in approach.

Modern administration system in India, however, does not recognise this time tested and age old institution nor has helped in strengthening the system and institution. The modern arrangement of panchayati raj extension to scheduled areas (PESA) Act has limited the authority of the village council whereas as per society's requirement responsibility has increased manifold. Panchayati Raj system talks of welfare of a group of people and village council is there to safeguard the long term interest of a particular community. The modern time arrangements like inter caste marriage, religious uniformity etc. which are perceived to promote unity and integrity among the

people and in the country appear alien to the arrangement so far in vogue in the traditional society. The tolerance which is expected of in a modern world is noticed in some areas whereas in some other areas it becomes the bone of contention based on the level of development of the concerned people.

It is worthwhile to mention that service of village council to the Santal community is commendable and should continue. Wherever some corrections are required should be made in the system. This is a pure, primary, grassroots level democratic system which is in need of support, aid and advice for its continuance as a viable and organised institution.

THE LOGIC OF OL CHIKI

A Tribute to Guru Gomke Pandit Raghunath Murmu

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{Continued from July 2014 issue}

So changing script is not such an easy matter. Today no one will change his script to another script, no matter how wonderful the other script is. They can do only at the cost of losing a lot of their cultural heritage and identity.

But what about scriptless societies, that is Adivasi languages? This is where dominant scripts like a Roman, Nagari, Bengali etc. are trying to impose themselves with apparently rational arguments. As a general rule, most societies today when adopting a new script, when they had no previous script will go for an alphabetic script. In India it means Roman. Or they will invent their own script like OL Chiki, which is also alphabetic. What are the reasons for it? Can one script be better than others? Are syllaberies (Indian scripts like Nagari, Bengali etc.) are superior to alphabetic (Roman, Arabic, Cyrillic) or Ideogrammatic scripts (Chinese, Mongolian, Korean etc.) ?

The most lucid work on this subject that I have read is by Anthony Burgess in his "Language Made Plain". What is a script? It is a tool that converts language from a temporal (time) mode to spatial (space) mode. When we speak, our thoughts are expressed one after another in time. When we write it is converted to space. We can go backward and forward, where as speech is, as the wise old saying is, 'like an arrow, once released, it does not come back.' So think before you open your mouth!

There are three kinds of scripts in the world - ideogrammatic, alphabetic and syllaberies. All evolved independently and in different regions.

Pictograms in Egypt and in their more evolved form ideograms in China and Korea. Alphabets in West Asia (Arabic) and syllaberies in India. Outside India there are very few syllaberies. One is in Japan which has all the three systems! Cherokee (an American Indian group) syllabery is supposed to have been invented in the early nineteenth century by Sequoyah. Traveller Bird, a Cherokee, believed that the Cherokee syllabery may be an old system in a book about Sequoyah called 'Tell Them They Lie'.

Now each system has its advantages and disadvantages. The great advantage of ideogram is that it is not phonetic. So people using different languages can use the same script! That is how China remained united over the centuries. There won't be any need for translations if the whole world were to adopt it! In a limited sense the world has adopted it in the form of mathematical symbols like plus, minus, multiplied by, divided by and so on. In most cases the Roman numbers 1,2,3,---0 also are used universally and are ideograms!

The disadvantage is of course the large number of ideograms, nearly 4000 in Chinese that you have to learn. Modern Chinese has reduced it to 400 or so. Still they could not have typewriters and till the computers came in the seventies, all Chinese, Japanese and Korean correspondence was hand written. That is why they have such a wonderful tradition of calligraphy and why the

computer revolution quickly took place in these countries.

The advantage of syllaberies is that they are the most phonetic scripts. This allows a new reader to pronounce correctly. It is particularly useful when you are a foreigner to that language. The disadvantage is that it is also a difficult script due to its half letters and vowel signs (matras). Secondly being so true phonetically can also cause problems due to problem of standardisation of spelling. The same word is pronounced differently in different regions of the same language and therefore it is spelt differently. Indians tend to think that the syllaberies they use are perfectly phonetic. This is obviously untrue. For instance there are only ten useful vowel sounds for Hindi whereas Hindi, in all its various regions has at least twenty vowel sounds. This tends to limit the language to those who learn mainly through books. Indian dictionaries unlike, the English, do not use special signs for guide to accent and pronunciation, presumably thinking that the script is perfectly phonetic.

Alphabetic scripts historically did not have vowels to begin with. Vowels got added on and thus they are not fully phonetic and have some glaring irrationalities. Indians never tire of making fun of English spellings and quoting George Bernard Shaw who left a large sum of money for spelling reform in English.

The great advantage of alphabets, particularly that of Roman is its simplicity. There are only 26 letters, three are no half letters, vowel signs and so on. The greatest point is their adaptability to machines. Even with computers, it is not easy to use Indian syllaberies or ideograms on computers. These are the main reasons

why so many "script less" societies prefer Roman/alphabetic scripts.

So where does this leave us? Anthony Burgess said that most of the irrationality of English spelling is due to the fact that Roman script is suitable mainly for Italian language! This is the clue. Scripts are like dresses. While we can wear the dress of any culture, we are comfortable only in our own dress. There are no superior or inferior dresses. Each is suitable for that culture or for that work. Similarly any language can be written in any script, but it is best expressed in its own script. That is the logic of OL Chiki.

Development of various scripts for different languages followed the requirement of the particular language. Furthermore, a script is also a part of the effort to define and assert one's identity. 'A language is mother, a script is father', says a tribal leader. Oriya language used a script similar to Bengali till the 19th century. But in the early 19th century, as an assertion of Oriya identity, they developed fonts, which made the script look like south Indian scripts. During the time of Vijayanagaram kingdom Kannada and Telugu used identical scripts but later as their separate identities got strengthened their scripts too acquired differences.

It is of course for the Santhalis to choose their script. Different Santhali living in different parts of India may use those dominant scripts. But in Jharkhand OL Chiki may find its place of pride. That will be the best tribute that the newly confident Jharkhandi can pay to Guru Gomke Pandit Raghunath Murmu.

Folklore of the Santal Parganas

Translated by **Cecil Henry Bompas** of the Indian Civil Service, 1909

{ASECA CHANNEL intends to publish the stories in order to familiarize the stories among the general public for their better appreciation}

{Continued from July 2014 issue}

XIV. The Prince Who Acquired Wisdom.

There was once a Raja who had an only son and the Raja was always urging his son to learn to read and write in order that when he came to his kingdom he might manage well and be able to decide disputes that were brought to him for judgment; but the boy paid no heed to his father's advice and continued to neglect his lessons. At last when he was grown up, the

Prince saw that his father was right and he resolved to go away to foreign countries to acquire wisdom; so he set off without telling anyone but his wife, and he took with him a purse of money and three pieces of gold. After travelling a long time, he one day saw a man ploughing in a field and he went and got some tobacco from him and asked him whether there were any wise men living in that neighbourhood. "What do you want with wise men?", asked the ploughman. The Prince said that he was

travelling to get wisdom. The ploughman said that he would give him instruction if he were paid. Then the Prince promised to give him one gold piece for each piece of wisdom. The ploughman agreed and said. "Listen attentively! My first maxim is this: You are the son of a Raja; whenever you go to visit a friend or one of your subjects and they offer you a bedstead, or stool, or mat to sit on, do not sit down at once but move the stool or mat a little to one side; this is one maxim: give me my gold coin." So the Prince paid him. Then the ploughman said. "The second maxim is this: You are the son of a Raja; whenever you go to bathe, do not bathe at the common bathing place, but at a place by yourself; give me my coin," and the Prince did so. Then he continued, "My third maxim is this: You are the son of a Raja; when men come to you for advice or to have a dispute decided, listen to what the majority of those present say and do not follow your own fancy, now pay me;" and the Prince gave him his last gold coin, and said that he had no more. "Well," said the ploughman, "your lesson is finished but still I will give you one more piece of advice free and it is this: You are the son of a Raja; Restrain your anger, if anything you see or hear makes you angry, still do not at once take action; hear the explanation and weigh it well, then if you find cause you can give rein to your anger and if not, let the offender off."

After this the prince set his face homewards as he had spent all his money; and he began to repent of having spent his gold pieces on advice that seemed worthless. However on his way he turned into a bazar to buy some food and the shopkeepers on all sides called out "Buy, buy," so he went to a shop and

the shopkeeper invited him to sit on a rug; he was just about to do so when he remembered the maxim of his instructor and pulled the rug to one side; and when he did so he saw that it had been spread over the mouth of a well and that if he had sat on it he would have been killed¹; so he began to believe in the wisdom of his teacher. Then he went on his way and on the road he turned aside to a tank to bathe, and remembering the maxim of his teacher he did not bathe at the common place but went to a place apart; then having eaten his lunch he continued his journey, but he had not gone far when he found that he had left his purse behind, so he turned back and found it lying at the place where he had put down his things when he bathed; thereupon he applauded the wisdom of his teacher, for if he had bathed at the common bathing place someone would have seen the purse and have taken it away. When evening came on he turned into a village and asked the headman to let him sleep in his verandah, and there was already one other traveller sleeping there and in the morning it was found that the traveller had died in his sleep. Then the headman consulted the villagers and they decided that there was nothing to be done but to throw away the body, and that as the Prince was also a traveller he should do it. At first he refused to touch the corpse as he was the son of a Raja, but the villagers insisted and then he bethought himself of the maxim that he should not act contrary to the general opinion; so he yielded and dragged away the body, and threw it into a ravine.

{To be continued....}

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