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Editorial

Going by the thread of the discussions in various internet groups as well as initiatives from many social other groups in search of a name for or the nomenclature of the religion of Santals, it seems the responses or deliberations are from the general knowledge or based on one's perception about the religion of Santals.

It is a matter of great concern and requirement to have single nomenclature for the religion of Santals. But it is not so. The following figures and analysis show that till now Santals are in a dilemma or they have not yet concluded about the name of their religion. The codification and application of the same to all Santals is a distant dream going by the state of affairs.

As per the 1991 Census, religion of Santals in all India level was given as under:

Sl. No.	Religion	Total	%
1	Hindu	3920640	79
2	Sarna	540605	11
3	Sari Dharam	343932	7
4	Christian	126986	3
	Total	4932163	

The above figure is followed by Muslim (4101), Buddhist (404), Sikh (295), Jain (82) and others in small numbers. It is pertinent to mention here that Sari Dharam has been

indicated mainly in West Bengal. It shows that Santals have been influenced by various religious, other institutions and people have accordingly indicated their faiths during the census operation.

On a sample basis, let us discuss the religion of Santals of Mayurbhanj District in Odisha as per the Census 2011. Religion of 3,51,714 Nos. is shown under "Other" category. For a moment let us consider this figure as "Sarna" and Santals have indicated their religion as "Sarna" which has been shown under the "Other" category. But the population of Santals in Mayurbhanj District as per 2011 Census works out to about 6,40,618 numbers. From this one aspect becomes clear that Santals in Mayurbhanj District are not indicating their religion as "Sarna" as "Other" category is about 55% of the total Santal population. It may, therefore, be presumed that "Sarna" has been indicated by 50% population provided "Other" is considered as "Sarna".

From time to time this aspect is being raised at various places, platforms. Religion of Santals needs broad based discussions and along with it there are other issues to be discussed too for understanding the issue in a better way. What is emotionally being talked about is otherwise and not totally true. This point needs to be understood, realized and if possible to be deliberated at length.

It is important to accept that Santals in the present day do not have a "Guru" or "Institutions" to guide them permanently and

regularly. Santal people have not realized the requirement of having Institutions at various levels and still social administration unit is a “village” or a “tola”. People based on urban areas and rural areas are divided in terms of education, earning capacity as well as thought process. We come across so many organizations who are propagating and protecting the interests of Santals. But actually, inter organization cohesiveness is missing. Though everyone aims at doing something for the society and with similar agenda, a macro level approach has been missing throughout. The alignment of people has been seen in case of political formation. Political approach in social emancipation becomes contradictory as basic objective of any political outfit is not social transformation or emancipation. So automatically, people are divided on political lines, whenever some process of consolidation is thought of. As a result social interests become secondary.

One can see there is hardly any representative from the villages or “Monehors” in the modern social organizations being created by urban as well as rural based educated mass. This gap needs to be addressed. Owing to this gap, it is not being possible to standardize social systems, thereby, social systems differ from village to village and aspiration to standardize religion remains to be achieved. The representatives of the village traditional institutions have also not thought of forming a formidable group as per the aspiration, need and expectation of the people.

There is not a single marriage function which has been completed without any disturbance. Due to lack of proper guardianship, though progress is gradually being achieved socially, educationally and economically, social behavior has not changed much matching with progress and prosperity. Due to lack of proper authority, duty and responsibility attached to some positions, management of a marriage or other social

events in a proper way becomes difficult. Going by the present trend in the society that people who want to promote, protect and preserve the Santal cultural value systems are facing lots of problems. There is no incentive, recognition or appreciation for upholding the virtues of Santal Society. When there is no incentive, the tendency in the future will be to bypass the system and as a result the marriages and other events, rituals would be told like fairy tales.

There is certainly a requirement for a way forward. But irony is that there is absence of seriousness for creating required infrastructure or coming together to form a formidable group. There is no forum which can support a continuous brainstorming or dialogue process till some concrete conclusions are arrived.

First and foremost requirement which is lacking in all the Tribal societies in general and Santal society is particular is to generously donate for the development of the respective society. Small donations can bring magical results and one can draw inspiration from contemporary societies who are flourishing from such small or big donations and feeling of caring and sharing. Problems are plenty but initiatives are not forthcoming. When a society is there, there will naturally be problems and one has to face them. Information dissemination or gathering through internet should lead to formation of a group of discerning people.

One must support the process where initiatives are to be started from the grassroots level. There is an urgent need to support Traditional Headmen to create and run institution(s) for the welfare of the society. They should be adequately supported to take up various problem areas of the society in a continuous basis. Let the association of Village Headmen take the lead. Unless and until, these village headmen are being empowered, bargaining capacity and identity as a society cannot be exercised or developed.

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 February 2016 issue}

XXVII. The Flycatcher's Egg.

One day a herd boy found a flycatcher's egg and he brought it home and asked his mother to cook it for him, but she put it on a shelf and forgot about it. His mother was a poor woman and had to go out all day to work; so before she started she used always to cook her son's dinner and leave it covered up all ready for him. No sooner had she gone to work than a *bonga* girl used to come out of the flycatcher's egg and first eat up the rice that had been left for the herd boy and then quickly put water on to boil and cook some rice with pulse; and, having eaten part of it, cover up the rest, ready for the herd boy on his return. Then she used to comb and dress her hair and go back into the egg. This happened every day and at last the boy asked his mother why she gave him rice cooked with pulse every day, as he was tired of it. His mother was much astonished and said that some one must have been changing his food, because she always cooked his rice with vegetables. At this the boy resolved to watch and see who was touching his food; so one day he climbed up on to the rafters and lay in wait. Presently out of the egg came the *bonga* girl and cooked the food and combed her hair as usual. Just as she was going back into the egg, the herd boy sprang down and caught her. "Fi, Fi," cried she "is it a *Dome* or a *Hadi* who is clasping me?" "No *Dome* or *Hadi*," said he: "we are husband and wife:" so he took her to wife and they lived happily together.

He strictly forbade her ever to go outside the house and he said incantations over some mustard seed and gave it to her, and told her that, if any beggars came, she was to give them alms through the window and, if they refused to take them in that way, then she was to throw the mustard seed at them; but on no account to go outside the house. One day when her husband was away a *jugi* came begging; the *bonga* girl offered

him alms through the window but the *jugi* flatly refused to take them; he insisted on her coming out of the house and giving them. Then she threw the mustard seed at him and he turned into ashes. By superior magic however he at once recovered his own form and again insisted on her coming outside to give him alms, so she went out to him and he saw how beautiful she was.

The *jugi* went away and one day he went to beg at the Raja's palace and, talking to the Raja, he told him how he had seen a girl of more than human beauty. The Raja resolved to possess her, and one day he took the form of a fly and flew to the house and saw the beautiful *bonga*; a second day he came back in the same form and suddenly caught her up and flew off with her on his back to his palace, and in spite of her weeping shut her up in a beautifully furnished room on the roof of his palace. There she had to stay and her food was brought to her there. When the herd boy came home and found that his beautiful wife was missing he filled the air with lamentations and leaving his home he put on the garb of a *jugi* and went about begging. One day he came to the palace of the Raja who had carried off his wife; as he begged he heard his wife's voice, so he sang:—

"Give me, oh give me, my flycatcher wife,
Give me my many-coloured wife."

Then they offered him a jar full of money to pacify him, but he threw the rupees away one by one and continued his lament. Then the Raja called for his two dogs Rauta and Paika and set them on the man and they tore him to death. At this his wife wept grievously and begged them to let her out since there was no one to carry her away, now that her husband was dead.

They prepared to take away the corpse to burn it and the *bonga* girl asked to be allowed to go with them as she had never seen the funeral rites of a jugi: so they let her go.

Before starting she tied a little salt in the corner of her cloth. When she reached the burning place, she sang to the two dogs:-

“Build the pyre, Rauta and Paika!
Alas! The dogs have bitten the jugi,
Alas! They have chased and killed the jugi.”

So the two dogs built the pyre and lay the body on it. Then she ordered them to split more wood, singing:-

“Cut the wood, Rauta and Paika!
Alas! The dogs have bitten the Jugi,
Alas! They have chased and killed the jugi.”

So they split more wood and then she told them to apply the fire, singing:-

“Light the fire, Rauta and Paika!
Alas! The dogs have bitten the Jugi,
Alas! They have chased and killed the jugi.”

When the pyre was in full blaze she suddenly said to the dogs “Look up, Rauta and Paika, see the stars are shining in the day time.” When the two dogs looked up, she threw the salt into their eyes, and, while they were blinded, she sprang into the flames and died as a *sati* on the body of her husband.

To be continued....

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