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Editorial

Social existence leads to the formation of a society for any social group. The groupings in the human beings are commonly seen on the basis of many similar factors. The social continuation and progression is determined by its very nature and people tend to grow on the basis of some standard codes and practices. Some groups have their own systems and procedures in written form whereas some others depend on their traditional ways and means through oral system. In the case of oral system, the traits and practices are transferred from one generation to another through a process of recitation, recollection and remembrance. The established or modern system depends on standard texts, defined experts and dedicated institutions. These three pillars are essential to help a social group to remain united and maintain uniformity. The essence and extent of the value system of the social groups, however, are not strictly guided by these arrangements. With the presence and extensive use of texts, experts and institutions also, it sometimes fails to bring about a decisive positive change in the society. However, these help in forming a particular kind of social order and discipline in that society through the guiding principles.

The marginalized or less developed societies, however, do not have some solid institutional arrangement with regard to their social formation and social administration. Whatever little they have learnt or remembered from their forefathers comes to their rescue and they manage their life and society with that kind of knowledge and expertise. Some people term the social existence as rudimentary whereas some term it as pristine, precise and perfect. The less

complexity is appreciated as it makes life simpler and easy to manage and maintain. The more is the application of discipline, the more it contributes towards complex situations with varied multiple dimensions.

Throughout the ages, experts in a group can be from the ascetic or household social order. The ascetic orders prefer puritanical life style with a lot of sacrifice whereas others prescribe less stringent discipline and life style, which allow people to strive for achieving salvation maintaining a family life. Many social or spiritual formations prescribe ascetic life style as the minimum requirement to lead a social group in pursuit of discipline, purity and perfection. The practice of becoming a monk or leading an abstinence life has been hailed throughout the ages and they are being termed as the true teacher to show the right and enlightened path. These groups sacrifice their life for the general welfare and larger interest of the humankind. The social groups, which are blessed with such dedicated people without any kind of self goal and self development agenda prosper hugely and highly. These people though less in numbers always contribute positively and lead the society in a right direction. Such kind of arrangement is not generally prevalent in tribal society. The general arrangement is to form a traditional group through consensus or on the basis of traditional customs. But that arrangement is becoming less powerful due to absence of institutional arrangement and necessary finances. The contribution which was expected of them gradually is being realized as insufficient.

Under this circumstance, there is an urgent need to start an initiative so that

formation of a group of dedicated volunteers within society can be materialized. It is experienced that such dedicated volunteers can only contribute positively for the welfare and wellbeing of a society.

The modalities, however, have to be developed and in this process, extensive consultation with the people who are leading ascetic life from within a particular society, should be commenced immediately. For realizing this process to take a shape, it is urgently required to identify such persona and

intimate the requirement seeking their direct and distinct involvement in the shaping of their own roots. Initial interest may not be generated immediately as one of the arguments can be that ascetic people do not form part of a particular group and they are dedicated for a universal group.

The requirement to rope in such Swamis who are born as Santal from various modern social or spiritual groups is the requirement of the day in the making of a strong and spirited Santal social order.

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 October 2016 issue}

Then the prince asked where his wife lived and having learnt the name of the village he galloped off home and at once began to question his mother about his marriage; his mother told him that they intended to have the bride brought home that year, but the prince was impatient and proposed that he should go off at once to his father-in-law's and see his wife, and try to persuade them to let her come back with him without any ceremony; his mother made no objection, so he got ready for the journey and started off on horseback. He had not gone far when he saw a field of thatching grass on fire, and in the middle, surrounded by the flames, was a huge poisonous snake, unable to escape.

As the prince rode by, the snake called out to him "Prince, you are going joyously to bring home your bride, and here am I in danger of being burned alive; will you not have pity on me and save me? If you do I will confer a boon on you." "But if I save you," objected the prince, "you will only eat me: snakes do not know what gratitude is." "I am not of that kind," answered the snake: "here I am in danger of death, I beseech you to have pity on me." These pleadings prevailed and the prince got off his horse and beat out the fire and then spread a cloth over the embers so that the snake could crawl out. When the snake was safe the prince asked for the boon that had been promised him: "No boon will you get" said

the snake: "you did a foolhardy thing in saving me, for now I am going to eat you, and you cannot escape from me."

The prince saw that there was little hope for him but he begged the snake to allow two or three judges to decide whether it was fair that he should be killed, after what he had done. The snake agreed to this provided that the judges were not human beings; he was willing to be bound by the opinions of any one else.

They set out together to look for judges and soon saw a herd of cattle resting under a banyan tree by a pool of water, so they agreed to make these their judges; then the prince explained to one of the cows and the banyan tree and the water what they were to decide, whether it was fair for the snake, whose life he had saved, now to want to kill him. The banyan tree was the first to answer: it said "You did good to the snake and your wages for doing good are evil; you saved his life and he will now kill you, this is fair, this is the justice we have learnt from human beings; you enjoy the shade of us trees and in return you lop off our branches and sit on them, and do us all manner of injury; it is right that the snake should eat you."

Then the prince turned to the cow: "He may eat you," answered the cow: "the tree is right, see how men treat cattle; you drive away our calves

from us and take our milk and you beat us and make us work hard; for all this ill treatment the snake shall eat you.”

Then the prince asked the water what it had to say: “I agree with the other two” said the water: “to return evil for good is the justice of mankind, it is by drinking water that your very lives are preserved; yet you spit into it and wash dirty things in it; shall not the snake return you evil for good?” So judgment was delivered, and the snake wanted to eat the prince; but the prince asked the tree and the cow and the water to listen while he made one prayer; he told them how he had been married when he was too young to know anything about it, and how he was going for the first time to see his wife, when this misfortune befell him; so he begged that he might be allowed to go and see his bride and then be eaten on his way back; the banyan tree asked what the snake thought about this proposal and the snake said that it would make no objection if the tree and the cow and the water would be sureties for the return of the prince within three days. So the prince promised them faithfully that he would return and they let him go.

The prince rode on to his father-in-law’s house, and when he arrived, a bed was brought out for him to sit on and he was asked where he came from. When he explained who he was, they at once brought water and washed his feet and then gave him oil and a tooth stick and took him to bathe; then they brought him curds and dried rice to eat and afterwards killed a goat and made a feast and showed him every honour.

That evening as his wife was rubbing his arms and legs, the prince remained silent and downcast and showed none of the joy of a bridegroom; and when his bride asked what was the matter, he told her that he had only come to see her for one day and that afterwards she must try and forget all about him. At first he would not tell her more, but when she urged him, he told her how he had to go and surrender himself to the snake on the next day. When she heard this she vowed that she would go with him and die with him.

The next morning came and the prince said that he must return, and his wife said that she was

going with him; so they made everything ready and set out on their way. When they came within sight of the banyan tree where the prince was to be killed, he tried to turn his wife back but though he used force she refused to leave him and said that she would first see him killed and then go home; so at last he let her accompany him.

When they reached the tree she asked to be allowed to go in front and be the first to meet the snake; to this the prince assented. They had not gone far when they saw the snake awaiting them in the path with its crest raised, and when they drew near, the prince’s bride begged the snake to eat her first, as she had nowhere to live if she survived her husband. The snake refused and bade her go home to her parents; she said that that was impossible; they had sold her and the prince had bought her, in life and in death, bones and ashes. But the snake would not listen and made for the prince to eat him. His wife however kept in front of the snake and would not let it pass; she called the banyan tree to witness that the snake should not eat her husband without first killing her; without her husband she would have no one to support her.

Then the snake promised to teach her an incantation by means of which she could support herself, so saying, the snake conferred some magic power upon and taught her an incantation; and promised her that if she took some dust in her hand and repeated the incantation and then blew on the dust, any person on whom she sprinkled the dust would at once be burnt to ashes. Then the prince’s wife asked how she should restore the people to life and the snake taught her that also, but she was not satisfied and said that she must try at once to see whether the snake was deceiving her or no; so the snake bade her experiment on a *tarop* tree which grew near. Thereupon she gathered up some dust and repeated the incantation and blew on it and suddenly threw it over the snake, which at once turned to ashes, and that was the end of the snake.

Then the prince and his wife went on their way rejoicing, and he was filled with wonder at the way in which his bride had saved him by persisting in going with him.

XLV. The Tiger's Bride.

One day a woman went to cut thatching grass and she cut such a quantity that when she tied it up, the bundle was too big for her to lift on to her head; so she stood and called for someone to help her, but no one was within hearing and no one came. She called and called and at last began to promise that she would give her daughter in marriage to any one who would help her.

After she had called out this a few times, a tiger suddenly appeared and asked what she wanted; she explained her difficulty and the tiger undertook to lift the load on to her head, if she would really give him her daughter in marriage. She promised and with the help of the tiger took up the bundle and went home.

Two or three days after, the tiger presented himself at her house and was duly married to the daughter. After the wedding the couple started for the tiger's home; all the way the unhappy bride wept and sang:—

“How far off is our home, big head?”

“You can just see the mouth of the cave” answered the tiger and in a short time they came to a large cave. Then the tiger told her to set to work and cook a feast while he went off and invited his friends to come and share it. But the bride when left alone caught a cat and killed it and hung it over the fire, so that its blood dropped slowly into the pan and made a fizzling noise, as if cooking were going on; and then she ran off to her mother's house and climbed a tree which grew near it and began to sing:—

“You married me to a ti-ti-tiger:

You threw me to a bear:

Take back the necklace you gave me

Take back the bracelet and the diamonds and the coral.”

Meanwhile the tiger returned with his friends and sat down outside the cave and told his wife to be quick with the cooking of the cakes for he heard the hissing over the fire and thought that she was cooking. At last as she did not come out, he got tired of waiting and went in to fetch her: then he saw that she had disappeared and had to go and tell his friends. They were very angry at being cheated out of a feast, and fell upon the tiger and beat him, till he ran away and was seen no more: but his bride was left to flit from tree to tree singing:—

“You married me to a ti-ti-tiger:

You threw me to a bear:

Take back the necklace you gave me

Take back the bracelet and the diamonds and the coral.”

XLVI. The Killing of the Tiger.

They say that there was a time when all living things had a common speech and animals and men could understand each other, and in those days there was a man-eating tiger which infested a jungle through which a highroad ran; it preyed on people passing along the road till no one ventured to travel, and as the country was so unsafe, the people went in a body to the Raja and told him of the ravages of the tiger and asked him to send a force of soldiers to hunt and shoot it.

So the Raja called together all his soldiers and promised to give half his kingdom to any one of them who would kill the tiger, but not one of them was brave enough to make the attempt; they said that their business was to fight men and not tigers and leopards; then the Raja extended his offer to all his subjects and the petitioners went home to consult about it; and the news was published that the Raja would give half his kingdom to the slayer of the tiger.

(To be continued...)

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