

*Journal of Adivasi and Indigenous Studies (JAIS)*

Vol. III, No.1, February 2016: 17–36

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## **A Visual Journey into Santal Village Life**

Dr. Ratan Hembram, Amitava Ghosh, Sonia Nair and Devla Murmu

E-mail: kalamandir.jsr@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The authors have primarily selected Rasunchopa village, situated at a distance of 27 kms from the steel city of Jamshedpur, in the Potka Block of East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. This village is famous as a heritage of rich Santal culture. To capture the nuances of their rural life, the authors make a double journey as if, travels into the village from Jamshedpur to conduct the field work for collection of materials through photography and interview, followed by a journey through time to capture the dialectics of Santal life. This presentation is divided into two interlinked facets of Santal life, that of a familial home and the community home, that is the village. The visual journey is complemented by suitable narratives for a closer understanding of Santal rusticity.

### **Introduction**

The authors of this piece, representing INTACH Jharkhand Chapter Research Team made several visits to Rasunchopa village of Potka block (enroute Jamshedpur–Hata–Haludbani–Tiring–Rairangpur connecting Jharkhand and Orissa) during 2013-15. The original purpose was to investigate the process of labour migration to the Steel factory at Jamshedpur. During our fieldwork, we could find that mainly Santal villages in the neighbourhood were the key labour supply hub. The labour would daily cycle several miles to reach their workplace. Till date villagers work as permanent or daily wage workers in large numbers taking the advantage of accessibility by road.

We learnt that among these villages, Rasunchopa village continues to serve as the main source of labour pool. This made the village our principal place for further investigation. We were fascinated by the sight of their distinct style of house-making. We started exploring further by interviewing the *Jogmajhi* and *Nayke Baba*. The village head or *Majhi* or *Pradhan*, Sasodhar Hansdah acted as our principal resource person who revealed the changing technology of house-making and also the rural ambience and Santal worldview. Sonia and Devla took the lead in taking interviews and photography. Few photographs and interviews were taken from other Santal villages like Pindrebera, Dudhchuan, Harda, Nunia, Butgora, Patharbhanga etc.

Later, library work was conducted at the Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi and Kalamandir, Jamshedpur. These facts are presented in the following pages beginning with a short introduction about the socio-economy of Rasunchopa village. As the forests are gradually disappearing, economics based on the forest also tend to become rarer and rarer. Hunting is no longer practised in this village and most of the adjacent areas. Motorbike and tractors are quickly replacing bullock cart, bicycles in this village. But

still the forest provides the Santals with some important articles, namely, wooden poles for building and agricultural implements, leaves for making leaf cups and plates, various types of roots and tubers used both as food as well as for medicine. It is quite understandable that in the past, when the hillocks and surrounding area was completely wooded, there was a greater dependence on the products of the forests like Mahua, Kendu, Karanj, Neem, Ashok, Shirish, Piyal (*Chaar/Chiranji*).

In economic life, though they are more or less self-sufficient in the production of their staple food the Santals in Rasunchopa had to be dependent on a number of artisan communities for essential manufactures. The potter (*Kumhar*) and Black smith (*Lohar*) used to make useful wares and tools like ploughshares, sickles, arrow-heads, hoe-blades, picks, etc., the *Dom* and *Mukhis* make the essential basketry goods, the Cobblers (*Chaamar* or *Ruidas*) make leather items, and so on. Community leaders and elderly people confirm that formerly trade of forest or agricultural produces and even clothing were conducted through barter, but today, all transactions are done through money only. Nonetheless, it has to be mentioned that very few local products are still transacted through the barter system.

Tatanagar, Mussaboni, Ghatshila centres attracted a substantial number of poor Santal labourers, who, however, mostly occupy the unskilled ranks. They have not been able to adjust their habits to wage-earning economy and are often unable to utilise the hard-earned money beneficially. A large proportion of the money is spent in liquor and the purchases of unessential fashionable goods. With large amount of currency in their hand they often did not find the right or useful way to spend their money. Non availability of schools, colleges and hospitals denied them the basic facility of a civic life had a deleterious effect. The traditional village system became vulnerable and was slowly eroded. The lure and pitfalls of urban development didn't help wither. These factors combined to ruin their socio-economic and cultural base.

The Santals in Rasunchopa now live a settled agricultural life. Moreover, being conveniently connected by road with Tatanagar, it is a major source of labor supply tribal. A section of inhabitants have moved to Jamshedpur and its adjacent areas in search of livelihood in industry and construction work. Composition of the village also took drastic changes due to the passing of State Highway through its heart. Being connected through Hata-Tiring-Rairangpur road, which is a lifeline route between Orissa and Jharkhand, the villagers were exposed to outer world faster.

### **Housing pattern: A product of age old knowledge and traditional technology**

There are indications that the pattern of houses of these people has undergone considerable changes in the last fifty years. The single-sloped houses were slowly converted into two-sloped and thatched with wild grass were given the structure of walls being made of upright bamboo or thin *Saal* logs being placed side by side at a distance of 5-7 feet. With the passage of time, they adopted the technology of plastering the walls with mud. Now-a-days along with two-sloped thatches, we also find thatches with four (*Chaar Chala*) or even eight slopes (*Att Chala*). The wild thatching grass has largely given way to paddy straw or country tile (*Khapra*), manufactured on the potter's wheel at the village by Kumhars who were offered settlement by the Manjhi. The walls are principally built of rubbles, grass, mud. The houses are kept clean by regular plastering with mud and cow-dung solution; the walls are painted with broad bands of yellow, black or white, giving a very colourful appearance. Very often, these broad bands are further decorated with graphic or line drawings. Sometimes we see animal figures and

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flowers too. The colours are made from locally available materials; the red and yellow are obtained from red and yellow ochre; the white made from soapstone and the black from burnt straw. Thus even to-day, in erecting their houses, the Santals are basically dependent on locally available materials. However, in the past 30 years concrete houses with asbestos roof or concrete roof have come up specially near or along the State Highway.

The clan makes their housing in different patterns such as

*Chatom Orah*(Umbrella type House with bamboo, hay stacks),

*Kotha Orah*(Large House),

*Bangla Orah* (Bungalow type House with window, verandah, parapet etc).

The walls are made of Murom, mud. Along with mud a mixture of hay dust or paddy flex or straw is mixed. Hay and *Saagah* (a grass found in the forest area or grass land) is used for making the roof of the house. The walls of the house are coated with mud plaster. The women draw pictures of flowers, trees, sun, moon etc. on the walls painted with natural colours. Pictorial representation of folk tales and folk songs are also imprinted on the walls. We notice a perceptible change in the sizes and patterns of Santal houses, when substantial structures gradually came up. When the foundation of such a house is laid, the villagers prepare a layout or map:

Northern part is *Jonom* (birth part)

Southern part is *Moron* (death part)

Eastern part is named *Sinachando* (referring sun)

Western part is *Needachando* (referring moon).

The length of the house is generally 7 *Haath* (approximately 10 feet), 9 *Haath* (13 ft.) or 11 *Haath* and the breadth should be 5 *Haath*, 7 *Haath* or 9 *Haath*. It is always rectangular not square. The house is divided into:

*Bonga Orah* i.e place of worship

*Gitich Orah* i.e the bedroom

*Gora Orah* i.e the cowshed

*Daka Orah* i.e the Kitchen



Mud and Cowdung mixture, Amadubi



Floor Plastring with mud, Amadubi



Cow-dung liquid on mud plaster, Amadubi





Walls painted with natural colours, designs of flower etc.  
(site: Pindrabera, Gamharia block)

### **Architecture of a Santal House**

We notice a perceptible evolution in the architecture of a Santal house from the very modest *Jhanti* (leaves, shrubs ) type to more substantial structures comprising of bamboo/timber logs, mud etc. This may be ascribed to the changes in their socio-economy and their exposure to the outside world. How and when this transformation exactly occurred is not known to the community living in Rasunchopa. Another noticeable fact is that changes were generally commensurate with the basic cultural ethos of the Santals. The old structural forms co-existed with the new type of houses. This shows the crystallisation of different socio-economic layers within the community; the former belonging to the socio-economically marginal families, while the latter to the more affluent.

### **Jhaanti: the early housing structures**

The bamboo and *Sagaah* ( a kind of shrub sticks) are used as its structural material. *Jhanti* is the original and primitive style of house making. As the pictures show the essential components were bamboos, branches of trees, hay and even mud. There would be no window or formal door/ threshold, roof, courtyard, etc. Few bamboos dug post in line would make a rectangular or square area within a 5' to 10' width and 10' to 15' Length. On top bamboo poles will be fixed tilted on one side. branches of trees and hay will be spread to make a roof. Presumably, this represents a stage of Santal life when their forest dependent economy had not consolidated to provide the material basis for a more substantial houses.

This may also be because of the clan which was in the state of migrancy and did not think of finally settling down at the particular site. Obviously, the modest structure was enough for the inmates and their cattle. They started making substantial houses only when they found that they could live in the chosen site safely and could collect the buildings' materials easily from the adjacent forest accounting for enough food.

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*Jhanti* : Dudhchuwa, Dhalbhumghar Block



*Jhanti* with hay roof Janumdih, Potka Block

### **KUMBA: towards more stable housing**

It is assumed by the community leaders that they started building mud walls sometimes between the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. If Jhanti style housing were symbolic of forest dependent nomadic lifestyle of the Santals during that period depending more on foraging and hunting, the shift to mud houses occurred when they had moved decisively towards settled agrarian life. Interestingly during these years, forests in the Singhbhum region were increasingly brought under state control since the framing of the Forest Act in 1865 that curbed people's unhindered access to forests. Shrubs and wood for construction was subsequently not abundantly available also due to the opening up of mining and industrialization.

*Kumba* happened to be the next structural type that the Santals developed. This was constructed with better and stronger building materials like mud, grass mixed with murom (gravel) and Saal logs or bamboo poles which were used as column and beam. One side of the structure was kept higher to make a sloping single roofed. *Kumba* had the better strength to wither the nature's wrath. This change was coeval with the community turning towards less nomadic and more settled and community-managed village life. Incidentally, it was readily available from the vicinity of the villages and began to be used for building houses.

### **Visual representation of the change: Jhanti to Kumba**

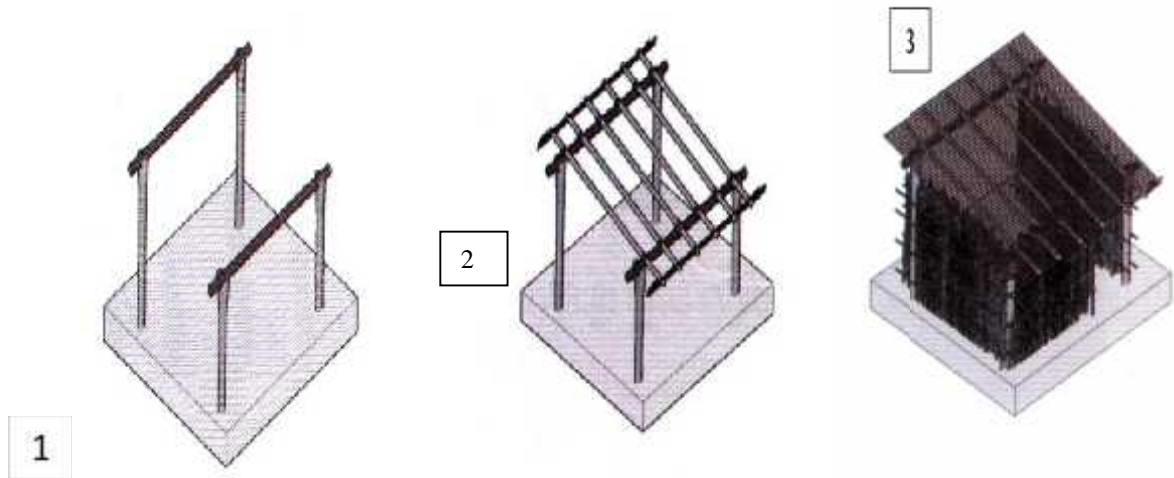


Dhalbhumghar  
*Jhanti* style still prevailing among poorer Santals



Bahragora  
*Jhanti* has been transformed into *Kumba*

### Structural design of Kumba



Source: Gauri Bharat, 'Transformation of Santal Houses', *BAHA Magazine*, December 2014 Issue

### One side or both side slanting roof with tiles or Tiles or hay stack



Primitive Tribe house

Primitive Tribe House, Butgora

Jhanti Orah, Dumaria

Two side slanting Roofed House, Dumuria



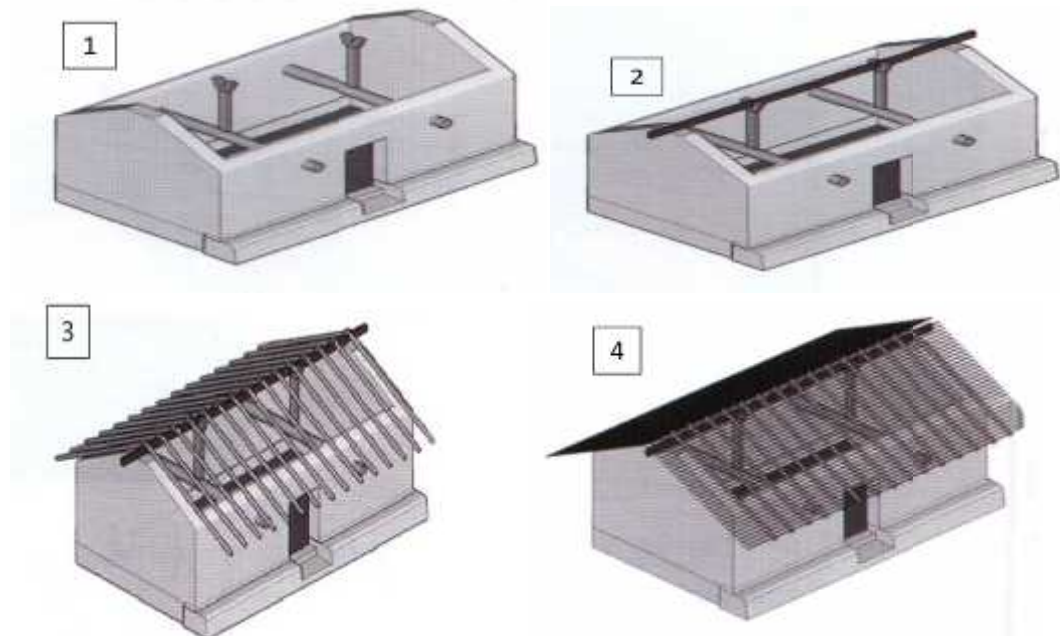
Clean and smooth walls with organic colour on it are symbolic of a Santal house ( Buruj Khunti) in Dumuria

### Buruj-khunti Orah

*Buruj-khunti Orah* is the sum of two words Khunti meaning a post or a piece of wood and 'Buruj' i.e. a wall all around or a tower. Therefore, the type of house that has a high central post to support the roof is called by the specific name. The truss is made by one or more beams (orah) placed across two poles along both side walls. Central post/s

(Buruj Khunti) is/are placed at perpendicular on both beams. A long timber log (*pidh* or ridge beam) is placed on its top. This completes the truss to support the roof.

The ridge beam is the combination of two beams of given size. Thus, the length of roof and room can be increased. Use of Buruj is the result of contact with the Turks who had invaded Santal territory in the past. This is reflected in their folklore. In their famous story of Dasai dance they have reference of ‘Turk’ king whose army kidnapped two strong Santal women named Kajol and Ayon.



Source: Gauri Bharat, ‘Transformation of Santal Houses’, *BAHA Magazine*, December 2014 Issue



Buruj-Khunti housing with Hay roof



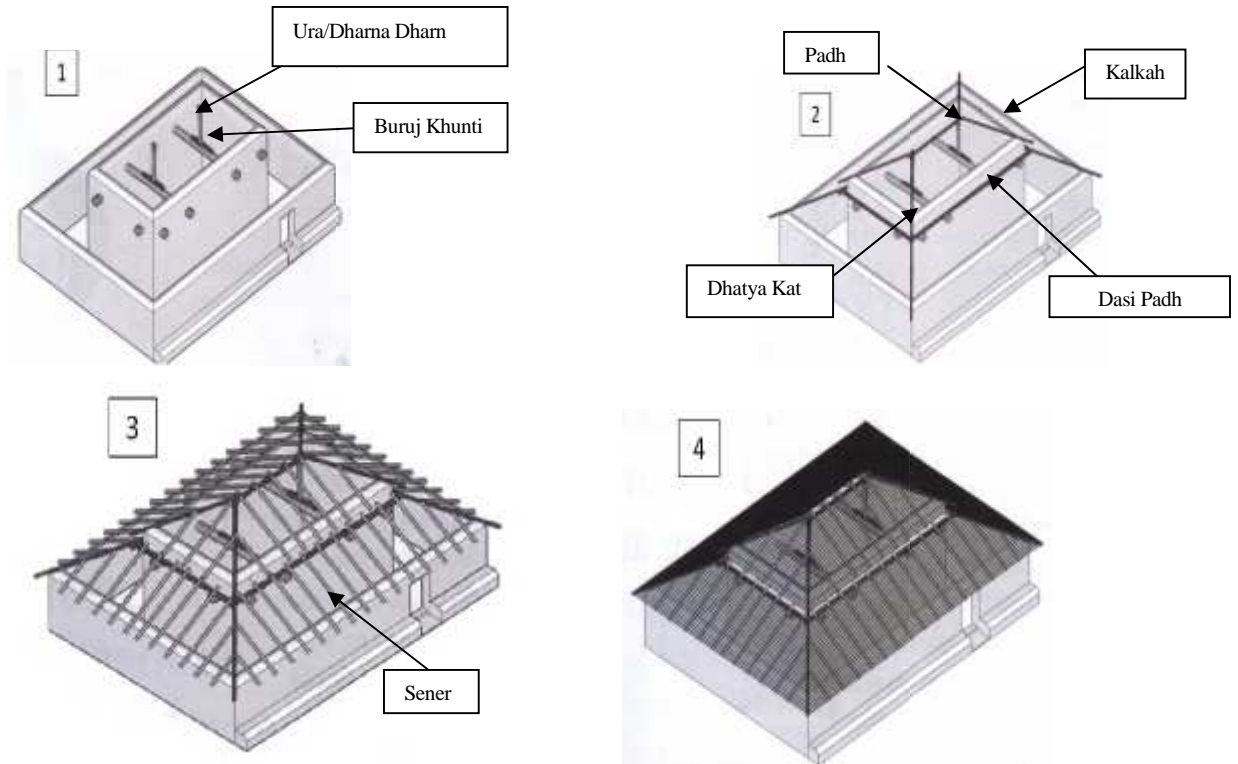
Buruj-Khunti housing with Tiles roof

### **ATH-CHALA (the House with eight sloping roofs) - Structural Design**

With the inception and spread of *Buruj Khunti Orah* among affluent Santal families, some modified pattern of structures became popular. These are the *Buruj Khunti Orah* having eight slanting roofs known as *ath-chala*. However, the common type is the house with four slanting roofs called *chaar-chala*.

In the *ath-chala*, the *padh* (ridge beam) is supported on *Buruj Khunti* to take the central load bearing. *Buruj Khunti* is erected vertically on ‘*Ura*’/ ‘*Dharna*’ (beam/connector of two- side walls). The *Padh* (ridge beam) is connected with *Kalkah* (a type of beam that creates the slope). The truss is bound at middle level by frames named *Dhatya kat* and *Dasi padh* to hold it and the roof. *Seners* are the beats or

thin frames coming down to connect *Dasi padh* and *Dhatya kat* and to hold hay stack or *Khapra*.



Source: Gauri Bharat, 'Transformation of Santal Houses', *BAHA Magazine*, December 2014 Issue



Roofs of Aat Chaala house, Patharbhanga, Potka Block



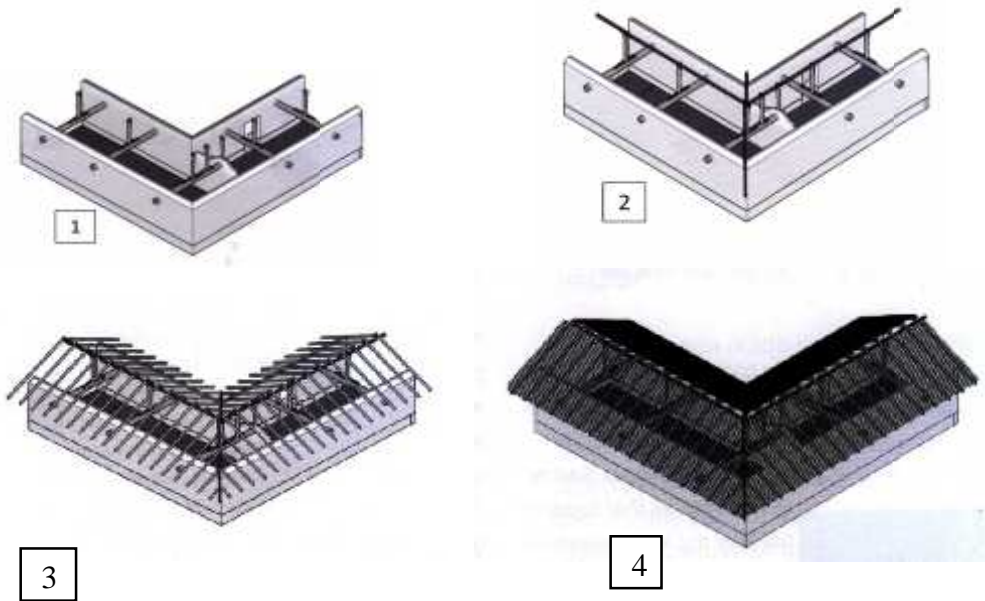
Roofs of Chha Chaala house, Dumuria Block

### ***Raacha Orah/ Gitich Orah* (Courtyard house/ Bed Rooms)**

*Gitich Orah* means Bed Room, *Daka Orah* means kitchen, *Raacha Orah* means Courtyard houses. In these structures, two *Buruji Khunti* structures are built perpendicular to each other on a horizontal plane in the inside courtyard. Inside the truss, beside *Buruji khuntis* on both wings, one of which is erected on a beam connecting the corners to support two perpendicular beams.



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Source: Gauri Bharat, 'Transformation of Santal Houses', *BAHA Magazine*, December 2014 Issue



Harda: Dumariya Block  
Hay roofed Courtyard House



Hesra: Dumariya Block:  
courtyard House with Tiled Roof



Nuniya: Dumariya block  
Tile and Hay Construction

### A Santal village is often an Architect's delight



In a Manjhi Orah (Headman's House) at Kaliyam kocha, Block-Dumuria, East Singhbhum  
Raacha Orah (Courtyard House)

### Housing style of the Santals is unique

The lifestyle of the santals corresponds to their housing architecture, system, colour-sense and planning. Space management, drainage, water passage are also taken care of.



Ghagda, Dumuria Block: Agricultural practices



Pindraber, Gamharia Block: Grafic Art on walls

### Staying in a Santal village is heavenly experience

A Santal house is often a piece of art. Soothing earthly colours, organic colour bands, graphic designs are put in best possible elegant way. They call it *Bhitti Chitra* (Mural). Lines, colours and motifs bear unique stamp of Santal culture.



Dumuria Block, East Singhbhum District: Grafic Art on walls



Pindraber, Gamharia Block, Seraikela-Kharsawan District: Grafic Art on walls

## Village organization among the Santals

*Oh My Land!*  
*This will be our Land!*

Migration coupled with the formation of new settlements is an integral part of the history of the Santals. Mode of intended migration and settlement at a new place has much to do with village organization among them. In the past, a group of Santal families would migrate from their original habitat to some other place where they might find some unclaimed land that could be brought under plough. The migratory group often consisted of closely related families, other than families of other clans from the same village of origin. Before settling down at a particular piece of land, the migratory groups made careful divinations and observed various rituals. Accordingly, then they established the village along with *Jaher Sthal* (Santal worship place). Shasadhori Hansda says 'in a village, the Santal families are clustered in a particular tola/s; if minority, then away from the main village and constitute a separate social –ritual entity'. They normally inhabit in a cluster of villages, which grow with the expansion of families. Their villages are settled at the outskirts of forest (*Veer*) land or forest fringe areas flanked by hill (*Buru*) as depicted by the following pictures.



Lakhaidih, Kherbani Panchayat, Dumuria



Dhalbhumgarh Saal Forest



Narwa nadi (Yamuna)

### Establishment of A Santal Village

After the selection of a suitable site or territory, the inception of a *Santal* (A Santal is also known as *Kherwal* i.e. predecessor of *Kher* meaning birds) village used to begin with the allotment of lands among the community members i.e *Gosthi or* accompanying families. A village boundary was also defined from top of a hillock. It was followed by the selection of the headman (*Manjhi Haram* or *Manjhi*) and a priest (*Naiyke*). The establishment of *Jaher Thaan* and *Manjhi Thaan* (the sacred places where the sacrifices to specific deities are offered) used to be the next step.



Manjhi Thaan at the right corner

The important village offices like headman and the priest were selected from original group of settlers themselves after seeking popular opinion of the settlers. The office bearers were granted rent free land which passed from parietal side, though the clan was the real owner of land. The village offices, including that of priest, generally passed to the eldest son or, in his absence, to the nearest patri-kin. Shasador Hansda, elaborates that the priest may be selected by the community by identifying a possessed individual through whom the *Bonga* (*it is a santal word for God*) expressed his choice.

There was earlier a social practice of expelling or discontinuing with the inefficient officials and selecting new ones in their place. Sometimes, a village official might himself offer to relinquish the office for personal reasons. It was revealed that in the past all the village officials used to formally relinquish their offices and land at the time of *Magh/Baha* (months of February-March) festival. Their terms used to be renewed on the request of villagers. The Santal village organization generally follows the same pattern that was originally established at the time of settlement. There may be some minor alterations to suit the exigency. The duties of the village officials and their privileges are passed on orally to next generation of the clan by elders.



Practicing religion and rituals under guidance of Naiyke



Naiyke performing a ritual practice: Baha festival

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The Santals (*Hor Samaj*) are bound by a strong sense of social and cultural identity. They sit together to listen, to understand and to decide collectively. Kochar writes ‘The attributes of tribal identity viz., linguistics, cultural, social, religious practices are conceived in terms of community practices, under community authority and for a community life. Everything that is of some significance to the community derives its validation from the context of community life. Despite vigorous contact with external/urban populace since two or three centuries, the main reason, why they have been able to keep up their traditional values and norms, is their strong and almost inseparable bond with the community and its culture’.



The Gramsabha in Phuljhuri Village, Potka, East Singhbhum, Jharkhand

### **The Village Governance** *More –Hor or Village Council*

The village is governed by a hierarchy of village officials or the village council, led by the *Manjhi*. The Santal headmen are often economically and socially better off partially due to some economic advantages associated with their office. He is the final arbitrator for all disputes. Headman used to hold considerable authority in the village and the villagers were expected to obey his commands. Any individual can file his complaint to him against any individual in the village. In practice, he convenes village council meetings as and when he or community needs it. The decision is taken by the council and not by the headman alone, though he may significantly influence the opinion of the council. It is the duty of the headman to see that sanctity of the traditional rules are maintained and justice is done to community or individual. The punishment decided by the council are often executed in terms of fines (eg Handia or country made rice beer for the entire village and / or cash) imposed on family of the individual. Manjhi often receives one-fourth of total fine collected. He cannot punish anybody of his own accord, nor has he any compulsive powers vested in him. He represents a collective conscience of the community and cannot exercise any force, except through the council. If anybody fails to comply with the decision of the council, the headman reports it to the village council with his recommendation. All matters of `significance to the village and the community are brought to his notice. His participation and opinion is very much desired. The headman participates in all important village affairs, like birth, marriage, funeral rites, etc. in any family of the village. It is a practice that the headman would be attended

first on formal occasions, such as when salutations are offered in gathering, when rice-beer is served, when purification rites (such as shaving, anointing) are performed. The dates for festivals, village worships, marriages and communal hunts are finalised by the headman after consulting other persons in the village. The formal dances and the ceremonies involving the whole village are started in the house of either headman or head priest according to traditional rules.

The marriage parties have to go to headman's house first. He makes brief speeches at all formal occasions. In all matters in which other villages are involved, the headman should be regarded as the spokesman. He is the representative of the community and villagers in any negotiation in the village or related to other villagers. He is expected to protect the interests of the members of his village. In case of serious breach of conduct by a resident of another village, the headman sends or himself leads the mission to demand the justice. *Manjhi Haram* (Headman) offers sacrifices to *Bonga* (God) at the *Manjhi thaan* (a worshipping place at the courtyard of Headman) on behalf of the whole village and on behalf of himself at scheduled occasions. At the time of marriage, he should be given a rupee by the groom's party. Special share is given to him from the game hunted during collective hunting.

The duties, obligations and privileges of the headman, given above, are the traditional norms. In practice, role of headman may not meet the expectation. There are formally elected Manjhi in Santal villages who abstain from any village affair. Naturally, he does not hold any authority in the village matters. This type of Manjhi is often absent from the village meetings due to his incompatibility with new pattern of political or social leadership that has emerged to undermine his role and status. Even, villages along the highway or road from where daily wage earners go outside the village do not follow such customs anymore.

At Rasunchopa village, however, Sasodhar Hansda participates in all the affairs of the village, takes part in meetings and shows interest in the village matters. He takes the decisions, convenes the village council and conducts the general affairs of the village. He continues to represent Rasunchopa in inter-village affairs.



Meeting of Village Council : hearing of family dispute

Generally, in a Santal village only males are present in the general meeting. But in above picture presence and participation of large number of women participants in a general meeting substantiates social transformation among the Santals.

### **The Jog-Manjhi**

O'Malley and Culshaw have described the *Jog-Manjhi* as the 'guardian of morals'. Being deputy to the headman, he passes on the decisions of Village Council to villagers. His special function is, however, to preside over the marriage ceremonies. He and his wife used to perform the duty of the moral guardian of the village youth. We are told that in an ideal case 'the Young men of the village would sleep, in the house of *Jog-Manjhi* on the final day of Sohrai festival'. Likewise, 'the wife of *Jog-Manjhi* acts as a moral guardian over the young girls of the village (Culshaw, 1949:9). However, in practice we found that such a practice has been abandoned by villagers now a day. *Jog-manjhi* plays very important role at the marriage ceremonies from the beginning till the end. He directs the villager on various kinds of works in connection with marriage. He guides the marriage parties, especially the bride and bride-groom at various ceremonial rites. He is kind of secular priest for marriage and festive rites and ceremonials.

### **The Paranik**

The *Paranik* is an assistant to the headman. His functions are not precisely laid down except that in the absence of the headman, he may be called upon to perform the duties of headman. In most of the villages, he does not hold any significant position even if the *Manjhi* is a defunct member. In some places, there may be an assistant to *Paranik* called *Jog-Paranik* Campbell reported that *Jog-Paraniks'* duty was to assist *Jog-Manjhi*.

### **The Goret**

The *Goret* is the messenger of the headman. He informs the community regarding headman's instruction or any important event in the village such as death, birth, etc. He also informs the village officials when any issue arises. He collects funds in cash or kind for specific occasions. *Goret* always accompanies the *Nayke* at the time of sacrifices at *Jaher than* and carries with him the chickens for sacrifice and the rice for preparing sacrificial meal.

The role of *Goret* and *Jog Manjhi* at Rasunchopa is played by one individual. As the village is spread over a large area and the settlements are quite far away from each other, the village is divided into four *tolas*. Two *Jog Manjhis* are allotted to look after four *tolas*. They are changed after the term of one year. The selection of the *Jog Manjhi* is done on rotational-basis in the month of *Magh* (Mid February), when *Magh Bonga* is worshipped or *Baha* is performed.

### **The Nayke**

The *Nayke* is the village priest, who offers sacrifices to the *Bongas* at *Jaher than* on behalf of the whole village. He is the spiritual guide. He performs most of the rites and rituals and offers worship to *Bongas*. He is in touch with the most important deities of the Santal community. As such, he observes necessary taboos connected with the duties he performs. He offers sacrifices and eats the sacrificial meal prepared with the head of chicken or goats sacrificed to specific deities on scheduled occasions. The *Nayke* and his wife enjoys a sacred status in community.

The Nayke is chosen by the deities themselves through a possessed individual. The eldest son of the Nayke generally inherits the position although it is possible that he may be replaced by another individual chosen by the deities through possessed individual.

In Rasunchopa and adjacent Santal villages, the Nayke is accorded great honour at the time of Baha festival. He is taken in dancing procession, his feet are washed and 'water of luck' is distributed by him in every house. A number of individuals are possessed by the different deities of the Jaher grove and they dance around the Nayke who is taken in a procession.

### **Kudam Nayke**

In Santal villages, Nayke's assistant used to be called *Kudam Nayke* who used to perform special sacrifices to the *Sima- Bonga*, (spirits of the village boundary), with his own blood. He also sacrifices a fowl to *Pargana Bonga* (Pargana means cluster of villages. Pargana Bonga is accordingly the God of entire territory). Now days this tradition is not in vogue.

### **Dihri**

There used to be yet another priest called *Dihri or Deuri* selected specially at the time of annual hunt for offering sacrifices to the *bongas* of the forest for the safety and success of the hunting party. Selection and authority of *Dihri* is nowadays totally obsolete in *Santal* villages.

### **Ojha**

*Ojha* is the naturopath-cum-magician, who is believed to connect all gurus and bongas to dispel the bad spirit to get rid of disease, death or distress of community. He is supposed to suggest /administer courses of magical and medicinal treatments for certain ailments and maladies. General perception is that an Ojha performs magical rites and is supposed to have knowledge about Bonga or spirit's wish / approval / disapproval. He does chanting of *mantar* and *jharni* (warding off evil spirit). His services may be called in by any individual, a family or the whole village. He may be called in to perform magical rites to protect the whole village from a general disease or disaster (*disom duk*). Ojha is paid for the services, by the respective person and group either in kind/ cash or both. With advancement in scientific knowledge and resources available, power of Ojha has been undermined within the community.

### **Functioning of the Village Council**

The village council represents the formal or structured scheme for maintenance of law and order in village/community. As there is no religious sanction for moral behaviour among the Santals, the personal and social virtues are perpetuated and enforced among them by secular organization. In this respect, informal village organization is as important as the formal one. Informal village organization is implicit in the day-to-day interpersonal behaviour of the community through which is rich in oral history and oral strictures passed on by seniors in the village. This is beyond the formal structure of Village Council and codified rules. The significance of community life for an individual Santal lies more in the informal pattern of relationship in the village rather than the formal pattern. The latter comes into picture at crisis situations only.



Any family dispute is referred to the family head, who normally explains reasons and has the right to decide acts, punishment, dos and don'ts in the family. The family head is questionable for the conduct of any member in his house.

The incumbents of the formal village offices, namely, *Manjhi*, *Jog-manjhi*, *Paranik*, *Nayke*, *Kudam Nayke* constitute the inner circle of the village council called *More-Hor*. In practice, all the village elders (usually the head of the every family) are invited at the meetings. The punishment, which is generally a fine in cash and/or kind (rice-beer), is imposed upon the family head (not upon the person found guilty) by the Village Council. Similarly, all allocations, nominations and distributions are made house-wise irrespective of the number of households or individuals in it. A family is the smallest unit of village organization.

The headman convenes the village council on some complaint or in some cases even at his own instance. The council and the village elders meet and discuss the matter. The discussion is generally led by the influential members (wealthy and/or literate) who influence the decision making in the village council. Free discussion may take place. The inconclusive discussion may continue for some days pending the collection of evidences by *Jog-manjhi*. The persons who are subject of discussion are generally called at the meeting or are given a chance to explain their position.

Proper hearing is given to all persons. The council may depute *Jog-manjhi* and some other persons to make further enquiries in the matter and attempt reconciliation if that is possible. The fines imposed are generally complied by, though in exceptional cases some may defy and challenge the ruling of the council.

In Rasunchopa village when any fine is collected, generally on the spot or within a specified period, a part of it is distributed among the members of the village council and village elders for drinking. These days at many villages, this practice is not followed. The decisions are taken collectively by the village council and not by any particular person, not even by the headman. More vocal and assertive elders who have sufficient personal influence inside or outside the council may however carry the general opinion with them.

### **Village Leadership and the organisation of village life**

Allocation of village offices is originally made among the group of families which originally established the village. The numerical proportion of the clan members and the personality of the individuals are the two important criteria for selection as an office bearer. The succession of the office is hereditary in male line. But in many Santal villages traditional practice of selection of the Council of village officials from various clans according to their numerical majority has undergone a sea change. Often, it is observed these days that the influential individuals and influential clans have gained more representation in the council than the numerically strong clans of the original settlers.

Almost all the important events in the life cycle of an individual, such as birth, initiations, marriage, death, divorce, serious disease, festivals, serious crimes such as a adultery, murder, incest, etc., are essentially community affairs and not mere individual or family matters. Social recognition by co-operation and participation is actively sought, howsoever selectively, by every Santal on every important occasion whether it is construction of a roof of the hut or fixing the date for marriage (Kochar, 1964). It is therefore expected of village leaders to ensure that the traditional norms are observed to maintain village homogeneity.

Over the centuries, we notice a significant transformation in Santal's cultural life. This occurred with the gradual conversion of foraging and hunting community getting transformed into an agrarian community. With the advent of mining and industry, some of them adopted the vocation of mining and factory labour. The educated among them joined jobs and services. But still generally agriculture continued to be the main vocation.



The traditional occupation still prevails among a chunk of the population

### Graphics ( Daag Chitra)

























While the above visuals reproduce the Santal village life in historical and contemporary perspectives, we have the instance of *Daag Chitra* to further depict how rural life is organised. We extensively quote from K.C.Tudu for elaboration:

For the execution of the social obligations in their daily life, Santals have divided the work among themselves according to their clans. The type of work done by each clan was traditionally added as title along with their clan name. Like: the people from Hansda clan were designated for carpentry. Hence they were titled as "Hansdah Badohi". The people from Mardi clan were genius in farming and agriculture "Krishikarya", hence they were titled as "Mardi Kisand". The people from Soren clan were courageous, so they were allotted to be the soldiers, and so were titled as "Soren Sipahi". The people of Hembram clan were educationist and so they were titled as "Hembram Purudhul". The people of Tudu clan were artists and thus were named as Tudu Rasika. The Kisku clan people were good in administration and so were named as Kisku Rapaj. The group from Baskey clan were considered to be quite powerful and thus were named as Baskey Bayar. The dancers belonged to the Besra clan and thus they were titled as Baskey Nachoni. The people from Chodein clan were involved in social work and thus titled as Chodeinchayreth. The business man was from Pavriya clan and they were titled as Pavriya Beypariya. The people from Bediya clan were involved in superstitious works and thus titled as Bediya Ojha. The people from Murmu clan were involved in social work as well as the work of Priest and so were named as Murmu Thakur.

About the change, Tudu writes:

Presently the Santal tribe does not give much importance to clan title. But according to the clan title tattoos have been a major part of the lifestyle of the tribe. Thus traditionally and even today during festivals and different rituals, the cows & bulls are marked with various designs which are known as Jaati Daag or Gotra Daag or Gotra Pratik Chinha.

## A Visual Journey into Santal Village Life

1. हॉसला गोत्र के लिए <i>For Hansala Clan</i>		कापी (कुलहाड़ी), <i>Kapi (AXE)</i>		हॉसली (हॉसली) <i>Hansali (an ornament worn on the neck)</i>
2. मारदी गोत्र के लिए <i>For Mardi Clan</i>		सार (तीर), <i>Saar (ARROW)</i>		सिमकाटा (पैर) <i>Simkala (leg of cock/ben)</i>
3. सोरेन गोत्र के लिए <i>For Soren Clan</i>		इपिल (तारा), <i>Eepil (Star)</i>		तारा (Star)
4. हेम्ब्रम गोत्र के लिए <i>For Hembrom Clan</i>		पौवडा (छड़ी), (Wooden Stick)		अंकेसेरी (A bent nail or hook)
5. टुडु गोत्र के लिए <i>For Thudu Clan</i>		हापा (लकड़ी), (Wooden Stick)		हापा (छड़ी) (Wooden Stick)
6. किरकु गोत्र के लिए <i>For Kisku Clan</i>		आइगोम (हैपा),		हापा (लकड़ी) (Wooden Stick)
7. बास्के गोत्र के लिए <i>For Baskey Clan</i>		नाहेल (हल), <i>Nahel (plough)</i>		पोटोम (पौटला) (Bale)
8. चोड़े गोत्र के लिए <i>For Chorey Clan</i>		दलटेम (हँसिया), (Sickle)		छादरी (सिन्धरी) (Ladder)
9. पावरीया गोत्र के लिए <i>For Pawriya Clan</i>		ओझा (घर), (House)		घड़ा (पिंली) (POT)
10. गोंडवार गोत्र के लिए <i>For Gondwar Clan</i>		पालकी, (Palanquin)		खोंड (खोंड) (Spherical sphere shaped rice duct)
11. बेदिया गोत्र के लिए <i>For Bediya Clan</i>		हुयड,		साकाम (पत्ती) (Leaf)
12. मुमु गोत्र के लिए <i>For Mumu Clan</i>		हेरा, (Hook)		हेरा (सुन कटने का समान) (Hook)
13. बेसरा गोत्र के लिए <i>For Besra Clan</i>		चाका (चकिया), (Wheel)		खड़ी (छड़ी) (Twig)

### Method of DAAG

To quote Tudu again:

The whole community gathers together for the celebration of any festival or execution work. During the Saakraat Parv on a definite day the whole community of the village gathers at one place. The process of Daag is accomplished by Ojha or an elderly person from the community. At first the cow or bull is made to lie down on the ground. The mixture of cowdung and water is rubbed on its thighs after which the Ojha with a hot rod or Hasiya (sickle) puts a seam (Daag) on the thighs. Then a mixture of ointment for the pain relief is

applied on the thighs of the animals. In this way every cow and bull gets a seam on its body. The seam is different for different clans. The cow or bull without the seam is not allowed to participate in any social or ritual work, marriage etc. Seam as per clan and tribe is enclosed at the end of the document.

### Conclusion

The above portrayal thus depicts the story of how Santal rural life is organised. It portrays how norms had/have been formulated and transformed. This also depicts how the historical forces influenced the community to reshape rural life considerably. Visual representation of the change particularly in the house structure signifies the historic movement of the community from nature to the culture. The type of substantial houses and the most attractive murals perhaps also evidence the emergence of the house pattern as the expression of their collective identity.

### Acknowledgement

The structures depicted in the article have been taken from Gauri Bharat. 2014. *BAHA Magazine*, pp. 51–53.

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