

# Conservation of Environment through Traditional Knowledge, Beliefs and Practices of Santal Tribe in Mayurbhanj, Odisha: A Critical Analysis

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**Abstract:** The present paper tries to bring out the Santals relations with the forest and critically analyses their ceremonies, festivals, beliefs and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). The Santals are the 'major' (most populated) tribe in the State of Odisha as well as the major tribe in Mayurbhanj. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an era of global warming, technological advancement and environmental deterioration in which it discussed about the significance of traditional form of knowledge for conservation of environment. To understand the belief and practices of the Santals, the paper is critically look into the vernacular sources, folklore, statistical reports, published government records and other secondary sources.

**Keyword:** Santals, traditional knowledge, ecology, festivals, culture.

## Introduction

There are sixty two tribes in Odisha. Out of these forty five tribes are found in Mayurbhanj. Among these tribes, the Santals are a large tribal group (Karua, 2006-07, p. 592). They are located in Odisha, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Nepal and other parts of the world. In Odisha, they lived in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Balasore, Bhadrak and Dhenkanal . Originally, the Santals included the Ho, Munda, Mahali and Birhal. Earlier, they are the nomadic people, so there were differences in customs and traditions. As a result, the Ho split into Mahali and Birhal. The folk story of Santals mentioned that they first settled in the areas of Hihili, Pipili, Badli, Koanda, Chae, Champa, Satgal etc. After that, due to

shortage of places, search for food, lack of compromise, they clashed with each other and moved to different places.

## Origin

The term ‘Santal’ was given to the Santal by others. According to P.O. Boddington, the term is most probably derived from Saontar, which was used by Bengali speakers when referring to the Santal living in the area around Saont, located in today’s Midnapore district, West Bengal. The Santal refer to themselves as ‘men/humans’ (hor) or ‘sons of men’ (hor hopon) (Droesch, 2018, p. 3). Simultaneously, L. O. Skrefsvold argued that “the term Santal, is a corruption of Saontar. It was adopted by the tribe after their sojourn for several generations in Saont region of Midnapur of West Bengal. Before they went to Saont they had been termed ‘Kharwar’, the root of which ‘Khar’, is a variant of ‘hor’ or ‘man’-the term used by all the Santals” (Karua, 2006-07, p. 592).

The ancestors of the Santals are ‘Pilchuhalam’ and ‘Pilchubudi’. Their birth story is recorded in a book called ‘Hital’. The Pilchu couple had seven sons and seven daughters. They gave seven clans to seven sons such as Hansda, Murmu, Kisku, Hembram, Marndi, Soren and Tudu. Later, the addition of five additional clans to these seven classes such as Baske, Beshra, Pauria, Chane and Chapeyar has made the Santals into twelve clans. Out of these, nine tribes were allotted various departments to regulate the way of life of the society. These departments are as follows: (Besra, 2020, pp. 21-22).

1. Hansda-Purudul- worked as an advisor
2. Murmu-Thakur- to serve the deities worshipped by the society
3. Kisku-Rapaj- set as a King
4. Hembram- Kisan- worked as a Mahajana to safeguard the wealth
5. Marndi- Ischaemum rugosum
6. Soren- Soldier- used to protect society from the enemy as the archer
7. Tudu- Madalia- to involve in the process of entertainment
8. Baske-Trade- to export domestic goods and import foreign goods
9. Beshra-Bayar- used himself to entertain others

According to Census report 1931, Bengal and Sikkim, the total population of the feudatory states in Bihar and Orissa is 39,504. In Mayurbhanj, they constitute a little over 29 per cent of the population. The statistics of Santals in Mayurbhanj are given below: (Mukherjee, 1962, pp. 59-60)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
1891	91,490
1901	185,149
1911	214,164
1921	220,588
1931	258,088
1941	282,642
1961	340,327

The subsequent 1921 Census recorded an unusually low rate of increase. It was just above 3 per cent. The influenza outbreak caused this outcome. In the 1931 census, the growth rate was approximately 17 percent. The total variation in the Santal population of Mayurbhanj from 1891 to 1961 is 248,837.

### Santal Cottages

The Santals lifestyles, especially their way of building cottages is a reflexion of the “Man-Forest” relations. They used ‘Sal’ log, ‘bamboos’, cow dung, mud etc. for their cottages. According to Charulal Mukherjee, “the santals cottages were depends on their financial stability. For instance, Dalpat Marndi, a well to do Santal of Andharia in Mayurbhanj, constructed his home with a novel plan. The cottage did away with all beams and rafters as one sees in an ordinary cottage. There were no supporting posts to the walls, the triangular frame of the roof rested alone on two ‘Sal’ rafters placed on both sides near the end” (Mukherjee, 1962, p. 66).

The variations also found in term of dimension of the houses. The rich Santal people have *sat satara* sizes of houses which mean seventeen by seven. Apart from this mostly the variations are like *egara panchi* (eleven by five cubits), *bara panchi* (twelve by the five cubits) and *tera panchi* (thirteen by five cubits).

There are various types of leaves eaten by Santals. These are “sinarak” (a small tree, *Baubinia Purpurea*), “purai arak” (Beng, Pui sang, *Basella Alba*), “Kedak arak” (the Supper pot-herb, *Argyreia speciosa*, Sweet; Oriya, kendo sang), “matha arak” (a pot-herb *Antidesma Diandrum*, Tulas; Oriya, *khata*), and “munga arak” (horse-radish leaves, *Moringa pterygosperma*, Gaettn.) (Mukherjee, 1962, p. 73).

They also eat various kinds of flowers such as “mohua”, horse-radish, “kohnda baha”. The very interesting is the fact that Santals were used furniture. A palm leaf mat, called “patia” spread on the bare floor serves as the bed of the average man and

women. The financially sound people are used “parkom” (known by the Santals), and “khatia” (known by the non-Santals, Dekos) to sleep on a string-bed within a wooden frame-work. Through the use of “sabai” grass, Santals makes their rope which is known as “bachkom”. They used carrying-nets in different shapes for the different purposes such as used as bags (sikuar maran), basket and used to carry bottles.

### Ceremonies of Santal

1. **Narta-** It is a name giving ceremony of Santals. Though, the name giving tradition was celebrated between third and fifth day after birth among the Santals but the time-period of ceremony was different in the context of santals in Mayurbhanj. In Mayurbhanj, the ceremony was observed within the period of one year.

The male child of the family was named after his grand-father, while the female child was named after her grand-mother. A customary beverage of rice beer would precede dinner. The mid-wife, who typically receives a fee of eight *annas* for a female child and ten *annas* along with a *baru* (brass-plate) for a male child, will now invoke Maran Buru and the deceased ancestors of the child’s father at the village bathing *ghat*, using leaf-cup water for the ritual, before returning home.

2. **Caco-Chatiar-** The second pivotal phase in the Santal’s life is protected by cleansing rite known as Caco-Chatiar. The ritual can be conducted at any time prior to marriage and effectively serves as the male child’s formal acceptance into the community privileges of the tribe. It is vital to note that marriage is prohibited for individuals who have not undergone the process, therefore, upon death, their remains cannot be burned, nor can their bones be cast into the river, which is a crucial aspect of a Santal burial. It is observed that the father of multiple children conducts the Caco-Chatiar rite for all of them simultaneously. Initially, *jang-handia* is produced in the early morning. The locals acquire oil and turmeric. The Headman and *Paranik* consume rice beer and summon the locals. The women subsequently apply oil and turmeric to the bodies of the *Naeke* (village priest) and their aids, following a conventional hierarchy that extends from village leaders to the general populace. Next, an elderly villager, a Guru and Custodian of Santal traditions, recounts the tribal narrative of the world’s origin and the journey of the Santal fore-fathers to their current settlements. It is emphasized that all impurities of the male child have

been eradicated, and by partaking in the *handia* drinking ritual, he has been inducted into the complete rights and obligations of adulthood. The ceremony culminates with the invocation to the Monren hor, “we were as black as crow, now we are as white as paddy birds; you five men serve as our witness”.

3. **Cicatrization (Sika)**- The Santal possess marks resembling vaccination scars on their left forearms, situated midway between the wrist and the elbow. The signals observed on the external aspect of the forearm exhibit an odd quantity of marks, specifically one, three, five or nine. The event is typically conducted during the twelfth year. For Cicatrization, a rag is employed, rolled to a thickness of around one and a half inches and fashioned like a candle. An unusual number of areas of the forearm are then exposed, and the makeshift candle is positioned on the saliva, which gradually burns and injures the skin. The two guys restrain the hands of the youngster, who writhes in anguish, until the procedure is complete. Subsequently, the wound is treated with a moss known as sealom (a fresh water Alga). When inquiring of a Santal regarding the peculiar oddity of their marks, they will promptly explain that the initial mark signifies lion (life), followed by *Moron* (death), then lion again, and subsequently *Moron*, continuing in this pattern. He does not wish to confront death, and the reason is readily apparent. He acquires an odd quantity of *Sika* marks, which will guarantee his life. The Santal believes that failure to complete this ceremony will result in enormous worms like their large drums sitting on their lap and consuming them in the after-life. The *Sika* is only a male event and does not involve any specific religious rites. The women typically display *tatoos* on their palms, and occasionally on their breasts.
4. **Tattoos Marks on Women (Khoda)**- In Mayurbhanj, Santal women typically adorn themselves with several tattoo marks on their wrists, around the end of their forearms, and on their chests. Concerning the nature of these marks, there is no distinctive association for the Santals linking them to their traditional heritage, unlike the evidence found on the Kharias. The predominant design feature identified was that of the sun accompanied by various birds and flowery embroidery on the skin. This likely pertains to the Santal supreme deity, Sin Bonga (Sun God). These markings are typically administered to Santal girls between the ages of ten and eleven prior to their marriage. In few instances, tattooing after marriage is also observed. Tradition dictates that the tattooing ceremony must be conducted outside by a female member of the *Siklidar* tribe.

A professional woman is referred to as Khudri in Mayurbhanj. She employs a three pronged iron implement to penetrate the flesh and create designs, utilizing *myrobalan* juice as the dyeing agent. Ultimately, the designated area is cleansed with a turmeric paste diluted in water. The Santals believed that these are as essential to women as cicatrization is to Santal men. If a lady lacks her tattoo marks, her mother-in-law will reject her as a member of the household; and if such a woman dies before receiving these ceremonial markings, her acceptance is further denied. *Jom Raja*, the deity of death, will deem her impure and subject her to punishment in Hell. The Santals regard tattooing as a social and religious need, and its absence as an offence, a fact that is indisputable given the extensive prevalence of this ritual throughout Santal regions.

### Santal Festivals

The Santals observe various religious and semi-religious festivals. The essence of the tribal community resonates harmoniously with the occurrence of these events, as the Santals immerses himself in his ancestral communal existence to venerate tribal deities, celebrate the asset of the agricultural season, revel in a bountiful harvest and employ magical practices to repel the adversities that disrupt their collective existence.

#### *Iri Gundi Nanwani (The millet festival –August)*

In Mayurbhanj, the *Iri Gundi Nanwani* is known as ‘Muchri’. The celebration is associated with the presentation of the initial harvest of millet to the Santal tribal deities. The festivals essence involves the *Naeke* (priest), following a purificatory ablution, proceeding to a tenant’s field where the produce has matured and harvesting as much as possible. Subsequently, he proceeds to the *Jaherthan*, purifies it with cow dung, and presents the corn to all the deities of the Holy Groove. The priest subsequently returns to the hamlet and, upon reaching the shrine in the Headman’s residence, presents the new corn accompanied by a similar prayer. He retains the remaining millet for his personal use.

#### *Gamah Purnima (August)*

The Santals of Mayurbhanj are celebrated *Gamah Purnima* on the full moon of *sravana* (August), during which cows are nourished with salt, *mohua*, flowers, rice, the corrosive bhela fruit, and grass known as *mutha*, while their horns are generously anointed with oil. Subsequently, men and women do a *karam* dance around a *karam*

branch, situated at the *akhra* (dancing venue), and upon completion, submerge it in water. The ancestors are honored with offerings of rice beer. The Santals celebrate the event in conjunction with certain Hindus. Everyone dons new attire and partakes in banquets and beverages, ensuring to provide sustenance to Brahmins and Vaishnavas.

### *Janther (November)*

The celebration occurs with the harvesting of wetland rice, and in the absence of such crops, the event does not take place. The date of this public celebration is determined in Agrahayan (November-December) by the “Monren hor” (the tribal assembly), during which the village priest acquires a winnowing fan, vermilion, new earthen pots, and *mithi* (a type of spice). The Mayurbhanj festival, lasting two days, has Um Narka as its inaugural item. In the early morning, the unmarried males of the tribe restore and cleanse the little home for the *Jaher era* at the Holy Grove, following a day of fasting. In the evening, the people gather at the residence of the *Naeke* (village priest), when the elders invoke Maran Buru, Jaher eko, Monrenko, Maran Manjhi Haram, and Hudin Manjhi Haram through traditional songs. To invoke the deities, a dance is conducted at the Holy Grove; if this is unfeasible, five men, corresponding to the number of gods, massage a plantain with sun-dried rice, ensuring a response to the tribe prayer. Subsequently, they position themselves on a mat. The priest provides them with sun-dried rice, which they process using the winnowing fan. They now exhibit symptoms of frenzy. The priest inquires about their names, and in a trance, they identify the five deities. The actor-deities are summoned and interrogated to ensure an abundant paddy harvest, and to eliminate the plagues and epidemics afflicting the Santals; they respond with their hypnotic incantations, proposing solutions to the issues at hand. At the conclusion, the local priest instructs the Santals, who are impersonating the deities, to vacate the grove.

On the morning of the second day, known as Sardi, the Godet gathers rice and chicken from each household. Upon the decision to hold a dance, men and women proceed to the Jaherthan (Holy Grove), engaging in singing and dancing accompanied by cymbals and kettledrums, led by the *Naeke*, who carries items acquired the previous day along with a pot of rice beer. A bachelor youth with an earthen pitcher closely follows the priest. Consequently, they arrive at the Holy Grove and purify the area with cow dung. The priest harvests paddy from a selected field and presents it alongside the prayers already detailed in the description of the

Janther celebration in other Santal regions. Chickens are sacrificed to the five deities, and the boundary god is appeased by the priest at a distinct location with offerings of rice beer. Having completed all these tasks, the women return home. The men remain and cook the tribal feast, which they consume by the afternoon. The priest personally prepares meals near the shrine of Jaher Era. He presents the feast to the five deities of the grove and consumes the entirety himself. Simultaneously, the entire town is abuzz with music and folk songs performed by the women who have already returned. The men return to the village by dark, led by the priest, dancing and singing along the way.

### *Sohrae*

In Mayurbhanj, the *Sohrae* is commonly referred to as Bundhna or Kali Puja, celebrated concurrently with the Hindu holiday dedicated to the worship of the goddess Kali. It is a harvest festival and most popular festivals. (Priyanka Soren, 2020, p. 84). The fundamental distinction between this celebration and the Santal Parganas festival, as previously observed, is the absence of Hako katkom (the catching of fish and crabs) and jale (the day of greetings) that finishes the event. On the morning of the inaugural day known as Um or Goth *Puja*, the Chatia gathers contributions of poultry and rice from all the villagers and accumulates them in the residence of the priest. The villagers promptly gather there. All elements for the ritual, including cow dung, sun-dried rice, vermilion, *mithi* (a type of spice), and powdered rice, are arranged in a winnowing fan that the priest holds in his right hand, while he carries a pot of water in his left hand. A villager holding a pot of rice beer follows him. A villager holding a pot of rice beer follows him. A solemn procession led by the priest approaches the pasture where the cows graze. A location is designated by the priest and sanitized with cow dung and water. Subsequently, offerings are made for the welfare of the maize, livestock, and for the harmonious observance of *Sohrae*. The Headman thereafter addresses the assembly, urging the tribe to brace for a time when transgressions will be overlooked, since significant inebriation is anticipated. Upon the completion of the preliminary *Puja* at approximately 10 a.m., the gathered rice, poultry, and rice beer are presented to Maran Buru and other deities. Subsequently, the peasants cook these items collectively, while the *Naeke* (priest) prepares a distinct dish using the chicken heads. The *Naeke*, leading the communal feast, presents the food once more to the deities, such as Maran Buru, with the tribe in attendance. In the evening, the tribe's cattle are brought to the Goth, and their

horns are anointed with oil. Subsequently, they are released near the location where the tribe has dined, and the individual whose cow consumes the *sal* leaf plate utilized by the *Naeke* is deemed exceptionally fortunate and has the honor of providing a pot of *handia* for the subsequent year's festival. He is exalted as the hero of the tribe, endowed with abundant animals and harvest, and is elevated above the assembly for display. Eggs are positioned on sal leaves, but cows are not permitted to tread upon them, as observed in the Santal Parganas. The nighttime observance in Mayurbhanj closely resembles that of Gohal Puja night, featuring same melodies, albeit with the inclusion of numerous sensual compositions. However, fruits and vegetables like as gourds and sweet potatoes must be appropriated from the villagers' homes to be consumed alongside the Headman's portion of rice beer, and no moral culpability is associated with this act, unlike during the Hindu 'Nosto Chondro.' These thefts are referred to as *lagarna* in Mayurbhanj. The purpose of the ritual is rooted in the Santal belief that individuals who steal during these events will not face prosecution for crime, nor will the affected households be harmed by actual robbers again.

The second day of Mayurbhanj marks *Sardi*, during which *Gohal Puja* occurs. In the morning, an intriguing dance is performed around a *Karam* branch, which is brought by two unmarried lads and planted in the ground, purified with cow dung by the tribe's maidens. Elderly women encircle the tree with clay lanterns and offerings of sun-dried rice. This is succeeded by a joyful dance performed by the tribe's men and women, organized into distinct groups. At noon, individuals present fowls and pigs to *Kalimata*, the guardian deity of the cowshed, as well as to their ancestors; subsequently, they ritually cleanse their agricultural tools, such as ploughshares and yokes, and adorn them with powdered rice and vermilion. It is now time for the supper, during which the sacrificial animals are consumed at home; following this, by dusk, one will observe the Santals congregated at the *akhra*, participating in songs and dances around the *Karam* branch. The conclusion of the dance features a contest of strength between the youths and maidens of the tribe, as the latter resist the former's attempt to remove the branch for immersion; this struggle can be circumvented only if the severed branch is stealthily taken from the watchful gaze of the opposite sex. This tug of battle is sheer entertainment. The custom possesses no concealed significance. At midnight, the villagers conduct a nighttime procession near the cow sheds, singing songs accompanied by music, with the intent of loving and venerating the cattle.

The third day is dedicated to livestock sports. In the early morning, the tribe members gather at the Headman's residence with their drums and musical

instruments, creating *biras* (a circular stack of paddy) corresponding to the number of cattle in the Headman's shed, which they then affix to their horns. They become somewhat apprehensive and are released into the cacophony of drums, whereupon they are doused with rice beer by men and pelted with eggs by women as they surge forward. As the cattle rush chaotically, the final one is apprehended by an industrious Santal, and its feet are cleansed with some ceremony. Subsequently, a punch is prepared from the Headman's rice beer, shared among the other cattle owners, and consumed as an offering to the ancestral spirits. Encouraged by this, the tribe engages in a water carnival, during which men and women douse each other with liquids derived from sun-dried rice, all while joyfully parading along the kulhi (village lane). The afternoon observes Khuntau in the Santal Parganas, where playful cows and buffaloes are tethered to stakes and taunted with treacle cakes. Moreover, Mayurbhanj offers an additional attraction in the form of a mask dance, during which the Santals portray tigers, snakes, and elephants. The program concludes on the fourth day with a tribal dance conducted from house to house; subsequently, the paddy from the *biras* designated for livestock decoration is kept, and the rice beer brewed from it is set aside for consumption on a future occasion.

### *Mokor (Mid-January)*

The Santals of Mayurbhanj commemorate a ceremony on the final day of *Pous* (mid-January) in conjunction with the Hindu festival celebrated on that day. This ritual, known as Sakrant Puja, is conducted on a grand scale in Mayurbhanj, when flattened rice and molasses are presented to deceased ancestors. On the inaugural day known as "Banudi," individuals capture fish and crabs, believing that consuming them on this day will provide them a prolonged lifespan. In every family, savory meat cakes and sun-dried rice flour are cooked; following baths, the Santals consume them with treacle and sesame seeds, with flattened rice being an essential component. Concurrently, the consumption of rice beer continues. In the evening, individuals participate in an archery tournament aimed at a target positioned on a plantain tree. The victor is celebrated by the tribe and escorted to the Headman's residence with a grand display, where the tribe is served rice beer and fried rice. Individuals who sustain a consistent record for three successive years receive a special gift from the Headman, accompanied by tribal songs and dances. The festival's completion brings considerable joy to all households. Straw puppet monkeys are animated to move from residence to residence. Individuals solicit contributions for a tribal

supper, while the countryside resonates with joyous music and laughing, signifying a delightful occasion.

### *Magh Sim (January-February)*

The month of Magh marks the conclusion of the Santal year and is associated with specific ceremonies involving the harvesting of jungle thatching grass. Employees receive their remuneration and new contracts are established. All village authorities resign, *rayats* announce the relinquishment of lands, and are subsequently reappointed while consuming rice beer. After that, they eat *Saldoka* which is prepared by the community and drink *handia* to end of this agricultural festival (Besra, 2020, p. 33).

### *Jom Sim*

This event involves the presentation of sheep or goats as offerings to the Sun-god, Sin Bonga. No specific period is established for the observance of this sacrifice; it suffices to perform it once in a lifetime, contingent upon one's financial means. This is not a public worship event like the Flower Festival or Harvest Home, as the village deities believed to inhabit the Holy Grove is not venerated, nor do the Santals, as a tribe, participate. The worship is confined to a specific clan within groupings. Thus, when the Marndis intermarry with other clans and have offspring. The monies are, of course, contributed by the clan members. The Marndis, traditionally conduct this festival prior to the full moon of *Phalgun* (February-March) or *Baisakh* (April-May), with the specific date determined by the clan during a meeting, and a goat is castrated in preparation for the event. On the inaugural day known as Um Narka (purification), the clan members cleanse their residences, launder garments, and consume solely rice and *biri*. Subsequently, additional goats are castrated, the sacrificial site is purified, and a vessel of consecrated water is positioned there. On this day, the clan performs *pujas* for two deities, whose names remain undisclosed as a clan secret. However, our informant indicated that Brahma and Ganesh of Hinduism are the closest equivalents to these deities, who are embodied by two Santals in a trance state. They are formally inquired about their names, and upon their response, they are presented with a goat and a ram to be offered to them the following day for their consent. While articulating their contentment, they are implored to return to their usual demeanor. Prior to dawn on the second day known as Sardi, the clan congregates at the site of sacrifice to present a goat to the

Santal counterpart of Ganesh and a ram to Brahma. Two ancestors are honored with offerings of poultry, with the spotted fowl designated for maternal ancestors and the red fowl for paternal ancestors. Maran Buru, the principal presiding deity, receives a white fowl. The distinctive aspect of the sacrifice is that the ram, goat, and white fowl are dispatched with a single stroke, as practiced by Hindus, while the spotted and red fowls are methodically severed. Prayers are thereafter directed to the deities to safeguard the clan against terrestrial afflictions, with gastrointestinal disorders specifically identified as a feared illness. The Marndis are required to consume the heads of the slaughtered animals, while the remainder is allocated to the invited guests.

### *Baha, the Santal 'Sal'-Blossom Festival*

In late February, the Santals commemorate Baha, their sal-blossom season, marked by extensive tribal festivities featuring water sprinkling, distinctive songs, and dances. The celebration, as described in *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, the traditions and Institutions of the Santals, aims to commemorate the arrival of spring, marked by the blooming of their preferred *Sal*, *polas*, *mohua*, and *icak* flowers. As long as Baha persists, no Santal will extract the nectar from these blossoms or consume them, nor will their ladies adorn their hair with them. The event commences with a purifying day known as Um, during which the village's young men gather to the Jaherthan (the Holy Grove) to construct two homes. One hut is designated for the Santal deity, known as Gosane era, while the other is intended for shared use by Jaher era, the governing deity of the grove, "Monrenko" (the "Fives," referring to the five principal gods), and Maran Buru, the major presiding deity. The constructed shrines are subsequently purified with cow dung by the priest. All the young men of the village subsequently cleanse and purify themselves. Meanwhile, the *Naeke* purifies a winnowing fan, a basket, a bow and arrow, a pickaxe, a broomstick, a holy gong, and a hunting horn, anointing them with oil and *mithi*. In the evening, Godet, the orderly of the local Headman, presented him with three fowls. Three young men approach the priest's residence, nodding their heads in a trance while embodying Jaher era, Maran Buru, and Gosane era, respectively. Jaher thereafter enters the priest's cabin, adorns himself with the bracelet, places the basket over his head, and grasps the broomstick. Monrenko wields the bow and arrow, while Maran Buru, the master of the pick, and the acting deities subsequently proceed to the groove, accompanied by the young men. Jaher thereafter cleans the shrine, while

the other two oversee the process. They return from the grove at night. The priest, with mournful lamentations, retrieves the insignias worn by the deities. Everyone then sits on mats. The three acting deities are thereafter presented with a handful of rice apiece as an offering, and inquired about the auguries. This is succeeded by a universal invocation of the deities. The priest subsequently washes their feet, commencing with the Jaher period. The deities engage in mutual participation, with the Headman, the drummer, and the vocalist, all of whom are involved in the ceremony. The remaining water is subsequently splashed on everyone, accompanied by widespread jumping and shouting. The priest subsequently requests the water pot and instructs Jaher era, Maran Buru, and Monrenko to sit on the mats as they are stripped of their spiritual essence. They are thereafter provided with a dinner of rice and *handia*, accompanied by the other attendees. It is unusual that the vocalist is permitted a substantial portion of the dinner yet prohibited from returning home. The itinerary for the second day, featuring the photography of *sal* flowers, is the most visually appealing. In the early morning, the priest's spouse mills flour. The Headman's aide traverses the village collecting rice, salt, and turmeric. All proceed to the Holy Grove, singing during the journey. The priest bears a large basket filled with a chain, bracelets, broomstick, bows, arrows, and horns; and a smaller basket holding rice, oil, vermilion, flour, and a pickaxe. A bachelor youth transports a tiny holy water jug there. The actor deities from the previous day are once again invigorated. They don their usual insignia and hasten into the forests, trailed by the young men. Monrenko launches arrows at the budding *sal* flowers, Maran Buru ascends the tree to sever the branches bearing the flowers, and Jaher era collects them in his basket. Subsequently, they all return to the Holy Grove, collecting *mohua* flowers en route, where the priest greets them with a bundle of *sal*-flowers in a checkered napkin. The actor deities are subsequently enshrined in their designated huts. Fowls are sacrificed in their honor with a specific incantation, and among singing and celebrations, the priest presents the deities with bunches of *sal* and *mohua* flowers. Subsequently, following a reciprocal foot-washing ritual, headed by the Jaher era, the remaining water is sprayed upon them. Subsequently, there are exclamations and cries as the deities reveal their true forms. All thereafter return to the village, engaging in song and dance. The essence of these specific songs is an invitation for all the village boys and girls to receive a *sal*-flower from the priest and to acknowledge him in return. At night, the priest stays in the grove with his wife, who presents him with a unique dinner of spotted fowl, prepared by him. The third day, representing

the return home, is dedicated to communal feasting and celebration. Individuals proceed to the Jaherthan (grove), striking the kettledrum and sounding horns to signify the priest's return home. They all say to one another, "Let us proceed to greet the priest," and advance to the grove. A young man subsequently balances the basket of neatly arranged *sal*-flowers on his head, while the priest holds a few flowers, a winnowing fan, and a pot of water. The container of holy water is, as previously, transported by a bachelor. As the Santals approach their town, the maidens prepare the ritual water jug, wooden seats, and oil contained in a little wooden box. The maidens of the first home wash the priest's feet. They are presented with *sal*-flowers in exchange. The maidens greet the priest as he douses them with water. This occurs in every house until they get at the priest's residence, where water is thrown on the roof and a generous offering of rice beer is presented to all attendees. A large-scale water festival ensued. Water is dispersed onto everyone, akin to the Hindu festival of "Holi," with the distinction that it is uncolored. All individuals, regardless of gender, may participate in this, except those restricted by specific familial relationships. The Santal believes that his younger brother's wife and his wife's elder sister merit significant respect, hence it is deemed inappropriate to splash water on them. The celebrations culminate in songs and dances involving the entire community, with the procession of revelers commencing at the priest's residence and concluding at the Headman's house. The intriguing event in Mayurbhanj is referred to as "Salui Puja," or a '*sal* flower' feast.

### **Sakrat**

Mag sim festival is the first festival in terms of village institution while 'Sakrat' is a festival of joy and happiness. In this festival, no worship is organized by the village institution. A three-day festival 'Sakrat' is celebrated in the month of *pausha* after the main rice harvest. The first day of this three-day festival is called 'Baundy'. On the day of 'Baundy' the women are done cleaning the house. Along with smoothing the clothes, the head is cleaned with special mud. For the festival, *chuda*, *mudi*, *guda*, *pitha* are prepared. For dinner, there is definitely a variety of eating fish, snails or crabs in the menu of non-vegetarian. After the meal, according to the members of the house, a small amount of food is offered in the courtyard for 'Sinja Bonga' and it is requested that the next year 'Sakrat' gets more space in the courtyard.

The second day, all is taking bath in the early morning. At the time of bathing, *Budhi Kumbha* (Aghira) is burnt on the banks of rivers and ponds. While the women

prepare the cake, the men beat the chicken on the door and sprinkle the blood on the entrance of all the houses. After the bath, cakes, *chuda*, *handia* (rice-beer), *haplam* (ancestral) are offered in the inner house. After that, the festival begins with wearing new clothes and eating cakes, *mudi*, *chuda* etc. The chicken that is beaten at the door is cooked and prepared for the day's food. They used to buy goats and sheep for dinner. In the afternoon, *Bejhatunj* (lakhbindha) takes place. The Headman of the village gives the prize to the winner of lakhbindha.

In the third day, the 'Gali Asen' or 'Gali Enage' war started. The young men and women are going from village to village performing dances and collect rice from houses. Later, the rice was cooked and the festival of 'Sakrat' is celebrated. A 'Sakrat Pata' (three day dance festival) is held everywhere. It started on the third day known as 'Gali Asen' day and spread over the three days. The Santal of Mayurbhanj scatters bones on the occasion of 'Sakrat'.

### **Dasayan**

The Santal society has a tradition of teaching magic. Protecting the village and villagers from evil and diseases by giving medicines was prevalent in the Santal society since ancient times. It is called 'Ojha'. A person skilled in this science removes fever, pain, leprosy etc. The *Ojha* started learning through education every year from *Rohini tithi*. The completion of education is 4 months in a year. The *chelas* (disciple) come to the Guru's *akhras* every evening and chant the mantras one by one after hearing from the Guru. Every Sunday he goes to the forest to find medicinal plants and once a week he performs *puja* in the courtyard (*akhras*). This institution is broken in Dussehera. Seven days before the institution is closed, the disciples go around the village to distribute medicines and dance and beg for alms is called 'Dasayan' festival.

'Dasayana' is thus a colorful festival only for those associated with magic. It maintains the *Gurusishya* tradition and is to extent associated with *Sannyasa dharma*. The *chela* abstains from traditional music or dance. The money collected through alms is usually spent on the 'Ojha' (*Guru*) and wife of 'Ojha' as a fee. After seven consecutive years of learning from the institution, a *chela* would be promoted to *Guru* through the paid of *Gurudakshina* (Sidatang).

### **Conservation of Environment through Belief and Practices**

For the sustainable of plant, the conservation of environment is one of the ultimate mottos of human being. When the matter is related to environment, it is somehow

questioning the livelihood pattern of human being and the relationship between human and natural resources. Conservation is the sustainable use and management of natural resources including wildlife, water, air, and earth deposits. In that case, the role of tribes and their traditional form of ecological knowledge (TEK) is more important for the interest of the planet. Here, the paper deals about the role of Sanals and their lifestyle, beliefs and practices in favour of conservation.

In the above section of this paper it discussed about the rituals and festivals of Santal tribe in Mayurbhanj. Their belief and practices is based on the protection of forest. Traditional beliefs and practices are very much inter-linked and intimately related to the management of ecosystem. The tribal populations of India are conserving the environment with the help of their traditional belief and practices such as totem, taboos and maintaining sacred groves. They relate their existence to some or other animal and plant that are sacred to them. This kind of belief system restricts them from destruction of their natural resources and promotes conservation of the environmental balance. For instance, they worship Holy Grove in the name of *Jaherthan* is a response towards the protection of tree. Each grove comprises a wide range of ecological diversity. It is forbidden to cut trees from a *Jaher*, seen as the abode of the village deities. Even dead branches should not be used, and the place must be protected from any 'polluting' intrusion, such as pregnant or menstruating women. (Carrin, 2022, p. 1458). Like their festival of *Baha* is known as Sal blossom festival is one to protect the different trees in the form of worship. This festival is a safeguard to protect the *sal*, *polas*, *mohua*, and *icak* flowers. The other festivals like *Magh Sim* and *Muchri* is also known as the harvesting of jungle thatching groves and harvest of millet festivals. Their *tattoos* in the name of *Sin Bonga* (Sun god) also represent their faith on nature. So as a tribe they know the importance of natural resources and most importantly the essence of forest in a balance ecological system.

## Conclusion

The study highlighted the significance of the tribal beliefs and practices among the Santals in Mayurbhanj in terms of the conservation of environment. For them, trees are thought to have similar properties to humans, such as life and soul. So in the era of technological advancement and environmental deterioration in the name of development by the *dikus* (*non-tribal*) is a serious threat to the ecological balance. Though, we are encouraging the development model for both tribals and

non-tribals but we should promote the sustainable development which is the key elements of tribal life.

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