

BIRTH CEREMONY AND CUSTOMS AMONG THE SANTALS OF MAYURBHANJ

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ABSTRACT

The Santal tribe of India has a rich Socio-Cultural heritage. The Santal's life cycle is marked by several rites and ceremonies connected with various stage of life. These rites are mainly connected with Santal traditional reliance and practices concerning both the benevolent and malevolent spirits. The turning points in the life cycle of an individual Santal are critical occasions of birth, initiation, marriage and death. In Santal society birth is regarded as special important and crucial event. The revolving points in the life-cycle of an individual Santal are the critical occasions of birth, initiation and marriage. These stages of Santal life play an important role in the socio-cultural history

of the Santal of Mayurbhanj.

KEY WORDS: Santals, Pregnancy, Child birth, Janam chhatiar, Chacho chhatiar, Rituals, etc.

INTRODUCTION

The Santals life cycle is marked by several rites and ceremonies connected with various stage of life. These rites are mainly connected with Santal traditional reliance and practices concerning both the benevolent and malevolent spirits. The rites and ceremonies are performed to secure the active help of the benevolent spirits and the passive individual and his family at different stage in the life-cycle.¹ The turning points in the life-cycle of an individual Santal are the critical occasions of birth, initiation and marriage. In such crises men are potentially exposed to the danger involved in contingency and powerlessness inherent in the human condition² and to control these dangers and to have emotional need of restoring hope and confidence, these life crises moments are set off by various socio-religious rituals and festivals.

Shift from one stage to another e.g. from pregnancy to child birth from birth to initiation, from initiation to marriage, from marriage to funerals etc. disturb both the life of the individual and the life of the society. Danger always lies in transition. The person who passes from one stage to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others and the functions of these celebrations are to reduce the harmful effects of the disturbances.³

PREGNANCY AND CHILD BIRTH

The birth of a child is an individual joy to all because it is the greatest desire of married couple.

'Their desire for children is simple and humane one. Children are named after sept of their father, not after that of their mother. 'They are treated as the gift of Chando Bonga and are considered to be the assets for a family'. Boys are given first priority than the girls. Every couple hoped the first child should be a boy because a boy can inherit his father's lands. He is required to assist in funeral ceremony of his father and perpetuate worship of his on ancestors. 'The delight to have children is heavenly without children life seems to be dull and futile it lacks variety'. An eldest son will become the authority of family after graveyard of his father because all management he will have to change and handle. They trust that son can serve the 'Bonga Buru' of family.⁴ Girls are not accepted as the same as the boy.

When women got pregnancy her nipples go black. Belly grows big and her face body gets thin. Neck becomes like a stick. All physical construction appears due to lack of nutrition. In six month she feels the child stirring within her. During this time she is subject to strange cravings. At first she will want to eat many sour fruits. Then eat meat and fish or puffed rice and laddu- a form of sweet. She maintain menu for whole day food.⁵

A Santal Poati (Pregnant Women) ⁶ obey certain taboos and rule for attend the some social evils and unlucky incidents to save her placenta self and baby from the unsatisfied soul of the dead witch craft, ghost, spirits, etc..⁷ On the otherhand, daily inter course with her husband is not permitted.⁸ She is not allowed to go anywhere because her life is dangerous when the sun is not directly overhead, nor does she go anywhere at sunset. 'She should not sit on the narrow edge surrounding her hair loose or any portion of her clothing hanging loosely from her body'. She never jump over the straw rope use of binding bundles in which grain bin is stored⁹ and any wood or stick. The pregnant woman is not permitted to go alone to the jungle, hill, cross the river, attend to cry on death of her relative and go to the cremation. Pregnant woman does all types of easy and simple works, except some hard works. Restrictions is mandatory for care of the child and herself to avoid all evil spirits.¹⁰

The second category of precaution is that during pregnancy, she never listens and looks the thunder storm and lighting strike. She is not to make bread. Lest her child's ears should gate wrinkled. She never plant or break turmeric roots lest finger of her child should be forked or the child should get an extra finger. She must not make leaf cups, lest the child should born with a split lip nor look to an elephants, lest her child's tongues should be very long and his ears be large and floppy.¹¹ She never walks over to snake because the baby may be walk like snake and skin colour would become same. She does not break an egg during cook the food because he trust is that all men and creature have got born from an egg. So she wants to save life of all.

The pregnant's husband does not kill any animals and breaks an egg. He does not attend in funeral ceremony and cremation and also never touch a dead body.¹² He is deprived to eating the head flesh of animals. This offered is sacrifice for hunt. The women realize concerning sex of coming child if mother's appearance sickly and particularly she get thin round the neck, it indicate that she will have a male child.

When the labour pain starts expectant woman is taken in a separate room, where only female are entered. The gashi budhi (Midwives) is appointed there for issuing of a child. She is known as dah dul budhi or dhai (water pouring old woman). They are untrained but develop the knack for their assisting others. Married women are gathered to suggest and encourage to pregnant woman. Special measures are accepted when delivery proves to be difficult. An Ojha (exorcist) is called upon to divine whether a bonga is present to search out the problem with leaf and oil by experiment. He may experiment the problem with leaf and oil and search out way of easy method. If the matter of cause do not appear to be serious, he proceeds at once to the prescribed treatment, one of his methods is to take a square of bark from a plantain tree in his right hand and to prick it repeatedly with a needle held in left hand or a dagger is held upright over brass drinking vessel and water is poured down the blade of the dagger. This water is

given to the mother to drink. Another method is mother's hair should not be tie or clothes do not nut. So when the strand of hair or nut of clothes is loosed as soon as the bears of a baby take place. At that time he is to keep with the materials for lighting fire. He has to make fire for providing a dry heat massage to child's mother abdomen. As soon as baby born the woman cries what the news for husband and other in courtyard. The husband or house any person beats the brass and roof with stick for declaration of child birth happened. Other is that the child crying out loudly at the same time to drive away and looking ghost. When the other peoples heard this they asked "Dipil che Bharia" which means, Does it Carry on the shoulder (a boy) or does it carry on the head (a girl). 'In reply to the question may say it is a hunter or a water career the mid-wife cuts the umbilical cord until the placenta is fallen.

placed beneath it. This is a copper piece, but it may be a coin of higher value when the financial position of the family is sound. The coin is offered to the mid-wife. As soon as the floor is cleaned and the mother takes rest. The husband of pregnant woman is entered to that room. Then he digs the hole in left side corner of the door with a plough share. He put the cord in deep hole and covered with mud. They believe that if hole is deep the difference between the age of the present baby and its next new comer will be long and if the hole is short, the difference will be short. But if the stump of the cord is put in hole and covered too deep the baby's teeth will be slow in their growth.¹³

While a baby is born in village then this village becomes unclean for worship. So the Santal do not perform any bonga-worship until the uncleanness has been blotted out. Where a baby is born this house becomes unclean, therefore the house is wiped out, no inhabitant of village eat or drink in this house¹⁴ observe on that birth day the 'med halan day' which literally means 'open the eye'. The mother and mid-wife sit facing each other on the floor of the house; the mother then fills a leaf cup with rice-beer and gives it to the mid-wife who throws away its contents on her left side. This is repeated three times and is believed to render both the child and the mother immune from any imminent danger.

JANAM CHHATIAR

Janam Chhatiar or the cleaning ceremony is observed after birth of child. Janam means birth and Chhatiar means identity. When a new born baby need live in human society. The Santal people are offered him/her identity among their. On this day a word chhatiar is connected with the hindi word 'chhut' means polluting. This ceremony may be said to have a three-fold function. Firstly it purifies the house and village from the defilement's. Secondly, its gives a name to the child formally admitting it into its father's clan and sub-clan. Thirdly it incorporates the child in to the tribal identity.¹⁵

Normally the Janam Chhatiar ceremony is held on the third day after the birth of a girl and on the fifth day after the birth of a boy.¹⁶ The pollution cleaning day is observed. The santal are believed if the child is born while village has polluted. So no, worship is done. No sacrifice is done until Janam Chhatiar and it is mandatory. The rice beers is need for birth day ceremony but here only pure water is enough. The paternal side are invited for the occasion. On the occasion of some birth day "Um Nalka" the purify bath is done. The husband called some help at the village of headman. Then he declares entire village to join the chhatiar and given appoint to one person co-villager to doing barber's duty, both male and female have presented there. So, the mid-wife holds to baby and barber shaves child's hair carefully many hair is collected in leaf cup. The child's father pour little oil anoints and gives to the mid wife. Mid-wife rubs the child's head with oil and smearing the turmeric. Child's father gives oil and some clay to the people to take bath and wash their heads. Then men go to pond for bathe, while they went away the mid-wife binds two piece of cotton thread with hair around the arrow with which she had cut the umbilical cord, and rest thread are bound around the waist of baby. An arrow is put as standing inside the head of the baby's cot. Then mid-wife set off to bathe to another pond with women. At the pond child's father invoking to Marang Buru and the ancestral spirits for remove all danger and bad notice and also keep away from

fever, headache, and colic pain. Then he does float the bundle of asan leaf on water.¹⁷ All men doubt the clay and oil on head and take bath. Female are also finished their bath as same way by using more oil and turmeric. Then all are returned to home the mid-wife grinds some undried rice and mixed the powder with water. This halang dah is sprinkled on baby's parkom (Stringed), all clothes, on the chest of child, childmother and all attenders, with leaves of asan. Then the house of inside, outside and surrounding is also sprinkled. With halang dah (mixture of water and sundried rice powder). Santal trust that witchcraft evil and bad influence of supernatural agents will be neutralized. The midwife takes the other string wound around the arrow, soaks it in oil and turmeric and ties it round the child's waist as a loin string (dora).¹⁸

The name-giving ceremony is a necessary. The giving of a name to a child formally admits it in to father's clan and sub clan. So the child is name given the protection of its father's ancestors and bongas. The father removes all trace of illegitimacy by giving it a name. S the child acquired a definite status in the village and among its kinfolk. The name giving also emphasizes the social obligations of the family to its new addition.

The Santals follow a traditional formula is assigning name. The father of first born son is named after his paternal grandfather, the second son his maternal grandfather the third son his paternal grandfather's eldest brother. Period of time the fourth son receive the name of maternal grandfather's eldest brother. Other male child was born if any consecutively receive the name of their paternal grandfather's brother and maternal grandfather's brother respectively. A same custom is followed in case of the girls who receive the names of the female relatives in the same order. Name giving their new born children in a cyclic process reveals a sense of balance, parity and honour as well as remain loyal to their family tradition. However, Santal's do not revive the names of their ancestors, who are died suicide case leprosy stricken and snake-bite or killed by tiger, bear and an elephant etc. in case of the gradijawae marriage the naming order in reversed that is names on the maternal side comes first. If the child excessively cries after it is named it is presumed that the named is not suitable to the child and subsequently it is changed.¹⁹ Sometime of twins, the pairs of names that are given to twins are drawn from Hindu mythology. If both the twins are male, they are named Ram and Lokhan, Loba and Kusha, Chand and Bhaira, Sidho and Kanhu, and if female, Chhita and kapura, Dangi and punggi, Hisi and Dumuni, Nasa and Paya. If one is male child and other is female child, they are named Ram and Chhita.²⁰

Santals are given two names. One is called mul or bhitri njutum which means literally "inner or private name" and other is called baina or chetan njutum which means literally "upper or outer" name. The bhitri njutum of the child must correspond to that of the kit and kin after whom it is called. The nickname is a kind of chetan njutum. These nicknames, given in early childhood, are often replaced by others as the child grows up. The second name is important, because on the whole, the Santals are reluctant to call someone by his real name fearing it may cause him harm.²¹ 'A name is said to be an integral part its owner and consequently presents a very potent means to the sorcerer for his magical operation.'

The conclusion of the ceremony is marked by the drinking of gruel made of boiled rice water with nim leaves (Melfa Azadirachata) it called ni-dah-mandi. The family head offered to the village of male, female and children. Now the defilement is wiped out and the child has come in among its kinship. So it is very bitter, this beverage is said to have a purificatory effect. The practice of healing treatment through plants and herb is very general among them. If the families can afford to do so, they can give meal to call relatives, with the end of the ceremony the villages bongas are purified as well as the house where the birth has taken place are cleansed.²²

When a child is born to a Santal girl out of wedlock the girl's father and the families are semi-out casted (Pante-Begar) and Santal can only return to the tribe by arranging a father for the child. This work

can be done in two ways. First step If a person is proved to be the genitor, whether he accepts paternity or not, he either has to marry the girl or pay for a "bought husband". Second step if the villager cannot prove who is the real father then a substitute father is arranged. In both the instances the nim-dah-mandi ceremony removes all trace of illegitimacy and the child takes the bongas of his father.²³

During this period the children age of three and four years of both the sexes are ear-pierce by parental grandmother or elderly female relative with thorn of the *Samudra fera* or with a brass needle. When the pain consequent on such ear-piercing abates either some a reed or thin piece of a brass needle is inserted in to each hole to widen it. Neither feast is given to relative nor are any rites observed. No invitation is given since it is a domestic ceremony.²⁴

CHACHO CHHATIAI

Santal are second critical stage in the life-cycle observed by a purificatory rite called Chacho Chhatiar. The word chacho literally means 'a toddler'; the ceremony is not performed until the child has grown up. There is no fixed time for the Chacho Chhatiar.²⁵ It is observed before the marriage; while the Janam Chhatiar ceremony admits a child to the outer fringes of the tribe, Chacho Chhatiar ceremony is believed to give an individual all social responsibilities and privileges of a full-fledged member of the tribe. Through this ceremony an individual enters in to a new relationship with the bongas whom he can now approach with sacrificial offering and also share in the sacrificial meal.²⁶ Without this no Santal can be married or cremated.²⁷ The ceremony used to be rather expensive, since the whole household has to dine together. Santal's has become customary for a family to wait till the ceremony is performed for several children at the same time. In case a family child dies before this ceremony they do not cremate such cases and do not go to their bones to the Damodar River.

Santal wants to have the Chacho Chhatiar for his children he rice beer and procures oil and turmeric to anoint villagers. Then this house of head calls the village headman and his assistant and serves rice beer to them. They ask him look here, what rice beer is this that you are giving us. The family says; "father! This is intimation beer-I have thought to do so. Now I am going to Chacho Chhatiar for my children". This occurs in the morning. After having drunk the rice beer the village headman and his assistant send the Godet for inviting the villagers.²⁸

On the day appointed by the headman, the villagers are summoned by the godet in the family. When all have gathered, the mid-wife who had presided at the birth of the children or any other old village woman bathes the children to be initiated by pouring water over them. Then the village of three girls anoint all those present with oil and turmeric, starting with the priest and his wife,²⁹ there upon his deputy and his wife and then to others. Rice beer is offered which is brewed for this occasion. It is offered first to the village headman and assistant, there upon to all others who are present. When one round has been served the ask the father of the children, for how many term is this? He, answers for so and so many. Then so many children as are to have the chacho-Chhatiar so many rounds of beer they serve, each round four leaf-cups to each. Rice beer, brewed for the occasion, is served to all assemble, after which they sing and dance in honour of the household in whose honour the ceremony is to be performed. This village of elder person recites the Santali account of creation, the wanderings of their ancestors and how they came to occupy the present habitat. This is an essential aspect of the ceremony, since it is considered very important for a Santal, young man to be instructed in the tribal tradition and made to realize that the recitation also serves to transmit their tribal lore, ensuring certain continuity in the tradition. The ceremony is observed by eating, drinking, singing and dancing of Chhatiar and dong song.³⁰

CONCLUSION

Thus, the birth ceremony and different customs of the Santals constitute a significant part in

socio-cultural life of the Santals of Mayurbhanj. The birth ceremony is being observed with much enthusiasm as the Santal couple wait for this very eagerly. The ceremony is observed by eating, drinking, singing and dancing. In spite of all the difficulties, the birth ceremony is observed with the traditions and customs till today.

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