

History of origin of the Santals of India

Nayan Jyoti Das

Associate Professor

Janata College, Serfanguri, Assam

Abstract : The Santal of Indian has been treated by various anthropologists as Pre- Dravidian, Kolarian, Dravidian, Proto-Astraloid, Nishad and Austric. They are the largest tribe in India. They are, at present, scattered in Jharkhand, Chattishgarh, Bihar, Orissa, West- Bengal and Assam. There is no history of human inception in India. This paper is an attempt to study the history of the origin of the Santal living in India.

Key words : Santal, origin, migration, North

The oral tradition of the Santal indicates that the Santal is a migratory community. Their history prior to the establishment at the present Chotanagpur and its adjacent area is a history of migration from one place to another. The folklore of the Santal narrates a whole variety of range ranging from the creation of the universe, creation of the first human pair, the preparation of the liquor as per the instruction of Lita Gossain, the main messenger of the supreme being 'Thakur Jiu' and their first encounter with sexual intercourse as a result of consuming the liquor and birth of seven son and seven daughter as a consequence of that sexual intercourse to the marriage among themselves and the increase of the population out of that marriage. As per their folklore all these happened when they were in 'Hihiri Pipiri'. When population increased there they migrated to a place called 'Khoj Kaman' where they became immoral. So the God asked them to go back to Him but they ignored. So the God decided to destroy them all except a pious couple. He asked that couple to take shelter at the caves of Harata Mountain. When they took shelter inside the cave of Harata mountain there was hail and thunder storm for seven consecutive nights and days and every creation except that couple burnt to ashes. When that thunder storm ended the couple came out of the cave and a new generation was created out of them. They stayed in Harata for several years and migrated to 'Sasangbeda' thereafter. There in Sasangbeda they were divided into clans and five more clans had been added with that seven earlier ones. There after

they migrated to 'Jarpi' and when they migrated from Jarpi they encountered one tall mountain range which obstructed them in the middle. That mountain range was so tall that only at noon they could see the Sun. it means that their migration was towards the East. So they started worshipping 'Marang Buru' there who was considered the God of the mountain for a safe passage. Marang Buru was satisfied with their worship and opened two passage by the names 'Sinduar' and 'Baih Duar' through the middle of the mountain. They entered then in 'Ere' and thereafter in 'Koinde'. From Koinde they entered in 'Chai' and at last they settled in 'Champa'.

They settled in Champa for many years peacefully under their own ruler. Their identity as 'Kherwar' was lost during their stay at Champa and they were divided into various groups like Santal, Munda, Kurmi, Birhor etc. from Champa, in a later period migrated to a place called 'Tore Pukhuri Baha Bandela' and they had discarded some of their old rituals at that place after a long discussion and adopted some new customs and rituals and they migrated from there also and finally they migrated to 'Sikhar' and 'Sant'.

Various hypotheses have been put forward by various researchers out of their traditional folklores on migration L.O.Skrefsrud says that after living in Afganistan and China for many centuries they entered India from North-West and settled in Punjab for many years and then migrated to Chotanagpur. But Colonel Dalton opined that they entered India from North-East and settled in the plains of Chotanagpur for several years and spread to the adjoining highlands of the sacred Damodar river. Sir William Hunter supported Dalton in his book 'Annals of Rural Bengal'.⁽¹⁾

Colonel Waddell treated the traditional legend of their migration as a record of their true story of migration leaving the alluvial South-West highlands towards the hill as a result of the Aryan invasion.⁽²⁾ Based on this document Dr. Campbell writes that though the Santals lives either side of the Ganges but their presence was more in the North. Starting from the North-East they moved towards the Ganges Valley and settled in the adjoining areas of Benaras with the headquarter at Mirzapur. In a later period the inhabitant of the Northern side of the Ganga migrated towards the South and obstructed by the Vindhya hill. As a result they migrated toward the left and settled in Chotanagpur. He further states that process has been initiated to identify the names of the rivers, fort, countries mentioned in their tradition with the names found in Chotanagpur area because various names having resemblances with their traditional name are

found in Chotanagpur area. So it can be assumed that their tradition and the institutions had been developed out of this place. But that their history of origin is of a much remote period and to countries separated by many hundreds of miles can easily be presumed by their tradition. ⁽³⁾

Sir Herbert Risley, on the other hand – “ A people whose only means of recording facts consists of tying knots in strings and who have no bards to hand down a national epic by oral tradition, can hardly be expected to preserve the memory of their past long enough or accurately enough for their accounts of it to possess any historical value. If, however, the legend of the Santals are regarded as a account of recent migration, their general purport will be found to be fairly in accord with actual facts” ⁽⁴⁾. He further states that it is historically true that once there was a rich Santal establishment in the Chai and Champa province of Hazaribag district and it is also a fact that they had once a fort there which, in a later period was occupied by the Muslims. If the time is assumed to be around 1340 of taking over the fort by Ibrahim Ali then it would be easier to fill up the gap between their departure from Chai Champa and their present establishment in Santal Pargana. The recent migration was toward the East because it was the direction which had been expected to follow. Their early settlement in “Ahiri Pipiri” and “Chai Champa” was situated in the North-Western Frontier of Hazaribagh . As a result they had to confront with the direct line of advance by countless Hindu Immigrants from Bihar. That they had been driven by the influx of the Hindus is a fact and the places mentioned in their legend corresponds the direct line of their retreat thereafter ⁽⁵⁾

Birinchi Kumar Barua states that the spread of these people to the places like South China, Myanmar, Assam, India and Indochin from the banks of Howangho river and Iyangsikiyang river happened at around 2000 BC. In India they were spread mainly at either side of the Brahmaputra and the Ganges river . He further says that many linguists opine the South-East region of China as the places of their origin. In the course of time they have been divided into two groups. One group migrated toward the Malay and Indonesian countries like Bali, Sumatra, Java, Barnio, Philipine and in a latter period they were spread to the Melanesia and Polynesian island. The second group settled in the Brahmaputra Valley and in a later period migrated to Punjab and Middle India. A handful of them advanced firther towards the South and settled in Tribankur region. ⁽⁶⁾

Whatever may be the origin of the Santal but since time immemorial they had been living in Chotanagpur plateau and its adjacent areas along with Singhbhum district upto 18th century. Toward the end of the 18th Century they migrated towards the North and a large number of them settled in Hwnde and Belpata of Lakerdewani region from Birbhum at the first half of 19th Century. They were hired to Birbhum to get rid of the wild animals and to clear the jungle. ⁽⁷⁾

Buchanan Hamilton, on the other hand, opines that the Santal migrated from Birbhum due to the atrocities and exploitation of the land lords and settled in Hwnde and Belpata region in between 1790 and 1810. On the otherhand a large number of Santal population was noticed by Mr. Sutherland and Mr. Ward who created 'Damin-E-Koh' for them in between 1826 to 1833. This Damin-E-Koh was packed with the Santals of its neighbouring area in between 1836 to 1851 and started settling down outside Damin-E-Koh clearing the deep jungle. In a later stage they cleared the jungle and owned it in easy term from the local Jaminders.⁽⁸⁾

The pattern between the inscriptions found in the archeological sites of Mahenjodaro and Harappa and the drawing they draw on the altar of various religious celebration like Saharai and Baha are similar in nature. ⁽⁹⁾ These Austric people were once called as Dashyu and Nishadas ⁽¹⁰⁾. In the ancient Sanskrit epic also they were named as Nishad, Sabor, Pulind, Bhil, Kol, Samanpal etc.⁽¹¹⁾ All these statement proves their present in India from a Pre-historic period.

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