

Spiritual Kinship: An Insight Study of Santhal's Totem World

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Abstract

Despite the knowing about biodiversity's importance for a long time, human activity has been causing massive extinctions. Some 25% of the mammals, birds and amphibians species are threatened with extinction, due to human actions. The need of the hour is to save them, and tribes of Jharkhand state of India are doing with this with the help of totemism.

A totem is a spirit being, sacred object, or symbol that serves as an emblem of a group of people, such as a family, clan, lineage, or tribe. Totemism, system of belief in which humans are said to have kinship or mystical relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal or plant. The entity, or totem, is thought to interact with a given kin group or an individual and to serve as their emblem or symbol. Totemism is a complex of varied ideas and ways of behaviour based on a worldview drawn from nature. There are ideological, mystical, emotional, reverential, and genealogical relationships of social groups or specific persons with animals or natural objects, the so called totem. The particular tribe, Santhal, have more than 100 totemistic clans. The researcher has tried to bring forth few of them.

Keywords- Santhal, Creation Myth, Totems, totemic clans

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1. Introduction

1.1 Totem is a belief in a spiritual association between a clan/lineage/moiety and a bird, animal or a natural phenomenon. The tribes believe that they are related to some plants and animals that are sacred to them. The trees which are considered sacred are worshipped in two

forms, namely the worship of tree itself in its natural form and the worship of the tree spirit. Tree like 'Sal' is associated with the great festival, the Sarhul, the Lojo (the tamarind), and many more.

1.2The idea and concept behind Totemism is that people have a spiritual connection or kinship with creatures or objects in nature, making the practice very similar to Animism. Animism is a belief based on spiritual idea that the universe, and all objects within the universe, has souls and spirits. It is believed that souls or spirits exist not only in humans but also in animals, plants, trees, rocks and all natural forces. The concepts of Totemism, Animism, Ritualism and Shamanism should all be considered to gain a full understanding of the religious beliefs of the tribes.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Source of data:

A) Primary Data

- a. Observation
- b. Interview (face to face)

B) Secondary Data

- a. Books
- b. Journals
- c. Internet
- d. Others

2.2 Objective of the study

1. To find out the totems in the Santhal society.
2. To find out the totemic clans in the Santhal society.
3. To find out the different mind set of different clans in the particular society.

2.3 Methodology

The basic objective is to understand the totems and totemic clans of the Santhals as well as the evolution of Santhal ethnographic study.

3. Santhals

3.1. The name of community is Santals or Shantals. This was adopted by the Santhals when they lived in the area around Saont in Midnapur district of West Bengal. The word Santhal is an English word adopted from Hindi which corresponds with Saontar used by Bengali speaking people. Ordinarily they call themselves as hor (man). There is another similar term as hor which stand for the way or means. A hor (man) is in search of hor (way or means) and effort continues till he finds a satisfactory result. They also call themselves as hor hopon which means child or children of human beings.

3.2. There twelve clans among the Santhals, they are Hasdak, Murmu, Kisku, Hembrom, Marndi, Soren, Tudu, Baske Besra, Kore, and Pauria. Among these clans the last two have been lost. The marriage with Besra and core are avoided by other clan since they were considered as inferior. But today this thought pattern is no more. The main function of the clan organization is to regulate marriage relationship within the tribe. A Santhal cannot marry a member of the same clan. If he or she does then they are committing clan incest. They are both cast out of the community and the village. A Santhal was also prohibited from marrying a girl belonging to his mother's sub-clan.

3.3. The Santhals have no recorded history and therefore all that is known of them came down through words of mouth handed down from generation to generation. Therefore the origin of the Santhals is not absolutely certain. The Santhals tried to explore the mystery of creation, history and life by means of myths and legends. As regard to the creation of human

beings they have no written tradition but oral tradition. According to their oral tradition, one duck and a darkduck were flying in the firmament in search of some place to land, but the vast sheet of water cover the surface of the earth. And at the bidding of Thakur Jui, Marang Buru created the land for them and covered with Binna grass. There the duck laid two eggs and from the eggs sprang Pilchu Haram and Plichu Budhi. The first human couple from them the whole horhopon (human beings). The Santals are the largest homogeneous scheduled tribe in India. According to the 1991 census of India, They numbered approximately 6.8% of the nation's total tribal population. Of the major tribal groups of India the Santhals stands third next to the Bhil and the Gonds. They are largely concentrated in the four Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Orissa. A large number of them are also found in Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Santhals folklore describes this tribe as a wandering race.

3.4. There is a belief among the Santhal society about creation of world. They believe that primitive world was filled with only water and God had the problem in creating the land, where man can live. The land is normally considered opposite to water. He created all amphibian animals that can operate both in land and water; therefore, he created seven animals -crab, crocodile, alligator, eel, Pawn, earthworm and tortoise. For creating land, God invited the kings of all these animals to solve help him out. Everyone was coming one by one; they all had not got any success. Lastly, earthworm came and succeeded to create land. It is said that the King of earthworm after seven days and seven nights ate the bottom of water and excreted in on the back of tortoise who is swimming at the top. The tortoise anchored himself on the both side firmly and brought up the earth and thus earth was shaped. That is why there is a belief among Santhals that earthquakes are result of movement of tortoise. In other words, when tortoise moves or shakes, earthquakes occur in earth. Santhal

myth about the creation of world is substantially different from myth associated with creation of world among the other indigenous peoples of India and in many sense it is unique that it ascribe the creation of earth with the help of amphibian animals, specially the earthworm and tortoise. This is all about the story of creation of earth.

4.Totemism

4.1. After creation of earth, **Pilchu Haram** and **Pilchu Burhi** gave birth to seven sons and eight daughters. In later stage they married among themselves thus forming seven exogamous clans. With the passage of time, five more groups were formed. A total 12 clans is found among the Santhals. They are *Hansdak, Murmu, Hembrom, Soren, Kisku, Tudu, Marandi, Baske, Besra, Chonre, Puria and Bedea*. An affiliation or sacred contact is believed to link these clans and their respective totems. Therefore, each of the names of the clans are derived either from the plants or animals species. There is a belief that is prevalent among the Santhals that totems have some connection with the deeds or birth of ancestors of the clans. *Hansdak* clan members claim to be of the highest status as they have derived from the name of their clan from first ancestors. The term *Hans* designates wild goose while *dak* in Santhali means water. This clan is, therefore, linked to the original state of world and first ancestors. It is the most senior among all the clans of the Santhals since it is related to myth of creation. Moreover, swan or goose is not just animal. It builds nest on earth, walks on earth and flies on sky.

4.2. Next in order are the *Murmu* who are represented by the *Nilgai* or the antelope. According to the myth of genesis of this particular clan, it is said that ancestors of this clan hunted the first antelope as animal and in other words, it is this animal which was first sacrificed by Santhals. Since this time, Santhals started hunting and eating of animals and subsequently become fond of hunting and eating of flesh. The antelope being purely a land

animal is responsible for the destruction of Santhals among the Santhals as opposed to swan who combines the four elements and stands for humanity and creation of human beings. The *Hansdak'* and the *Murmu* are the two superior clans of the Santhals. As the story goes, *Hansdak'* are given the status of advisors and the *Murmus* are the priest.

4.3. The *Kiskus* have kingfishers bird as their totem and come third in the hierarchy. They are regarded as kings and are given the Royal status. *Hembrom* are fourth in order and have betel nut as their totem. It is believed that the ancestor of the *Hembrom* clan was born with betel nut string around his waist. There are also those who believe that their ancestor was actually born under a betel nut tree, which is totally hard and solid.

4.4. The *Marandis* are linked with grass or type of weed and are traders. The *Sorens* are soldiers or warriors and are linked to the constellation of stars. The *Tudus* are musicians and have accepted owl as their totem. *Baskes* are cooks and are associated with stale rice. It is believed that they had offered stale rice to the Gods and are thus prohibited from eating it. *Bedeas* have sheep as their totem and believed to have no personal own much like the animal they revere. They are not found now days and it is believed that they have mixed with other clans. Lastly are the *Paurias* and *Chonres* who have pigeons and lizard respectively as their totems. It is found that in most of the cases that the only animals the clan members could hunt were made their totem, which perhaps restricted them endangering the species.

4.5. So strong are their feelings towards these totemic species that they respect them as their own clan members. If any of the clan members sees a dead totem, he observes the death rituals. Eating or hunting the totem is prohibited. According to stories about the restriction of marriages among the different clans, the reason lies in the nature of the totems and the elements they are connected with. In first place the marriage is forbidden between the water and land that swan(*Hansdak'*) and antelope(*Murmu*). It is restricted between "lower heaven"

and "lower earth" that is Kingfisher and weed (*Kisku* and *Marandi*), also "upper heaven" (*Hembrom*) and "upper earth" (*Soren*). Secondly, marriage is prohibited between three heavenly birds (Owl, hawk and pigeon). The totem also defined some relationship between consumed and consumer. The pigeon that is the prey of the hawk along with the lizard eats Rice and the owl also hunts this lizard. Therefore, initially the *Chonres* did not marry with *Besras* and *Tudus*. But presently this restriction is no longer followed and the marriages take place between all clan members.

4.6. Each of these clans is further divided into several sub clans. Each one upholds a distinctive myth and set of customs that differentiates it from the others, including kinds of food taken, ornaments, worn and worship of the spirits or Gods (*Bongas*). Even the sacrifices vary during the rituals, from one sub-clan to another. The names of the sub-clan are derived from plants and animals. Out of the 16 sub-clans that were available in the area, nine trace their origins to certain animals. For examples, *Chilbinda hansdak'* derived its name from the ancestor who killed an eagle, "*Jihu hansdak*" from *Jihu* or babbler bird. *Sole-Hemborm* do not eat eels as it is believed its ancestor have been saved by it while ferrying flooded river. The *kahu-Besras* are prohibited to kill crows. The totem exercises powerful influence on the habit of the Santhals.

5. Conclusion

5.1. The entity, or totem, is thought to interact with a given kin group or an individual, and to serve as their emblem or symbol. Totemism is a complex of varied ideas and ways of behaviour based on a worldview drawn from nature. Every climatic region has its own trees, animals and rocks peculiar to its own. There are twelve clans among the Santhals, they are Hasdak, Murmu, Kisku, Hembrom, Maarndi, Soren, Tudu, Baske Besra, Kore, and Pauria.

Among these clans the last two have been lost. The marriage with Besra and core are avoided by other clan since they were considered as inferior.

5.2. The animal totems in Chota Nagpur region of Jharkhand state consists of those animals which can be found in the plateau and from which various endogamous totemism groups have originated. The totemistic names are from those animals generally found in the tract, such as Karkha (the cow), Tirki (a young mouse), Lakra (the tiger), Kindu (the Saur fish), Toppo (a small bird), Kerketta (the quail), Khalko (a fish), Ekka (the tortoise), Gidhi (the eagle), Tiga (the field mouse), Alia (the dog), Hartu (the monkey), Tatenga (the lizard), Dhimda (a bird), Lapoung (a small bird), Minz (Eel), barwa (wild hog), Kachhap (tortoise), Xaxa (crow), Xess (corn), Bankula (crane), Koriko (cork), Bando (fox), Rawna (vulture), Beshra (a name of tree), Ckigalo (jackal), Orgoda (hawk), Godo (name of water creature), Kuhu (cuckoo), Kannhar (vulture bird), Baghwar (the tiger) and Khoya (jackal) and so on.

5.3. From the above discussion the researcher has come out with a view that the totem not only plays an important role in the folklife of the Santhals, but also manages the ecological balance of the society. The limitation of the paper is that it can be further worked on, as per the information from the primary sources there are more than hundred totemic clans. As long as the surrounding environment provides a wellspring of imagery and symbolism for assisting humans in the act of summoning identity for their groups as well as their individual selves, the concept of totem will continue to be important.

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