

## **Administrative System of Santals: Past and Present**

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**Abstract:** Santal community is the largest tribal community in India. They live in the eastern part of India, including the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Odisha. Outside India, they live in Bangladesh, Nepal. Some say that the Santals came to the Indian Subcontinent long before the Indo- Aryans through the Khyber and Bolan Passes. But how they came to be known as Santal is debated. The Santal community lived almost in isolation until modern times. As a result, they have been able to maintain a complete traditional form of administrative system. The village of the santal community is the basic unit of their entire administrative system. According to Kolean Guru, there are three types of councils in their entire administrative system. Such as the village or headman's council, the outside, or overchief council, and the hunt or the council of the people of the county. This article attempts to discuss the past and present status of the Santal administrative system.

**Key words:** Santal, Tribal, Administration. Headman, Council, Overchief.

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### **I. Introduction:**

The Santal tribe, one of the largest tribal communities, lives in the eastern part of India, including the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Odisha. Outside India, they live in Bangladesh, Nepal. The origins of the Santal tribe can be traced back to ancient times. They are believed to have migrated from the Hihiri-Pipiri but the exact location of Hihiri-Pipiri is shrouded in mystery. Social scientists and anthropologists differ on the exact location of Hihiri-Pipiri. Resly said Hihiri-Pipiri was situated to the north-west of Hazaribag district in Bihar.<sup>1</sup> Some say that the Santals came to the Indian Subcontinent long before the Indo- Aryans through the Khyber and Bolan Passes.<sup>2</sup> But how they came to be known as Santal is debated. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, the word 'Santal' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Samantapal' meaning border guard.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, According to Rev, Skrefsurd, Santal is a corruption of the word 'Saontar'.<sup>4</sup> Some also say that they lived in the vast plains for a long time, hence their common name Santal. Many also call the ancestral identity of Santals as 'Kherwar'. People of this community prefer to call themselves 'Santar' rather than Santal. And if they discuss among themselves, they call themselves 'Hor' meaning human.

Traditional administrative system of Santals: The Santal community lived almost in isolation until modern times. As a result, they have been able to maintain a complete traditional form of administrative system. The village of the santal community is the basic unit of their entire administrative system. According to Kolean Guru, there are three types of councils in their entire administrative system. Such as the village or headman's council, the outside, or overchief council, and the hunt or the council of the people of the county.<sup>5</sup>

The village or headman's council: As I have already mention the village is the basic unit in their administrative system. The village council consists of seven members. They are Manjhi, Paranik, Naike, Jog Manjhi, Jog Paranik, Godet, Kudam Naeke.

Manjhi: In the village council, the village headman is the president, they call him Manjhi. Manjhi will be elected by the villagers. His salary was to pay the villagers half-a- seer clarified butter, eighty cobs Indian corn and one rupee a year.<sup>6</sup> He can give any order. Villagers must obey Manjhi's orders. Although he gives any order based on the discussion of 'More Hor' (literally meaning the five persons). Manjhi has many power and function in santal society. They are as follows. All people in the village will have to follow his lead. In ordering and inviting, in calling and restraining, at the name giving, at the initiating festivals, at marriages, when hunting and chasing, at feasts and festivals, at religious instruction and worship, in connexion with rice and curry, with beer and liquor, with spirits and mountain spirits, in quarrelling and squabbling, in strife and dispute, when there is hunger and thirst, with landlords and money-lenders, when crime and misdeeds occur, in connexion with thefts and stealing, with medicine and witchcraft, with wenches and strumpets, when there is fighting and killing, murder and wickedness, in grief and sorrow, in calamities and dangers, in illness and pain, at dying and falling away, at ceremonies in connexion with death and decease, at cremation and the final funeral ceremonies: in connexion with all this the Manjhi has the responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

Paranik: Paranik is an assistant of Manjhi. He acts as Manjhi when a vacancy occurs in the office of the Manjhi due to his resignation, removal, death. Apart from this Paranik inform the villagers about the place and

time of trial. He performs all the duties that have to be done in the village election. He also informs people about new methods relating to agriculture.<sup>8</sup>

Naeke (Priest): Naeke is the priest of the Santal community. he fixes the date of puja with the advice of Manjhi and Paranik.

Jog Manjhi: Jog Manjhi's main job is to look after the youth of the village. During the soharai festival all the young men and women stay in Jog Manjhi's house for five days. He has to see to it that no shamelessness shall occur in the village. If the Jog Manjhi comes to know of the misbehavior of a young man or woman, he will arrest that man or woman hand him/her over to the village council. The village council can punish them.

Jog Paranik: Jog Paranik is the assistant of the Jog Manjhi. In the absence of Jog Manjhi, he will acts as the Jog Manjhi in the village.

Godet(Messenger): Godet is the messenger of the village council. His main job is to deliver the Manjhi's message to the villagers and bring the villagers to the village council meetings.

Kudam Naeke(the priest of the outskirts): Kudam Naeke is the assistant of the Naeke. O.P.Bodding in his book 'Tradition and Institution of the Santals' describe the job of the Kudam Naeke as follows. The Kudam Naeke( the priest of the outskirts) offers his own blood every time the Naeke perform, sacrifices in the name of the Pargana bonga and bongas along the boundries. At the hunt he offers to the same, in order that the village people may be fortunate and return well.<sup>9</sup>

Pargana council: Pargana Parishad or Pargana Council is the middle stage in the hierarchy of the Santal administrative system. At this stage, the Santal villages are divided into cluster called Pargana. All manjhis in the cluster are member of the Pargana Parishad. All Manjhis in a cluster and the people under its jurisdiction elect their Parganait. Parganait is the head of the Pargana Parishad. This Pargana Parishad decides matters too important to be disposed of by a village council and also adjudicates on appeals from its orders.<sup>10</sup>

Dighri Parishad: Dighri Parishad is the highest and supreme council in santal society. It is also highest court of the Santal community. The order of the Dighri Parishad is final. Dihri Parishad sits at the time of annual hunt. Hunting festival is celebrated every year on the full moon of Baishak month. Both married and unmarried are required to participate in the hunting festival with bows and arrows. This hunt is convened by the Dihri who is both master of the hunt and sacrificial priest.<sup>11</sup> During such hunting festival, if a conflict cannot solved by a meeting called by the headman (manjhi) of a village, it is transferred to the Pargana, a person presiding over a certain federation of villages called torop.<sup>12</sup> If the Pargana cannot solve it the matter is passed on to the desh Pargana and if again no solution can be found, then Dihri Parishad resolves the matter.<sup>13</sup>

Present status of administrative system in the Santal Society: 21<sup>st</sup> century is an age of Globalization. Globalization has brought many changes in Santal society. In the past, village councils were the backbone of Santal society. But today it has become a formal system. A large number of people from the Santal community approach the local political leader instead of the village council to solve their problems. They think that the political leader can solve their problems very easily. Due to this the administrative system of Santals is losing importance.

Due to rapid urbanization the Santal community has to live with other communities in a situation where they achieve mainstream values which influence them to ignore the administrative system of Santal society. Educated Santals want to be more involved in the Indian administrative system, judiciary, and political parties. As a result they do not care about their administrative system. Traditional administrative system is only formal to them.

Conclusion: Santal community is the largest tribal community in India. India can not rise to the pinnacle of development without the development of tribals. Other communities, various non-governmental organizations and the state must come forward to maintain their traditional administrative system. Then they can preserve their identity and participate in the development of India.

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