

BAHA: A FLOWER FESTIVAL FULL OF MUSIC IN SANTHAL COMMUNITY

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Abstract

In every Santhal community, they have some religious festivals, spread over different months and seasons. Those festivals are Baha, Sohrae, Dansae, Karam, Magh, Erok, Pata, Chhata etc. Most of these festivals mainly based on agriculture. Among those festivals, 'Baha' is the second most important festival in every Santhal community. The most important festival is the 'Sohrae' festival. 'Baha' festival is also called Flower Festival. This festival is held in March- April. In every Santhal village they have different dates for this festival. The Manjhi¹ of the village decides the date with all people of the village. In every Santhal community there are some rules and regulations for this festival, which are followed by all villagers. If anyone does not follow the rules they will be punished. The main rule is that they do not use or collect any Sal, [Shorea robusta] Mahua [butter tree/honey tree] flower or new leaves until the 'Baha' festival is over. They believe if they do so then whole village will be doomed. The purpose of this festival is to protect the village from evil- spirits. During this festival the 'Nayke'² worships the deities [Marang buru, Jaher Era] of the village to protect the whole village from diseases like pox, cholera, TB [Tuberculosis].
Keywords: Santhal, Baha, festival, culture, music, nayke, manjhi.

INTRODUCTION

The word '**Baha**' in *Santhali*, means flower. This festival is conducted through song, dance and flowers. This is one of main festival of the *Santhal* community. It is also called flower festival.

At the end of winter and beginning of spring when the tender leaves and flower buds begin to appear, this festival is celebrated. The *Santhal* community welcome spring and new life of nature through this festival. The essence of this festival is to bring out how nature and the external have an impact on *Santhali* people's inner life. Many people believe this festival is a welcoming of a new life of mother- nature and an offering of gratitude, because the flowers later become fruits.

Among the cultivators of *Kol*, *Vil*, *Ho* sub- communities this festival is called '*Sarhul*' festival. The cultivators of Netarhaat, Palamou with the help of the '*Nayke*' they celebrate this festival. This is not only the welcoming of the new-year but also it

¹ Manjhi: Head of the Santhal community. He has all the responsibilities of the village. Each and every festival, marriages, birth ceremonies will not possible without his instruction.

² Nayke: the village priest.

is the major festival of the cultivators. This is celebrated straight after ‘*Dol-purnima*’¹.

In the month of ‘*Chaitra*’² or a little later is the ideal time to celebrate ‘*Baha*’ festival. The ancient people of India observing the changes of nature during spring, they welcomed it as the starting of the new- year. Ancient Hindu text, also pro-claimed the month of ‘*Chaitra*’ as the beginning of the new-year. This is how they welcome the new beginning of nature through their musical festival ‘*Baha*’. Beside this, among the *Santhals* this festival is also signifies advancement of adulthood of a young lady. It indicates the attaining of maturity of a girl who can then be given in marriage. In the *Santhali* language young ladies monthly period is called ‘*Baha Kanai*’³. The nature, perhaps takes on a similar form of a girl who enters her puberty, during this season.

Here is a beautiful ‘*Baha*’ song in *Santhali* language, which explains about natures changes during this season. This is given below:

‘Baha bonga hale molo-chando

Bir buru sajaw ena,

Dare nari bahai-ena,

Sarjom baha, matkom gele sa-da muhur-muhur...

De-seng atang me-ya

De- seng daram me-ya

Noya abhron, nowa sagen sajaw

Phagun bonga molo chando

Baha bonga amge poroi poroi...

[The Baha month is the new moon period. The surroundings became beautiful as the trees in the forest grow new leaves and flowers of which ‘sal and mahua’ are prominent. Tribals welcome this graceful appearance of the nature. They feel alarmed with the fresh and charming beauty of the surroundings. The baha month is full of flowers all around.]’³

1 Dol Purnima or Dol Jatra is a major Holy festival of west Bengal. It is dedicated to Sri Krishna and Sri Radhika. It is a full moon night.

2 Chaitra is the last month in Bengali Calender.

3 Dr. P.C. Hembram, *SANTHALI – a natural language*, Usha Hembram 476-Dakshinayan, Sector -4, Plot -19 , DWARKA, New Delhi-110045, page no-86

During this season of natural changes of nature cannot be disregarded without celebrating a festival. That is why, not only in the *Santhal* Community but also in different religions all over India it is celebrated as a spring festival with different names and different norms. Like..

- **Vasant Panchami:** This is a Hindu ritualistic festival, which is considered as the beginning of spring and an auspicious day for new beginnings. This festival is celebrated in various ways in different regions across India. The Hindu goddess of arts and knowledge Goddess *Saraswati* is also worshiped on this day. In Punjab people dress up in yellow on that day this signifies and represents the brilliance of nature.
- **Holi:** This is a festival of colours which is dedicated to Lord Krishna. People celebrate with pomp and glory by throwing colours on each other. In some places it is also celebrated as '*Holika Dahan*' by burning *Holika*, a demoness.
- **Gudi Padwa:** This is a Maharashtrian festival. On this day in Mumbai, there is an amazing parade early in the morning, women riding motorbikes, and on floats to depict their culture and they dress up in their traditional in clothing.
- **Ugadi:** This festival is celebrated particularly in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It is on the First day of *Vasant Navami*. The main highlight of this festival is a traditional meal.
- **Gangaur:** This is a spring festival of Rajasthan. On that day people of Rajasthan worship the Goddess *Gauri*. The women decorated the Goddess *Gauri*'s Statue and carry it out in procession all over the area.
- **Bohag Bihu:** this is a main festival of Assam. It is an agriculture festival among the Assamese, which includes plenty of music and dance.
- **Tulip festival:** It is an annual festival of Kashmir, the Heaven of India. During spring on that day at the Indira Gandhi Tulip park people add more tulips in that park and they celebrate with traditional cultural programs, traditional foods and Kashmiri folk songs.
- **Mopin Festival:** this is a festival of '*Galo*' tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. It is a harvest festival by worship of Goddess *Mopin* to protect from evil spirits. On that festival young people are performed various folk songs and dances.
- **Aoling Festival:** this is a spring festival of *Konyak* tribe of Nagaland. During this festival people dress up in traditional way, sing, Drink all day and night.

- **Nenmara Vallangi Vela:** this is a festival of Kerala. It is held at *Nellikulangara Bhagavathy* temple after the paddy harvest. During this festival two villages are competing with each other to display of best traditional art forms and music performances.
- **Kavant Gher Fair:** this is a rural harvest festival of Gujarat. It is a festival of *Rathva* Tribe. On that day they dressed up as demons and gods of Hindu mythology and performed many traditional folk songs and dances wildly.
- **Chapchar Kut Festival:** it is a festival of Mizoram, in northeast India. It is a bamboo harvest festival of traditional songs and traditional culture.

Therefore, our traditional Indian culture has been so rich for years. And the *Santhals* are born directly in nature's lap. In *Santhal* community each and every *Santhal* is filled with deep love and respect for nature. Through '*Baha*' festival they show their love and respect to nature.

A Santhali '*Baha*' song is given below:

“Loghu ma buru re sereng sadekan dorong dorong

Ghantama barire ghanti sadekan ratang ratang

Chete lagit ge do hale sereng sadekan

Chete lagit ged hale ghanti sadekan

Ondegok hiju lagit sereng sadekan

Ondegok hiju lagit ghanti sadekan

Kanto enga nasao lagit ghanti sadekan

Bayda merom nasao lagit ghanti sadekan”¹

In this song people are talking to each other about their '*Baha*' festival. Musical instruments are playing in the nearby hills. All the people are enjoying together, singing songs. They are calling everyone to join them. They are sacrificing the young breed to their deities.

THE PREPARATION PRIOR TO THE '*BAHA*' FESTIVAL:

Two days before the '*Baha*' festival, the village people create a '*Jaher than*'¹ which is build outside the village in a *Salgroove*. This place should be very peaceful, clam

¹ Santali Gan O Kavita Sankalan: An anthology of Santali songs and poems compiled, translated and edited by Suhrud Kumar Bhowmik. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, Third Printing 2013.

and clean. After that they cover that place with a thatched shed which is called '*Jaher Sarim*'.

The village people also build a platform in the courtyard of the *Manjhi*'s house and cover this with an umbrella. This platform is for the ancestors of the '*Manjhi*'s household, who created this village.

Before the festival the '*nayke*' or the priest has to perform some rigorous rituals. He has to keep a vow and live a consecrated life during this time. He sleeps on floor before the festival. If any other villagers, wish to make a vow they also have to follow the same ritual before the festival.

The rituals on the day before the festival is called '*Baha um*' which is conducted with a bathing ritual and night is called '*Bonga-Dakau ayub*' which is conducted with invoking of the deities of the village. The night before the festival the villagers worship the deities by chanting of various '*Baha*' songs with some musical instruments. Like the horn pipe, *Madal*, drum. After invoking the deities they performed '*Baha*' songs together through the night. The men and women both are dancing together in a traditional way.

A '*Baha*' song is given below:

'Akay may chiyalet ho bir dishom do
Akay may doholet atore payri
Marang buru chiyalet ho bir dishom do
Jaher eray doholet atore payri
Chiyatehoy chiyalet ho bir dishom do
Doholet leka maho atore payri
Chiyalet leka maho bir dishom do
Doholet leka maho atore payri
Akay may baret let ho bir dishom do
Akay may basti let atore payri
Marang buru beret let ho ho bir dishom do

1 Jaher than is a Puja Place. Which is made by soil.

Jaher ayoy basti let atore payri
Beret te hoy beret let ho bir dishom do
Bastite hoy bosti let atore payri
beret let leka ma ho bir dishom do
basti let leka maho maho atire payri..”¹

This song is sung on the day of worship at *Nayke*'s house. In this song they offer thanks to their Gods and Gurus for giving them food water and a house to live in.

THE WORSHIP DAY:

The day of worships in the morning the villagers comes together in the *Nayke*'s house to take him to the '*Jaher Than*', while dancing in procession. When they arrived at the '*Jaher Than*', they stop dancing and make the arrangements which they need for worship. During this festival '*Nayke*' plays the main roll. He offers the deities first flowers and fruits of the season of the *Sal* and *Mahua* tree. While the Puja is going on, other members of the village continue to perform songs and dance with the various musical instruments around *Jaher Than*.

A '*Baha*' song is given bellow:

‘Kuriko
Dol chaloen kora pata daraykan (2)
Kiring jongpe korako khari fir firi
Pata tadire korako atang achurpe.
Korako
Doll chlaoen kuri pata daraykan (2)
Kiring jong pe kuriku lotur jhir jhiri
Pata tadire kuriku hor achur pe.’²

This song is sung by girls and boys. The first part of the song is sung by girls. In the first part girls give instructions to the boys that festival is arriving, prepare all things

1 Santali Gan O Kavita Sankalan: An anthology of Santali songs and poems compiled, translated and edited by Suhrud Kumar Bhowmik. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, Third Printing 2013.

2 Santali Gan O Kavita Sankalan: An anthology of Santali songs and poems compiled, translated and edited by Suhrud Kumar Bhowmik. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, Third Printing 2013.

for festival. And the second part is sung by boys. The boys reply to the girls that festival is arriving, you do your own preparation.

After that they have food and drink together. The meals are made for all the villagers at a nearby place of *Jaher Than*. After having lunch they start dancing again. In the evening, the *Nayke* is taken back to the village the same way. While returning to the village the *Nayki* as he passes each house, the household women come and wash the *Nayke*'s feet with water and *Nayke* gives them *Sarjom Baha* (Sal Flower) as a blessings.

CONCLUSION

In that manner every *Santhal* community, they celebrate their major festival '*Baha*'. The most important part of this festival is their songs. Thorough songs and dances they celebrate their '*Baha*' festival and enrich their traditional culture and life.

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