



Literary Enigma

The International Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture
(Peer-reviewed and Indexed)

Vol. 2, Issue: 3

June 2025

Article No 3

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Page No: 17-26



Santali's Makar Sankranti: Inducing Harmony and Solidarity in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha

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Abstract

The Munda people of the Indian subcontinent known as the Santal speaks an Austro-Asiatic language. In terms of number as well, Santal are the largest tribe in the states of Odisha, Bihar, and Assam, as well as Jharkhand and West Bengal. In the Mayurbhanj district, Makara Sankranti is a famous harvest festival which is observed after the harvest of the paddy crops. In the Mayurbhanj district, "Makar Festival/Parab" is one of the most popular holidays. The day is celebrated by distributing special Mayurbhanj sweets and cookies, including *gud pitha*, and other sweets. The end of the reaping month is celebrated by the people worshipping to the God of the fire. The villagers destroyed the collection of branches they collected early in the early hours of the morning. The members of the common caste prepare makara chaula, uncooked newly harvested rice, and fruit as offerings to God. During the three or four days of the festival, the people eat fish or meat in every house. For special celebration festivities, parents invite all friends and family members to their homes, especially their sisters and daughters. The indigenous people celebrate the holiday with great excitement. Various tribal groups participate with traditional dancing, eating their own food, and gathering with family. The celebration of the Makara Mela in different places on the day of Makara Sankranti. People prepare offerings of customary foods to ancestral spirits, wear new clothing, and pray to God. The winter season ends on this day, and spring formally starts with warmer, longer days than nights. This is known as Makara Sankranti.

Keywords-*Santal, Culture, Festival, Makara, Sports Activities*

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Santali's Makar Sankranti: Inducing Harmony and Solidarity in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha

1. Introduction

Mayurbhanj, now one of the thirty districts of Odisha, was once one of the 26 feudal states. With 10418 km², it is the largest district. 62% of the people in the area are from 53 different tribal groups, including, to name a few, the Santal, Bathudi, Bhumij, Bhuyan, Dharua, Kharia, Kols, Khadia, Birhor, and Mankadia. There are urban semi-tribes of peasants and indigenous people who collect food, are totally illiterate and superstitious, and lead a semi-nomadic lifestyle. During the development of human culture, certain days or times were set aside for religious festivals. These are days that are significant in agriculture, religion, and culture. Festivals in the traditional sense refer to the days or times that were typically associated with religious celebrations that were also considered significant events. The culture, tradition, and history of a country are reflected in its festivals. Each festival relates to the worship of a specific divinity, goddess, component, etc. Other religious texts contain legendary events that evolved in connection with these festivals to inspire people to believe and live virtuous lives. Therefore, all festivals are imbued with religious significance. Hindu holidays are intricate. Mash-up religious rituals, such as worship, prayer, feasting, drinking, singing, dancing, and various other cultural activities. Thus, despite having powerful religious beginnings, festivals seem to be primarily pleasant and enjoyable in nature. Festivals then serve as a chance to gain from friendship and collaboration. In addition, festivals take people away from their boring daily lives to enjoy entertaining activities. People who feel exhausted from a hard day's work can rest during festivals. As a result, they develop a sense of cohesion in society, a sense of friendliness and cooperation, as well as joy and relaxation. In addition, the performance of the festival creates an anchor that connects neighbours to the structure of culture.

The state of Odisha has a number of festivals. It's a proverb in Odisha that indicates "*Bara Masare Tera Parva*," which means, "There are thirteen festivals celebrated by the people during the year." There are several religious festivals in Hinduism that are celebrated by everyone, from members of high society to members of tribal and semi-tribal groups. Festivals are important and necessary to create a sense of community and understanding. A feast is not only a one-time event but also a celebration of long-standing traditions and social customs. The celebration of festivals is very clear and pompous in Mayurbhanj. Undoubtedly, Mayurbhanj is one of the most popular places in Odisha because the district has a vibrant and rich cultural tradition. Various festivals like Akshyaya Trutiya (*eroh mut*) and Mayurbhanj have a number of festivals like Gamha Purnima, Makar Sankranti (*sakrat*), Nuakhai (*nauwain*), Udarparba, Karam Festival, *Jantal* Festival, Tusu Parab, etc.

2. Santal Tribes

A large number of the Santals, one of the most common tribal groups in India, are located in the cities of Odisha's Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Dhenkanal, and Balasore. They include those from the nearby states of Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, and Jharkhand. The Santal were nomads in the past. On the Chhotanagpur plateau, they eventually made their home there. At the end of the 18th century, people travelled to Bihar's Santal Parganas area in order to get to Odisha. They communicate in the Santali language, which is also spoken to them, in the Munda group of the Austro-Asiatic language family. The Santali are the writers of the "*Ol Chiki*" script, which was written by Pandit Raghunath Murmu. The Santal separate themselves from others because of their own costume style and creativity. The women wear a saree (*jhalah*) and a green and blue plaid, while the men use a handmade loincloth (*kacha*) and napkins

(*gamchha*). But nowadays, they wear costumes made by machines. Hairpins (*pankatha*), coin chains (*sikimala*), rings (*baju*), necklaces (*sankhachudi*), and anklets (*painri*) are among the jewellery items that Santal girls love using. In contrast to the large silver jewellery used by previous generations, today's generation selects jewellery composed of materials like plastic, glass, and lighter metals. That's since technological advances have advanced. The custom of receiving a tattoo has reached its height. The Santal area is surrounded by farms, fields, ponds, and funeral homes, as well as being the location of the "*Jaher era*" within the "*Jaher gal*," which is a place of prayer. The *Jaher*, a famous cave made of sal trees, is outside the village; it is supposed to be the home of the gods. Santal villages frequently include a sizable neighbourhood of between 50 and 100 families. Their houses are neatly structured within their borders, on either side of a wide village street.

2.1.1. Traditions And Customs Of Santal

The Santal homes, known as *Olah*, are very neat and attractive, with bright and colourful paintings decorating their front surfaces. The earth colours used for painting the wall are black or red at the bottom, green or yellow in the centre, and white at the top. The homes have numerous rooms and a covering made of either grass or native tiles (*khapar olah*). Boards of wood covered with mud and animal manure form the walls of the house. Long verandas are found on every house. The bedrooms are equally big. The ancestors are worshipped in a sacred area called *Bhitar-bonga olah*, which is situated in the main room. Corn and other agricultural goods are stored in the main space, which is separated from it by a mud wall and a wooden bench. The main room has a kitchen area (*daka olah*) on one side. The house is near the cow shed, or *dangri gola*. The house is connected to the vegetable garden. In their spare time, the residents of the homes gather in a square garden to chat and debate a variety of topics. Majhi, the village's secular chief, resides in the largest home in the area. Another religious location known as Majhi Than (*Gosani*) is situated in front of his home. The village chief's creative soul has a home there.

Household items such as broomsticks (*janah*), pottery pots (*hulutukuj*), Winnowing fans (*hatah*), and bamboo baskets (*tunki*).

There are several different kinds of instruments used for music, like flutes (*tiriau*); horn trumpets (*sakua*), stringed instruments (*banam*), and double membrane drums (*tumdah*).

Santali language items found in a Santal house are fishing traps like *jhimiri*, *tardang*, *janjid*, and *jalam*, as well as tools for hunting like a bow and arrow (*aah*) and spear (*sar*), a sacrificial axe (*kapi*), a knife (*chakhu*).



Broom (Jonah)



Traditional Rice miller (Dhinki)



Winnowing Fan (Hatah)



Pot (Chukah)



Desi liquor (Handia)



Beam (Aran)



Gruel (Baske Daka)



Shed (Merom Gola)



Cattle (Dangri Gola)

2.2. Fairs and Festivals

The Santal people organise several kinds of holidays every year in order to bring joy to their gods and goddesses. The Santals were farmers; hence, their celebrations primarily revolve around different agricultural pursuits, though some also involve hunting and gathering natural resources. Their primary celebrations are the agriculturally themed *Eroh Sim*, *Harihal Sim*, *Jantal*, *Saharai*, and *Baha*. The first seeds are planted in the fields on *Eroh-sim*. When seedlings first appear, *Harihal Sim* is observed. The first fruits of the winter rice crop are consumed at the festival of *Jantal*, which is observed in September, to please the mountain god. One of the most significant celebrations for the Santals is *Saharai*, the cattle festival held in November. To boost the livestock's prosperity, they worship cattle. The year ends with the celebration of *Magh Bonga*. Between January and February, the Magha months. The Santal present the *Jaher* deities with the first sal flowers, *matkom gele*, wild flowers, and fruits during



the *Baha* celebration. For the benefit of their community's wealth and happiness, festivals like Karam and Makar Sankranti (*Sakrat*) are also observed with formality and beauty.

(BAHA PARAB celebrated by KISS Students)

3. Makara Festival (*Sakrat Parab*) In Mayurbhanj

A holiday celebrating agriculture, Makar Sankranti (*Sakrat Parab*), occurs on the first of the month, or "Push" in Santali. The Christian calendar indicates that it occurs on January 13 or 14. Although Makar Sankranti is observed throughout Odisha, Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, and Keonjhar residents particularly enjoy and enjoy themselves during this festival. Using raw rice (*holong*), molasses (*gul*), coconut, chhenna, honey (*nele rasa*), and milk (*towa*), the dish known as "makar choula" is a specific type of bhog. It is first presented to the sun deity before being accepted by everyone. The days lengthen and warm up starting on this day, depending on the path of the sun. As a result, the sun is viewed as a powerful protector. The event is joyfully observed in Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Keonjhar, and Sundargarh, places with significant populations of tribal people. It is not a tribal group celebration, but because of centuries of adaptation to the Hindu culture, it is also celebrated with a great deal of pomp and show.

The words Mayurbhanj and Makar seem to complement each other. Makar is not a festival on Mayurbhanj soil but a passion of collective public life. Magha Sankranti is very important in the concept of 'Sanatan' Hinduism. On this day, the base of all energies, the sun, begins its upward movement. Gradually, the temperature rises, and all sacred activities begin. Since it is post-harvest time, everyone has enough wealth and money. A festive atmosphere is created. Before Makar, pots, gourds, rice, and new clothes are bought in the huts. The houses are cleaned, and the walls are colorfully painted. In the *dhinki*, rice is made into chuna (*holong*), *holong pitha*, etc. And perhaps most significantly, it is a harvest festival that occurs after the harvest. For this celebration, preparations began considerably earlier. All homes have been thoroughly cleaned and painted in white, red, and black. People don new clothes, consume "Aarisha," a jaggery-and-rice-flour cake, and every home must provide meat curry as a dinner. Early in the morning, people bathe in the river for purification. Alcohol (*handia*) is freely consumed by men and women. On the day of Sakrat Parab, Var gets up early in the morning and starts the Makar festival by collecting palm trees or wood and lighting a fire. In the morning, corn and rice are placed in each house near the goddess of the first *Daka*. During this period, various sports competitions are organized in different villages, like Lakhbindha (*Bejha*) Run, High Jump, Long Jump, Biscute khia (*Jom*), handi futa (*Tukuz Dal*), kholi tipa (*Patla pati*), knowledge test (*Ongko kosa*), find shose (*chopol chinhaw*), cockfighting, etc.



3.1.1 Makara Festival (Budhi Sakrat)

Just as the Odias celebrate Makar Sankranti, the Santals celebrate the *Budhi Sakrat* festival in grand style. It should be made clear here that in the traditions of the Santals, the practice of celebrating Sankranti is not prevalent. So they celebrate Makar as a festival, not as a transition. Makar festival is celebrated, as indicated through the *Bejha'* (Lakhbindha) folktale. It is said that because the old man was able to answer the question at the last moment, he was saved from imminent death. But now it is the turn of old age.

The old woman was unprepared and went out to get injured. On this occasion, he expressed his final wish that the day be celebrated as a festival every year. Let the festival be named *Budhi Parab* in his memory. Not only that, all the food, like Aarisha, jaggery meat curry, and rice flour that they prepared would be accepted by everyone, regardless of whether they were rich or poor. The festival will be celebrated for three days: the first day will be called baudi (chaudi), on which everyone will have meat and fish in their homes, and the next day will be called Sakrat Parab. On this day, there will be arrangements of chuda, mudhi, gud, and pie in everyone's house, along with meat and rice. After eating, everyone will dress in new clothes and go to the Lakhbindha

(*Bejha tunz*), held in memory of old people, and participate in the Lakhbindha (*Bejha tunz*). Considering the reality of celebrating this festival, it is celebrated in grand ceremonies in all regions, such as Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Balesore suburbs of Odisha, the entire Jharkhand state, and Medinipur, Bankura, and Santals inhabited areas of West Bengal. Of course, there are some differences in the variety of festivals in different regions. The purpose of this festival is to bid adieu to the previous year and wish a happy new year.

This day (*Makar Parab*) is considered the final day for some. A helping hand (*Guti*) is one of them. They are also locally called Barmasia. The young men or women who are working as *Guti Kalmi* in the house of the Santals. They are not treated as servants or maidservants in that family. Rather, they become new members of that family. So they are left in one house for four to five years. After so many years, on this day, it is normal for them to shed tears when they say goodbye to that family. This separation creates an atmosphere of compassion for both the owner and the animal. But despite this, reality is denied, and they are forced to accept it. Farmers who do not have their own land cultivate the land under contract with the landowner. He is called *Thika Chash* in the Santali language. This day is also their final date. On that day, Leek again took the land from them. Of course, if there is a good agreement between the *Thika Chas* man and the landowner, the period is extended for the next year. But sometimes this is not possible, and the day of mercy is cancelled for them as they take back the land. Similarly, this day is also the last day for cowherds (*Guti*). *Guti* have been hired for years to graze cattle in some villages in areas inhabited by Santals. For this, he is given some grain for each cow. Their contract also ended on this day. Therefore, even if the cows are not his own, he considers them to be his even more than his own. So this tradition has been celebrated as the last day for the *Guti*.

Sakrat is also observed as an auspicious day for several activities. Because it is named a holy day (*Akhan*) by the Santals. On this day, those who want to build a new house call elderly people (*Majhi Baba*), the village head man, and make a map of it (marked by drawing a rope on the ground). Therefore, it will be considered that the house building work started on this day.

Those who have a marriageable son at home and are willing to get married that year also call the senior members of their family and some of the *Majhi Baba* classes on the inside to discuss the matter. On this occasion, the opinion of the youth is also accepted. The prominent personalities present are asked, who is seeing a suitable girl where? Subinam (*Raibar Halam*) is requested to inform the bridegroom if no one is watching them. Since the Santals do not have a tradition of seeking a bridegroom from the girl's side, it is not discussed even if there are marriageable girls in the house. Only those who needed to keep their house together could find a bride. Generally, if there is no son at home, the parents think about keeping the house together.

Another thing done on this day is the sanctification of calves. In the tradition of the Santals, cattle are marked on their hindquarters from a young age (two to three years) to identify them. In order to make this mark, the iron (*Datram*) bar is touched to the mark and drawn in a specific manner. It should be noted here that the Santals have a tradition of giving different saints to different parishes (*chinha*). So, when the cow is lost, the people who find it see the spots. Be able to find out which *parish* it belongs to. They can also inform them if necessary. And this cow is needed when it is offered for a future marriage. Because without this sign, the cattle are not known to belong to that family and be clean. Therefore, if there is no sign in this case, the bridegroom has to be fined. As the Santals are agriculturists, earthworks are initiated on this holy day. It is worth mentioning here that even though there was no rain, they took the plough and

ploughed the dry land three times to touch it. On this occasion, it is considered auspicious if the cow's excrement is left on the right side. Their belief is that there will be good rains that year and good crops. They hold that it is not so auspicious when the left-handed buffalo leaves its excrement. On this auspicious day, a vermilion donation (*baha sawnha*) ceremony is held for brides who are brought in for love marriage that year. According to Santal tradition, until the sindur donation is completed, the daughter-in-law remains the clan's worshipper and choir house (*vitah olah*), which she can't erase. That is, until that time, he did not fully acquire the dignity of Kulabadhur (*Olah Rani*). So, the need for this sindurdan is easily understood from here.

Apart from the above activities, the Santals do another great thing on this occasion, which is to scatter the bones of their relative Krijan. What they call "*Jilinj Dahar*" or "*Damudar Chalah*", this tradition is seen in the Sadar sub-division of Mayurbhanj in Budha Balanga, Bhimkunda, Subarnarekha, Baripada, and areas like Kolkata near the Hawda river, West Bengal. On the other hand, in the Bamni sub-division of Mayurbhanj and the Singhdhoom area of Jharkhand, it is performed before Makar Sankranti (*Budhi Sakrat*). The significance of this festival is very important for the Santals, so they keep it in their folklore.



(Budhi Kumba)



(Jil Pitha)



Archery/Lakhabindha (Bejha Tunz)

4. Conclusion

It is a popular saying among the people of Odisha that they celebrate thirteen festivals in twelve months (*Bara Masare Tera Parba*). The essence of these festivals is not for the sake of celebration but as a very important medium for maintaining social relationships, unity, and belongingness, strengthening familial ties, and understanding each other. These festivals are the main source of infusing hospitable and amicable behaviour among the people of Odisha, and more specifically, the tribal people. The festivals are the lifeline of every Santal, and hopefully the new generation will carry this legacy of festivity and fervour forward.

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