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## BAHA PARAB (FLOWER FESTIVAL)

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### Abstract

Though India is a land of divertive religions and cultures comprised of both indigenous as well as immigrants, in this age of globalization, some of the festivals of the tribal communities still survive because of their uniqueness. This uniqueness is nothing but a kind of worship from the bottom of the heart of these indigenous people. It is that kind of worship of the nature by the natural human beings from the perspective of a kind of intrinsic enjoyment in order to the respect the nature. Amongst these festivals, *Baha Parab* or the Flower Festival is one. The purpose of this paper is to project this festival in detail in order to show how this festival makes the life of the *Santal* people meaningful.

### I

Over the course of its five millennia of recorded history, India has been the homeland of both indigenous populations and numerous waves of immigrants from both the West and the East. India, of course, is rich in diverse languages and cultures, but the flag of togetherness has never wavered. All of the world's major religions either originated in India or travelled here. The most important of these is Hinduism, which developed in India 4,000 years ago from the Vedic tradition. Using the Vedic text, which was most likely largely written in India, the ancient Indian wise thinkers instilled the Vedic faith, a mirror of profoundly Indian intellectual traditions.

While little is known explicitly about the pre-Vedic convictions and their bases, there is a very slight influence of pre-Vedic aspects on Indian culture and tradition. The Hindu god Shiva is thought to have sprung from the non-Vedic, or Dravidian, tradition. Since the Vedas make no reference of the goddesses *Kali* or *Ayaspan*, it was assumed that they too originated outside of the Vedas. In the sixth century B.C.E., Mahavira and Buddha, through Buddhism and Jainism, respectively, revitalize the non-Vedic faith. India is home to a growing number of Jews as well as Christians. Subsequent groups of Muhammad's followers began attacking India in the ninth century A.D.E., and they founded the religion of Islamism, which today has a sizable following. Once more, starting in the fourteenth century, the Dutch, French, British, Germans, and others invade India.

This means India by default is a country where unity in diversity is the main mantra of living force. This history of the past is still alive following this main mantra and thereby many sects of people have been living peacefully following their rituals and cultures. Sometimes it remains limited within a certain boundary in individual life or social life, sometimes it crosses the boundary and meets with another culture. Changes in family, social or national life took place at the center of this meeting of human-culture. There are many tribes or communities in India, whose national life even in this age of globalization is complementary with their own unique traditions. They continue to amaze the modern world with their robust expression of primitive life and dance-art. The individuality they have been able to retain even today is possible only because of their natural environment. They thrive in a calm yet wild environment. They wake up with the chirping of the morning birds, depression descends on their lives with the twilight moment. But still the softness of peace emerges in their frank conversation.

### II

Amongst these indigenes people, the *Santal* community is very well known. The social life of the *Santals* is very simple, divertive, and nurtured by the deep affection of the Goddess *Prakriti* (Nature). This deep affection with the *Prakriti* (Nature) is expressed by the *Santal* community through some special festivals throughout the year. These festivals add variety to their quiet village life and give them a taste of contentment. All these festivals are the path of their social and religious life. They celebrate different festivals in different seasons. The history of the celebration of these festivals is connected with their life history.



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Just before the starting of the rainy season i.e., during the time of seeding and the time of harvesting the crops, the *Santal* peoples celebrate ‘*Eroh Sim*’, ‘*Hariad Sim*’, ‘*Janthad*’ and ‘*Saharai*’ festivals.<sup>1</sup> But at the arrival of spring, when the whole world is filled with flowers and fruits, the animals and birds all around merrily rejoice, the *Santal* community celebrates the *Baha Parab* or the festival of flower in order to be the part of that natural beauty.<sup>2</sup> Through this festival they worship the nature goddess.

The meaning of the word ‘*Baha*’ is flower. That is why it is actually a festival centered with the flower. As the *Santal* community believes that the nature is their goddess, and the nature is full of flowers means the nature is dressed in a new fashion. It starts with the arrival of spring, when the nature-goddess is dressed in a new outfit, old leaves fall from trees, new leaves are grown, colorful flowers blossom in the branches, groups of butterflies fly over flowers with colorful wings, villages and forests become lively with the melodious songs of birds. The beauty of nature-goddess is the soul of this festival. *Santals* throw themselves in this stream of beauty of nature through dance-song and *Puja-Parban* (worship) and pray for their own happiness, prosperity and welfare.

The ‘*Baha*’ phase starts from the *Dwadashi tithi* of *Shuklapaksha* of *Phalgun (Baha Bonga)* month. Consuming the *mahua* flowers are prohibited to each individual of this community until the *Baha Parva* is celebrated, nor do girls wear shawl flowers on their heads.<sup>3</sup> If anyone violets this tradition his family will be punished through the ban of the *Naike* (priest). This festival is especially dedicated to shawl tree. The significance of this festival lies in the fact that shawl and *mahua* are the most important in the life of the indigenous people. Shawl trees are used to make their house, and the *mahua* fruits are used to prepare their hot drinks which they drink at the time of dancing in the festivals. That is why both these trees should be protected.

However, from the spiritual perspective the shawl trees are the sign of the Truth. *Santal* tribal people also believe that it is not right to use nature’s fresh leaves and flowers without the permission of the god. That is why they at first offer these flowers to the Lord Marang Buru, Jaher Era and Marhe Ko Turui Ko then the ordinary people get the permission for using these flowers and leaves. In fact, the *Baha Bonga puja* is mandatory for the Santal people, because until this *puja* is celebrated, none is permitted to use of new leaves, new flowers and new fruits for celebrating any auspicious occasion.

### III

At least seven days before of the *Baha Bonga*, the *Manjhi* of the village calls the *Naike* (village priest) and fixes the date. After the confirmation of the date, the *Naike* inform the villagers about the date of *puja* through the *Godeth* (village messenger). This *puja* is celebrated for three days.

#### Day-1 *Um Maha*:

The Santali word ‘*um-maha*’ means the day of dirt-free and purification. The first day among the three days of *Baha Bonga* is *Um-Maha*. On this day, the young boys of the village cut small branches of the shawl trees from the forest in order to build six huts in the names of six god and goddesses (Jaher Era, Marang Buru, Moreko-Turuiko, Gosare, Manjhi Bonga, and Gosai-Era) at *Jaher-Than* i.e., the place of God. When the huts are ready, the *Naike* Baba (village priest) after taking a bath, coats the place of God with cow dung in order to place Jaher Era, Marang Buru, Moreko-Turuiko, Gosare, Manjhi Bonga, and Gosai-Era in their respective huts. Then he draws some *Khond-s* (designs) with white paint made of rice-paste on the mud floor of the huts. On this day at the evening *Tumdag (madol)*, *Tamak (dhamsa)*, and *Jhai-Kortal* (music) are played at the *Naike* Baba’s house where the villagers gather. *Naike* Baba invokes the god and goddesses so that they could appear among them. In order to response the pure prayer of god and goddesses from his heart, the god and goddesses find no other way but to appear before the public in order to prove their divine present through simple souls. These means Marang Buru, Jaher-Era and Moreko-Turuiko appear in three people in such

<sup>1</sup> Baskey, Dhirendranath: Adibasi Samaj O Palparban( Tribal Society and Festival), Lokosanskriti o Adibasi Sanskriti Kendra, 2005, P-78

<sup>2</sup> Hembrom, T. : The Santals, Punthi Pustak, Culcutta, 1996, P-43

<sup>3</sup> Murmu, Rameswar: Jhaher Bonga Santarh Ka (A Book on Customary Rituals & Social Activities of Santals), Adim Publication- Kolkata, 2001, P-152



a way that the divine activities are performed by these three persons.<sup>4</sup> The Marang Buru takes the axe, the Moreko takes the bow and arrow; whereas the Jaher-Era is possessed with garlands, rings, basket and broom. After the appearance of these three heavenly persons, the Naike Baba along with them goes to the Jaherthan to perform the rest ritual activities.

In this modern age of Globalization, this type of activities undoubtedly categorised as unscientific, because none of the modern civilized person believe on the appearance of god or goddesses in man for a few hours. The medical persons will mark it as some kinds of mental disorder. Whether these types of fact could be treated as unscientific or not is a debatable issue, we should not forget that India is fertile land of spiritual cultivation in order to realize the final destination of human being. However, the appearance of Marang Buru, Jaher-Era and Moreko-Turuiko in the individual persons, are actually the representations of unconditional beliefs and the personification of the god or goddesses in order to save the nature.

### Day-2 Sardi Maha:

On the Sardi Maha, Naike Baba takes bath in the early morning and brings water in his house by a new pitcher with the help of an unmarried boy. Then he with a Naoya-Hatag (winnowing-fan or *kula*) filled with the articles for worship in his hand goes to Jaherthan along with the villagers. The Naike chants the mantras after reaching the Jaherthan where Marang Buru, Jaher-Era and Moreko-Turuiko are present in the form of three villagers following the last night. Next, all of them go to jungle where the Moreko-Turuiko throws an arrow at a shawl tree, Marang Buru climbed on that tree to pluck the flowers and Jaher-Era collects the flowers and finally, they come back to the Jaherthan. Then the Naike Baba starts the rituals related with the worship with the collected shawl flowers. The Marang Buru, Jaher-Era, Moreko-Turuiko, Gosare, Majhi Bonga and Gosai-Era in this occasion, are worshiped by the Naike Baba at their particular hut through the sacrifice of rice-beer and cocks. After the end of the worship, all of them enjoy a plate full of hodgepodge, as complacency, prepared with the sacrificed chicken to Marang Buru, Jaher-Era, Moreko-Turuiko, Gosare, Majhi Bonga and Gosai-Era at the time of worship. After cleaning that area, everyone except the Naike Baba return. However, the Naike Baba, at the afternoon, lefts that place with some shawl flowers accompanied by some of the youths, in order to make a walk into the entire village. At that time his feet are washed by the girls who have been waiting to get the blessings of the god and goddesses. Naike Baba gives them the flowers of shawl as if they are bestowed by the god and goddesses. Let it be noted that any girl is permitted to wear shawl flowers on her head for that year if and only if she is bestowed by that shawl flowers through the hand of Naike Baba. On this night, the people of the village dance and sing with flute, dhamsa, madol etc.

### Day-3 Baha Baskey:

On final day i.e., on Baha Baskey day, in the village, boys-girls splash water on each other as if the sacred Holi festival of the Hindus. In fact, in santhal community, the sprinkling of water signifies the cleanliness of all sins done in the past, just like taking bath in the holy river Ganges.

1. Baskey, Dhirendranath: Adibasi Samaj O Palparban( Tribal Society and Festival), Lokosanskriti o Adibasi Sanskriti Kendra, 2005
2. Hembrom, T. : The Santals, Punthi Pustak, Culcutta, 1996
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4. Baskey, Dhirendranath: *Paschim Banger Adibasi Samaj*, Subarnarekha Publishers, Kolkata,1987

<sup>4</sup> Baskey, Dhirendranath: *Paschim Banger Adibasi Samaj*, Subarnarekha Publishers, Kolkata,1987, P-214