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## Echoes of tradition and heritage: The ritualistic music and dance in Santal culture and festivals

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### Abstract

Santali music and dance have a profound position in the cultural and spiritual practices of the Santal community. It shapes their customs and ceremonies which continue through generations. This paper explores the significance and value of Santal festivals music and dance, through their religious ceremonies, social bonding, and identity preservation. Festivals like Sorhai, Baha, Karam, and Dasai, represent unique musical rhythms, lyrics and dance patterns that reflect the community beliefs, deep connection with nature and their ancestral heritage.

This research examines the symbolic meaning of the musical instruments like Tumdak, Tamak, Banam, and also analyzes dance movements which convey emotions, blessings, and communal unity. The paper explores how the Santal community transmits its songs and dances through oral tradition. It highlights the challenges of modernization, migration, and changing cultural dynamics that endanger these traditional practices. Additionally, this research explores the modern initiatives to preserve and adapt ritualistic performances, as well as investigates the impact of educational platforms and cultural organization and digital platforms that sustain the survival of Santal cultural heritage.

This research is conducted in Pakuahat, a region with a rich Santal presence, offering a focused study. The paper investigates the evolution of Santal ritualistic music and dance, using field research combined with literary review and ethnographic methodology to address understudied knowledge gaps. The study emphasizes that the activities should continue so the Santal cultural practices become foundational to Santal identity in present day society.

**Keywords:** Santal culture, Ritualistic music, Traditional dance, Festivals and Ceremonies, musical instruments

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### Introduction:

The Santal people represent one of India's biggest Indigenous tribes whose cultural legacy grows from spiritual customs and nature traditions merged with group identity. The core features of Santal heritage include their original musical expressions that serve as essential tools for living. All Santal ceremonies from festive events including Sorhai, Dasai, Karam, Baha Parab to marital and funeral celebrations include ritualistic musical performances.

Specific rhythm and song patterns together with dance movements during each celebration lead the community toward their ancestral history through their symbolic value.

The essay analyzes the living nature of Santal musical and dance traditions based on ethnographic research conducted in the West Bengal area of Pakuahat which hosts vital Santal cultural activity. During ceremonial observations researchers recorded how music instruments adjust sounded tones and rhythm patterns to match each occasion while being played in tamak', tumdak', and tiriyo instruments. This song data reveals the deep meaning within Santal compositions since the Dasai song describes the quest for cultural origins through its "dhak" sound imagery.

The research demonstrates Santal music and dance endurance amid contemporary threats of modernization and cultural homogenization because of migration. The study integrates ethnographic research and scholarly works of Onkar Prasad, Rajesh Kumar, Shibasambhu Nandi, and Subhash Hansda to create a detailed understanding of ritualistic traditions that protect cultural identities while building social networks despite modern obstacles. This investigation works to show how essential it is to protect these important living customs for the benefit of coming generations.

### **Ritualistic music in Santal culture:**

Santali music plays a major role in how the tribe shows their traditions and is used through all daily activities and ceremonies. As stated by Onkar Prasad (1995), Santali music stands as more than artistic expression because it helps the tribe uphold its culture by keeping alive ancient legends and present experiences in song. People use diverse songs for different events including festive activities at Baha and funeral ceremonies. The music songs depend on event circumstances yet keep similar instruments throughout.

According to Rajesh Kumar's 2019 article various folk dances are performed at festivals and religious events. The specific songs exist for particular events such as harvest celebration and wedding ceremonies. For example, in the Baha Parab, which marks the beginning of spring, songs of renewal and fertility are sung. The music and dance activities that are observed in my fieldwork in Pakuahat: during Baha, music and dance marked both celebration and spiritual renewal.

During Dasai which occurs during Durga Puja period a special song is:

“Oka duyar redo groho dhak do sadı kan groho rankı rara kan? Dıbi duyar redo groho dhakdo sadı kan groho rınkı rara kan.”

The song narrates a symbolic journey of a community toward the unknown direction of a distant dhak drum as its members pursue the source of its sound. The image expresses several aspects of culture including exploration and living a life filled with cultural meaning. The actual messages within these songs enable them to become more than musical presentations because they connect and unite people through common experiences.

### **Musical instruments and symbolic meaning:**

The Santals use identical musical instruments for various occasions according to your field observations but the actual musical performance changes through different playing techniques. The main instruments include:

The traditional drums called Tumdak and Tamak produce rhythms as a main musical function. The bamboo flute Trio acts as an instrument for emotional communication and serves courtship activities. People play Banam as a story-telling string musical instrument.

Both percussion instruments Dhak and Madal are played during big community get-togethers. The musical instruments extend their function beyond rhythm and melody creation. Rates of these traditional instruments remain essential components within the Santal lifestyle of spirituality and their storytelling practice. According to Hansda (2022) the forest instrumental system functions as “the voices of the forest” that resembles natural acoustic elements such as bird song and leaf movement and rain sounds to form an ionic bond between society and their habitat.

Sohrai brings out the heart pulse rhythm of the Tamak' instrument to represent Earth's heartbeat during the agricultural harvest festival. The Karam dance features procreativity-focused music performed through drum and flute synchronizations that produce a spiritual connection to ancestral divine forces.

The observations during fieldwork showed how using the same musical instruments in weddings and funerals leads to total mood and importance transformations based on rhythm and tempo adjustments and volume changes. The artistic flexibility together with the emotional range of Santal musical traditions finds clear expression through their ability to adapt.

### **Santhal dance form and their cultural meaning;**

Dance operates jointly with Santal music at all times. Dance functions as a shared visual communication system which exemplifies public opinions together with male-female social positions as well as connection to natural environments. According to your field research at Pakuahat the collective festive dance consists of harmonized footwork combined with circular formations and bright traditional clothing that aligns male and female participants as they join hands in formation.

The dance performed in Baha Parab adheres to natural rhythms. In the study by Nandi (2020) readers learn that dancers express harmonious motion with the Tumdak beat which resembles both blooming flowers and flowing rivers. Every part of the dance including steps and postures as well as turns consists of cultural significance. Through dance the performer uses stooping movements to show humility toward natural entities and jumps upward to represent spiritual connection.

Rajesh Kumar (2019) demonstrates that Dasai and Karam festival dances take narrative structures. The community members share unrecorded stories about spiritual entities and migration events alongside philosophical moral teachings. The performance functions as an active repository that exists in the present.

The custom during Santal funeral ceremonies includes ceremonial dancing which takes place both by the fire and at the grave site. The controlled body movements convey reverence as well as the spiritual path the soul takes when it goes to the afterlife. Wedding dances typically consist of merry performances that feature family jesting between the bride and groom. The Santal dance ceremonies serve as active timekeeping mechanisms for recording the vital elements of human memory and religious practices alongside social customs.

### **Gender and community participation**

Gender roles define the performances of Santal dance and music even though performers always collaborate inclusively. The fieldwork documented that performances show active male and female participation yet they occupy different areas of operation. The male

participants in the rituals perform music and women serve as singers while dancing. The performance rules change based on where the occasion takes place but these regulations are not set in stone. The author Hansda (2022) explains that gender harmony makes these performances stand out as one of the few social spaces where people can witness it. During Baha and Karam festivals the specific dance formations alternate male with female participants to signify their complementary role in natural humankind.

The neighborhood participants actively engage in this practice. Observing and practicing after elders teaches children new things. Circular wisdom is obtained through active engagement rather than traditional educational methods. Participation along with continuous practice will provide all the necessary training to become skilled. You witnessed young boys performing their drums when elderly women took the lead in singing during field observations thereby demonstrating how traditions smoothly transfer from generation to generation. Community events and performances only serve the community members because outsiders never participate nor do they generate commercial income. This ensures authenticity and sustainability. Through group rituals the community achieves strength that develops social connections and increases group membership while maintaining cooperative values and respect for each other.

### **Preservation Efforts and Contemporary Challenges:**

Santhal music and dance traditions preserve their traditional character but confront increasing threats because people turn toward modernization and migration as well as cultural assimilation. Youth culture participation in digital and urban existence presents a risk of abandoning traditional practices because they may exist as empty performances without their authentic significance.

Shibasambhu Nandi (2020) demonstrates in his Baha Parab research that numerous youth members have cut ties with their cultural ceremonies. Elder residents at Pakuahat stated their worry about the declining transmission of songs and dances to younger generations. The transmission of traditional cultural knowledge through communal events Baha Sohrai and Dasai is now disappearing.

Still, local efforts are emerging. Students in Pakuahat receive encouragement from cultural groups together with local teachers to take part in traditional holidays and learn artistic traditions of their heritage. Several NGOs together with researchers create documentation of these traditions through their interview and recording processes.

Such initiatives lack sustainability without well-organized backing. Long-term preservation depends on internal community participation and external support which should notably come from government authorities. Lack of official recognition along with insufficient resources and public recognition endangers Santhal music and dance from disappearing from the cultural heritage.

The preservation of these cultural traditions proves vital because it safeguards both Santhal cultural heritage and the total cultural diversity within the region.

### **Conclusion:**

The Santal community builds its beliefs along with its historic identity together with its collective identity through their music and dance forms. At Santal festivals Baha, Sohrai, Karam and Dasai the people perform rituals to express their happiness along with their

suffering and solidarity and opposition against authority. Through cultural expressions the community reveals its worldview and its spiritual beliefs and social framework.

The research conducted in Pakuahat demonstrates that traditional music and dance establish living traditions because they continue through generational transmission along with ongoing transformations. These traditional cultural practices maintain their great value but encounter challenges due to contemporary development and the diminishing cultural connection between older and younger Santhal members.

However, there is still hope. Santhal people actively protect their cultural heritage through their communal work alongside educational initiatives and documentation projects. Broader commitment from external organizations together with governmental support systems would bolster these efforts to maintain the hearty beats of 'Madal' and the profound messages present in their sound compositions.

The survival of Santhal ritual music and dance relies on individual and shared responsibilities from all members of their community. The recognition of these local art forms as cultural legacy will strengthen efforts for protecting their value in addition to celebrating their contributions to India's overall cultural heritage.

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