

THE DRUM-BEAT IN SANTHAL CULTURE

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In Santhal society the drum-beat is considered an integral part of Santhal life. Through phonetic connotation it expresses a part of the culture.

Santhal Pundits at different times have tried to convert the sound of the drum-beat into phonetic expression. Pandit Sadu Ramchand Murmu, the great Santhal poet, was the chief protagonist of this movement.

Santhals, numerically the largest of Indian Tribes, have preserved their traditional culture and have retained their dialect in three different States of the country, namely Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa. They form a fascinating rural community with a highly developed aesthetic sense. They have a passion for music and dance and possess varied types of musical instruments such as kettle-drums and others which form part of their culture.

Santhals are mainly a settled agricultural tribe. Pot-herbs and rice is their usual diet. Besides these, they occasionally also eat meat and fish.

The Santhal woman has her own individual style of wearing a Sari. She wraps it round her waist in such a fashion that one end of the breadth of the Sari hangs a little below the knees. The other end is thrown over the left shoulder covering her breasts; the remaining part goes over her back and again is wrapped round her waist. Men wear a short length dhoti. But the dress style has undergone certain changes in the present-day.

Santhals live in well organised villages called *Ato-more-hor*, isolated from the non-tribal population. Every village has a *Majhi* (headman of the village), *Jogmajhi* (assistant headman of the village), *Godet* (the village messenger), *Paranik* (head assistant of *Majhi*) and *Guni-gurib* (the rest of the villagers). This organisation (*Ato-more-her*) looks after the socio-economic and religious affairs of the village.

Role of the Drum-beat

Santhals are a pleasure-loving, colourful people and claim to be *rasikas*. They celebrate various festivals with much zest and gusto. Almost every month they organise functions of dance and music.

Every evening after dusk, one can hear the beat of drums from Santhal villages, for drums play an essential role in most Santhal dances. Social festivities and religious ceremonies cannot be thought of without the dance and drum-beat. Only a few types of dances are not accompanied by drums; in these, drums are replaced by some other musical instruments such as *Sarpa* and *Bhuang* (chordophones).

Division of Drum-beats

The drum-beats of Santhal society may be divided into four parts:

- (a) *Khandia* (*Torou*) —opening drum-beat
- (b) *Ru-laga* —dance drum-beat
- (c) *Ru-torou* —changing drum-beat or renewing drum-beat
- (d) *Ru-muchat* —finale drum-beat

(a) *Khandia* — This is an introductory drum-beat. The beats are indicative of the type of beat that will accompany the dance which is to follow. It ushers in the dancers and creates the necessary mood. Sometimes this type of drum-beat has no other purpose except to entertain people. It is a complete form in itself, and lasts for a short duration. While it is being played the dancers do not move but keep themselves in readiness.

(b) *Ru-laga* — This is the second part of the drum-beat with the longest duration and follows *Khandia*. *Ru-laga* is called a dance drum-beat.

(c) *Ru-torou*—Usually changes the form by varying what may be called the style of the drum-beat, or sometimes it replaces one beat, with another.

(d) *Ru-muchat* — A *Ru-laga* is brought to an end with *Ru-muchat*. This combines *Ru-torou* and *Khandia*. Here *Khandia* is played after *Ru-torou*.

The drum-beat accompanying a dance should be complete, and includes the playing sequence, of all four parts.

The uniqueness of the drum-beat in Santhal community is its power of co-ordinating different sounds of beats and synchronising them into a harmonious whole.

Baha and Ma-More Ru

Baha and *Ma-more* are two festivals of common origin. *Baha* is a festival to propitiate the gods by offering flowers and taking solemn oaths for invoking their blessings, before starting any agricultural operations like tilling of land and sowing of seeds, etc. When the harvest is over in winter, there comes the harvest festival called *Ma-more*. At both the *Baha* and *Ma-more* festivals the same songs are sung and the tribals organise the same dances and play the same drum-beats. *Baha* is celebrated during the spring season. *Ma-more* also includes homage to the gods and ancestors of village apart from being a seasonal festival.

Phonetic expressions of the *Baha* drum-beat can be stated :

Khandia: 'Dharti-ttang tis caba, da-te dharti o-da tis o-da.'

When does earth quench its thirst?
As soon as the earth is watered.

Ru-laga —'Badur den badur Badur atan tetang lagaii'

Oh showers, fall on earth
Oh showers, quench my thirst.

In order to cause rainfall Santhals invoke the deities of the village and swear solemn oaths. The foot work of the dance which follows, imitates rhythmically the showers of rain.

Ru-laga —'Badur den badur
Badur atan tetang lagaii'

—Oh showers fall on earth
Oh showers, quench my thirst.

In addition there is another type of *Ru-laga*-

'Er me tolaii me
Tod kate rohoi me'

—Sow and broadcast the seed
Then transplant the seedling.

When the drum gives out this beat, the dancing feet pick up momentum and start moving swiftly. The dancer's body bends forward and backward rhythmically.

This form may be replaced by another type of drum-beat without breaking the continuity :

*'Tod' kedam rohoi kedam
Gachi gachi herhed me'*

(You) transplanted the seedling
(You) weed the root of each of the paddy plants.

Besides, these, there is another type of drum-beat which is performed in *Baha* and *Ma-more* festivals.

Lagre or Langre Ru

The name *Lagre* has been derived from *La* and *More*. *La* means scraping or removing the grass from the surface of the earth. Here it stands for *akhara* (centre of a village or meeting place of villagers). *More* means five, it stands for the whole village group including *Majhi*, *Jogmajhi*, *Paranik*, *Godet* and other village folk. *More* is degenerated as 'ngre' or 'gre' and compounded with *La* to form *Lagre* or *Langre*.

The Headman of *Moreko* (village Panchayat) is called *Majhi*; he engages two virgin maids to cut the grass of the *akhara* and to purify the spot by washing it with cow-dung water. Then with the solemn chanting of *mantras*, they start the communal dance. The significance of the dance is to invoke the rains for better crops and fertility.

Phonetic expression of *Khandia* is given :

*'Dharti c-etam ing atang da-ting,
da-te tetang lagaii ting'.*

On the surface of earth
I invoke rain.
Oh Rains! quench our thirst.

Phonetic expression of *Ru-laga*:

*'Dharti abowa da ce-tan mena aa
da-te dharti tabo sona aa.*

The earth, floating over water,
water makes it a golden earth.

The drum-beat accompanying the songs and dances signify the prospect of agricultural work.

The first line of *Khandia* may be replaced by *Ru-torou* by repeating beats. But it is brought to an end with the double beats of *Khandia*.

Bariat Ru

Drum-beats during a marriage ceremony are equally important in Santhal society. The marriage ceremony of Santhals is always associated with dances and drum-beats.

While the members of the groom's party (*Bariat*) proceed to the brides' house they take kettle drums, *tumda* and *chorchori* (membrophones) etc. The drum beat may be converted into phonetic expression:

Hati sadom jhil jhol
C-ak lekon dar-hii

Elephants and horses have been decorated with glittering metals. Each member of the marriage party has a round turban on his head.

One type of *Bariat-ru* may be replaced by any other type while passing on the way:

Har maco adi geo-o jhail ting
dela abo c-ala ab-o doua-dhoui

The distance is very great,
Let us hurry up to reach our destination.

As the groom's party approaches near the bride's village the drum-beat changes to :

Dinge dinge dhorom reya talarebin ta-hena
Jouge dhorom dohoy bin, dhorom ta-bin manaou bin.

Every day lead a holy life,
Obey the tenets of religion and enjoy a happy conjugal life.

Bariat-ru is not a dance drum-beat. It is a drum-beat while on the way to the bride's village a processional beat.

'Da-n-ta' -Ru

The word *danta* has been derived from *dan* and *tanga*. *Dan* means club-stick of a suitable length and *tanga* means 'battle axe'. The said instruments have been associated with clearing a jungle for the setting up of a new

settlement. Now-a-days, this festival is celebrated to revive the practices of Santhal tradition. Usually after the harvest season in the month of 'January-February' the ceremony is performed.

Phonetic expression of *Danta Khandia* :

*'Dela logon ya
colo logon ya
pan-te logon ya
mit-te sapab aa-te;
dela mag mag aa
Dela dipil dipil.*

Let us hurry,
move quickly,
Move together quickly
And in a row, hurriedly;
Hand in hand together,
Come : cut and cut (the trees)
Come : carry away the bundles.

Phonetic expression of *ru-torou* as :

*'dela logon
colo-logon
mit-te logon ya'*

Come hurry :
move quickly
move together and hurry up.

Phonetic expression of *ru-laga* :

*Ma-mag mag me
dela dipil dipil me—
ma-gating jage me;
Onte note gating dipil gidi me' —*

(You) Cut and cut (the trees),
Come : carry away in bundles,
Dear one : collect it,
Dear one : bundle it and carry it away;
to a distance, carry away the bundles.

Ru-laga is rounded off with *ru-muchat* and may be replaced with *ru-torou*-. The rythm of the dance, the chant of the songs and drum-beats together express the operation of clearing a jungle for a new settlement.

Sendra-Ru

Santhals are very fond of hunting. Whenever they propose to hunt in a big jungle they circulate a *gira* to all Santhal inhabitants. (Meaning of '*Gira*' is news). Physically *gira* is made up of the bark-fibre of the Sal tree (*Shorea-robusta*). The fibre is knotted with several knots. Each knot signifies a day. Seeing the number of knots in the bark-fibre a Santhal can easily decipher the day of the commencement of the hunt. As soon as the *gira* is circulated, Santhals prepare their kettle drums, and *chorchori*, for the hunting ceremony.

One or two days prior to the day fixed, Santhals start for the jungle. On the day of departure before leaving the precincts of a village, the drums are played at the *akhara* alerting all the hunters of the preparations. The sound of the drums inspire and enthuse the hunters with joy and heroic zeal. The drum rolls i.e. *Tamak* (or kettle drum) alone. "*den-den-den*" means, "hurry, hurry and hurry up". Then it rolls accompanying a *chorchori* "*den se, potam tam, ghir-ghir, den-se, potom tam*", means 'hurry up and get your food bundle ready for long-disnace hunting'. They always take drums and musical instruments in a communal hunt and the beats of the drums inspire the hunters during the chase and kill of the game in the jungle.

After dark sets in, they stop the hunting and all of them gather at a previously selected spot along with their weapons and hunting dogs. The women join them from nearby villages at the "*gipitic-tandi*" (resting place). They carry pots of rice-beer. They sell rice-beer (*handi*) to the hunters. Men play the drums. Some of them form a group to organise a dance. Prior to the dance they play drums. The drum-beats relax their mind and the pleasing soft sounds inspire the gathering. It may be converted into phonetic expression as :

"*Kunti-bid-pe*" which means "Set up the poles". When the beats of the kettle drum is accompanied by the beats of *chorchori* the sound excites them. The sound is as follows :

*"Khunti bid pe,
tol-ko tape seta ko-do,
Khunti bid pe"*.

Set up the poles,
tie the dogs to the poles,
Set up the poles."

The rousing pulse of the phonetic expression of these dancing drum-beats goad the hunter further, thus :

*"Sar-tam kapi tam,
Sar-tam kapitam sabtam*

*Delang bir bon delang bir bon
delang bir bon bairii daram.*

Prepare the arrows and battle axes,
hold the arrows and battle axes,
Let us go to a jungle,
Let us go to a jungle for hunting.

Conclusion

Santhals celebrate various festivals either social or religious almost in every month of the year. Festivals are a part of their traditional life-style and the dances accompanied with drums and musical instruments are an integral part of each festival. Thus the drum beats during 'Baha and Ma-more' festival, *Bariat* ceremony, *Lagre*, *Danta* and at the occasion of communal hunting (*Send'ra*) have their significant role to play in the traditional performance held on festive and other occasions. The modulations in drum sounds, different rhythms and their sequences express the different phases of traditional customs and practices, past and present. The beat of the drum is the very pulse of the Santhals.