

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What are the social backgrounds of the Tribal people living in Uttar Dinajpur district?

Before attempting to discuss about the social background of the tribes of Uttar Dinajpur, we should have fir-hand knowledge on how the tribes have come, wherefrom they have come, where their whereabouts were and why they have poured into the district. There are about thirty nine types of Scheduled Tribes living in Uttar Dinajpur at present. Among them the mention worthy are the Santals, Oraon, Hansda, Hembrom, Murmu, Pahan, Munda, Tudu, Pahari, Malpahari, Yogi, Mahato etc. Different sections of the tribal community have come in the district in various ways. They used to live in this district from generation to generation since 1853. Those settled down them in the like manner are known as pre-Dravidian, Pre-Aryans and pre-Astroloid. Later, in 1854-1855, after the Santhal Revolution in Santhal Pargana, the British unleashed ruthless torture on them. It was mainly due to their untiring effort to bring their own societies and the other in one platform to oppose the British. Besides this, the British Government pressed them on further torture out of the fear that the Santhals, being more united, might cause some greater upheaval. As this area was the main habitat of the Santhals, the British wanted them heart and soul that they could neither be reunited nor be settled permanently in the Parganas. Under this situation, the helpless tribals chose up West Dinajpur as a calm, solitary and severe region. Thus, it is found, the rate of tribal inhabitants in undivided West Dinajpur during 1990 was 15% while the percentage of tribals in North Dinajpur

after 1st April 1990 stands to 6% and the Dakshin Dinajpur district with the rest tribals totals up to 9%.

Apart from these, the situation under which the tribals came and settled down this district are – during 1964-65 many a tribal people fled to this district having oppressed by the then East Pakistan Govt. The Pathan Govt. was no less oppression than that of the British Govt. The East Pakistani Pathans knew that the Santhal community has enough reviving spirit in themselves. They can, at any moment jump into a revitalizing upheaval by making the other communities politically conscious which the early histories of the tribals put in evidence to them.

They have followed up tactics of oppressions from the British Govt. The Khan administration was aware of this consciousness of the tribals. So, they were always alert to drive them away from their native-land. The tribals, being unable to bear with this torture, were compelled to enter the Indian soil, crossing the international boundaries and took up West Dinajpur as well as North Dinajpur as their dwelling place.

In 1941 when in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) there was fierce fighting on the establishment authority and supremacy between the Pathan, alias – "Bihari" vs. the Bengalee, the tribal communities faced severe tortures. The tribals as if became a thing of suspicion and grudge, the West Pakistan Govt. wanted to dominate over West Pakistan or the Bengalee of Bangladesh. So they unleashed inhuman torture on the Bengalee. The conscious tribals had their supporting view to the Bengalee and joined the uprising. So, even the tribals became a target point of Govt. like the Bengalee, the

tribals were oppressed. As a result, they again started streaming into India as did in 1965 and they came to West Dinajpur, being a vicinity of Bangladesh. After the divide of West Dinajpur into Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur on 1st April, 1992, they started living in both the districts. It is found in a spot survey that those who have come to India from Bangladesh either in 1965 or in 1971 have not even got their voter identity card or ration card. As a result they are being deprived from many an Indian Govt. opportunities. In spite of being tribal and needy or have-nots they cannot avail themselves to the benefices of the Government.

The tribal people of West Dinajpur passed their lives for generations this way. Their descendants, even today have been living in the same manner in this region. Then from 18th to 19th century, they used to power in gradually with different phases. So, each Block, Gram Panchayat is found with more or less tribal people. As a consequence, they are found as most primitive trace of human civilization, similarly are traced back as comparatively new aged inhabitant in this district.

The tribal people go on having resort to different social customs, conventions, religious beliefs, culture and rituals. No similarity is found between their customs and culture and those of the other higher classes' societies. Especially those living in Uttar Dinajpur are almost-dissimilar or different from the others. Dances, cultural programmes, social customs and conventions which the Adivasis observe are not followed by the Adivasis of the other districts.

Tribal communities follow various religious beliefs. There are different types of Gods and Deities as worshiped by the tribals of Uttar Dinajpur.

Their each and every walk of life is associated with different Gods and Deities. They have been staunch devotee to their primitive Gods, the Shiva, the Surya and they worship the deities like *Bishoy Chandi*, *Sukan Chandi*, *Yogini Chandi*, *Basanta Kunwari Chandi*, *Banga*, shapeless God etc. Their worshipping Gods are even connected with different customs and conventions of their lives. They perform those rituals in the most festive manner are – *Arak Bonga* (Home God) *Dahar Bonga* (Travel God) *Shaluk Puja*, *Aktar Puja* etc. The Pujas need different trees, creepers and leaves. The trees and leaves used in their Pujas are – Banana tree, *Shimul* tree, turf mango leaves etc. In each and every case they use vermillion.

There are a lot of anecdotes and sayings centring round these Gods and Deities. In this connection the mythological story of the first man and first women is well cited.

At the very onset of the story, a flock of geese are found hovering with water underneath having no jungle or land-world. Taking compassion on the exhausted geese, God commanded *Marang Buru* to create the land world with much effort. *Marang Buru* to create the land-world. With much effort *Marang Buru* created land from the aquatic world and invented one kind of grass called 'chimba'. The geese took shelter on the gross land and laid these eggs. From those eggs came out the First Man, "Pilchu Horom" and the First Woman "Pilchu Buree." They are the first two human conjugal partners. With the command of God (*Thakur*) *Marang Buru* began looking after them. They both grew older under the care of *Marang Buru*.

One *Marang Buru* taught the couple on how toxicated drinks can be produced from the seeds of *shoma*-grass. Papu containers are also made.

When the *Pilchus* were about to have the drink, *Marang Buru* stopped them and asked them to offer first in the container in His name. Accordingly they followed the advice. Accordingly to tribal mythology, this was the first offering for God from the part of human being. *Marang Buru* went away. *Pilchu Horom* and *Pilchu Buree* took that toxicated drink from cons of their heart. Immediately this caused a sexual excitement. *Pilchu Horom* and *Pilchu Buree* spent away the night as husband and wife. On the following day, the First man and Woman felt ashamed of *Marang Buru*. But *Marang Buru* assured them saying – they have done so for the sake of creation and there is nothing to be ashamed of it.

The first couple, in this way, bore with seven male and seven female children. With the advice of *Marang Buru*, the male and the female children were kept aside into two different places. It was commanded that they should live in their own whereabouts and not go to the other. One day during a deer-hunting expedition, the male boys approached the whereabouts of the female ones while chasing a wounded deer. Both the boys and the girls were taken aback of each other. They could never think that the jungle could accommodate their opposite sex – the female one.

Curiosity brought them together. They danced and sang chorus and spent away the whole day through gossip and chat. At the end of the day the boys and girls chose their partner from among themselves. *Pilchu Horom* had already made separate home for each of the couple. The seven spouses entered their own home each and started living there as husband-wife. This has been the formality of married life in tribal society from time immemorial. There was however, no special code for marriage.

After a long time, they called upon a social meet called *Chitri Hutup* in which some norms and orders, regarding tribal marriage were scheduled. The system ensures social welfare and co-habitation among the tribals. In this way "A marriage oriented social club is set up. There is a public saying that the tribal community took twelve years to schedule different social rules and regulations. Then they reformed their society.

The seven sons of *Pilchu* laid the foundation of seven descents of the tribes. Each unit they called 'Parish'. The seven units were – (a) Mus Duk or Hansda; (b) Murmu; (c) Kisku; (d) Hembrom; (e) Mardi or Marandi; (f) Soren; (g) Tudu. Later five other units (a) Baskey; (b) Besra; (c) Pouria; (d) Choube and (e) Bedia – have joined the former, making a total of fifteen units. The descents are all exogamous. All the units but Pouria, Choube and Bedia have their own Shibboleth. From this point of view, it can be confirmed that they all lived at Champa or nearby its position. These symbolic terms have their utility in marital affairs.

The tribal people have highly honoured "Sing Bonga" or the Sun. They addressed on looked upon it as 'God' or *Thakur*. However, there are no regular formal arrangements for worshipping Sing Bonga. Only after an interval of five to ten years the Thakur is worshipped with the sacrifice of a white cock or he-goat to let the *Thakurs* bless shower continue. As the Sun rises in the east, they take the East direction to be 'holy', while taking oath or worshipping God they sit with east-ward faced. Some of them invites on the envelope of letter –"hate and hearty by Sing Bonga". Regarding this belief some historians opine that "the Santhals are influenced by Hinduism regarding their faith in Sun God. But the historians like Rizla

and Hunter think – no trace of an elevated spiritual outcome of a Supreme God is found among the Santhals.” According to Troysea – “The Santhals have used the term *Chando* for the Supreme God which indicates the Sun. The Santhals think that the Thakur is the creator and protector of this universe. With deep veneration they worship the God day in and days out. At the time of taking any oath they recall Him. Even during famine or drought this god is remembered and worshipped.

The tribal people of us worship “show Bonga”, the god of corn. During the period of harvesting the ceremony which they observe is *Sohrai* or the ceremony of harvesting. They observed the ceremony in gorgeous way by drinking country wine or *pochoy* and by singing and dancing. Besides this, they observe a Puja named *Jaher Era*, the deity of holy arbour. The Santhals consider her as the eldest daughter of the First couple. According to the Tribals, the very name *Jaher Era* causes them well. Her Puja is celebrated in the village areas by sacrificing cock with a belief that a good harvest is made and rural people have a sound health and mind. The Deity is shapeless. On the day of *Fagua* or *Dol* the Puja of *Jaher Era* is celebrated.

Another religious celebration *Gosanchi Puja* is observed now-a-days among the Uttar Dinajpur tribes. On the day of *Jaher Era*. This Puja is offered to a stone on the same place (than) under a tree with a hope to be recovered from different skin ailments like scabies, bruise, prickly-heat etc. Pargana Bonga is another deity placed on the *Jaher Than* (place of worship). The Santhals believe that Pargana Bonga has a great influence on the witches. So the senior persons of village offer their Puja on the

Jaher Than to remain away from ills and maladies and from the clutch of witches.

During the chief religious ceremonies *Bongas* is celebrated in the alter of *Jaher* and sacrifices are offered for them. The examples of this type of worships are *Baha* (festival of Flower) *Aerok Sim* (festival of sowing) *Horiar Sim*, (festival of germination), *Zanthar* (festival of flower) etc. The pujas other than *Jaha Bonga* are *Majhi Bonga* or *Majhi Horom* and *Majhi Bari*. Mache's *Horom* is spiritual advisor of the village *Majhi* who is also controller of good and evil of village. He gets worship first. The *Majhi* himself offers his puja to *Majhi Horom*. He uses *Haria* by sacrificing two pigeons in the puja. *Pargana Bonga* and *Majhi Horom* dominate even the other *Bongas*. *Jaher Bonga* and command over each and every work of the Santhals and stand by then in time of danger. The Santhals are always conscious keep their own village pure. For this they observe *Chhatia* and *Telnahan* to remove any ills from village on the occasion of both birth and death.

Inspite of all these, there is a widespread custom of offering a puja – *Oroak* or *Bra Bonga* in the tribal communities of Uttar Dinajpur. It is their individual family puja. Once the tribals tried earnestly to keep a cordial rapport with this God. They pray to this God when attacked with disease. The women cannot perform this puja. Only the leader of the family knows the name of this God and he informs the name to the eldest son of family in death-bed. This God is handed down from the predecessors. Many a Santhals of the district worship the Hindu God *Kali*, *Mahadeb*, *Durga* etc as *Ora Bonga*.

Like other castes and religions there are many prejudices among the tribes, cantering round the soul of dead person. To them, even after death their predecessors do not lose their social existence. As long as the descendants keep them in mind, they offer their help to danger and pain. After death the forefathers become *Bonga* God and Hopramko turning into *Bonga* takes shelter within the Santhal's Home. Only after a full ... the dead ascendant becomes a *Bonga*. But in case of accidental death, death caused by touchable disease, death during travail and in case of incomplete last situates the death soul turns into devil and wanders about its home. After five days of death it is the *Tel Nohara* puja that sets the soul free to come in. After another one ritual the death's soul, being united with the other *Hopram*, gain the status of *Bonga*. Though these social and religious rituals a death ascendant become a *Bonga* and help its family in different mundane affairs like a birth, marriage and other family affairs. The Santhals do not either dishonour or disobey them for at least one generation because the dead forefather has been living with them under a same roof like kith and kin.

In the lives of Santhals religions do not evolve centring round vice and attainment because it, according to them, is pure and sacred. Pain and penury came down to their lives of *Bonga's*, displeasure for which they are not a bit liable. Their main target is to save themselves from this sorrows and sufferings without hurting the *Bongas*. The Santhals worship their personal Home God and personal hushed-up deity inspite of socially appointed priests to a conduct the worship of social deity and Hamlet God. Santhal society demands that a person should participate in a social

or Institutional function. Many a ceremonies come by turn in the lives of Santhals. These ceremonies are inseparably connected with their religion. Dancing, singing and drinking are inevitable part of these functions. They worship different deity in different way on different occasions.

The tribal society brings up a fully different opinion regarding their village, village-path, social leadership, society etc. which can't have at least a slight semblance with any other society. They look upon their social arrangements – elevated and developed. They consider the social customs and conventions as primitive and natural. They do not respect the social practices of other communities. The other social set ups other than tribal one are conducted and controlled by state administrative machinery. In fine, it can be said that the tribal societies move upon its own system and will.

The tribals call the path of village *kulhi*. They don't allow a house front-door facing the ward of *kulhi*. The house compound is used for the family members social association not only for path, *kulhi* is a symbol of unity in a Santhal village too. Here the ceremonial dances are organised. Again a *kulhi durup* or village association is called open here. A plough or ladder cannot be dragged through *kulhi*. A tribal village chief is known as *Majhi*. Before the foundation of village the *Majhi* were elected or selected by the village males. The post is generally hereditary but in case of serious offence as management the village people can elect a one to the post of *Majhi*. During the British period the *Majhis* exerted some administrative powers. Even today the *Majhis* collect taxes in Santhal Pargana. This post is too much important in the tribal society. No social work or worship is

performed without the prior consent of the *Majhi*. Christianisation, wedding and death news one to be informed to a *Majhi* because in a marriage ceremony a *Majhis* consent is essential. After the wedding is over, the bridegrooms-party first goes to the *Majhi's* house to pay him respect. When a new bride comes to a village, the *Majhi* is to be first given one rupee *salamee*. The brides father has to start a ceremonial dance or singing from the *Majhis* house. The *Majhi* fixes up the date of a ceremony. *Majhi* is the only authority to call up a village meeting. The *Majhi* tries to cool down a problematic situation, having called upon a *kulhi durup*.

Another social head of village is *Jog Majhi* (Upa-Pradhan). He is the lord of moral value in village. He acts as a master of ceremonies in different functions like birth, marriage, obsequies rites etc. He superintends over whether the marriage oriented social laws are implemented and obeyed in society. It is his supreme duty to prevent moral declination among the village boys and girls and to judge them well. He is assisted by thither designated person called *Jog Poramanik* (Upa-Pradhan). Besides, *Neik* and *Kudam Neik* conduct upon the village pujas. *Kudam Neik* supervises the puja of the *Zaher Bonge's*.

The supreme organisation of the Santhal society is *Lobir* or Jungle Great Association. During *Deesom Sendra* or annual hunting, this great association is called upon any discussions may have its place in the association. The decision taken in the association is unanimous. Those who work as news-bearers are called *Godeathh*. Besides, the other tribal communities have their Panchayat system such as – the Oraon's *Porhan* or *Boiga*. The village leader is called Mahato. Similarly Munda Panchayat

is found as Munda Pahan Mahal. When their bearer goes out with important news, their rooms find place with mango or banyan branches. The banyan branch is extreme important while the mango one is lesser significant. The news-man reaches a nearby bazaar with his news and the *Bonyan* bough and inform the news to all the people of his community. In a fixed place, the people hear pioneer-borne news with rapt attention. Then those who hear the news bear the bough and deliver the same to another nearby bazaar. In this way, they air the news to the farthest places. Then a Panchayat is convened. The Santhal society's possess another classes of people termed as *Janguru*. These gurus can demonstrate a spell related to well doing and harm making power to tribal society. When they fall victim to some family or social issue, they come to the *Jangurus*. On hearing the problems the guru gives them proper advices. These gurus lead a constrained life following the norms of society. In the spiritual world of tribal community no place can be found for the *Jangurus*. The tribals never depend upon the *gurus* in the matter of social or personal pujas. They go to the *guru's* relation to some earthly problems and seek their help on a formal way. Then he helps the seeker with super power. In this way, the *Janguru* and the social leadership are dependent on each other.

The tribal society is too self-protective. They lead their personal life cautiously harmonizing with his personal life pattern status. Their outward social controlling tendency sometime augments and sometime decreases. The tribal society is very sensitive to out world pressure. Different queries arise in the mind of social people regarding their inner social set up when

contacted with the other people of society. In this connection it can be exemplified that the tribal tongues have become of two kinds. One is their own mother tongue and the other is the language of the place in which they live. This society has turned more and more self-protective because the other developed societies have made a bump in the way of their progress. Besides this, when the people of this micro society apprehend a danger from the upper societies, or guess any class between the two, they take a way of self-protection. *Mahazohoni* exploitation, urbanisation, deforestation, industrialisation have created more problems in their life. The tribals are found with unbreakable tie of kinship. The society is fully family based. So they have their own family deity. The tribal communities living in Uttar Dinajpur are greatly influenced by Hindu-culture. As for example – dowry for a bride was prevalent in the old tribal society but at present, due to co-habitation with the Hindus groom dowry has been started in the tribal society. Social banquet system is in the way to take the Hindu norms. May a tribal young boy and girls have taken government employment by preparing them literate? Even they are unwilling to abide by the customs and conventions of tribal society in a proper manner today.

Tribal boys and girls enjoy unfettered freedom to choose their partner through social marriage through a matchmaker is considered prestigious one. *Itud guff* smears vermilion or dust on tiara in fair or bazaar and fry away. Then the girl's relatives go to the boy's village. In this context the bride-dowry doubled. Such arrangement of marriage occurs even today. Another system of tribal-wed is *Nirbolok* in which the girls themselves go

to the boy's home with their own initiatives. Here the *Majhi* and *Jog Majhi* take main initiatives. The other wedding system is *Saksha*, one kind of widow-marriage which is approved by the tribal society. But in this type of wedding, special emphasis is laid upon the purity and separation of marriage. Most of the witches in tribal societies are married under the process of *Hotud* or *Sanjha*. All these marital processes are at large in the tribal societies and all these found in the district of Uttar Dinajpur. However, one thing is clear that the tribals of this district are more inclined to education now and due to their over-mixing with the Hindu community, they have started liking settled marriage through matchmaker. The educated employees prefer much to marry in gorgeous way by lightning, pedalling etc. like the Hindu community.

Witch Craft:

The term *Fuskin* is probably a degeneration of the Santhali term "*Fuskin*". The Santhals mark the witches with different names as *Bokis*, *Koksin*, *Dun*, *Zun*, *Janguru* etc. Different terms like *Bokos*, *Boksin*, and *Dun* etc. are used to indicate witches in West Bengal. In Uttar Dinajpur two terms. *Boksin* and *Dun* are used. The Santhali term *Fuskin* has its similarity with the Bengali term *Jharpukh* means - charms and incantations. By *Fuskin* the Santhals want to mean enchantment. The tribal communities think that they use chantment. The tribal communities think that they use the terms *Dun* and *Charms* among themselves for indicating the murdering activities of the witches. The faith of tribal community behind the origin of witch is thus –

Once a Santhal family lived with husband-wife and two son-daughters. The head of the family, the father kept a cock to sacrifice it for *Abge Bonga*. The girls cannot have a taste of these arts: this is the running custom of the tribal community. But the little girl possessed an overwhelming desire to have taste of the chicken. So the girl always looks after the cock. In such a condition, one night the father awoke up his son from sleep and the duo went out of home. After offering puja and sacrificing the cock for *Bonga* the two (father and son) took most of the meat. The rest was hidden into the oven, breaking the oven to dust powder on. Then they went off to sleep. Arising from sleep in the morning the daughter cannot find the cock. When the father went out for day-work, the boy told the history to his sister. To confirm the matter he shows her the broken oven. The girl, having dug up the oven, could see the meat and then she ate a small portion of the flesh. At this *Bonga* became too much displeased with the girl and possessed on her. The girl began crying, quarrelling, beating etc. The mother seeing this was vexed and went out of home for committing suicide. The House *Bonga* made her understand and advised her to go back home. He assured her that the girl would swallow any kind of meat, taking it to be the cock's one if offered to her.

The mother asked the Deity where she would get meat at such a dead of night. *Bonga* suggested that she should cut the flesh of her sleeping husband and he would not be able to apprehend that. According to *Bonga's* advice she cut off her husband's flesh, cooked them and fed them to her daughter. But the husband could know nothing of it. From then the mother and daughter ate up many other's flesh. This way and in

course of time they became witches. In accordance with their belief the forms which a witch can assume are thus:

The witches possess multi-power and they can assume different shapes and forms as they like. This change of form is done to their effort of collecting the instruments of magic and charms to be used on the would-be victims. A witch never harms a stranger or an unkindred. She can cross a long distance by narrowing a path with charms and again can return the same place before Sun-rise. Some time she will be seen on *Jahuchan* with others or be seen in the dense forest dancing at night. Before an accident or inauspicious death such a scene is seen. Sometime the witches walk on palm by putting a lamp on their toe. Sometime at night they assume the shape of black cat or dung worm and enter the victim's house and catch away their prey. House-people cannot have the slightest sense of the incident because the witch spreads over her illusion aforetime. The witch eats heart and lungs of the victim and put them on her own bed. Next day the person is getting killed. No treatment can better his condition because the witch has already killed him. The tribal society has a confirmed belief that witches' charm works behind any kind of incurable disease.

There is a widespread belief that the witches themselves take initiatives to teach in the art of witch-craft. The witches, sometime, entice a stronger girl and come down upon her. Then at an appropriate time the newly taught are introduced with the *Bonga's* names. Then she is married with one of the *Bongas* and her Bonga husband she takes lessons of deadly witchcraftmanship. After the completion of lesson the new witch

tries to apply the same on her kith and kins, following the advice of teacher. If she refuses to do so, she is either turned mad or got killed. A witch makes an other witch with a view to establish their authority on the earth.

In a survey through us, it has been revealed that 90% of the women who are widow, socially deprived, deserted or eloper is the haunted victims of witticism. This results some unnatural activities in them. When the power of *Bonga* is added to these unwanted natures of a person, she is in greater possibility to become a witch. In this regard, the *Jangurus* ceremonial judgement and declaration is the last word. The tribals believes that the women possessed upon with witchcraft, they turn into witch in time that the females may have hysteria are denied by them. Their common notion is that a woman can do such a nature only when she is possessed upon *Bonga*. There are some who opine that when one cannot swallow up some lesson related to witchcraft properly, she goes senseless.

The tribals feel a lack of security when living in society with a witch. If someday is attacked with charms and spells of a witch, it is the responsibility of the witch itself to compensate for this. They believe in disease caused by witch-spell and demand its' recovery from the witch. The tribals even believe that a witch can take back the spell that she costs upon. The witches are always a symbol of destruction to the tribals. Disease or epidemic is caused by witchcraft. The Santhals believe that the invincible power of a witch can influence *Bonga* and may cause Him harm. The tribals want heart and soul to disconnect the rapport between the witches and the Bongas. And this is the outcome of witch-killing practice.