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**ETHICAL PRACTICES OF SANTAL TRIBES: AN EXPOSITION WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BIRBHUM DISTRICT**

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**Introduction:**

Ethics/ morality deeply entangled with values. In the ancient period, set of values were basically individual's accepted standards of right or wrong. But at present moral/ethical values are to be considered as the society's standards of right and wrong and for that community consciousness has occurred in the society. But it does not mean that individual ethical values are being overlooked. Now a days, there is no doubt that ethics become a more structured system of principles that govern appropriate conduct for a group, including activities such as professional ethics, compassion, commitment, cooperation etc. In order to explicate ethical conducts there are various western ethical theories have emerged in our society, like- consequentialism, deontology, normative and virtue ethics. The main task is to clarify how to distinguish consequentialism in general from virtue ethics in general. Virtue ethicists typically assert eudemonism is a close connection between virtue and the agent's own flourishing, whereas consequentialists deny this. Moreover, consequentialist theories endorse agent-neutrality, but virtue ethics is agent-relative. Consequentialism is appealing, but faces damaging objections; some of these can be blocked by switching from direct consequentialism to indirect consequentialism. These families of theories offer different responses to intrinsic value: consequentialism seeks to promote it, deontology to respect it, and virtue ethics to embody it etc. But Santal ethical sense and systems are naturalistic rather than theory based.

**Santal Tribe and their Ethics:**

Santals are basically Tribal people, inhabited in the various parts of India and it is believed that they are the people of **Proto-australoid** group.<sup>2</sup> They are also known in some other names, like- *Santhal*, *Saontar*, *Satar* etc. West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Assam are the home place for Santals.<sup>3</sup> They are the third largest tribe in India. Typical dancing is one activity that is in their blood. It is the collection of closely related kins or any two or more nuclear families and is divided into two categories, Matrilocal joint family and patrilocal joint family. Such type of family are found among several tribes of India also. But it is quite common among the Paraon and the Santals.

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The origin of Santal Tribe is yet to properly ascertained because their tradition was called *jonsinbinti* (oral mythological tradition), where the position of *wild goose* is very pertinent and some mythological incidents are related to their culture, like- *Pilchu haram* and *Pilchu budhi* sprang from two different eggs and they are considered as the first parents of entire human beings. According to L.O. Skrefsurd, in the beginning there was only *dak* (water) and *Hasa* (soil) from where the *Thakur Jiu* (the spirit of God) created the aquatic animals as *Katkom* (crab), *Mangar* (alligator), *Tayan* (crocodile), *Raghop Boar* (whale), *Horo* (tortoise), *Landet* (earth worm), *Icak hako* (Lobster) and so on.<sup>4</sup> Haricharan Bandhyopadyaya, a notable scholar of Santal culture maintained that Santals are the aboriginal tribe of India mainly lived in the hill areas of Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and Tripura. Though the term "tribe" has no consistent meaning in our society, however, in general terms, this tribe is a human social group who mainly live in a forested region and survive by hunting animals and also by carrying out shifting cultivation. They have their own culture, religious beliefs and traditions which are completely different from mainstream practices of the society. The origin of term Santal still is a subject of controversy, however, it is believed that they adopted the term Santal after their settlement in *Saont disom* in Midnapur district of West Bengal. Dr. Krishna Chandra Tudu of Ranchi university opined that Santals are prefer to called themselves as *Hor hopon* (son of human beings) which is the offspring (*po-ponggra*) of *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Budhi* who are familiar as the parents of the entire Santal community. It is also claimed by some scholars that Santals are the aboriginal people of India and so far our knowledge has gone that they are the first settlers of this sub-continent even before the arrival of Aryan and Dravidian people.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Biswas, an eminent anthropologist in this regard says- 'if there is any culture which is still carries on the impress of the underline philosophic speculation and order of the thought that was wide spread in India prior to the rise of the Dravidian culture that is the Santal culture.' This tribe prefers to remain with nature, the flora and fauna. In their eyes all elements of nature are sacred, such as- trees, water, soil, rivers, sun, moon, rain and animals etc. and they claim that their religion is the most traditional form of natural religion as *Adi dharam/ Sari saran*.<sup>6</sup>

More or less each and every tribe has their distinctive and typical habits of living and they are very fond of to retain their own features as their own. Similarly, Santal Tribes have certain set of beliefs which are deeply entangled with bio-centric moral and social values those can be treated as the basis of Tribal Ethics. It is a kind of ethics which are systematically maintained by the Santal community to discharge moral behavior in following certain moral principles and standards as well. Hence, Tribal ethics is, in my point of view, they have certain beliefs, faiths and distinctive culture/traditions which retained by them very strictly and that is the sign of community consciousness too. History tells us that the entire human's races have tribal background and their ethical values have emerged in a new shape in the due

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course for their own needs. It signifies that tribal creatures, and belonging to a tribe is a deeply wired value for most of us. Their sense of discipline, obedience and allegiance to the traditions of our ancestors are not futile at all. Their sense of respect for self, elders and others are praiseworthy too. Their respect for Nature, Property and Natural resources are unique in character. Patience, simplicity, fellow feelings etc. is the pride of their family, their unbounded allegiance to the leader, clan and tradition is tied up with deep sense of love, the sense of loyalty or generosity which are to be considered as the jewels of tribes as their innate propensities. Santals have 5 major components, viz- *sacred beliefs, sacred spirits, sacred space, sacred specialists and sacred performances*, where the notions of animism, bongaism, totemism, taboo, magic, polytheism, naturalism and ancestral worship traditions have been discerned. Even their food habits, life style, etiquettes, culture and religious practices are different in comparison to modern culture, beliefs and habits.<sup>7</sup>

From the historical records it is vivid to us that Santals are basically Tribal people and their relation is based on to a group or community with similar ancestors, customs and traditions. They claim certain natural rights for their survival and for its protection as well as preservation they take special care and initiative. In the ancient period they never felt about these rights separately which were inherently related to forest-dwelling, land and other natural resources etc. Racially Santals are phyletic and autochthonous (*mulnivasee*) or the indigenous (*adivasi*) people of India. They are also familiar in other names, like- *vanavasi* (inhabitant of forest), *vanyajati* (people of the forest), *pahari log* (hill dwellers), *adim jati* (aboriginal community), *anusuchit janajati* (schedule tribe) etc.<sup>8</sup> so far as we remembering that in the Ramayana, Sage Valmiki acknowledged about *adivasi* people. In Santal community all classes of people have enjoyed their freedom, autonomy of work, freedom of hunting, freedom of farming and acquiring lands. In economy they are completely free to earn in honest way and utilize money in their own choice and wills as well. They are self-designation people and believing upon the joint patrimonial system. The constitution of India grouped these ethnic groups together "as targets for social and economic development. Since that time the *Adivasi* people of India has been known officially as Scheduled Tribes."<sup>[1]</sup> In our constitution, Article 366 (25) defined scheduled tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution". The historiography of relationships between the Adivasis and the rest of Indian society is patchy too. In India there is the largest number of tribes as compared to any other country of the world. There are a variety of groups of tribes. According to the Anthropological Survey of India, they have said that there are 461 tribal communities in India, out of which 174 were identify as sub-groups. 212 tribes are found in different parts of India and so far our knowledge has gone that the *Gond* is the largest tribal group of India who have comprises

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with a population exceeding 12 million and mostly are found in Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh, Bastar district of Chhattisgarh and parts of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha. In West Bengal there are many tribes those who are familiar as scheduled castes people:

As per the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, the following were listed as scheduled tribes in West Bengal: 1. Asur 2. Baiga, 3. Badia, Bediya, 4. Bhumij 5. Bhutia 6. Sherpa 7. Toto 8. Dukpa, Kagatay, Tibetan, Yolmo, 6. Birhor, 7. Birjia, 8. Chakma, 9. Chero, 10. Chik Baraik, 11. Garo, 12. Gond 13. Gorait, 14. Hajang, 15. Ho 16. Karmali, 17. Kharwar, 18. Khond, 19. Kisan, 20. Kora, 21. Korwa, 22. Lepcha, 23. Lodha, Kheria, Kharia, 24. Lohara, Lohra, 25. Magh, 26. Mahali, 27. Mahli, 28. Mal Pahariya, 29. Mech, 30. Mru, 31. Munda 32. Nagesia, 33. Oraon 34. Parhaiya, 35. Rabha 36. Santal 37. Savars. After 2002 amendment the Tamang and Limbu (Subba) was added in the list of ST. <sup>9</sup>

As per 2001 census scheduled tribes numbering 4,406,794 persons constituted 5.5 per cent of the total population of the state. Santals constitute more than half (51.8 per cent).of the total ST population of the state. Oraons (14 per cent), Mundas (7.8 per cent), Bhumij (7.6 per cent) and Kora (3.2 per cent) are the other major STs having sizeable population. Along with Santal, they constitute nearly 85 per cent of the state's total ST population. The Lodhas, Mahalīs, Bhutias, Bedias, and Savars are the remaining STs, and having population of one per cent or more as per 2001 census report.<sup>10</sup> After 2002 the population of ST had increased due to addition of major groups. Tamang(20,153 in India)<sup>11</sup> and Limbu(Subba)(38,067 in India has great significant number in the population.

Population and proportion of ten major STs in West Bengal, as per 2001 census, are given below:<sup>12</sup>

SI No	Scheduled Tribe	Population	Percentage of the total ST population
1	Santal	2,280,540	51.8
2	Oraon	617,138	14
3	Munda	341,542	7.8
4	Bhumij	336,436	7.6
5	Kora	142,789	3.2

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6	Lodha	84,966	1.9
7	Mahali	76,102	1.7
8	Bhutia	60,091	1.4
9	Tamang		
10	Subba (Limboo/Limbu)		
11	Bedia	55,979	1.3
12	Sabar	43,599	1

**Santal tribes of Birbhum:**

Basically, Birbhum Santals ethical/moral sense is accompanied by various myths of the community. Their myths are the inevitable parts of their life those are keenly related to their notion of God and His relationship with men and from those the standard of morality has been developed. The religious beliefs of Santal tribal groups of Birbhum are very interesting which are accompanied by some specific ethical rules and regulations. These rules are more or less common to other tribal groups in the country also and in some points there are common beliefs are functioning. The Mundas, Hos, Santals, Kharias and Uraons are the major tribal groups in “Central-Eastern India” and In their traditional religious myths we find that there was only water in the beginning with its creatures. In creating this world God took voluntary help of the crab, turtle, tortoise, crocodile, alligator, boarfish, prawn, etc. in different accounts in bringing a little bit of clay to God the Creator from the bottom of the sea. All of them failed in their task except the earthworm which succeeded in supplying God with little bit of clay with which He created the earth with all its creatures and in this way their mythological cycle of creation has begun.<sup>13</sup>

Birbhum is one of the famous districts of *Rarh Bengal*, and its history is very primitive. Various divisions taking place in different times those are very conducive to traced its area. Due to its natural shape and setting, the map of the area of Birbhum has undergone in significant changes. Similarly, this map has been altered owing to administrative, linguistic and other reasons as well. The flow of the history of civilization and culture has maintained its continuity through these natural and man-made changes and transformations. Amidst the uninterrupted conflicts and struggles between nature and man, the real history of the cultural transformation of Birbhum lies embedded in the flow of the social and geographical changes of the area. It is known that the term Birbhum is the composition of Sanskrit words *bir+ bhumi*. The term *bir* in Sanskrit means Jungle and *bhumi* means lands, hence the single meaning of term Birbhum is the Land of Jungle. It is also familiar as “the land of red soil (*lal mati desh in Bengali*

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*language*)". **Birbhum is noted** for its topography and its cultural heritage which is somewhat different from the other districts in West Bengal. The western part of **Birbhum** is a bushy region, a part of the Chota Nagpur Plateau and rests are to be conceived as non-bushy areas.

At present, it is a district lying on the western fringe of West Bengal, and near the border between Jharkhand and Bihar. In the district as a whole, hills and plateaus, dense forests, and hillocks of various heights are to be found. Birbhum is the district, which abounds with ochre-colored soil, in full of much diversity and is the residing place of many communities. A large section of the total population is tribal, and their food habits, culture, lives and livelihoods are in keeping with the geographical environment. The tribes living in this district are Santal, Munda, Kol, Ho, Oraon, Paharia, Mahali, Lohar etc. Birbhum district is mainly rural based area where the forest ranges are depicted in the various parts and at present there are many villages which have been divided into certain Blocks as follows: <sup>14</sup>

SI No	C.D.Block	Total Villages
1	Bolpur Sriniketan	170
2	Dubrajpur	227
3	Illambazar	133
4	Khoyrasol	170

Santal society has much less stratification and is more egalitarian than neighboring caste Hindu society, but still has some differences in position. Broadly their ethical principles are related to the social strata. The most important marker of a person when interacting with others in Santal society is their standing as *marang* ("senior") or *hudin* ("junior") and which are deeply related to their ethical considerations. This standing is evaluated by relation: for example, is someone is greeting their father's elder brother's son; they would be the junior irrespective of age. Similarly, when someone greets their elder brother's wife, the wife would be *marang*. However for strangers or guests with no clear kin connections, the question of *marang* or *hudin* is decided by age. The ritual greeting (*god* in Santali) of someone is given much importance and is done in the courtyard of a house when a *pera* visits. The greeting differs by gender, and whether the person is junior or senior to the one being greeted. The greeting rituals given by a *hudin* involve an "offering" (*dobok' johar*) of respect, while a *marang* "receives" this respect. This greeting should not be done hastily, and correct practice of it is encouraged in children from a young age. However the *hudin-marang* distinction does not apply to *phul* or *bala*, who instead greet each other as if greeting a *marang*.<sup>15</sup>

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As we have stated earlier that the Santals are *animistic* and *totemistic* clans, known as *pari* divided mainly into 12 clans and these 12 clans are divided into two ranks: 7 seniors and 5 juniors. The senior clans are believed to originate from the 7 sons and daughters of the first man and woman, and in order of seniority they are: *Hansda* (goose), *Murmu* (Nilgae), *Marndi* (*Ischaemum rugosum*), *Kisku* (kingfisher), *Soren* (Pleiades), *Hembrom* (betel palm) and *Tudu* (owl). The junior clans are *Baskey* (stale rice), *Besra* (falcon), *Caure* (lizard), *Pauria* (pigeon) and *Donker*. On the basis of ethical principles members of a senior clan do not marry members of a junior clan, and there are some forbidden marriages as well, such as between *Marandi* and *Kisku*. In addition, *Besras* are sometimes treated differently due to their perceived low status, but other than the context of marriage, they play no role in social life. The clans also avoid harming their clan totem, lest evil befall them. The Santals have another social organization important for rituals, called *khunti*, or *gusti*. The term refers to descendants of a common ancestor, not more than a few generations back, that live nearby. The *khunti* is identified by some distinguishing feature of the ancestor, such as *poeta*, people who wear a thread on their chest in worship. In many cases, all the people of a *gusti* live in their ancestral village, but some members may have migrated to neighboring villages.<sup>16</sup>

Ethical practices of the Santals of Birbhum are intimately connected with their religion also, the majority of reverence falls on a court of spirits (*bonga*), who handle different aspects of the world and who are placated with prayers and offerings. These benevolent spirits operate at the village, household, ancestor, and sub-clan level, along with evil spirits that cause disease and can inhabit village boundaries, mountains, water and many types of flower, tigers, and the forest. The *bonga* are intermediaries between *noa puri* (visible world) and *hana puri* (the invisible reality), the abode of a Creator. This creator is variously called *Marang Buru* (Supreme Deity or literally The Great Mountain) or *Thakur Jiu* (life giver), and is the "cause of all causes," making the Santal religion, in a deep sense, monotheistic as well as pantheistic. There are several ranks of *bongas*: the most important are associated intimately with *Marang Buru* and are worshipped by all Santals. These include *Maran Buru bonga*, *Jaher Era bonga* and *Gosae Era*. Other *bongas*, who are held to be less powerful, are the spirits of important people of the village who have since been deified. There is also another class of *bongas* who are feared as bringers of evil. These spirits are not placated by a priest but by a medicine-man called *ojha*. In the present-day, belief in these malignant *bongas* is eroding due to the penetration of modern medical science. The lack of a separate name for malignant *bongas* caused many early colonial scholars to present Santal religion as wholly focused on the appeasement of evil spirits or as representing *bongas* as exclusively harmful. However *bonga* in itself simply means a supernatural force in the world and has no specific connotation

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with good or evil. Moreover these bongas do not refer to specific objects but to the invisible force that governs or is associated with that objects.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of brotherhood is one of the important ethical principles of Birbhum Santals community. The base of Santal society is a division between "brother" (*boeha*) and "guest" (*pera*), a divide found in many other tribal societies of central and eastern India also. Children of the same father (sometimes grandfather), known as *nij boeha*, often live next to each other and own adjacent pieces of land. Those in the closest form of brotherhood, called *mit orak hor* ("people of one house") in Singhbhum, cannot marry each other and propitiate the same deity, since the house refers to a common ancestor from which all the families are believed to descend. Only *mit orak hor* marriages are severely stigmatised. Another brotherhood is membership of a clan, which are exogamous. The last form of brotherhood is *phul*, a ritual friendship with members of other ethnic groups. Children of *phul* brothers consider themselves as brothers, and they attend each other's main lifecycle events, such as weddings or funerals, as *pera*. They also give help in times of hardship. Those who do not have brotherhood are referred to as *pera*, or guests. Members of other communities, especially those not speaking Santali, are excluded from this grouping, except for communities such as the Karmakar, Mahali or Lohar, who are enmeshed in Santal society. Those with this relationship can marry, and attend major festivals as guests. People related by marriage, although *pera*, have special roles in life-cycle events. Women perform special welcome rituals for *pera* when they visit. Those related by marriage can have one of two relationships. They can be *bala*, a relationship exemplified by the couple's parents, or *sangat*, between cross-siblings of a couple.<sup>18</sup>

There are some specific assumptions of tribal ethical practices which are common to almost all Santals of Birbhum district. Those are as follows:

1. The clan and lineage are important structural units of the Santals of Birbhum.
2. Land and forest constitute their main means of livelihood in eco-friendly manner.
3. They foster communitarian living and decision making, however, they enjoyed freedom in all levels of life but social customs are also very rigid to retain their culture.
4. They prefer to live in grouping system in the rural village or hills, their village communities are relatively homogeneous and un-stratified economic inequalities exist in them no doubt, but they are of a totally different order from the inequalities present in village communities in which Brahmin or Rajput or Muslim landlords reside.
5. Since they are simple and honest, hence, they have been exploited in the past by the 'outside exploiters' like- moneylenders, revenue farmers, and landlords. The process is on even in the



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- post-independence period. Again, the Santals of Birbhum have few external social ties, whereas a caste is by its nature a part of a larger whole being linked by multifarious ties with other castes.
6. Each and every tribal group speaks its own special mother tongue which is different from the major Indian languages. There is no denying the fact that some tribal groups in some pockets in the country have lost their mother tongues under certain socio-political situations/pressures. Similarly Santal language is in danger because the present generation is preferred to speak in Bengali rather than in own language and they treated it as their uplift in the society.
  7. Santals of Birbhum think that this world is a working field where we will have to struggle for our survival and for that killing animals are not immoral at all, because these are the basic needs and pre-requisite for their life and livelihood.
  8. Their ethical foundation mostly followed by collective will and cooperation, and their morality is geocentric as well as apathetic in nature.
  9. Santals tribes of Birbhum have an attitude like- our beliefs, practices and principles are mainly for ourselves and no other community people those who are alien to their culture are incapable to penetrate in their fold. They thought that outsiders have no moral right to interfere in their life and activities as well. They also thought that we the groups of people are well acquainted concerning our benefits and for that they never allow any outsiders in their community matters.
  10. They lead common environmental and eco-friendly behavior and for that they are mostly depended for their livelihood. Since they are not so interested to lead urban life style and even not so desired to set up any industry for the greed of earning much money. In this aspect they are something indifferent from the sophisticated cultural milieu.
  11. They lead simple life and also satisfied in fulfilling the minimum needs. In following ethical guidelines they trust unquestionably upon their group and engaged to retain their values and for the constructive development of group interests.
  12. Santals of Birbhum are hardworking men. Simplicity, honesty, self-subsistence, self-confidence and self-sufficient are their core ethical values.
  13. They believe to discharge constructive and liberal behavior towards all. Their attitude of compassion and purposiveness help to construct a humanistic world. They dislike any kind of dishonesty and injustices in life. To remove injustices from their society they become very cruel and if necessary they can rebel to safe guard their rights.

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14. To preserve their culture they think their values are sufficient for their lives and thus, their hardship sentiment is very strong and nature centric too.
15. They are very tolerant and patient in nature. They believe in the constructive attitude and hard working for survival. They are ready to face all kind of obstacles in their life for their livelihood.
16. Unconditional allegiance towards the clan/group leader of Santali community of Birbhum district is a sign of distinctive moral appeal for the construction and development of their society.

Santal ethical practices are the way in which a group of people live in their own cultural milieu by which they can think, feel, organize themselves, celebrate and share their life mutually and reciprocally. As we know that in every culture, there are underlying systems of values, meanings and views of the world that are expressed visibly in languages, gestures, symbols, rituals and styles. Culture is also what a social group considers as the best and sum-total of its thinking, living and the source of discharging moral values. In this context, over the years Santal culture has attained distinctiveness by fostering a balance between nature and culture. Economically, natural resources, which are gifts of nature, are shared in common among the Santals of Birbhum where honesty is the best moral value of them. Politically, consensus is a moral way of their decision-making. This manifests itself fully in their village council. All the heads of families have equal voice in this council. The head of the council is not a chief, but he is the 'first among equals', a chairman. He articulates the opinion of the members and allows them to come to a unanimous decision which is the sign of their moral equality. A Santal swears by God and the council elders. The council in action thus fosters and promotes democratic political thinking at the grass roots level. This is morally important because the present day systems of administration and other institutions depend on the ruling elite and not on the common people. Socio-culturally, there is no place for caste hierarchy among the Santals of Birbhum because they do not believing on any caste society. There is egalitarianism in their social structure, secular attitude in their religious outlook, and a people oriented art expressed in their seasonal and communitarian songs and dances. Santals Core Values referred to above do not exist in their totality in the non-tribal society today. Our society has considerably been fragmented, resources have been individualized, social stratification and competitions have sharpened. The present day phenomena of growing materialism, consumerism, individualism, dishonesty, lust for power and money, use of violence, lack of concern for others, trampling ruthlessly on the rights of the poor, the weak, women and children are some of the devastating ill effects of industrialization and modernization that have affected the Santal societies too.

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However, Santals core values are very significant , such as, awareness of all pervasive influence of the transcendent, respect for elders, gender equality, spirit of sociability and hospitality, solidarity and sharing, community feeling, democratic style of functioning in decision making, openness to other religions, basic honesty, hard work, creativity, contentedness and joy in simple living, love of nature, attachment to land and forest, love of freedom with proper parental discipline, celebration of life through seasonal feasts and festivities are the hope for the future. These values may be there at present or may have been there in the past. They are a kind of ideal types in terms of which the tribal societies may be evaluated or reconstructed.

Birbhum Santals social custom is also based upon the moral principles because they regarded power to restrain and its control to direct an individual in their community and which is very vital. Ethical understanding is shaped by aiming at the goal of life, which is becoming a member of the community of ancestors in the next world after the life in this world. One's moral conduct is defined in terms of the idea of this good to be attained. The norms of conduct for a tribal are set in his/her tradition and myth defined in the customs of the tribe and every tribal is bound to comply with them. Taboos are put forward to safeguard the pure form of the customs. For example, one is forbidden to associate with non-tribals in order not to endanger the purity of one's tribe and its homogeneity. That is why strict social control is applied and heavy punishment is enforced upon the erring person. However, with changing times social customs too change for the better without remaining static and yet retain their important function of social control. Purity of the Santal Tribe of Birbhum retains and preserve for their self interest as well as for their community. Preserving and maintaining of order is their collective responsibility. Hence, they consider certain actions good and others bad depending upon what good and bad effect they have on their communities. A tribal receives the values of his/her community from childhood that govern his/her ways of life through myths, folklore, socio-religious rites, rituals and customs. One learns to be part of one's social environment and knows what is expected of him/her. In a strictly traditional sense one may not associate with strangers who are non-Santal. No married Santal is allowed to dine with non-Santals because on him/her rests the *responsibility and sacred duty to preserve and foster the purity of the tribe*. It is because the tribe is understood to have taken its origin directly from God. The unmarried person may, however, not observe this restriction as he/she has not got as yet the full responsibility of the married members. Sexual Conduct Extra marital relations (adultery), fornication (sexual intercourse between unmarried persons) and incest (sexual relations between immediate relatives, usually between parents and children, and between brothers and sisters) destroy the ordered family or clan structure and poison the intimate relations within the family and lineage. Thus, if

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a man were to have an affair with a woman, the community would exact heavy fines from him and punish him, if need be by boycotting the culprit.<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes for violating their social and moral orders the punishment is most severe. The offending person is expelled from the tribe temporarily or on a lifelong basis in the case of un-repentance. Not observing their tribal customs as morally an evil action which may be put right by ritual purification, reparation and reconciliation with their own tribe. It is a breaking of the order established and maintained by the Creator for the good of the tribe and its members. Enforcement of measures against any breaking of accepted norms and misconduct rests with the village council. It has the duty to guard the tradition, to ensure the good of one and all. The myth is the model and reference point for their actions. Marriage As described above in the second creation account, marriage was divinely instituted by God. It is the sacred duty, therefore, of every adult tribal to get married in his/her own community and raise children so that the family, clan and tribe may continue. Thus, there may be members to offer sacrifices to God and the ancestors. Every family head is a sacrificer. In keeping with their inheritance law, non-tribals cannot inherit land from a tribal. Therefore, a tribal has to get married within his/her own tribe. Persons not observing this rule may be dismissed from their communities till they agree to observe the rule which they had broken. Similarly, the community members may cut themselves off from the erring members in all social relations and activities till the latter correct their wrong social behavior. Their social behavior expresses a sense of decency and caution against any undesirable intimacy. Such public decency is meant to protect and safeguard public and private morality. Family It consists of a more or less durable union, socially approved of a man, a woman, and their children. It is found in each and every type of society. The prime duty of a married tribal is to look after his/her family well, bring up children, take care of them and make them fit members of the tribe. Extra marital relations or adultery is therefore a serious failure of one's sacred duty and responsibility towards one's family. Hence, it is condemned outright. In the same understanding, pre-marital sex or fornication and any other form of illicit sexual relation are grave offences. That is why a child born out of wedlock is considered illegitimate and in the case of a male child of this category cannot inherit land though it is not his fault.

Truthfulness Before the British rulers came, formal judiciary and court procedures as well as prisons were clearly absent among the Santals and their Mukhia was enjoyed absolute power to resolve the matter. Instead of them there was a council in every village to look after the smooth running of social life in the village. This institution still continues among the Santals in their villages. Telling lies in the council or showing disrespect and disobedience to it is a grave offence for which the offender may be

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subjected to heavy fines or even expelled from the tribe. No one may have any association with that person. Justice, Peace and Unity every member of the Santal tribe has a right to possess land and a home for the upbringing of his/her family. No one may deprive the other of it by encroaching upon or misappropriating what does not belong to him/her. Anger, envy, theft, quarrels, injury and murder do serious harm to individuals and inflict suffering on them. They destroy peace and harmony existing among them. Practice of witchcraft and sorcery brings about enmity, disunity and division among the community members. Such actions are, therefore, severely condemned. The offender is made to give compensation if there is any loss of property and the usual fine is exacted from him/her by the council which has to re-establish order by healing the harm done and to restore peace and harmony between individuals, families and groups in the community. Kindness, Hospitality and an action is judged to be right or wrong in reference to the good of the individual and of all the members of the community as well. The approach is based on an egalitarian (Seeing equality of condition, outcome, reward, and privilege as a desirable goal of social organization) outlook which determines the moral conduct of individuals. The moral ideals to be followed by all are peacefulness, equality and kindness. Peace with men/women and the supernatural is a sign of 16 order and harmony as intended in creation. Equality among all promotes, strengthens and sustains the intended order. Kindness, hence, is characteristic of the Birbhum Santals. If one chances to enter a tribal house, it will not be long before one is made at home and no longer has a stranger among the house members provided one introduced oneself to them speaking their language. They get relaxed and become friendly, happy and kind. The guest is first greeted and is requested to be seated. If he/she is very dear or respectable, the mother or sister or sister-in-law washes his/her feet with water, followed by applying mustard oil on the feet, and washing the feet again with water and drying it with a towel. This is done to the guest as a part of welcome, hospitality expressing love, affection, appreciation, friendship, respect and gratitude.

**Conclusion:**

Ethical practices of the Santals of Birbhum is mainly an overwhelming community consciousness and group welfares' attitudes. Here the goal of life is the good of the community, continuity of the tribe, for therein lies the good of the one and all. The good is understood as a happy living protected from physical evils and not for acquisition of money or wealth. It thus appears that an individual has no personal value; the person is swallowed up by the community, his personal good and wellbeing overwhelmed as it were by the interests of the community. Hence, the individuality here is being sacrificed for the sake of community. The notion of equality and social cohesion based upon the

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sacred ideals and honesty. Their notion of salvation is intimately connected with their ancestor's, natural God and the creator.

**Conclusion:**

Thus, the life and existence of every person receive true value and common benefits concerned. The outlook on life and happiness is based on equality and harmony in the society. Establishing and maintaining happiness and wellbeing is a collective duty, justice, equality and responsibility. Everyone is responsible for the peace and prosperity of the other in the community. It is thus the community which determines Birbhum Santals moral conduct. But at present their moral /ethical principles are in a changing order by the pressure of the big cultural hegemony. In view of these, tribal values have undergone a considerable degree of change. Notwithstanding these, the values so described above are a kind of ideal types in terms of which Santal societies of Birbhum may be evaluated or reconstructed.

The greatest challenge for the Santal tribes of Birbhum today is that at present they are courageously confronted with the profound and inevitable changes taking place in their socio-economic, political affairs and religious culture ; however, they are also very creatively and boldly 'reshape', 'reinvent' and 'recreate' their culture and even moral identity. There is no doubt that at present Santals tribal reality of Birbhum becomes very complex because of marked differences and uniqueness of each tribal group in different parts of the country and Santals of Birbhum are not able to elude that influence. However, almost in all tribal religious traditions morality bears imprints of mythical and cultic aspects and they are still retaining their moral values uncompromisingly.

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