

BOOK REVIEW

SANTAL SHAMANISM By **Suresh Chandra Murmu, Jagannath Dash and Laxman Kumar Sahoo**, P.G. Department of Anthropology and Tribal Studies, North Orissa University, Baripada, Orissa, Pp. 94. ISBN: 978-81-910122-1-7, Hardbound, Price: Rs. 395.

The Book under review has seven chapters. It is a joint work of three authors based on their fieldwork. It has tried to give a rounded description on Santal shamanism. The authors begin the discussion with the meaning and theories of shamanism, how it is defined by different authors. Here most of the definitions on shamanism have been given from the anthropological point of view. Thereafter, authors have pointed out nine characters of shamanism. They also show the difference between priest and shaman and state that when priest is present, the shaman is absent.

In chapter three, the authors have given a brief introduction of shaman. The Santali term for shaman is *ojha*. How did the *ojha* come into existence, what is their origin and their category. To answer this question the authors have brought a story of origin of *ojha*. The sun god has given this shamanic knowledge to *kamburu*. *Kamburu* was an ordinary person of Santal society. After gaining all the knowledge from sun god, *kamburu* became very powerful shaman and was recognized as *guru*. On the other hand the wife of *kamburu* learnt some supernatural knowledge and became witch. The authors have also evaluated that in Santal society *ojha* acts as a diviner, a medicine man who is responsible to cure the disease and to communicate with supernatural power. There are 13 categories of shaman in Santal society recognized as *guru* who are experts in respective knowledge.

There are some positions in Santal shamanistic hierarchy, *jaan guru* comes first than *sakha* in terms of their knowledge and power. Here authors also mentioned a unique categories of *ojha*, this type *ojha* has the power to trace out lost object, animals or any missing person. This type of *ojha* are called *rama arsi ojha* (nail mirror Shaman).

In the fourth chapter, the authors show the role of Santal shamans and how do they function. They found *ojha* usually communicate with spirits and learn about hidden matters. In addition to their supernatural knowledge *ojha* has profound ethno medicinal knowledge to cure the diseases. This *ojha* also plays vital role during life-circle rituals such as marriage ceremony and death ritual. *Ojha* worship to defend the malevolent power from effecting any unexpected incident. The author also discussed about the *bhujni Bonga*, *Bhujni* is a female demon who is responsible to bring about the epidemic or disease in village. Hence, to appease the *Bhujni bonga* *ojha* worship her in month of April. In order to take the preventative measure *ojha*

makes *dumbra*. *Dumbra* is one kind of sacred thread made out of medicinal plant. There are 31 medicinal plants mentioned to make the *dumbra*. *Ojha* prepares this *Dumbra* for each individual in the village. At the same time some ingredients are buried in different places in the village as preventative measures.

The authors have narrated the curative practices. It is little bit different from preventative practices. After one comes to the shaman with any disease, then shaman finds out the causes of diseases by applying his technique and asks his god or spirits to the concerned person. Thereafter, sacrifice is made. The authors have made case studies and found many persons to follow curative practice after recovering from serious illness. The authors also highlighted on reading and diagnosis technique of shaman and they found that *ojha* uses five types of technique to diagnose the cause of illness, these are: *charej khari*, *soonum khari*, *sindur*, *jol nel*, *adoa chaole khari*. The authors again show how a shaman drives away the malevolent spirits when they attack an individual. They referred to four techniques that *ojha* apply according to the nature of spirits. The above mentioned techniques are performed with chanting *jharni*, a set of *bakher*. *Jhar* means to blow air over any things to clean out. According to them the *jhar* is done by chanting the *jharni*, *mantar* and found 21 *jharni mantars*. The shamans apply these techniques according to the nature of problem. This *jhar* works instantly to cure the problem of the patient.

Chhadao is another healing technique in Santal society. Santali word *chhadao* means removal of anything. The authors mentioned here that this practice is applied when a person falls or any psychosomatic arises problem. He sacrifices cock or pig to his god or spirit to remove the evil spirits.

The author also discuss about *jharni mantar*. This is a form of incantation by which a shaman fights with supernatural power. This *jharni mantar* is originated from *kambru guru* so those who are descended from *kambru* have the knowledge of *jharni mantar*. There are many types of *jharni mantar* which are used to solve the specific problems. The authors have given 8 *jharni* and *mantar* but do not give any indication where it is applicable. Another *jharni mantar* author has given with the indication of its uses.

The authors have also noted that apart from the supernatural knowledge the shamans have profound ethno-medicinal knowledge to cure the diseases. They use different herbs, roots, brews, politics, salves etc. to cure the various illness.

The authors have mentioned 31 types of medicinal plants with its use. Name of the medicinal plant are in Santali language. These are used for curing the ordinary diseases like headache, stomache, skin disease, body pain, gastric, *dhatu* etc., some are also used in treating the supernatural forces like *nojor* (evil eye), to make quarrel in family etc.

The authors have tried to depict the trance and sprits calling. Trance is known as *rumuh* in Santali. It happens when an individual possessed by spirits or god then

he directly communicates to god or spirits. The Shaman connects to any dead person during trance and communicates to know the causes of problem. The authors again put some information about the Shaman's role in other spheres to indicate. that shaman does not only work as disease healer, they sometimes plays role to make the individuals to reach their ambitions like getting job, better performance in job etc.

The authors says that *ojha* in Santal society act as sorcerers. They have the power to cause many problem to victim even can kill him. So shaman can bring about the malevolent and benevolent function. Here authors found that in santal society which craft or belief in *dan* are very much prevalent.

In the chapter five the authors have made a discussion on Santal Shmantic Performances. The authors found that santal shamanism has been influenced by Hindu religion. There is reference to the symbolic depiction called *Khond* in Santali. *Sima* , *thari* are the name of the *Khand*, this system of symbolic depictions is important to sarna dharm. Again this symbolic depiction varies from *ojha* to *ojha*.

Shaman in santal society sacrifice domestic animal like pig, goat , cattle, buffalo, pigeon etc. to both benevolent and malevolent sprits. Process of sacrifice has been shown here. A case study of cattle sacrifice has been found, cattle sacrifice was given by one shaman as preventative measure (*mansik*). In chapter six, the authors have discussed about the changing trend of santal shamanism. How this santal shamanism is changing, what are the factors impacted upon the shamanism. The authors experienced that modern education and modernization have highly influenced on their belief system.

In the chapter seven, the author has ended the discussion with a summary and have made concluding remarks that Shamanism plays a vital role in santal society. It preserves the cultural tradition very well. Through the shamanism the old aged ethnomedicinal practices of the Santal is preserved. And also this shamanism was responsible to look after the health care system of the Santal. But this old aged tradition is gradually weakening due to the impact of modernization. The authors also opine the ethno medicine used by shaman need to examined for safe uses.

This is basically a well written accounts of Santal shamanism based on field work. Only *Sarna dharam* maintained here that the followers of *Sarna dharam* tend to add new trend what is little different from the followers of *saridharam*. *Guru akahara* plays a vital role to keep the knowledge preserve but now this *akhara* is almost absent. In present days there are some medicine men who have ethnomedicinal knowledge to cure the diseases but neither they have any supernatural connection nor do they do any ritual. Earlier the Shaman would not take money for their service. Now a days almost all Shaman demand a big amount cash for giving their service.

The book is a good account of the Santal tradition related shamanism. It will be a helpful reference to the students and individuals interested in Santal religion.

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