

Origin and History of the Santal Ethnic Group of Nepal

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ABSTRACT: The Santals are highly marginalized ethnic group live in Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari districts of eastern Nepal. They are usually known as Satars in Nepal but prefer to be known as Santals. They believed that the first human creation in the world were their ancestors. They have remarkable traditions and folklores but didn't have any written records until the 19th century. They believe that the legends, songs and folklores were the basis of their origin. The origin of Santals mentioned in the *Ho'korean Mare Hapramko reak Katha*, a book regarded as authoritative and frequently referred in Indian Law Courts of the Santal area which was based on the narration of an old Santal Guru Kolean. Although the original history of Santals is uncertain, however, large numbers of Santals inhabited the Chotanagpur plateau of India, especially the districts of Hazaribagh, Palamau and Singhbhum and their adjoining areas Midnapur and Birbhum during the middle of the 18th century, which was considered as their original homeland. During that period of Santal rebellion of 1855-56 several Santals migrated to different neighbouring countries including Nepal for settlement. The exact date of migration of Santals to Nepal is not documented, however, it is considered that the Santals could have entered Nepal during the year of 1855-56, and the process of migration had been continued by the drought of 1871 and subsequent years. Attempt has been made in this paper to review the origin and history of Santals of Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

The Santals are one of the highly marginalized ethnic groups of Nepal, they live in Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari districts of eastern Nepal and are usually known as Satars in Nepal. However, they prefer to be known as Santals instead of Satars. The word Santal is considered to be derived from Saontar area of Mednipur district in West Bengal (India). The Satar of Nepal and Santal (also written as Santhal) of India are believed to be the same ethnic group (Ghimire, '80). The Santal's complexion is dark-brown, approximates to the Negroid type; the face is round and blubbery; the cheekbones moderately prominent; eyes are of medium size and of black colour. The Santals generally have a scanty beard, *South Asian Anthropologist*, 2018, 18(2): 215-222

little hair on the body and thick lips (Siwakoti, 2015). The total population of Santals in Nepal is 51,735 (CBS, 2012). In addition, they live in India, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Majority of Santals live in the Chotanagpur plateau, Rajmahal hill, areas near Damordar river and forests of Dolma hill area of India since time immemorial. In past, the primary ways of their subsistence were hunting and food gathering. The agrarian way of their living was brought by the Aryans who came to their homeland during 1500 BC. (www.wordlingo.com).

The Santals speak Santali language which belongs to the Munda family of languages (Ghurye, '32). The Munda family is one of the Pre-Dravidian tribes of the Central India. Peter W. Schmidt
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classified the Mundari language as sub-family of the Austro-Asiatic language group (Roy, '12). Anthropologists classified the Santals as Pre-Dravidians, Kolarians, Dravidians, Proto-Australoids, Nishadies and Austrics based on races (Murmu, 2004). The Santals developed a script called "*Olchiki*" in 1925 (www.jharkhand.org.in). Majority of Santals observe Hindu religion (83.1 %) followed by Christian (5.8%) and others (Dahal, 2003). The Santals literacy rate is only 25.84%, which is low in comparison to national literacy rate (65.9%) (CBS, 2012).

Historically, the Santal, known as Kharwal/Kherwal, who had remained aloof for quite some time. When an agricultural economy developed around their habitat, they were compelled to come out of the forest for the subsistence (Chaudhari, 1993). It is considered that the Santals migrated to Nepal from the eastern-central part of India (Santal Pragana) during early nineteenth century. An attempt has been made to review the origin and history of their native land to understand various aspects of their life. The paper is based on secondary information published in different literature.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY

The Santals believed that their forefathers were the first human creation in the world. They have remarkable traditions and folklores but didn't have any written records until the 19th century. They believe the traditional songs and folklores are the basis of their origin. Different scholars have made effort to identify the countries, rivers, hills, forests, etc mentioned in the Santal's legends, however, due to the lack of proper supporting evidences, it has never been possible to offer any definite and universal theory (Troisi, '79). Owing to the migratory habit and the system of shifting cultivation as they practiced, it is difficult to determine their origin (*cf.* Murmu, 2004).

At present it is an open question among ethnologists concerning how this ethnic group made its way into the region which it now occupies (Campbell, 1894 cited in Troisi, '79). In 1887, Skrefsrud published a book '*Ho'korean Mare Hapramko reak Katha*', a collection of Santal myths and legend in Santali language (Skrefsrud, '68). This book has been regarded as authoritative and still frequently referred in Indian Law Courts of the Santal

area (Troisi, '76). It was narrated from the mouth of an old Santal Guru Kolean and based on traditions handed down from generation to generation through teaching and verbatim. The book was literally translated into English as "Traditions and Institutions of the Santals" by P.O. Bodding in 1942 and has been reprinted several times (Troisi, '76).

According to Santal's traditions and institutions, at time immemorial, there was only water all over the world except the bottom. The traditions say the *Thakur-Jiu* (their main God) made the first human couple (Santal's parents) on the earth; when he was going to give them *ajiu* (life-spirit), a *Sin'Sadom* (literally, Day-Horse) came and smashed them into pieces. *Thakur-Jiu* was grieved and made a pair of birds instead of human pair. He created a pair of Swans (*Has Hansil*) from his breast. He kept this pair in his hand and gave them to life. They flew off, but did not find any place to alight for their living. They came back to *Thakur-Jiu*, meanwhile, the came down along the gossamer thread to drink water. While doing this, the *Sim'Sadom* spit and left some froth which floated all over the sea. The *Thakur-Jiu* now told the two birds to alight on the froth. They did so and started floating about all over the sea. But they had nothing to eat. All was covered by water and the *Thakur-Jiu* called upon a number of animals to bring up earth; none of them succeeded unless the earthworm was asked. The earthworm promised to bring up the land, it provided the tortoise to stand on the water. The earthworm had its tail on the back of the tortoise, ate earth with its mouth and let it come out on the back of the tortoise. Now the *Thakur-Jiu* harrowed the earth, thereby producing hills and valleys. The froth mentioned adhered to the earth and *Thakur-Jiu* sowed different seeds of grass, trees, and at last all kinds of vegetation were grown on earth. Then the birds made their nest in a clump of *Sirom* grass, and laid down two eggs. From these eggs a boy and a girl hatched out. The *Thakur-Jiu* instructed the birds how to feed them. The next trouble was to find a place to raise them. They again implored *Thakur-Jiu* about it, he told them to fly away and find a place. They flew towards the direction of the sun and found a mythical place called as Hihiri Pipiri (a mythical place of Santals). They came back and informed to the *Thakur-jiu* about the place. By the order of *Thakur-Jiu* they

took their children on the back and flew towards the new place and kept them there. It was the place where first human pair lived. The legends do not say what happened to the birds afterwards (Mukherjee, '43; Murmu, 2004).

The legends further mentioned that, from Hihiri Pipiri they had to pass several countries to reach Sasan Beda / Sasangbera and from there they went to Champa / Campa after a long sojourn. The exact identity of the Hihiri Pipiri remains a mystery. The traditional mythical story communicated the Santals history in following ways: "We were born in Hihiri Pipiri. We were called to promise Kaman. We grew and multiplied at Harata. We were divided into clans at Sasan Beda" (Skrefsurd, '68), the English version from Santali was translated by Bodding (cited in Murmu, 2004). Many Santals of the study area had no idea about the history of their origin but some of the literate Santals who read the book about their origin repeated the similar story (Siwakoti, 2013).

There are different versions about the history of their original place, some said they came to Indian Peninsula much before the Indo-Aryans, through Khyber and Bolan passes, under the leaders of who were deified as personal gods like *Abge bonga* and *Orak bonga* (Chaudhari, '93). Umashankar ('66) also expressed similar view based on the Santals' folklores. He wrote that when the situation at Koinda, Kandhar and Bodhouli (locations at present Afghanistan) were not favourable to the Santals, then they migrated to Champa in the country of five rivers. It was irrigated by five rivers and was very fertile where they settled for a long time. It is considered that this is the Sindha pass of present Panjab. During that period, the Sindha was popular with the name of Chae; the Santals extended their country over the whole Sindha valley known as Chae-Champa. They again left Chae-Champa due to the fear of Madho Singh (a bastard son of Birhor), who wanted to marry a Santal girl, but the Santals became ready to leave their homeland (Chae Champa) rather than get married their daughter to a non Santal (Chaudhari, '93). According to Risley (1891) the Hihiri Pipiri was a Pragana Ahuri in the north west of Hazaribag district in Bihar (now Jharkhand). He wrote that the earliest settlements of the Santals (Hihiri Pipiri and Chae-Champa) lied on the north western frontier of tableland and of Hazaribag

district. The influx of Hindus had actually driven out the Santals eastward and the line of retreat corresponds to that attributed in the traditions (Chaudhari, '93). The traditions said that the dispersal of the Santals started from Hihiri Pipiri due to increase of their population. They went to Harata at first where the entire tribe except a couple was destroyed by a fire that raged for seven days at the bidding of *Thakur Jiu*. At Harata, the tribe sprang up once again from the surviving couple then they migrated to Susan Beda/Sasangbera (a plain area at the bank of a river) where they stayed for a long time. According to Kolean Guru, the Santals were divided into different clans (*Parish*) at Susan Beda. Mukherjee (1943) narrated (on the basis of the traditions) that *Thakur Jiu* in disguise of *Lita Ha°am* taught the first parents (*Pilchu Ha°am* and *Pilchu Budhi*) at Hihiri Pipiri to brew and drink the rice beer (*Handi*). When they drank the liquor, they behaved as man and wife. In course of time, they had seven boys and girls. These girls and boys married thereafter and grew in large numbers. To avoid incest, their parents divided them in to seven exogamous clans (Hansdak, Murmu, Kisku, Hembram, Mardi, Soren and Tudu). Then they migrated to Khojkaman, where they lived as beasts losing their sense of morality in sexual behavior. *Thakur jiu* destroyed mankind except a couple of virtuous persons sending them at Harata/Hara cave. The Santals again increased there and migrated to Susan Beda, where they stayed for a long time and once again divided into five more clans (Baske, Besara, Pauria, Core and Bedea). The Bedea clan is now considered as an extinct.

Mr. Jairam Murmu (a resident of Jhapa Haldibari) said that they heard the similar legends about the origin of Santals. But, he said the Murmu clan was not from a child of *Pilchu Ha°am* and *Pilchu Bu°hi*. He remembered a legend, once the sons of *Pilchu Ha°am* and *Pilchu Bu°hi* hunted the Nilgai (*Murmunga*), a mother of the Murmu clan, then Murmu child became an orphan. The *Pilchu Ha°am* and *Pilchu Bu°hi* took care of the orphan child. The first parents ordered their sons that if any unpredictable event occurs which spoils the norms and values of the society then they should asked the Murmu for purification (*per.Comm.* Jaya Ram Murmu).

Further, the legends mentioned that the Santals migrated eastwardly again from Susan Beda to Champa wandering various places including Jarpi. In Jarpi, they encountered the Great Mountain (*Maran Buru*) where they could not find out the pass. Only after paying homage to the great mountain (*Maran Buru*), they found a pass leading to Ahuri /Ahiri. They stayed there for some time and crossed over to Kendi, then Chae and finally to Champa. In Champa, the present social organizations of Santals evolved. In reorganizing the society, the Santals leaned heavily on the condign power. As a poor society, Santals could hardly afford to take recourse to compensating power, particularly, on the mundane plane (Chaudhari, '93). The traditions said that the days of Champa were comparatively calm and stable, as in the Hindu society, their clans were also stratified to assign a particular work. For example, Kisku clan was allotted the king, Soren became *sipahi* (police), Mardi as wealthy man corresponding to Baisya, while the Hembram was of princely status, Murmu was given a priestly role, Hasda became the warrior, Tudu the bandmaster, etc. However, from the stratification, it cannot be said that the institution of kingship had actually developed among the Santals in that day. The Kisku was Rapaj, not the *Raja* (king), indicating that the Kisku was to perform the duties of the Raja (king) and not to rule as the king. The social hierarchy nearly corresponded to that of ancient Vedic period. As in the Vedic period, there would be election to elect the headman; it was like a Vedic system (Chaudhari, '93). According to the Guru Kolean, they built up different *Ghars* or forts at Champa to protect themselves from enemies, such as Khairigarh by Hembrams, Koindagarh by Kiskus, Champagarh by Murmus, Badligarh by Mandis, Simgarh by Tudus, and others whose names could not be recollected by him. Similarly, they set up the *Marang Buru*, *Moreiko-Turuiko*, and *Jaher Era* by maintaining the *Jaherthan* in Champa (Chaudhari, '93). *Sim Bonga* was also worshipped, once every five years during sun rise (Mukherjee, '43).

Mukherjee ('43) wrote that the Santals, Mundas, Birho's, Kurmbis (Kurmis) were called Kharwar/ Kherwal up to the period of their settlement in Champa. The Birho's were outcasted because they ate the flesh of monkey which was considered as their totem. Mundas and Kurmbis gradually adopted the

Hindu customs and separated, some Kharwars entered into matrimonial alliances with a section of Hindus known as Sins (Mukherjee, '43). Until they reached the Chotanagpur in Ruidasgarh (now Rotasgarh), both Munda and Santals were considered as one tribe (Kharwal). The myth regarding the genesis of Santals is also shared in many aspects by the Mundas, Hos and other neighboring tribes of Chotanagpur plateau as well as linguistic closeness have contributed to develop a regional identity among them (Ray *et al.*, '82). As the inflow of Hindus increased in Champa, the Santals drove out from there and then they were no more called as Kharwal (Chaudhari, '93).

It is also considered that during pre-historical ages, the entire northern Indian subcontinent was dominated by the Kherwali group who were divided in various communities after the formation of different sections of religion (Jainism, Buddhism and arrival of Aryan to India). The Santals became the followers of Digambar section of Jainism. Being the followers of Digambar, they put on yellow dress in every ritual of life cycle ceremonies as well as worship the God "*Maran Buru*" meaning the God of Himalayas (Shiva) and the *Jaher Era*, the mother of Goddess under the Sal tree. The tradition continued from the time of Mahavira (Hasda, 2002 in www.allindiaaseca.org/sovenior_2002pdf).

The Santals used the term *Dekos* for non-Santals and feel the '*Dekos*' are thorns, because Santals reclaim the forest, *Dekos* come to snatch it away. In fact, the word *Deko* carries the memory of the distant past, when with the spread of Sanskritization the *Deva* or Brahman came down to the land of aborigines and settled there. This practice subsequently gave way to another practice of granting land endowment to Brahmans in tribal areas since the period of Gupta dynasty (Chaudhari, '93).

As the Santals became influenced by the Hindus in the Sikhar area, the Santal's *Raja* (king) adopted Hindu religion and converted himself as Kshatriya / Rajput, but his people did not agree to convert and they moved towards the present Santal Praganas leaving the *Raja* behind. The Santals felt that along with the loss of land, Hindu acculturation was a possible threat to their identity. If they lived without any symbol of identity then they would be induced to Hindus. They introduced some symbolic markers such

as tattoo marks on woman body and Sika marks on the man's forearm to highlight their group identity. Before arrived at Santal Pragana, they had migrated to many places including the Saont area of the Midnapur district (West Bengal), where they got their name Santal, it lies some 300 miles south and west of the *Damin-i-koh* (Somers,'77).

Although the origin and history of Santals is uncertain, however, large numbers of Santals inhabited the Chotanagpur plateau of India, especially the districts of Hazaribagh, Palamau and Singhbhum and their adjoining areas (Midnapur and Birbhum) during the middle of the 18th century. The reason behind the migration may be the failure of the tribe and its leadership in adjusting themselves to a changed system of land revenue administration, which took money instead of continuing accepting the taxes in kind. In course of time, induction into Hindus added the prestige to the king and the royal family by innovating Kshatriya genealogy. The services rendered were certainly not possible without money; the Hindus (Brahmanas) were given land grants to sustain themselves and are able to support the king. The exactions by the tax collectors were many times the demand of the royal court and in consequence, money lenders entered the field (Chaudhari,'93). The Santals were always troubled by money lenders and landlords and thus always spent their lives migrating from one place to other for sustainability. These various circumstances made Santals migrate to *Damin-i-koh*, the area that was established by the British administration demarcating a large part of Chotanagpur area of Rajmahal hill. The Rajmahal hill lies in the north-eastern part of Jharkhand state and west of the Ganges (Ganga) river. The Santals got some notable experiences in this new place such as their migration demanded what might be called pioneering investment in this place and it brought into conflict with earlier occupants of the territory (Somers,'77). The *Damin-i-koh* is a region of rugged hill ranges and historically dense forests with several streams including the Damodar river which is frequently mentioned in Santal legends.

The Chotanagpur area of India is a plateau in the eastern central Indian states like Jharkhand as well as adjacent parts of Orissa, Bihar and Chhattisgarh. The area is considered as their original homeland, because

the earlier historical settlements and events would be more likely just speculated (Somers,'77). In this area, the Santals developed an interest in wet rice cultivation in addition to their previous love of hunting and dependence upon forest products for livelihood. Later on, as the Chotanagpur area was penetrated by other agricultural population, the Santals became land hungry people early in the 19th century. They had sufficient labours organized under the village leaders, because the migrations always took place in groups. The group investment was necessary for the continuing arduous work of preparing rice fields and cutting channels for irrigation. The Santals were exploiting the forests along their route of migration and surrounding their new settlements for meat and vegetables, so they had no problem of life support up to the period of harvest. They only required iron tools, oxen and seeds from outside. The Santals went to the traditional agricultural moneylenders of non-Santal villages for loans for their tools, animals and seeds. These loans were by legal necessity for individual or family responsibilities. In *Damin-i-koh*, first they became predominantly agriculturalists; they were incorporated increasingly with non-Santal communities. In the area, markets were quickly established by non-Santal merchants. The new and attractive goods served to disorganize the village rules and leaderships. The Santals were attracted to spend more on clothing and alcohol than they could afford, because they were dependent heavily on the harvest from the newly cleared land. They went to merchants for loans who provided the loan at usurious rate of interest and the indebtedness was secured by mortgages on the Santal land and as soon as the debtor began to default on mortgage payments, the law permitted the money lenders to take the possession of the mortgaged acreage. The Santal lost the control of the field within a few years after their settlement in the *Damin-i-koh*, they had been carved out of the forests (Somers,'77).

The merchants and the money lenders pressed the Santals into a subordinate status in the caste hierarchy to fit in their own traditions and predilections. As a landless labourer, the Santal was thrown into the status of an outcast. Because, they ignored the status symbol of Hindu society, such as taboo on widow remarriage and meat eating (beef),

the Santals were becoming untouchables among the more powerful non-Santals (Somers,'77).

In this way, the Santals were being steadily deprived of their possessions, leading them to a stage of perpetual bondage to the creditors. As the forest of the Rajmahal hills had been destroyed by the increasing population and converted into agricultural land, the annual land tax was gradually increased; the landlords also began to demand a much higher sum as rent to harass the villagers. The money lenders gradually came in and tried to exploit the Santals in various ways. The continued ongoing dissatisfaction broke into the revolt of 1855-56. In that rebellion about 10,000 Santals died (Somers,'77). Regarding the rebellion, Hunter concludes, "There was not a single sepoy (soldier) in the British army who did not feel ashamed" (<http://weSantals.tripod.com/>). Though the British authorities crushed the rebellion, however, it brought a significant change in the relationship between the Santals and the economic political system of British India. The first measure taken was the establishment of a distinct administrative area in which Santal interests were to be guarded. An area of 5000 square miles was allotted of the existing districts of Bhagalpur and Birbhum as a Santal Parganas. The Santal Parganas was declared a non-regulation district, meaning the usual judicial and bureaucratic procedures of the British India would not be applicable to the government of the new district. The headman (*Manjhi Ha°am*) became the primary office of administration in the district of the Santal Parganas in Bihar (now Jharkhand). In each village, where possible, a man elected as headman, would be a direct descendent of the founder of the village who led the village group in the settlement and migration. The headman was designated by the government as the *Pradhan* or *Mustagir* of the village. This gave the traditional headman responsibilities for collecting land rents and taxes and transferring them to the government treasury (Somers,'77).

The Santals always had been in quest of permanent settlement and economic stability. However, under the depredations of power of a dominant society, their quest had remained only a dream. The Santals always moved here and there in search of subsistence, and cared little for permanent homes. They were not true nomads, but they liked to

be "on the move". As the revolt of 1855-56 was crushed by the British India government then at that time several Santals could have fled to different parts of India and adjoining countries including Nepal (Somers,'77). The process of migration was made to continue by the drought of 1871 and subsequent years.

SANTAL ARRIVAL IN NEPAL

The Santals of Nepal are immigrated population from the central eastern part of India (Santal Parganas), however, the exact date of migration to Nepal is not documented. If we observe the above mentioned situations in their homeland, the Santals could have entered Nepal during the year of 1855-56 to avoid involvement in the insurrection and onwards. The existence of the Santals in Nepal was not reported during or before 1846. For example, Francis-Buchanan Hamilton (1803) mentioned only Koch (Rajbansis) and Mech (Dhimal) while describing the people of Jhapa Morang and adjoining eastern border area of India. Campbell (1839) mentioned Koch (Rajbansis), Garo, Dhimal, Thaba (Tharu?) from this area. Similarly, Hodgson (1846) mentioned only Koch, Bodo, Dhimal, Rava (Hindu Bodo), Hajong, Kudi, Batar (Bor), Kerbat, Pallah, Gangai, Bharah and Danuk (cited in HMG/N, 1976). This means that the Santals have not arrived in Nepal during these periods or their numbers could have been insignificant.

Regarding to migration of Santals to Nepal, Mr. Jairam Murmu of Haldibari, Jhapa, said that possibly their ancestors were migrated to Eastern Nepal Himalayan region during the ancient time but not mentioned the date. Similarly, Mr. Lukhiram Hasda (president of the *Nepal Santals Utthan Sangh*) said probably during 1852 (per. comm.). Mr. Lukhi Ram Hasda's answer was close to the Santals insurrection of India in 1855-56 (Siwakoti, 2013). The population was increased in Nepal after the famines of Bihar in 1871 and subsequent years. During the last of 19th century, the British government of India, started many new developmental works near Nepal India border including extension of railway tracts (Kisangung, Thakurgunj, Galgalia of Bihar) and tea gardening (Assam, Naxalbari, Siliguri, etc). It is reported that during these days a large number of Santals labourers were taken to Assam and West Bengal for working at tea gardens and railway system (Chaudharai,'93;

Somers, '77). During that period, several Santals entered to Nepal in search of new work as laborers towards Nepal's Eastern Tarai, after crossing the Mechi River. This is supported by the Census Report of 1951-54, which recorded roughly 20,000 Santals in Jhapa district alone, whereas the Census Report of 1961 shows about 12,000 Santals living in Jhapa and about 19,000 in Morang district, it seems that many of them were moved from Jhapa to Morang (Bista, '67). The Jhapa and Morang districts had similar geographical and climatic settings as in their homeland (India) which made easier for Santals to live in the new area. Historically, the Eastern Tarai region was thinly populated only by malaria immune indigenous groups such as the Tharu, Dhimal, Rajbansi, Batar, Gangai, Santal and some caste groups from the south. In order to maximize agricultural production and increase revenue, the Nepal government pursued an official policy, beginning in 1768, of encouraging immigration from the adjacent districts of India (Dahal, '83, Regmi, '78, Guneratne, 2002). Initially, the policy was not effective, but as the 19th century progressed, immigration significantly increased. The devastating famine of 1770 in northern Bihar also brought many Indian peasants into the Tarai regions of Nepal, where they could get the job of clearing the forest for the sake of their subsistence. Even so, during the first half of the 19th century much of the Tarai areas were covered with forests (Dahal, '83; Guneratne, 2002). Until 1950, The Jhapa Morang area was under the Morang administrative jurisdiction and the area was thinly populated with dense forests. The ruling government of Nepal was interested to maximize agriculture production and increase revenue from the land. Santals were highly skilled to chase the wild animals, and reputed to clear the forest trees and cultivate agricultural land, so the local Zamindars also encouraged them to settle there (Bhattarai, 2010). Thus the dense forest of Jhapa Morang and the state policy of Nepal encouraged them to migrate in the eastern Nepal Tarai. Sharma (2054 BS) wrote that late Tursa Hembram's grandfather entered in Jhapa during 1863 on the invitation of a Rana ruler.

CONCLUSION

The Santals history of origin shows that they had remained aloof for a quite long time, but the

developing agricultural economy around them compelled to come out from their primitive forest life. They cleared the forest to cultivate the crops, but their lands have been snatched away by the dominant groups and that led them to semi-nomadic pattern of life. The Santals tradition says that in ancient time they were known as Kharwal/ Kherwal when they were at the mythological Champa. They moved to Sikhar from the Champa where they became influenced by Hindus to a great extent. Later on, it is believed that the Kharwals were separated into different tribes. They also lived for some time at Saont area of West Bengal from where it is believed that they got the new name as Santal. The *Damin-i-koh* area of Chotanagpur, later on named as Santal Pargannas, is considered as their homeland, where they adopted a permanent agriculture practice. Various documents related to Santals mention that they were compelled to disperse in different directions from their homeland due to various internal and external forces. They also moved to neighbouring countries including Nepal for their subsistence.

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