

Sound, Culture, and Identity: Musical Instruments Among the Santal Tribes of Odisha

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Abstracts

Music is not only an artistic but an essential component of every tribal community. In this context, music plays a central role in the cultural life of the Santal tribe of Odisha. Musical instruments among the Santal tribe are not only an entertainment device but also a vital element of cultural expression and ritual life. The Santals have their own instruments, and they are used during various festivals and dances such as Kalasi, Danta, Rinja, Baha, and Jachur, weddings, and other occasions. This article examines the traditional musical instruments of the Santal tribe, with particular attention to their socio-cultural functions, construction, and composition. It shows how these instruments are used in different rituals, festivals, and in social life. This paper argues that preserving musical instruments is essential for the promotion of inclusive cultural development.

Keywords: cultural development, musical instrument, socio cultural significance, santal tribe

1. Introduction

The Santals mainly reside in the Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Balasore districts of Odisha. They also inhabit neighboring states like Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam. Tribal music of Odisha is meant for the recreation and entertainment of tribal people. (Das, 2023)⁴. Various types of tribal songs and music have also been prevalent in different districts of Odisha. The prevalence of various types of tribal songs along with the tribal musical instruments is found, especially in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Koraput, Sundergarh, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Sambalpur, Kalahandi, etc (Sahu, 2024)⁵. Like other tribes, dance (enej) and music (sereng) are essential aspects of Santal culture (Ota 2014)⁶. The Santals have their own instruments, and they are used during various festivals and dances such as Kalasi, Danta, Rinja, Baha, and Jachur, weddings, and other occasions (Soren et al., 1920)⁷. Various musical instruments such as tamak, dhol, tiriau, banam (a one-stringed fiddle), ghanta (iron bell), singa (horn trumpet), and sarangi are used during dance performances. It is the tribal music that fulfills the aspirations of tribal people to a great extent.

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This paper provides an understanding of the different types of key musical instruments used by the Santal tribes of Odisha. It highlights their socio-cultural significance, including their construction and making process.

2. Objectives

- To study the use and sociocultural significance of the musical instruments of the Santal Tribe.
- To know the materials used and the making procedures of the musical Instruments.

3. Methodology

This study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data is collected from systematic observation from Odisha State Tribal Museum display gallery. Display labels are analyzed source of information. 5 nos of santal people are interviewed for cross check the data. Secondary data is collected from journals, books, museum brochures, and the audiovisual interactive Kiosk of the Odisha State Tribal Museum.

Types of musical instruments

4. Aerophones (Blowing instrument)

4.1 Tiriau



The Santal tribe places great cultural value on the flute. “*Tiriau*” is a bamboo flute (with seven holes) that falls under the Blowing musical instrument category. A suitable piece of bamboo, usually collected from nearby forests, is cut and shaped to create the flute body. Then, the inner hollow is drilled or heated by heating a metal rod. After that, finger holes are carved at specific locations and spacing, considering the size of the flute. Usually, seven holes are bored on the surface of the flute for the seven tunes of the music system. Then, its dimensions are adjusted to produce the best possible sound. Natural oils or waxes are applied to protect the material and enhance the sound quality. Flutes are played during marriages and other holy rites. The flute adds liveliness to dances and festivals such as Saharai and Baha Bonga also Santals believe that the sound of “*Tiriau*” attracts the god and goddesses to the earth. It expresses romantic love and separation and symbolizes liberation and independence. This musical instrument is also played by male members of the community during leisure hours for their entertainment.

4.2 Sakwa



“*Sakwa*” is a horn trumpet, which comes under the blowing instruments and made of buffalo horn, played by the Santal tribe men of Odisha. Sakwa is an important musical instrument of Santals. Dead buffalo horn is used to make this musical instrument. They put a hole in the middle part of the “*Sakwa*” to blow it. The trumpet has a mouth hole drilled on the surface keeping its shape intact. Sakwa or the horn trumpet is blown to start the rituals of Baha Bonga. Next day Santal men go for hunting to the forest carrying Sakwa with them which is considered as a sign of fortune by them. It is a symbol of bravery in the community.

5. Membranophones (Drums)

5.1 Dhak



“*Dhak*” is the large double membrane drum played by the Santal tribe of Odisha. Which is made from the trunk of a mango tree. It is cylindrical in shape. Wood, Cow hide, Goat skin are the raw materials used in making the Dhak. At first a straight trunk of the mango tree is selected for the instrument. Then the trunk is soaked in water for a month for smoothening. After this process the inside of the trunk is hollowed out and upper part is flattened. Then to evaporate the excess water from the trunk it is heated over fire for an hour. The two ends of the dhak are wrapped up with the Goat skin and stretched using the cow hide thread. The sound of the dhak depends on the stretching process. It is played by the hand, by beating on the middle of the head. Sound is produced according to the tightness of stretched skin / stiffness of the stretched skin. The double membrane drum is played by the Santal tribe in the flower festival (Baha Bonga). Although dhak is a double-membrane drum, it is played on only one side. It is played once a year during the flower festival in March or April, around the full moon. In this festival, Santals worship the Sal flower on the

Jaher (sacred groove) and play the dhak, and women of this community dance rhythmically to the tune of the dhak.

5.2 Chadchadi



“*Chadchadi*” is the ethnic name of this single membrane drum, which is made of an iron plate and goat skin. This Musical Instrument is made by the Santal Community by procuring the iron portion from the local blacksmith. Goat skin, Iron plate, cotton straps, and Kusum oil are the main raw materials. The sundried goat skin is soaked in water for three days to make the drum. After making the skin soft, it is stretched and fixed to the iron frame on both sides and stretched with a leather strap. After making the instrument, Kusum oil is applied to it and dried in the sun. It is hung from the shoulder with a cotton strap and beaten with two bamboo sticks to produce sound. Santal men play Chadchadi in all cultural programmes and festive occasions like Dong, Lagne, Baha Bonga, Saharai, Sendra, Sakrad, Bapla etc. The women dance to the tune of Chadchadi.

5.3 Tamak



“*Tamak*” is the single membrane drum usually played by the Santal Tribe of Odisha in almost all the festive occasions. The base of the Tamak is made of iron, which they purchase from the local smiths. The buffalo skin is soaked in water for 3 to 4 days, then tightly stretched across the mouth of the hollow iron base. The drum is beaten with the help of two drumsticks by the male member of the community. In various dances such as Baha dance, Mahmane, Dhangel, Lagne, Dong, Buru Jatra, Dantha, Drama, etc., the Musical Instrument “Tamak” is played. The Santals believe that this instrument, “Tamak”, connects them with their Supreme God, “Marang Buru”. Also, to honour the ancestors and spirits, Tamaks are played. It also brings together. Fostering community and social bonding through oral tradition, sharing myths, legends, and cultural heritage.

6. Chordophones (String Musical Instrument)

6.1 Banam



Banam is a string musical instrument played by the santal people. There are many types of Banam. Dhudru banam and Fadesh Banam is one of these banam category. wood of the plumeria (wood Champa) which is known for thick and fleshy is preferred to make the Banam. The banam played with a bow shaped instrument which is made of bamboo and horse hair is also used as its string. It is the essential accompaniment to the Santal love songs.

7. Idiophones (self-sounding instruments)

7.1 Dehra



“*Dehra*” is the circular musical instrument played by the santal community of Odisha. This Musical Instrument “Dehra” is made by the local smith through heat and hammer process. A heavy iron plate is flattened and a Wooden Stick is used to beat the plate. This Musical Instrument is played during different festive occasion such as Sahrai, Baha Bonga and Sendra. It is also played during the “Dong” and “Lagne” dance. This instrument represents the cultural identity of the Santal tribe.

8. Conclusion

Traditional Santal musical instruments such as Banam, Tiriau, Sakwa, Chadchadi, Nagara, Dhak and Dehra are an integral part of their cultural heritage. These musical instruments not only represent their musical tools but also represent their artistic creativity, community relationship, ecological knowledge and cultural identity. In the modern-day society of cultural change, the santal people continue to practice the preparation of musical instruments and used it, thereby they preserve it.

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