

A Study on Culture and Philosophy of Santal Society through the Songs of Gomasta Prasad Saren

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Abstract

Gomasta Prasad Saren is one of the most prominent poets, writers, and linguists of Santali language and literature. He emerged as an influential literary figure in the 1990s and made significant contributions to various branches of literature. His works include songs, poetry, drama, short stories, and translation literature, showcasing his creative versatility and intellectual depth.

From the very beginning of his literary career, he has been dedicated to the preservation, development, and enrichment of Santali language and literature. His writings vividly reflect the culture, philosophy, traditions, and social realities of Santal society. Through his literary expressions, he has successfully portrayed the essence of indigenous identity and cultural values.

Moreover, he is not only a creative writer but also a guiding force for the younger generation. Many emerging writers have been inspired by his works and have followed his path in contributing to Santali literature. His literary contributions have played a crucial role in strengthening the cultural identity and continuity of the Santali-speaking community.

Keywords: Santali Language, Santali Literature, Santal Society, Culture, Philosophy, Folklore, Poetry, Songs,

Introduction

This green earth is filled with creepers, grass, trees, flowers, and fruits, forming a beautiful natural environment. The creator of this wonderful world is God. Just as God created nature, He also created human beings and endowed them with diverse qualities and talents. At different times, various kinds of people have appeared on earth, contributing to society through their creativity and enriching human civilization.

Among these great personalities, Gomasta Prasad Saren holds a significant place. He is widely known for his contribution to the development of Santali literature. He is not only a writer but also recognized as a thinker and a political analyst. His works reflect deep insights into society, culture, and human life.

To understand any form of literature properly, it is essential to have a clear idea about the author's biography. This is because an author's life experiences, thoughts, and mindset are reflected in their literary

creations. Sometimes these reflections are direct, while at other times they appear through symbolism and metaphor.

Rabindranath Tagore expressed significant views on biographical literature. In his work *Utsarga*, he stated that “one cannot find the poet merely in his biography.” In *Atmaparichay*, he further emphasized that a successful literary work represents the true life of a poet. This suggests that the inner meaning of literature cannot always be fully understood through external life events alone.

Gomasta Prasad Saren was born on 2nd June 1943. His father’s name Was Gobinda Saren, and his mother’s name Was Mono Saren. He was born in Udolboni village under Bandwan in the Purulia district of West Bengal. From there, his life journey began. Through his writings, he spread his philosophy in society and elevated Santali literature to a new height.

Culture is the backbone of human life, as it reflects the identity and essence of a society. It is through culture that the daily lives, behaviours, traditions, beliefs, and practices of people become visible. Every action performed by individuals in their everyday life carries cultural significance, and together these actions shape the image of their society. Culture not only represents the present condition of a community but also preserves its past history and traditions. Therefore, by observing cultural expressions, one can understand the historical background, social structure, and identity of a particular group of people.

From the very moment of birth, language plays a vital role in human life. Language is the primary medium through which individuals express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas. As language develops, it naturally gives rise to music and songs, which are essential parts of literature. Songs are among the earliest forms of literary expression and have been used for generations to communicate feelings, tell stories, and pass down traditions. In this sense, music becomes a powerful cultural tool that connects people with their heritage.

India is predominantly a rural country, where life flows in a simple and natural rhythm, much like rivers and streams. This natural flow is reflected in the voices and expressions of its people, making Indian culture rich, diverse, and deeply rooted in tradition. Folk culture, especially, plays a significant role in representing the true spirit of Indian society. Among various communities, the Santal society stands out for its rich cultural heritage, which is vividly expressed through its folk songs and literature.

Santali folk songs beautifully portray the social life, traditions, beliefs, and values of the Santal people. These songs are not merely a form of entertainment but also serve as a means of preserving cultural identity and passing knowledge from one generation to another. They reflect moral values, social norms, and the collective experiences of the community.

In conclusion, every form of literature reflects the reality of its society, and Santali folk music is no exception. It highlights the unique characteristics and worldview of the Santal community. Thus, culture and literature are deeply interconnected, and together they provide a meaningful understanding of human life and society.

Objectives of Research Study

- To preserve and promote the language and literature of the Santal community.
- To highlight the culture and philosophy of the Santals through the works of Gomasta Prasad Saren.
- To present the contributions of Gomasta Prasad Saren to the next generation.
- To raise awareness among people through Santali folk music.
- To encourage the study and research of Santali language and literature.
- To strengthen the cultural identity and heritage of the Santal community.

Discussion

The first songbook of Gomasta Prasad Soren is titled ‘Akhra Thuti’(Community conversations at the Akhra) This book includes various types of songs such as Dong, Lagre, Baha, and Sohrai. Through his songs, he has portrayed the backward condition of Santal society, including issues like superstition and social underdevelopment.

He strongly believed that such changes could be effectively brought about through music. This is because the Santal people, referred to as “Hor Hopon” are deeply attracted to dance and music. Their lives are closely connected with nature—such as water, forest, and land. Their festivals, rituals, customs, and traditions are all closely associated with songs and dances.

Therefore, the author realized that awareness could be created more easily through songs. With this perspective, he composed the following song:

“থ.উগুথান্ন ঝু উচললুথ.

কুজপথিও ঝাওথিও-থি কুথ.ললুথ

লুজলুগা উচললুগা

লুজলুগা থিপথিও কুথ.ললুথ

লুগাথিউগা লুচললু.ঝ লুজলুগা

ওগাওল লুগাথিউগা পথিও উগাথিউগা ঝাচললু.ঝ থি।”

“Money in the edge of the saree,

Come sister, let us buy a songbook.

We will sing songs, sister,

Songs of social reform,

Only then can we cleanse our society.”

Through this song, the author presents a realistic picture of Santal society. It depicts a conversation between two sisters who decide to use their saved money not for personal expenses, but to purchase a songbook containing songs of awareness and social reform. By singing these songs, they aim to inspire people in the Santal community toward social change.

As a result, the society can progress in terms of education, move away from superstition, and move towards enlightenment. With this hope and aspiration, the two sisters take a pledge to bring change in society. The author clearly emphasizes that education is the only path that can bring true transformation in society.

“থিপথিও উথিউগাথিও লুথ.ঝ

কুজলুথিও লুথ.ঝ

থিপথিও ঝাথিওও ওগাওল

থি.চাথিও ওললুথিও.”

“গুথিপথিও উললু ওগা.লু

থি.চাথিও ঝাচললু.ঝ

থি.ওগা কুচপথি.ঝ ওগা.লু

থিপথিও ঝাচললু.ঝ।”

“থি.ওত ফুপথি.ত থি.থি
সহি ওখিঅ'ল থিঅস
খপখি থিঅথিঅ ফুপথি.ত
থিঅ-থিঅ '”

“We will truly pursue education—
this is our firm commitment.
Through education,
our knowledge will flourish.
Go, dear child, acquire knowledge;
do not hold on to the love of the village.
The love of the village lasts
only through youth,
but the love for education endures
forever, across generations.”

Through this song, the author conveys that only through education can a person become truly human. Being educated is essential, as it helps individuals become aware of their fundamental rights and responsibilities. Education is the only path that enriches knowledge and develops thoughtful and progressive thinking.

As a result, people can distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful to society. Moving society forward is not easy; it is a challenging and responsible task. In another part of the song, a boy is encouraged: “Go, study, become educated, and gain knowledge.” Although it suggests forgetting the love of the village, the deeper meaning is to move forward into the wider world for growth and to achieve one’s goals.

Here, the author addresses the youth of the Santal community, urging them to advance in education and knowledge. They are the future leaders of society and the nation. Therefore, through this song, the author aims to deliver an awareness-driven and motivational message to the Santal community.

“থি.থি থিঅথিঅ ফুপ থিঅ
ওখিঅ সঅখিঅ ফুপথিঅ
থিঅস থিঅস থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ
‘”

“Just like water cannot stay still on a colocasia leaf, human life is also uncertain.”

Through this song, the writer expresses the transience of human life using a simple and familiar image from Rural Bengal. We often see that water droplets on a colocasia leaf never remain stable; even a slight movement makes them fall. Similarly, human life is fragile and unpredictable—no one knows when the lamp of life may be extinguished.

The writer conveys this profound truth through a philosophical perspective. The message is clear: since life is short and uncertain, people should dedicate their time to doing good deeds and serving society. As long as we live, we should contribute positively to humanity and make our lives meaningful.

“থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ
ওখিঅ থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ
থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ থিঅ

නිමැනිම ගැන ඔබ දුන් උණුසුම
දැවැන්ත උණුසුම දැනටත්,
නි.බලනුයේ ඔබගේ උණුසුම මතම නිමැනිම යි”

The ring you gave me
is still on my hand.
Whenever I think of you,
my eyes fill with tears.

The blue sari you gave me
is still with me, though only half remains.
Whenever I wipe my tears
with its end,
my heart finds peace.

Through this song, the writer expresses the deep emotions of a woman who still cherishes the memories of her beloved. The ring that her loved one once gave her remains on her finger as a symbol of their love and the unforgettable moments they shared. Whenever she remembers him, tears fill her eyes.

Similarly, the blue sari gifted by her beloved is still precious to her. She continues to wear it, and its end (anchal) becomes a source of comfort as she wipes away her tears, finding emotional peace in those memories.

Overall, the writer highlights the universal experience of love, affection, separation, joy, and sorrow. The song reflects that true love leaves lasting memories, and even simple gifts can become powerful symbols of emotional attachment. Through these images, the writer portrays the feelings and experiences that are common to people from all walks of life.

Conclusion

Songs bring joy, inspiration, and emotional comfort to human life, helping people overcome sorrow and hardship. Through songs, the realities of everyday life, society, culture, history, and human philosophy are vividly reflected. Gomasta Prasad Soren realized that music could serve as a powerful medium for creating social awareness. Therefore, through his songs, he sought to raise social, cultural, and political consciousness among the Santal community while making them aware of their rights, identity, and dignity. Having faced numerous struggles and hardships throughout his life, Gomasta Prasad Soren dedicated himself to the cause of protecting people's rights. He personally witnessed the suffering, deprivation, and struggles of ordinary people, particularly those of the Santal tribal community. These experiences are deeply reflected in his songs and writings. His literary works portray the culture, customs, traditions, lifestyle, literature, education, and social values of Santal society.

He believed that education is the foundation of a community's overall development. A close study of his songs reveals that Santal music preserves profound spiritual philosophy, indigenous knowledge, myths, folklore, and rich cultural traditions. Through these songs, one can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage, worldview, and social consciousness of the Santal people. Therefore, this study highlights the culture and philosophy of Santal society as reflected in the songs of Gomasta Prasad Soren.

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