

The Dansai Culture: An Exploration of the Ancient History, Traditions and Cultural Identity of the Santal Tribe in India

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Abstract: The Santals constitute a distinct ethnic community among the diverse linguistic and cultural groups of the world. The Santals have their own distinct language, culture, society, and rich history. Santali is one of the oldest languages of India. Dance and music are an integral part of Santal society. Among their various festivals and rituals, Dansai culture possesses distinct characteristics. Dansai is also the name of a month in the Santali language. The presence of a ‘Guru Baba’ is essential in this culture, which cannot be observed without a Guru. Although the social activities of Santal society are conducted by the village ‘More Hor’, that is, the ‘Manjhi Baba’ and his associates, the Manjhi Baba has no direct role in Dansai culture. This culture is observed for five days, beginning from the sixth day of the full moon of Ashwin. According to the Santal mythology ‘Jamsim Binti’, the origin of Dansai culture is associated with the earliest phase of the creation of the Earth, aquatic creatures, plants, and human beings. Dansai culture originated due to various causes, including the conflict between ‘Niguriya-Nimuriya’, the first human couple created by Debthakur (the Creator), and ‘Pilchu Haram-Pilchu Budhi’, the second human couple; the struggle between ‘Jati-Bijati’ (own community and outsiders); victory and defeat; the establishment of kingdoms; disobedience to the commands of ‘Thakur’; and actions contrary to His prescribed rules and moral principles. References are found to ‘Gelbar Gatang’, meaning twelve (12) Gurus and their disciples. The educational system based on the ‘Guru-Shishya Akhra’ (training centre) is comparable to the ancient Gurukul tradition. Only men participate in Dansai dance and music, dressing in women's sarees and disguising themselves as women. Traditional musical instruments include ‘Bhuang’, ‘Kansa’, ‘Kartal’, ‘Tiriyo’, ‘Banam’, ‘Liphuur’, and ‘Paygan’. The use of ‘Tamak’ and ‘Tumda’ is also observed in certain regions.

Index Terms: Dansai Culture, Santal Society, Jamsim Binti, Guru-Disciples Tradition, Dansai Dance and Music, Mythological Narratives, Ancient History, Cultural Heritage.

Main Body:

The written history of the Santali language group is not very long; nevertheless, this language has continued through the ages by means of folk literature. One of the most important cultures of the Santals, who belong to the Santali language group, is Dansai. This Dansai culture reminds us of the Gurukul system of the prehistoric age, where various arts, skills, and techniques necessary for human life were acquired together. Dansai culture is observed during ‘Dansai Bonga’, that is, in the Bengali month of Ashwin, at the time of Durga Puja.

According to Saridharam Hansda, “Dansai dance is a travelling dance. It begins with Bel Baran and continues for five days.” [1]

According to Gobinda Mandi, “Dansai culture begins during the first five days of the full moon of the Dansai month and concludes within five days.” [2]

According to P. O. Bodding, “Finished for the year a few day before the Dasai festival, the festival of the Dasai or Aswin Month.” [3]

According to Dr. Ratan Hembram, “Dansai travelling is observed by the Santals for seven days, beginning from the first day of the Dansai month.” [4]

Dansai culture contains a true history of the Kherwari community, a history that has not yet found a place in the history of India. Dansai culture is essentially a form of the Guru-Shishya system of learning. The qualities and ideals of the Guru are propagated among human communities through the disciples. Only men participate in Dansai culture. It is celebrated by dressing in women's attire.

First Part-

Dansai is one of the oldest and most traditional folk cultures of Santal society. According to the mythological narratives of the Santals, particularly 'Jamsim Binti', the origin of Dansai culture is associated with an important event of the 'ancient age'. The main background of this event lies in the conflict over power, dominance, and the establishment of kingdoms between the descendants of 'Niguriya–Nimuriya', the first human couple created by Lita Gonsai, and 'Pilchu Haram–Pilchu Budhi', the second human couple created by Him. From the Santal mythological narrative 'Jamsim Binti', it is known that 'Lita Gonsai' had appointed the aquatic creatures as kings in 'Patalpuri' (the underworld). In the following period, the descendants of 'Pilchu Haram–Pilchu Budhi' also attained the position of kings in Manchpuri (the earthly world). The descendants of 'Niguriya–Nimuriya', the first human couple created by Lita Gonsai, also desired to become kings. They wanted to live as kings in all three worlds, namely Sargapuri (Heaven), Manchpuri (Earth), and Patalpuri (the underworld). From the mythological narratives (Binti) of the Santals, it is known that Thakur-Thakran once descended from Sargapuri (Heaven) to Manchpuri or Earth. Along with them, the gods and goddesses of Sargapuri also descended to Manchpuri or Earth. At that time, as there was no existence of water on Earth, there were no human beings, animals, or other living creatures. To create the existence of living beings on Earth, the gods, under the instructions of Thakur, dug wells in search of water. During the digging of the wells, the excavation work was obstructed by an extremely hard layer of rocky soil beneath the ground. With great difficulty, it became possible to penetrate that hard layer of soil by making an impression with Thakur's 'Barchhi Hapa', or staff. As soon as that layer was penetrated, a powerful stream of water began to gush out from Patalpuri onto the surface of the Earth. The entire Earth became filled with water. Thakur, along with the gods, returned to Sargapuri (Heaven).

At that time, Lita Gonsai had bestowed divine powers upon 'Niguriya–Nimuriya'. Because of those powers, they became extremely powerful. From the Santal mythological narrative 'Jamsim Binti', it is further known that, during the creation of the Earth, Lita Gonsai instructed the 'Sun God' (Sing Bonga) to rise in order to illuminate the Earth. However, when the Sun God was rising, the descendants of Niguriya–Nimuriya obstructed Him. They even pulled the Sun God down. With their own powers, they launched attacks on the human settlements situated in Manchpuri. During these attacks, they killed the people of all the regions and completely destroyed the settlements. They even turned the entire region into a 'cremation ground'. It is believed that Dansai culture originated from the Santali expressions 'Helej Goch' or 'Dare Shay'. The descendants of Pilchu were helplessly compelled to abandon their golden land and their own kingdom. In order to save their lives, they were running away from that place. To escape death, the remaining surviving descendants of Pilchu pleaded with the religious Guru, saying, "Those enemies are not being eliminated in any way. They cannot be resisted even with our 'bows and arrows' and 'Kapi', that is, it is impossible to defeat them. How shall we survive? They are killing all the men but sparing the women." At that time, the religious Guru showed them the way to survive. He said that, in order to escape from their divine powers, they would have to carry their religious materials, such as 'Lata Dag', 'Sunum Sindur', 'Aag Sar', 'Bhuang' (in which 'Sar' is placed inside a gourd shell), and 'Kansa Thala' (a bronze plate). Thereafter, they would have to disguise themselves as women and travel from land to land through 'Bhuan' dance and songs. For the purpose of self-defence, they inserted 'Sar' inside the 'Bhuang', meaning that 'A: Sar' would protect them. The religious Guru further said, "Come, let us go to 'Lughu Buru Ghanta Bare'." It is a sacred religious place of the indigenous Santals, where life is protected, life is regained, and the mind and inner self become relieved. In this context, the following lines are found in a folk song:

*“Hayre hayre hay
Hoy da hoy Lughu Buru re hoy da
Hoy da hoy Ghanta Bare re hoy da
Lughu Buru hoy da Ghanta Bare hay da
Hayre hayre hay
Hoy da hoy Lughu Buru re hay da
Hay da Ghanta Bare re hay da.”*

Following the instructions of the religious Guru, they reached ‘Lughu Buru Ghanta Bare’ (a religious place of the Santals). It is necessary to mention that, according to Santal mythology, in the beginning, this universe was a vast, infinite, dark, and motionless mass of matter. This Manchpuri was also a vast, dark mass of matter consisting of soil and rocks. Its name was ‘Lughu Buru Ghanta Bare’. It was a huge mountain, and there was an enormous cavity within this mountain. This cavity was covered by a massive stone. There, the religious Guru opened the ‘Dhirigor Kapat’ (the stone cover of the great cavity) situated at ‘Lughu Buru Ghanta Bare’. The remaining descendants of Pilchu entered that place. Along with them, twelve Gurus and their disciples also opened the door of the ‘Dhirigor Kapat’ (the massive stone cover of the cavity), entered the cave, and hid themselves. In this context, the following lines are found in a folk song:

*“Hayre hayre hay
Toka disom dhund ena ... hayre hay
Toka disom milat ena ... hayre hay
Disom da disom len lenged
Hayre hayre hay
Sing Disom dhund ena ... hayre hay
Sikar Disom milat ena ... hayre hay
Disom da disom lenlenged
Hayre hayre hay
Duse duse sen aype Sing Bonga sen aype
Duse duse sen aype Jaher Ayo sen aype
Disom rekin raj akan
Dharti puri kin doha ruwar ma.”*

On the other hand, the descendants of Niguriya–Nimuriya continued to devastate and destroy the entire world. Almost no human life remained. In other words, a situation of great destruction had arisen everywhere. All important places, including Manbir and Singbir, were being destroyed. Among the brave warriors of the Niguriya–Nimuriya lineage, there was one who was the most powerful. Through the blessings of ‘Lita Gonsai’, he had become endowed with extraordinary powers. With those powers, he destroyed Manchpuri. He even attacked Sargapuri and devastated and destroyed everything. As a result of his attacks, all the gods and goddesses were driven out of Sargapuri. They were compelled to leave their heavenly kingdom and take shelter in Manchpuri. They even had to abandon their own sacred places. At that time, in order to protect their existence, they took shelter in the residence of the religious Guru, situated in the north-eastern direction at ‘Lughu Buru Ghanta Bari’ (a sacred religious place of the indigenous Santals), after leaving Sargapuri. In this context, the following lines are found in a folk song:

*“Hayre hayre hay
Dev Thakur ko ko anrgolena
Dev Thakur ko ko opel lena
Lughu Buru Ghanta Bare re
Dhar Bare hor ko ko marshal ked
Hayre hayre hay
Chete lagid doko anrgo lena re*

*Chete lagid doko opel lena re
Lughu Buru Ghanta Bare re
Dahar Bare hor doko marshal agu ked
Hayre hayre hay
Desh lagid teko anrgo lena re
Disom lagid teko opel lena re
Lughu Buru Ghanta Bare re
Dahar bare hor doko marshal agu ked.”*

At Lughu Buru, all the gods and goddesses, Gurus and disciples, and the descendants of Pilchu hid themselves inside the ‘Dhirigor Kapat’ (a huge stone cavity), situated at ‘Lughu Buru Ghanta Bari’, the religious place of ‘Dharam Thakur’. At that time, the disciples asked the religious Guru, “How long shall we remain hidden in this way?” The religious Guru then told his disciples, “In order to escape from this brave warrior and protect ourselves, we must seek refuge in ‘Jaher Ayo’. She is the elder sister of Lita Gonsai. That is, she is the elder sister of all the Gurus, disciples, and descendants of Pilchu. The way to survive lies with her. She alone can protect us. Therefore, we must pray to her so that she may protect us.” Following the instructions of the religious Guru, ‘Jaher Budhi’ went to Sargapuri (Heaven). There, through her skills and strategies, she killed the brave warrior of the Niguriya–Nimuriya lineage on the night of the new moon. In this way, Jaher Ayo protected everyone from the powerful warrior of the Niguriya–Nimuriya lineage. Thereafter, ‘Jaher Ayo’ descended from Sargapuri (Heaven) on the sixth day of the full moon of the month of Ashwin (September–October in the Gregorian calendar). She appeared in the form of ‘Bonga Kuri’ (as a goddess) beneath the ‘Sija Dare Buta’, that is, under a Bael tree situated at ‘Lughu Buru Ghanta Bare’. At that time, all the gods and goddesses, Gurus, disciples, and descendants of Pilchu welcomed and received her with honour. Using ‘Dharam Lata Dag:’ (water from a sacred religious pot) and vermilion prepared from ‘Giru Dhiri’ (a type of red stone), vermilion marks were applied to her forehead, ears, and the Earth. At the same time, vermilion marks were also applied to the door, that is, the entrance of the religious Guru's residence, the ‘Dhirigor Kapat’ (the stone cover of the huge cavity). This tradition of applying vermilion marks to the door on the day of Bel Baran is still practised today. The tradition of welcoming and receiving Jaher Ayo beneath the Bael tree (‘Sija Dare Buta Re’) is called ‘Bel Baran’. An ‘Akhra’ was established beneath that Bael tree (‘Sija Dare Buta Latar Re’). There, the Gurus and disciples organised dance and music performances. Following that tradition, this dance and music have been performed for five days every year during the month of Ashwin.

Second Part-

In this Dansai culture, it is observed that, at first, a ‘Guru Akhra’ is established by the ‘Guru-Chela’ (Guru and disciples), where the ceremony is performed. Thereafter, ‘Guru Baba’ performs the worship rituals with the necessary worship materials by invoking the names of the Gurus (the gods of Heaven). Subsequently, the Guru and disciples travel from one village to another and perform dances at every household. The presence of Guru Baba is essential in this Dansai dance. Dansai dance cannot be performed without Guru Baba. Although Manjhi Baba may be present, the main responsibility for conducting the ceremony rests with the Dansai Guru Baba and his disciples. Through their disciples, the Gurus impart knowledge about the principles inherent in this Earth or universe and the ways of overcoming the obstacles and difficulties that arise during the progress of human life, which can be found in Dansai culture. The disciples acquire from their Guru all the essential knowledge and skills required for everyday life. A system of multidisciplinary education was prevalent in Dansai culture. The disciples acquired proficiency in various fields of knowledge, such as religious principles, principles of work, the study of astrology, scientific studies, the art of music, fine arts, crafts, principles of education, and even the principles of guiding the entire human community along the right path. In ancient times, young men and women acquired all kinds of skills necessary for their livelihood from their Gurus. However, due to the lack of written literature, many

aspects of this community have remained unknown. Dansai culture is associated with events extending through successive ages. These events of Dansai belong to the earliest period, that is, the ancient age. It represents a way of guiding people towards the right path of liberation from prolonged critical circumstances. In Hindu scriptures, references are found to four Yugas (ages), whereas according to the mythology of the Kherwars, references are found to seven Yugas. The events associated with this culture belong to a period preceding the four Yugas. This is because the mythological narratives mention ‘Eyaye Yug Dhabij’, ‘Eyaye Noy’, and ‘Eyaye Mahit’. It may be assumed that the Kherwars and Santals had three Yugas before the four Yugas mentioned in Hindu scriptures. According to the mythology of the Kherwals or Santals, the names of the Yugas are ‘Marang Yug’, ‘Mare Yug’, ‘Sot Yug’, ‘Sotya Yug’, ‘Sari Yug’, ‘Ari Yug’, and ‘Nahag Yug’. Dansai culture is completely different from the other dances and songs of the Santals because musical instruments such as ‘Bhuan’, ‘Kansa’, ‘Kartal’, ‘Tiriyo’, ‘Banam’, ‘Lifur’, and ‘Paygan’ are used in these dances and songs. However, in later periods, instruments such as ‘Tamak’, ‘Tumda:’, and ‘Tiryo’ also came to be used in certain regions. Why is the legendary Dansai culture celebrated? Regarding this question, the various theories that emerge can generally be analysed by considering the events of the early, middle, and modern phases of the prehistoric age and examining the underlying principles of Dansai culture. Among the theories found in the first phase, it can be observed that— From the Kherwal or Santal mythology ‘Jamsim Binti’, it is known that three worlds existed in the ancient age, namely Sargapuri (Heaven), Manchpuri (Earth), and Patalpuri (the underworld). Sargapuri was the abode of gods and goddesses, Manchpuri contained nothing, that is, it was completely empty, and Patalpuri was entirely submerged in water. In Sargapuri, besides ‘Thakur’ and ‘Thakran’, references are found to ‘Lita Godet’, ‘Jaher Budhi’, and ‘Dharam’, along with other prominent gods and goddesses. Through their plans, aquatic plants, the animal world, and the earthly world were created. Subsequently, through the skills and techniques of the gods and goddesses, the human race originated in Manchpuri (Earth) and gradually spread throughout different lands. For example, ‘Hihiri Pipiri’, ‘Khoj Kaman’, ‘Hararata’, and ‘Sasang Bera’. Later, they entered India and began residing in different parts of the country. During this period, the entire human community was living happily, comfortably, and honestly. However, after several decades, human beings forgot the principles of humanity, respect, and honesty. They became involved in various kinds of evil deeds and followed the wrong path, forgetting the gods and goddesses and beginning to live according to their own wishes. They even became involved in activities resembling those of helpless and irrational beings. Because of such behaviour, Thakur decided to destroy the human race. Through His powerful utterance, He would spread the rain of fire (‘Sengel Dag’), drought (‘Akal’), and diseases and germs (‘Poho Pakre’), thereby destroying them completely. In other words, nothing of humanity would remain. Thakur would destroy the Earth and human beings created by Himself. Upon hearing this, the people uttered the expression ‘Hay Hay’ (a cry of sorrow). As evidence of this, the following lines are found in an ancient mythological song:

*“Hayre hayre hay
Okay jape judiyada desh do
Okay jape atar ada disom da
Desh dore lo-latij en da
Disom dore hasay digiren”*

That is, by whose command did the rain of fire occur in this land and country, and the destructive play of fire begin throughout the land? Another song also mentions:

*“Hayre hayre hay
Tokay guru ablete
Poho kada ko anrgolen
Tokay chela nuralte
Tore Sutam pakare ko ding dabur ked
Dharam Guru bolete*

*Poho kada ko anrgolen
Dhorom Chela nuralte
Tore Sutam pakare ko ding dabur ked."*

From the above-mentioned songs, it can be understood that, as a result of Thakur's powerful utterance, the human community had reached the verge of death due to the rain of fire, drought, diseases, and germs. In this situation of extreme suffering and helplessness, Thakran appealed to Thakur to withdraw His curse. At the same time, she proposed bringing the human community back to the path of religion and honesty. Thakran herself, through Lita Godet, arranged for the propagation of Thakur's qualities, ideals, principles, and rules in Manchpuri. By spreading the teachings of religion, honesty, and particularly the qualities of Thakur, the human race was guided towards the path of religion through various methods. In this process, Dansai culture is observed under the leadership of Dansai Guru Baba, with the assistance of Manjhi Baba. In this Dansai culture, the expression 'Hay Hay' (a cry of sorrow) is used before the beginning of the songs. Immediately, following the instructions of 'Thakran', the Creator, 'Lita Godet' went to Manchpuri, accompanied by twelve Gurus from Sargapuri. With the assistance of Manjhi Baba, he established the 'Guru-Chela Akhra' and began carrying out the instructions of Thakur.

According to Krishna Chandra Tudu: "At that time, the Santals had twelve Gurus. Their names were—1. Dharam Guru, 2. Bhuan Guru, 3. Kamru Guru, 4. Sido Guru, 5. Sid Guru, 6. Narsing Guru, 7. Gan Ko Guru, 8. Bhairo Guru, 9. Jitu Guru, 10. Rahar Guru, 11. Lahobir Guru, and 12. Gando Guru." [5]

According to Ishwar Chandra Soren, the names of the Guru Babas were: "Dharam Guru, Kamru Guru, Bhuan Guru, Gando Guru, Sid Guru, Bati Guru, Lakhan Guru, Bhadu Guru, Bad Guru, Pat Guru, Labar Guru, Dari Guru, etc." [6]

They adorned themselves with 'Marag Pinchar', 'Paygan', 'Lifur', and other items associated with the attire of Thakur, along with 'Aynam', 'Kajal', 'Saree', 'Shankha', 'Sunum', and 'Sindur' associated with Thakran, and set out on the Dansai journey. There was also an instruction that a certain number of disciples should dress in the forms of Thakur and Thakran and observe Dansai culture. When dressed in these forms, Thakur and Thakran were believed to be inherently present within them. The twelve Guru Babas divided themselves into twelve groups and, assuming the roles of Gurus and disciples, began travelling from village to village, spreading 'Sunum Sindur' and the message of peace. This process constitutes the central aspect of Dansai culture. For this purpose, numerous rules and principles must be observed. As the human community faced death due to the curse resulting from Thakur's powerful utterance, the cry of 'Hay Hay' arose from the mouths of human beings. In connection with this event, the expression 'Hay Hay' became incorporated at the beginning of Dansai songs. Dansai culture originated to guide the human community away from evil deeds and towards the path of religion. From this event, it becomes clear that the Guru-Shishya tradition represents a form of learning the techniques of an advanced lifestyle based on religion and honesty. In order to preserve this Guru-Chela culture for generations, it is observed every year during 'Dansai Bonga', that is, in the Bengali month of Ashwin, in remembrance of these events.

In this context, Kalendranath Mandi states: "Dansai is primarily a ceremony for learning mantras and herbal medicines. The central figure of the 'Dansai' ceremony is said to be Kamru Guru. Through all his knowledge and skills, he became capable of travelling everywhere. At one time, the practices of exorcism, magical rituals, and recitation of mantras were highly prevalent from village to village. Those who performed these practices were called Ojha Gurus." [7]

In this context, P. O. Bodding states regarding the Ojha Guru: "The disciples of an ojha who have finished their course of instruction and during the Durga puja, walk about begging, India corn etc." [8]

P. O. Bodding further states: "The raison detre of the Dansai daran is on the one hand . The fun and merry making and the showing of the scholars, on other hand there seem to be same sense of appreciation that these young men have gone through a course of instruction in fighting the foes of men." [9]

Dr. Onkar Prasad states regarding Dansai: “Dasae: It is known after the festival Dasae celebrated in the month of Asin (Sept.-Oct), a week before the final day of the worship of the goddess Durga. Members of community who are initiated by a guru (preceptor) in bakher (mantras) are required to present themselves before the guru for testing their merit they have acquired.” [10]

Camble writes: “Young man who have undergone a short training in medicine, exorcism and divining who go singing and begging during Dasai Festival.” [11]

In this context, W. G. Archer states: “Dances of such pretty grace are confined to girls and women boys, however, also indulge in pantomimic dancing for, towards the end of the rains, those who have undertaken a course in tribal medicine under an ojha or medicine man perform a series of ‘play’. These are part of the dasae daran (September Wanderings) and are a mixture of dancing, pantomimic and trance,” [12]

From the above discussion, it can be stated that, through the twelve Gurus, the disciples of Dansai culture travel from one country to another, protecting human communities from evil deeds and guiding them towards a beautiful and normal way of life. At the same time, a training camp is organised, which is primarily a ceremony for learning mantras and herbal medicines during the annual month of ‘Dansai’. In order to preserve this Guru-Shishya culture for generations, it is observed every year during ‘Dansai Bonga’, that is, in the Bengali month of Ashwin, in remembrance of these events.

Third Part-

After many decades, that is, during the period corresponding to the Dwapar Kuli Yuga of Bengal, various other ethnic communities also began to live alongside the Kherwar community. The information that emerges regarding the origin of Dansai culture during this period is as follows: “Since ancient times, conflicts continued between the ‘Kherwals or Santals’ and the ‘Bijati’ (other ethnic communities). Sometimes these conflicts were over territories, and sometimes over kingdoms. However, in most of these conflicts, the Kherwars emerged victorious, although they were sometimes defeated. There were many ethnic groups within the Kherwar community. Among these Kherwars, there was a brave warrior named ‘Hudur Durga’. He was entrusted with the responsibility of administering the Kherwar Garhs (forts). ‘Hudur Durga’ was an honest, independent-minded, and patriotic ruler. Under his rule, the country and all its inhabitants lived in happiness and peace. During this period, they constructed twelve Garhs or forts to ensure the safety of the Kherwars. These were ‘Kutampuri Garh’, ‘Champa Garh’, ‘Koyda Garh’, ‘Chay Bahar Garh’, ‘Badali Garh’, ‘Khayri Garh’, ‘Loyang Garh’, ‘Sim Garh’, ‘Dugdha Garh’, ‘Bama Garh’, ‘Chiru Garh’, and ‘Halang Gada Garh’. In all these places, the Kherwals lived in great happiness and peace. There was no shortage of crops or wealth, and their daily needs were fulfilled comfortably. Later, the ‘Bijati’ began attacking these forts in order to occupy the Kherwar Garhs. The Kherwals were led by ‘Hudur Durga’, while the ‘Bijati’ were led by ‘Indra’. Despite repeated attacks, they could not break the defensive strength of the Kherwars. Thereafter, Indra began thinking of new strategies. He consulted with their kings and finally adopted a policy of conspiracy and deception. According to legend, being unable to defeat Hudur Durga in direct confrontation, the enemy sought the assistance of a deceitful woman to defeat him. This woman was known among the Bijati as ‘Devi’. Various scholars and linguists have also referred to her by different names, such as ‘Saro’, ‘Paro’, and ‘Uma’, depending on the region. Indra began searching for the weaknesses of Hudur Durga. Applying diplomatic strategies, Indra refrained from warfare and proposed a peace agreement. Indra proposed that the most beautiful woman among them would be married to Hudur Durga. (Many scholars also state that ‘Devi’ herself entered into a romantic relationship with the brave warrior ‘Hudur Durga’, the ‘Kherwar Raj’ or ‘Santal Raj’, which eventually resulted in their marriage.) Indra said, “Let there be no more fighting. Through a marriage alliance between us, we shall establish good relations and live in peace.” Hudur Durga accepted this proposal. However, Indra's intention was that, after the marriage between ‘Devi’ and ‘Hudur Durga’, all the rules and regulations, religious principles, festivals, rituals, and cultural practices of the ‘Kherwar Garhs’, along with their daily activities, would be regularly communicated to Indra through Devi. Devi could not accept the idea of betraying her husband. The main objective was to have Hudur Durga killed through Devi. At this moment, Indra said, “If Hudur Durga is

killed, the people of the world will worship you.” Even then, when Devi did not agree, Indra said that Hudur Durga would also be worshipped along with her. Devi was compelled to accept Indra's earnest request, and through an act of betrayal, ‘Hudur Durga’ was killed. Since Devi had killed Hudur Durga, she came to be known as ‘Devi Durga’ from that time onward. Thereafter, a situation of unrest arose in which all the men of the Kherwal lineage were to be killed. Only the men were identified and killed. In order to escape from this situation, the men disguised themselves as women and set out in search of their brave warrior, ‘Hudur Durga’. To protect Kherwal and Santal society, the twelve ‘Gurus’ created by Thakur at that time divided themselves into twelve groups and began travelling from land to land, searching for their hero ‘Hudur Durga’ through Dansai dance. Following this incident, some disciples or Chelas believed that ‘Hudur Durga’ had been defeated on the battlefield while defending his country. To remember him and preserve his qualities and ideals, they used the expression ‘Hayre Hayre’ (a cry of sorrow) at the beginning of their songs. Thus, since Dansai expresses mourning and sorrow, the expression ‘Hayre Hayre’ is used at the beginning of its songs. This form of Dansai dance is known as ‘Dukh Dansai’ or ‘Bhuan Dansai’. On the other hand, some disciples or Chelas believed that ‘Hudur Durga’ had been martyred on the battlefield while defending his country. To remember him and preserve his qualities and ideals, they used the expression ‘Sari Ge Sari Ge’ (a voice of happiness and truth) at the beginning of their songs. Although martyrdom for one's country and community brings sorrow, it is also a matter of joy because the martyrs sacrificed their lives for their country. They observe Victory Day. The Dansai dance performed by such followers is known as ‘Sukh Dansai’ or ‘Laboy Dansai’. The Kherwars were initially unaware that Devi had betrayed them. However, they later came to know about it. In this context, two proverbs emerged, namely ‘Orag Dinki Ge Tayan’ and ‘Diku Pera Janum Jhanti’. In this way, Dansai culture originated through the ‘Guru-Shishya’ tradition to preserve the qualities and ideals of Hudur Durga. The following song provides an indication of the above-mentioned events:

*“Hayre Hayre Hay
Devi Durga Dakin Odok ena re
Devi Durga Dakin Baher ena re
Hayre Hayre Hay
Chete Lagid Dokin Odok ena re
Chete lagid dakin Baher ena re
Hayre Hayre
Desh Lagid Chela Dakin Odok ena re
Disom Lagid chela Dakin Baher ena re.”*

Conclusion:

Dansai culture is a valuable cultural tradition that has continued for generations in the indigenous Kherwar society. The manifestations of this culture can be observed across different ages. In the first and second phases, the origin of Dansai culture is associated with the efforts to obtain liberation from the displeasure of spiritual gods and goddesses. In the third phase, after many decades, the origin of Dansai culture can be observed in the context of internal conflicts between two social communities, the struggles between ‘Jati-Bijati’ (own community and other ethnic communities), the occupation of territories and lands, deviation from religious principles and social norms, and the experiences of victory and defeat. Dansai is not merely a traditional folk culture; it also contains important elements of the ancient history of the Santal community. The rituals, dances, music, and oral narratives of Dansai culture reflect the struggles of life, social evolution, conflicts, victories and defeats, and historical memories of Santal society. Therefore, Dansai culture should not be evaluated merely as a folk culture, but rather as an important cultural heritage representing the ancient history, mythological consciousness, social traditions, social unity, and ethnic identity of the Santal community.

Reference:

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