



doi <https://doi.org/10.58256/rjah.v4i1.958>



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Research Article

Section: Literature, Linguistics & Criticism



Published in Nairobi, Kenya  
by Royallite Global.

Volume 3, Issue 4, 2022



#### Article Information

Submitted: 4th November 2022

Accepted: 26th December 2022

Published: 29th December 2022

Additional information is available at the end of the article

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ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

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## A study of Santals as children of nature in the light of Santal folktales

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### Abstract

South Asian nations are home to the Santal tribe. Even though they are dispersed over several nations, most of the Santal are found in India and Bangladesh. The Santal people describe themselves largely as natural beings. This assertion has found support from some scholars who have analysed the Santal rituals and festivals. However, very few studies have tried to define the identity of the Santals from a literary perspective. Therefore, by examining their folktales, this article aims to demonstrate the idea that the Santal are children of nature. The study was guided by The National Folklore Theory, Cultural Functional Theory, and Theory of Reality. The qualitative research was based on a textual analysis of 27 Santal folktales. The rationale of this paper is that Santal folktales serve as a repository of knowledge about their customs, cultures and identities. From the study findings, it is clear that the Santals live in and through nature. They have such intimate relations with nature as one would have with a parent or sibling. They emulate the simplicity of nature in their lifestyle. Even the spirits they worship and revere are thought to reside in nature. Therefore, the Santal are born from nature and exist in mutually beneficial and shared spaces with other creatures in nature.

**Keywords:** culture, children of nature, Santal identity, tradition

### How to Cite:

Hembrom, T. (2022). A study of Santals as children of nature in the light of Santal folktales. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.58256/rjah.v3i4.980>



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### Public Interest Statement

This paper's premise is that Santal folktales serve as a reservoir of information about their traditions, cultures, and identities. According to the research results, the Santals live in and through nature. They have the same close relationships with nature as one would have with a parent or sibling. Their approach to life reflects the simplicity of nature. Even the spirits they adore and venerate are said to live in nature. As a result, the Santal are born from nature and live in mutually beneficial and shared environments with other organisms.

### 1.0 Introduction

The Santals are among the major tribes in Bangladesh and India. They are descendants of Proto-Australoid (Kerketa, 2018). They have lived in the area for a long time. According to Kerketa, it is believed that the Santals lived there before Christ and even before Moses. However, Diwarkar (as cited in Kerketa, 2018) claims that the existence of human beings in India can be traced back 5000-55000 years (p. 24), and the Proto-Australoid was among the early humans. Indeed, scholars are unanimous on the fact that the Santals were among the first dwellers of India. From India, the Santals spread to other countries.

Some scholars aver that the Santals originally lived in Babylon (Shamsuddoha & Jahan, 2016, p. 206). According to Skrefsrud (as cited in Shamsuddoha & Jahan, 2016), the Santals lived in Persia, Afghanistan and the Chinese Tartary. Although there is no proven record, the Santal people claim their birthplace as *Hihiri Pipiri*, somewhere in present-day Pakistan (Kerketa, 2018, p. 23). Other scholars such as Siwakoti (2017); Soren, Priyanka & Jamir, Waluneba (2021). hold the view that Santals come from outside India, although none is clear on the exact identify of the place of origin. Nevertheless, the Santals believe they originated from somewhere in India.

Santals' creation myth shows that their first parents were hatched from a bird's egg. According to this narrative, in the beginning, there was water everywhere. There were only sea creatures and spirits in this universe. One day, the daughter of the supreme spirit known as *Thakur Jiu* (god) was taking a bath in the sea. While taking the bath, she made two birds from her body's dirt. Then she brought the birds to her father to give them life. Her father gave them life, and the birds started flying around the universe. Later, *Thakur Jiu* created the world so that the birds could get a place to rest and build a nest. Once they got a place to rest, the female bird laid two eggs from which the first parents of Santals were born (Hasdak, 1981, p. 20).

Santals cherish their culture and observe it everywhere. Their community is comprised of twelve clans. Marriage within the same clan is prohibited. Since the beginning of creation, the Santals have been involved in agricultural work and hunting (Tank & Gundala, 2021; Mohanty, 2021). During their festivals, they love to eat rice, drink beer and dance. Santals like to stay in their communities, each of which has separate administrative structures. The administration manages the community and protects the members in times of danger. Santal families cannot exist outside the community structure. As such, when one commits a major crime, the administration temporarily expels him from the community as punishment. The Santals are nonetheless a peaceful people.

At present, the population of the Santals is estimated at 7.5 million, scattered across the various states of India besides Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal (Worldmark Encyclopedia, 2022). Despite their uniqueness, the Santals have interacted with people of different cultures as they move and live in different places, and have thus changed over time. As such, in some parts of India and Bangladeshi, their unique cultures are hardly distinguishable from those of other groups. For instance, the Santals have embraced

formal education and although majority of them retain their traditional religion, many now practice different religions, especially Hinduism and Christianity (Khandoker, 2000).

### 1.1 Problem Statement

The gradual changes in the Santal culture have also slowly eroded the community's traditional literature over time. Only some of the Santals still observe the practice of story-telling, reciting of poems and performance of other literature. Meanwhile, there is limited research on the Santal literature and its transformation over time. This is partly because the modern Santals seem reluctant or indifferent towards literature in general (Brandt, 2011). Some non-Santals have tried to provide outsider perspectives on various aspects of Santals and their literature (Gautam, 1977). However, no research was found on Santal literature from an insider perspective. Therefore, this study sought to document the Santal literature as an important and uniquely rich canon.

The aim of this research is to highlight the importance of Santal literature, it also focuses on an important problem of Santals and tries to solve it through literature. At present, many Santals suffer from a crisis of identity. There are not many researches on their uniqueness as a race and on their identity. Many claim that Santals are peace-loving people (Cavallaro, Francesco & Rahman, Tania. (2009). Still many others hold the view that Santals are people of joy (Ali, 1998). However, these claims lack empirical data from within the Santal scholarship to support them. In fact, over time, many Santals seem to have lost their unique identity as they interact with others. As such, by examining the Santal folktales, this study aims to uncover and present Santals' unique identity to help the new generation in the community rediscover who they are. The research makes the argument that the Santals are children of nature, drawing evidence from their folktales. The study examines the richness of Santal literature as one of their key features of the people's identity.

### 2.0 Literature Review

There is a connection between the Santals' history, culture and folktales, which has been established by a number of academics. For instance, Canny (1928), in his writing, demonstrates an appreciation for the depth of Santal literature. The author notes that Santal folktales are reflective of Santal tradition. Datta (2018) has also examined Santal folk narratives in his writings. The scholar provides evidence of the cruel treatment of Santal people meted out by Zamindars and conquerors, as captured in some of the Santal narratives. Datta then concludes that a few of Santals' tall stories are reflective of their history. Similarly, Raj (2018) observes that the activities of witchcraft that are described in the Santal tales resemble those practices common in the Santal society. As such, the tales provide an inward look at the Santal culture. The author also notes, based on an examination of the Santal tales, that the community's traditional culture was largely patriarchal so that women hardly had a place in the Santal social order. Therefore, in Raj's view, women practised witchcraft as an outlet of their desire to exert power in the community.

Siwakoti (2017) has also researched Santal folktales, focusing specifically on the Santal people's collective subconscious as captured in their folktales. In addition to this, he identified archetypal elements within the narratives. The author demonstrates that the creation myth of Santal is an important piece of literature for them. Echoing Siwakoti, Hembrom (2018), in his lecture, argues that *Karam-Binti* (a hymn that recites Santal's creation myth) redefines Santal identity because it is a citation of the creation myth. It keeps alive the Santal identity because it passes down from one generation to the next. In a similar study of *Karam-Binti*, Tank (2019) also writes that millennial Santals are worried about their identity. In his view, *Karam-Binti* re-establishes the lost Santal identity. Both Siwakoti and Tank show that *Karam-*

*Binti* is a means of defining Santals' identity. Raj (2018) argues that the creation myth of Santal underlines the community's relationship with non-humans, animals and spirits. This view resonates with that of Kerketa (2018) who identifies Santals as spirit worshipers.

The loss of identity among the Santal has been attributed to various factors. Samad studied the Bangladeshi Santals and found a connection between their loss of land and culture, on the one hand, and their loss of identity, on the other. The author also observes that the conditions of tea garden Santals are more deplorable than plain land Santals because they have no scope to practice their cultures and traditions. They are so immersed within other tribes that one can hardly recognize their unique Santal identity. Shariff (2008) supports the argument by Samad (2006) that the Santals have been targeted by external forces for cultural erosion. He specifically cites political pressure as a major disruptor of the Santal culture and identity. The Bangladesh Government has denied their identity as a tribe, describing them instead as *Khudro Nritattik Jonnogosti* (a Bengali word that means small sub-tribe), which equates them to a sub-tribe. Akan *et al.* (2015) have also remarked that the Government and the public have largely neglected the Santal in terms of education and social development. This view may have been surpassed by events since many Santals are interested in education presently.

Saren (2013) cites globalization impact as the major cause of the Santal society's transformation. Now more than ever, most people work outside their locality and live in cities. Therefore, globalization has forced people to adapt to other cultures. Dey (2015) also mentions globalization and migration as the reason for the Santal transformation. Guha and Ismail (2015) studied the life of the Santals of West Bengal, India. The research revealed that Santals currently face various challenges. They lead a largely agriculture-dependent life on a land that has lost much of its fertility. Majority of the contemporary Santal population also seem disinterested in their traditional dances and songs. However, even with challenges and difficulties, Guha and Ismail describe the modern Santal as happy. Similarly, Biswas (2018) in his study of the modern Santals' socio-economic, cultural, language, beliefs and professions concludes that the community is no longer the renowned traditional tribe of old. The Santals have been transformed by contacts with western culture and education.

In another study in India, Roy (2016) noticed that the Santals are deeply divided along religious lines. New religions, such as Christianity and Islam, along with western formal education, have largely replaced the traditional belief systems and cultures of the Santals. In a similar study, Shamsuddoha and Jahan (2016) discovered that religious forces have greatly transformed the Santal society. As such, the authors identify three types of Santal currently, namely *Safa hor* (followers of the clean road) Santal (Hindu), *Um hor* (followers of the Baptized way) Santal (Christian), and *Bonga hor* (followers of spirit's way) Santal (adherents of traditional religion). Anthropologists Shamsuddoha and Jahan enumerate the forces behind the transformation of modern-day Santals as: state discrimination, conversion to Christianity, internal conflicts, and the public marginalization.

Shamsuddoha and Jahan (2016) recount that the Santals have made great sacrifices to conserve their culture and country. In 1955, for instance, they fought against the British colonizers and, in 1971, fought with Pakistan. Kerketa (2018) also claims that Santals are well-known internationally for their rebellion against the British colonisers. Despite these sacrifices for the country, however, Shamsuddoha and Jahan laments that the Santals have not been fully recognised by both the Indian and Bangladesh governments. According to these authors, the Santals should be appreciated for their role in the historical struggle against colonialism.

The Santals celebrate their culture and identity in diverse ways. Lea (2016) identifies the *Baha festival* (flower festival), locally called it the *Disam Baha festival* (country flower festival), as one way the Santals celebrate and express their unique cultural identity. Carrin (2015) also identifies the Luguburu

pilgrimage as another event that the Santals use to redefine their identity. This event brings together Santals from different areas to show solidarity and celebrate their identity. According to Bandyopadhyay (2019), Luguburu is not an actual physical pilgrimage but a reaffirmation of the Santal identity. Acharya and Kshatriya (2016) also observe that the modern-day Santals redefine their identity through *Ol-Chiki* (language script to write Santal's language invented by a Santal Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925) and *Sarna Dharam* (one of Santals' religions) movements.

The reviewed literature underline shows that many studies have focused on various aspects of the life of the Santals. Some studies have focused on their history, some on their present situation of life and existence while others have examined their effort to redefine their identity. It is evident from the literature that the new generation of Santals desire a clarification on their identity. Yet, none of the reviewed have tried to define the identity of the Santals with respect to nature or their environment, especially from a literary perspective. Therefore, this study attempts to define the identity of the Santals as children of nature drawing from their folktales.

### 3.0 Methods

To help in defining the identity of the Santals as children of nature, this research examines Santal folktales. The research was qualitative in nature. The method was appropriate since the researchers observed a social issue in its setting. It also deals with culture, values, opinions, behaviour, and social context. The texts are the first collection of missionaries to India. The research sampled 27 tales from the collection. The sampled tales are: *The Story of Sindura Gand Garur*; *Gumdha the Hero*; *Lakhan and the Wild Buffaloes*; *The Jackal and the Leopard*; *The Story of Hanuman Boy*; *The Changed Calf*; *Dukhu and Bonga Wife*; *The House Bonga*; *The Bonga's Victim*; *The Old Women who Died and Left her Son*; *How the Messengers of the King of the Netherworld a Wealthy Old Man Away*; *The Young Man who Saw his Dead Wife Again*; *The Tiger's Bride*; *The Monkey and the Girl*; *The Monkey Husband*; *Palo*; *When they Try to Marry a Brother and Sister*; *The Cure of Laziness*; *The Two Brothers Jhorea and Jhore*; *The Tiger and Ulta's Mother*; *Kara Guja*; *The Sisters-in-Law*; *Rajit Bonga*; *The Herd Boy and the Witches*; *The Silly Women*; *Nothing Must be Told to Women*, and *A Stepmother*. The data for the study was collected through close reading of the selected folktales. The research used textual analysis to process the data.

### 4.0 Theoretical Framework

The research was guided by three theories, namely the National Folklore Theory, Functional Theory, and Theory of Folklore and Reality. The National Folklore Theory, according to Dorson (1963), holds that national elements are hidden in the lore of the people. As such, the lore of the people can define a nation or help people to define themselves as a nation. The theory helped the research to identify elements in the tale that define the identity of the Santal.

Functional Theory was propounded by Franz Boas (1940) and William Bascom (1953). Boas called it "cultural reflector theory" (Lopez, 2006, p. 62) because of its nature. The theory helped to draw a connection between folklore and culture. Its main argument is that the study of folklore is the study of people. Therefore, folklore is the "autobiography of a people" (Lopez, 2006, p. 62). According to Bascom (1953), folklore 1) may be a mirror to culture; 2) may validate aspects of culture; 3) may be a means of education, and 4) work to maintain conformity to accepted patterns of behaviour. The theory thus helped to examine the relationship folklore and the cultural identity of the Santal. The claim by Boas that folklore is an autobiography of people was appropriate for this study. The research studied folklore to define the identity of the Santal people.



The Theory of Folklore and Reality arose from the work of renowned folklorist Vladimir Propp (1984) in his attempt to prove that folklore has a connection with reality. Propp argued that 1) folklore derives from reality, even if that is fantastic images; 2) the creators and performers of folklore intend to present real life through such literature, and 3) a folk artist aims to set himself as a representation of reality (Propp, 1984, p. 38). The theory helped this research to understand the true nature of Santals. Specifically, it helped the researcher to uncover the truth about the Santal identity behind their folktales.

## 5.0 Results and Discussion

### 5.1 *Setting in Santal Tales*

The events in the selected tales took place in rural contexts. Therefore, the tales describe features of nature, such as villages, jungles, trees, animals, and the simple lifestyle of the people. The characters are from villages and often move around forested areas. They live near or inside jungles. The events in most of the stories take place either in the forest, in the field, or the locality. The vivid descriptions of the landscape in the tales also reflect the Santals' present locality.

The themes from the settings of the tales also capture the key events in the Santals' daily lives. These themes include revenge on animals, hunting, harmonious living with animals and spirits, human character, spirits, witchcraft, family relations, death and life after death, humour, and many others. These topics show how the Santal folktales are socially related and how the people interact with nature.

Santals live in and depend on nature for survival. There is no mention of palaces, people from cities, or any discrimination among the people in these tales. The stories here are not about politics, murder, intrigue, or sex but about the struggling history of the Santals. In their moments of need, nature stands by them like a mother, providing food for them. The Santals collect their food from the jungle. The characters are mostly involved in agricultural work. They know how to survive in a critical situation. In the tale 'Lakhan and the Wild Buffaloes,' for example, the hero, Lakhan, survives in the forest by drinking wild buffaloes' milk. Again, in the tale, 'Kara and Guja', the two brothers, Kara and Guja, go to the forest to dig some roots to eat.

When Santals are defeated and have nobody to support them in times of danger, the wild animals come forward to their aid. The Santal folktales also feature stories of marriage between the people and animals as well as spirits. Such stories are found in the 'Tiger's Bride', 'The Monkey Husband', and 'Dukhu and Bonga Wife'. These tales show that the Santals are close to nature. This closeness is deeper than mere sentiment about nature and environmental conservation; it is a spiritual and physical connection that is characterised by shared life between humans and nature.

### 5.2 *Characters*

The characters in the Santal folktales are simple. The tales have no prominent or famous characters or heroes. The characters comprise Santals and non-Santals, animals, nature and spirits, all of whom are connected to and by nature. All these characters play an interesting role in the tales because they all speak the Santal language. Among the human characters, the Santals feature the most in the folktales. Most of the protagonists' professions are herding cattle or agricultural work, which emphasizes the Santals' connection with nature. They take their cattle to the forest, as shown in such tales as 'The Story of Sindura Gand Garur,' 'Gumdha, The Hero,' 'Lakhan and the Wild Buffaloes,' and many others. In these stories, the characters are close to nature. They produce their food from nature; they take cattle to the jungle, sometimes befriending wild animals and, again, sometimes hunting them for revenge.

In the Santal folktales, animal characters also play an important role. They converse with humans in human language. This serves to emphasize the symbolic quality of these animals as human alter egos.

The Santal stories do not shy away from personifying the animals. The people respect these animals as significant players in the human Santal culture and existence. In some stories, animals even take part in the decision-making. People listen to them. For instance, 'The Changed Calf,' two animals, Nightjar and Jackal, sit with the people to resolve a dispute on behalf of poor boy, Sona. They encounter the people and asked them questions, which the people could not answer. In the end, they win in the judgment, and people accept their verdict.

Spirits are also significant characters in these stories. In many of the Santal folktales, spirits play an important role. The spirits can take human form and live with human beings. As shown in the folktales, the spirits reside in ponds, *Nala* (stream), or any water source. These spirits are not outside nature but part of nature. The folktales have presented different types of spirit. Some of them are malevolent, such as the spirits in 'Ramjit *Bonga*' and 'The Sister-in-Law who was a Witch.' In these two stories, the witches called *Bonga* seek to harm people. However, some spirits protect the people from the witch finder. Other spirits get married to humans. The tale 'Dukhu and *Bonga* Wife' shows Dukhu marrying a *Bong* girl, and they form a family.

In the Santal folktales, humans, spirits and animals are part of the community stories. All of them are connected through nature. They move and work together. They respect one another and there is no segregation. In this way, all the characters, including the Santals, are children of nature.

### 5.3 Heroes' Pre-occupations

There are no famous heroes in the Santal folktales; here, heroes are simple or ordinary people. In fact, in some tales, it is difficult to delineate the main character from the rest. Every character is highly significant, even though their acts also are simple and ordinary.

Herding is the main pre-occupation of most protagonists in the tales. Most of the heroes are involved in goat herding. In 'The Story of Sindura Gand Garur,' 'Gumdha, the Hero' and 'Lakhan and the Wild Buffalos', the heroes' main work is goat herding. However, in 'Dukhu and *Bonga* Wife', the hero is a cowherd who looks after buffalos. Almost every Santal folktale presents its heroes engaged in some work requiring interaction with nature.

Agricultural work is another significant activity in the Santal tales. Some main characters plough the land and work in the field. Tales like the 'Hanuman Boy,' 'Dukhu and *Bonga* Wife,' 'The Monkey and the Girl,' 'The Monkey Husband,' 'Palo' and others highlight the agricultural work of the hero and the other characters. The characters cultivate the lands in order to grow crops. They live a simple and happy life deriving their livelihood from farming and animal husbandry.

Hunting is also another important pre-occupation in the Santal society depicted in the folktales. Hunting is done both for food and for revenge against animals that harm humans. For instance, 'The Story of Sindura Gand Garur' depicts the hero going hunting a giant bird *Sindura Gand Garur*, his father's killer. In the same way, 'Lakhan and the Wild Buffaloes' depicts the hero, Lakhan, going to hunt wild buffaloes because they destroyed his crops. However, he ends up becoming their friend. The fact that Lakhan and the buffaloes can reconcile shows there is a thin line between the human and animal nature in the Santal worldview. 'The *Bonga*'s Victim' is different because, here, the four brothers go hunting animals to collect meat.

In conclusion, the research found that all three types of work done in the Santal society (herding, agriculture and hunting) are part of nature. Even though everything in the world is part of nature in a broader sense, there is a closer intimacy between the Santals and their world.

#### 5.4 Santal Beliefs

Most Santals still adhere to their traditional beliefs. All their beliefs revolve around nature. Belief in the spirits is common among the Santals. They believe in several types of spirits, which is reflected in their tales as well. For instance, in 'Dukhu and Bonga Wife,' Dukhu marries a girl who is a spirit. She comes to Dukhu as a human and falls in love with him. Some spirits are malevolent, such as those referenced in 'The Sister-in-Law who was a Witch' and 'Ramjit Bonga.' In these stories, the witches called *Bongas* harm people. Santals fear these types of spirits. However, in 'The Herd Boy and the Witches' several benevolent *bongas* are mentioned. The Santal people do not have an isolated temple to worship these spirits. The worship of spirits is done in nature like in the forest or hills.

The Santals also believe in witchcraft. According to Bodding (as cited in Raj, 2018), "There is no genuine Santal who does not believe in witches." Therefore, even though Santal society is highly patriarchal, witches are regarded as powerful individuals. Nevertheless, witches are detested and if found are brutally tortured and killed. The Santals have many tales revolving around witchcraft. Whenever the Santals see someone attacked by witches or suffering from any illness, they go to *Kaviraj* (medicine man). The *Kaviraj* attends to all forms of illnesses and disorders; he even exorcises those believed to be possessed by demons or evil spirits. The *Kaviraj* sources his medicine and remedies from nature, such as roots or barks of trees. In most cases, the *Kaviraj* also recites mantras or makes sacrifices to the deity to bring healing. Therefore, nature is the source of much of Santal's health and wellbeing.

Belief in fate is also common among the Santals. Although they believe that hard work brings rewards, the Santals also believe that success is a product of fate. In 'The Story of Hanuman Boy,' when the mother conceived the hanuman boy, people criticized her. However, she did not abandon the child and instead accepted that it was her fate to bear the boy. Again, when the hanuman boy kidnaps a girl to marry her, the girl's parents request him to free the girl. The hanuman boy does not release her and the girl's parents interpret his refusal to mean it was the girl's fate to marry a hanuman. Many tales like this show the Santals accepting misfortune as their fate.

In conclusion, the research found that Santals' belief systems depict them as intimate children of nature. They believe in the spirits that live and are expressed or experienced in nature, such as in forests, mountains or trees. They worship these spirits and gods in nature. When they get sick, they rely on nature to find remedies. Their belief in fate also suggest that the Santals live as nature intends.

#### 5.5 Harmonious Living and Dependence on Nature

Harmonious living is one of the important features of Santal folktales. In almost every Santal folktale, there are diverse characters, including animals, spirits or trees. The different species of characters in the tales coexist harmoniously. They help one another, stand together in times of danger and even intermarry. In 'The Sindura Gand Garur' and 'The Jackal and Leopard', the main characters comprise a harmonious mix of humans and animals. In 'Dukhu and Bonga Wife,' the characters are human and spirits, and in 'The Sister-in-law who was a Witch,' the characters are humans, animals and spirit.

Different types of tools and objects are found in the Santal folktales. Among them are bows and arrows, axes, ploughs, drums, sticks, *pai*, *paila*, *pawa*, flute, garland and winnowing fans. Santal's bows and arrows are made from bamboo. 'The Story of Sindura Gand Garur,' 'Lakhan and the Wild Buffaloes' and 'Kara and Guja' mention that *Huti Budhi* (a witch; Huti is a type of insect that eats dry bamboo) used to eat bows at night. Santals also use various tools to support their agricultural activities. Their agricultural tools are made from wood. Their plough is also made from wood and bamboo. They also make tools like sticks, flutes, drums, axes and winning fans from bamboo. Santal girls also use wildflowers for aesthetic purposes.



### 5.6 Simple Lifestyle

As evidenced in their folktales, the Santals lead simple lifestyles. Much of their needs are readily obtained from nature. Therefore, the Santals hoard only a few things, such as cattle and goats, which they consider as important assets. Everything else is sought directly from nature. The Santals are not very aggressive in their approach to life. They are laid back in their attitude to nature and life. Much of their time is spent in simple conversations with other persons and animals, and the worship spirits. Much like nature blossoms when it is not interfered with, the Santals approach life with simplicity and surrender to fate. In fact, much of their traditional habitats are in jungles that preserved their natural appearance despite hosting humans. Therefore, nature has influenced them greatly and taught them how to survive. The tales do not feature or foreground aspects of jealousy, anger, greed, malice, covetousness, selfishness or adultery among the traditional Santals. The community is depicted as a simple and happy people.

### 6.0 Conclusion

The research has discussed how Santals are children of nature as demonstrated in their folktales. The Santals reside in and through nature. They collect food, medicine and objects and tools for use from nature. Nature is always generous to them, providing them with whatever they need. The gods and goddesses they worship live in nature. Worship is also done in nature. This worship is done in *Jaher Than*, a naturally occurring sacred grove. Santals believe that witchcraft exists and is associated with different malevolent spirits that live in nature. The Santals live in harmony with all things in nature. They have interdependent relationships with animals, trees and spirits. They treat aspects of nature such as trees and animals like their brothers and sisters. Nature is also kind to them as it helps them to live and keeps them safe. There are many tales in which animals help the Santals escape danger. Moreover, some tales depict Santals intermarrying with spirits. The different kinds of tools and instruments they use in their daily lives are made from naturally occurring elements such as wood and iron. The manner in which the Santal live in and through nature depicts them as children of nature. Their relationship with nature is like parent and child; brother and sister.

**Funding:** This research received neither internal or external funding.

### Disclaimer Statement

This article is part of a thesis, 'Santal Folktales as Mirror of Santal Identity', submitted to the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines for partial award of Doctorate Degree in Literature. The thesis is under the supervision of Professor Jorge Mojarro.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

### Author Biography

**Thadeus Hembrom** is a Catholic priest from Bangladesh. He completed his Master of Arts in English at the Northern University, Bangladesh. Before embarking on his doctoral studies at the University of Santo Tomas, he taught at Notre Dame College Mymensing, Bangladesh, and served as an acting principal. Currently, he is working as a principal in the same college. He is also a candidate for a Doctor of Philosophy in Literature at the University of Santo Tomas.

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