

## Traditional Marriage Ritual of Santal Tribe of West Bengal, India

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36348/sb.2026.v12i01.001>

| Received: 05.11.2025 | Accepted: 13.01.2026 | Published: 14.01.2026

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### Abstract

The Santals are an ethnic tribal group who mostly inhabit the states of Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Chatisgarh, and Assam. There is also a sizable Santal minority in neighboring Bangladesh and a small population in Nepal. Santals constitute the largest group among tribal communities. They belong to the Proto-Australoid race. The settlement of Medinipur known as Santal was first mentioned in Walter Hamilton's narrative (1820). He said that in the jungles lived an impoverished, oppressed class known as Santals. Some believe the term 'Santal' originated from 'Saont' or 'Samanta'. Once, an area of East Medinipur was known as 'Samantabhum' or 'Saont'. Most likely, they were the original inhabitants of this region. They also mentioned this place 'Sant Disham' or 'Sant Desh' in their mythology. 'Santal' means inhabitant of 'Sant Desh'. The Santal tribe of India have a traditional tribal lifestyle. Forest trees and flora serve the basic needs of Santal tribe. The tribes are also engaged in fishing and cultivation. They are also skilled in the production of musical instruments, mats, baskets, and other crafts. The Santal tribe is divided mainly into twelve sects viz. Soren, Murmu, Mandi, Kisku, Hansda, Besra, Tudu, Baske, Hembrom, Pauria, Bedea and Choral. Each sect has a totem symbol of its own. The traditional marriage system in Santal tribe is a religious practice as a goddess of happiness and heaven. In this paper we see the different kinds of rituals which are practiced by the Santal tribe from hundred and thousand years in their marriage and remarriage.

**Keyword:** Community, Culture, Marriage, Santal, Traditional, Tribe.

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### INTRODUCTION

The most significant life stage is marriage, which is a turning point in human social life and is observed in all societal groups. Marriage not only allows one to interact with others but also confers a social status on an individual. As this term is culturally created, marriage is the socially accepted connection of a man and a woman, usually for the goal of lawful reproduction, starting a family, or creating a new home. Thus, mating will be referred to be marriage when it receives societal acceptance and regulates a mated pair's relationship to one another, their kinsmen, their children, and society at large (Raul, 2018). In Santal tradition, getting married is a sacred ritual linked to the union of the goddess of happiness and heaven. The only institution of togetherness in Santal society is with everyone. Because everyone has the right to survive, rich or poor, the marriage culture is split into different segments based on

the traditions of the Santal ancestors. The best culture is Santal society, where marriage is customarily performed for both the rich and the poor. Both happiness and grief coexist in society; in fact, they are what define existence (Mandi, 2019).

Santal community has a ritual whereby children who attain puberty inside the family are given in marriage. Society will accept it in accordance with its rules even if they love and marry for the reasons that they choose. The young men and women of two families with different titles within their own community are customarily married, in accordance with the laws and norms of the society. In our society, marriage is a very religious institution (Mandi, 2019). In the Santals community, getting married is a symbol of prosperity and the start of a new life. Among them, the institution of marriage is highly prevalent. Among them, "Bapla" signifies marriage. In Santal society, marriage holds a

special place. Santal's marriage is both a societal duty and a private one. Santals' marriage isn't taken into consideration if there isn't a happy night filled with flute playing, drumming, and dancing (Raul,2018). Santal society is a cultural society based on its organizational structure. And the entire hamlet's responsibility is placed in the hands of "More Ko" village. It is thought that everyone in Santal society, affluent or poor, has equal rights based on how society functions. The fathers of the society have created the marriage system in a similar way so that everyone might live a family life through the marriage systems (Mandi,2019).

### **Concepts of Marriage:**

Marriage and family are strongly interconnected. The family is society's smallest institution, while the joint family is a significant entity. There are many institutions in society. Marriage is the best of these. This marital process creates new family pillars. Marriage is the institution by which new families are formed. That is why marriage is considered a family institution (Mandi,2019). Hindus Believe that since God preconfigures marriages, "the marriages are arranged in heaven, but are solemnized on earth. "This is a sacrament idea that is carried out using Vedic mantras and rituals to possess morality, high character, and produce intelligent offspring for a better human race to reach moksha (Bedi,2022). According to Islam, marriage is also known as 'zawaj' in Arabic, which signifies association or joining together. The Holy Quran uses this phrase to refer to bringing or being together (Shahu, 2021). In Santal tradition, marriage is an ancient ceremony akin to the union of heaven and the goddess of happiness. The only institution of togetherness in Santal society is with everyone. Because everyone has the right to survive, rich or poor, the marriage culture is split into different segments based on the traditions of the Santal ancestors. The best culture is Santal civilization, where marriage is customarily performed for both the rich and the poor. Both happiness and grief coexist in society; in fact, they are what define existence (Mandi,2019). It is really hard, to be honest, to argue that there is one definition of marriage that is perfect. That is why several social scientists have presented diverse definitions of marriage, which are—

Rupchand Murmu stated in his book "Saonta Sanresh" about marriage, "When we Santals enter youth, we are married privately or by love as we like." In the words of Lakshmicharan Murmu, "Marriage is the union of a boy and a girl (husband and wife) to create and organise a new family through cultural purity recognised by one's own national society's spiritualism (belief in God and Goddess) religiousism." According to social scientist Rameshwar Murmu (Adim Santarh), "when a boy and girl are tied together as husband and wife, it is called marriage." Furthermore, Gobinda Mandi sir defines marriage as the union of a boy and a girl in the

shape of gods and goddesses for the purpose of delight or initiation (Mandi,2019).

### **Origin of the Santal marriage term, "Bapla":**

In the Santals community, marriage is a symbol of wealth and the start of a new life. Among them, the institution of marriage is highly prevalent. Marriage is called as "Bapla" among these people. Marriage holds a prominent significance in Santal society. Santal's marriage is both a private and civic obligation (Raul,2018). It is difficult to identify the actual origin of the Santali word BAPLA (marriage). However, few sociologists or linguists have an opinion on the origins of the Santali term "BAPLA" (marriage). Marriage signifies equality between a man and a woman, according to Lakshmicharan Murmu Gomke in his book "Mahapurana Kherwal Saonta" (Religious Text, Part-I). For this reason, the terms BAPLA (marriage) and BALA BALA (equal) have been used." The parents of Pilchu are credited with coining this BAPLA term. This is a compound term for young people who have reached adulthood. The ritual of using turmeric oil at the marital house has persisted since then, and with it came the habit of presenting yellow fabric to relatives. Pilchu parents began introducing marriage as a practice on that day. Linguist Dr. Ratan Hembram writes more on the history of the word BAPLA (marriage) in his book "Literature and Culture in Santali Folk Songs." By appending the middle suffix "P" to the word BALA, the word BAPLA is created. By appending the suffix "YA," the word BALA was also transformed into BALAYA. BALA+YA=BALAYA denotes paternal connections between a son and a daughter-in-law (Mandi, 2019).

### **Santal Marriage Classification:**

To begin with, the structure of Santal society recognises equal rights for persons from all levels of society. That is why marriage ceremonies are performed for both the wealthy and the poor. Due to necessity, the ancestors of Santal culture separated the marriage system into numerous groups. Dr. Dhirendranath Baskey's work "Hor Bapla Seren' Puthi" (work of Santal Weeding Songs) divides the Santal marriage into eight (8) sections. Such as (i) Sadai or Duwar sindur Bapla (expensive wedding or wedding at the bride's house), (ii) Tumki dipil Bapla (low-cost wedding or marriage by bringing the bride to the groom's house), (iii) Nir bolok' Bapla (marriage by intrusion), (iv) Orh Aader Bapla (marriage by capture), (v) Ghor Janwai Bapla (if there is only a girl, the groom will stay in the bride's house for life), (vi) Ghardi Janwai Bapla, (vii) Epitid' Bapla, and (viii) Caodal Bapla (Mandi,2019).

In 'Mahapurana Kherwal Saonta', Mr. Lakshmicharan Murmu (Champa Baha) divides Santal marriage into seven (7) types. For example, (i) Kondel Napam Etud' Sindur Bapla (love marriage), (ii) Baryat Aate Orh Etud' Bapla, (iii) Baryat Aate Duwar Sindur Bapla, (iv) Baryat Aate Tumki Dipil Bapla, (v) Ghardi

Janway Bapla, (vi) Sangha/Baha Saonha Bapla (widow marriage), and (vii) Hirom Bahca (Mandi,2019).

Mr. Rameshwar Murmur (Aadim Santarh), a social worker, classified Santal marriage into seven distinct types in his book "Jaher Bonga Santarh Ko." Examples include (i) Duwar Bapla, (ii) Tumki Dipil Bapla, (iii) Orh Itud' Bapla (marriage by capture), (iv) Kondel Napam Bapla (love marriage), (v) Ghardi Janway Bapla, (vi) Sangha Bapla, and (vii) Kirin' Janway Bapla (Mandi,2019).

Santal's marriage is both a private and social obligation. Santal's marriage is not considered unless it is celebrated with singing, dancing, drumming, and flute playing. In general, the Santals practice eight traditional forms of marriage (Raul,2018).

1. Kirin Bahu Bapla.
2. Tunki Dipil Bapla.
3. Kirin Jawai Bapla.
4. Itut Sindur Bapla.
5. Nir Bolok Bapla.
6. Sanga Bapla.
7. Ghardi Jawai Bapla.
8. Dulor Kate Bapla or Upagir Bapla

### **1. Kirin Bahu Bapla**

Kirin Bahu Bapla: This refers to the purchase of a bride-to-be from her parents' house. Every member of the Santali family participates in the family's occupation, which is agriculture. Every member of the family is therefore seen as manpower. One must give their parents a specific sum in order to repay them for their hard work. It is a custom for determining the bride's value rather than the bride price.

### **2.Tunki Dipil Bapla**

Rahi Chaudal Bapla (portable dwelling for bride) is another name for this type of bapla. The bride sits inside the adorned rahi chaudal at the groom's residence after all rituals have been completed. Only the locals or relatives from the groom's village may take the bride to Rahi Chudal.

### **3. Kirin Jawai Bapla**

In Santhal, kirin means to purchase. From her parents' house, Kirin Bapla is referred to as the bride-to-be. Every member of the Santhal family participates in the family's occupation, which is agriculture. Every

member of the family is therefore seen as manpower. One must give their parents a specific sum in order to repay them for their labor. It is a custom for determining the bride's value rather than the bride price.

### **4. Itut Sindur Bapla**

Itut is the process by which the groom applies vermillion to the middle of the bride's forehead. Typically, the process takes place in the bride's home. This is an element of the marriage tradition. Itut customs are also carried out after finishing specified years.

### **5. Nir Bolok Bapla**

This type of marriage is arranged by parents throughout childhood. Nirbelok means someone who has not reached the age of adulthood.

### **6. Sanga Bapla**

Sangha Bapla (Marriage) refers to the marriage between an elder brother's wife and a younger brother in the event of death or loss. It is a common understanding between the bride and groom. Consent is also required from the eldest brother's wife. This marriage is intended to keep anyone from becoming a widow. Society accepts some rituals and practices observed by more hor (five famous persons of the village), naike, and manjhi haram (headman). In brief, a guy must become the spouse of a deceased brother's widow.

### **7. Ghardi Jawai Bapla**

In such marriages, the husband is expected to reside at the bride's house following the wedding. This type of marriage is especially common among single-girl kid families like the affluent Santhal family.

### **8. Dulor Kate Bapla or Upagir Bapla**

The Santhal community is open to engagement with both men and women. Any male or female can get along and agree to get married. Society welcomes such unionism and regards it as marriage. It is done without the knowledge of the parents, but they are later told by a village messenger, who is assigned by the headman. Such marriages occur at haat (village, daily or weekly local market) and pata (mela or community celebration of a special occasion). Tiril-Tarob is a special function for newly married couples. Where residents have the right to question and clarify their concerns about both of them.



Fig.-1: Bride before the marriage ceremony



Fig.-2: Groom before the marriage ceremony

### Significances of Santal Traditional Marriages Rituals

The Santal society's traditional marriages rites are a powerful manifestation of its social structure, cultural identity, and values. These deeply meaningful rituals honor ancestors' customs and foster closer community bonds. The focus on community is central to Santal marriage rites. Not only do the bride and groom's family attend weddings, but the entire community does as well. This group participation emphasizes the value of mutual aid and social solidarity, reaffirming the idea that marriage is a connection that unites two families and their communities in addition to two individuals. Santal society's social fabric is strengthened and a sense of belonging is fostered by the active engagement of friends, family, and villages (Ghosh, 2018).

The marriage ritual includes a variety of sacrifices to deities, which represent thanks and a plea for benefits. These sacrifices might range from food to cattle, demonstrating the Santals' reverence for their spiritual beliefs and ancestral traditions. By performing these rites, the couple requests heavenly favor for a fruitful and harmonious life together. This spiritual aspect of marriage highlights the interdependence between daily living and religious traditions in Santal culture. Santal marriages rely heavily on unique courtship customs. These techniques promote mutual agreement and family approval, which are critical components in developing harmonious partnerships. Traditionally, families discuss the match, emphasizing the value of family ties and compatibility. This emphasis on consent demonstrates a dedication to preserving domestic peace and social stability (Singh, 2020).



Fig. 3: Santal marriage ceremony



Fig. 4: Bride after the marriage

Exchanging gifts, such as animals, money, or other assets, is an important part of Santal weddings. These presents serve several functions: they show respect between families, develop interpersonal relationships, and reflect the financial aspects of marriage. The exchange of presents can also indicate social rank, with the value of the gifts frequently reflecting the families' standing in the community. This practice supports the notion that marriage is not only a personal relationship, but also a significant societal commitment. The bride and groom wear traditional clothes that have cultural significance. Their dress represents their heritage, representing pride in their identity and the move from single to married life. The

outfit frequently contains brilliant colors and intricate designs, highlighting the workmanship and artistic expressions of the Santal.

Celebratory dances and music are fundamental to Santal weddings, representing joy and cultural history. These performances are not only amusing, but also help to bring the community together in celebration, reinforcing cultural traditions and collective memory. Music and dancing communicate shared delight, emphasizing the necessity of social cohesiveness throughout key life events. Specific rites, such as tying the nuptial knot, represent the couple's commitment and loyalty. This act represents the binding aspect of

marriage and the duties that go along with it. It highlights the idea that marriage is a lifetime commitment founded on love, trust, and mutual support.

Following the wedding, practices such as visiting the bride's family strengthen kinship bonds and ensure continued support from both sides. These rituals emphasize the interdependence of families and the need of keeping strong relationships after the wedding (Tribal Research Institute, 2021). Santal marriage ceremonies encompass a diverse range of cultural, spiritual, and social components. They help to establish communal relationships, honor ancestral customs, and reflect the ideals that define Santal identity. These rites allow the Santal people to commemorate individual partnerships while simultaneously reinforcing their collective heritage and communal integrity.

## CONCLUSION

Marriage in the Santhal Adivasi community is a symbol of affluence and the start of a new life. Despite significant social upheaval in social conventions during the last century, the institution of marriage in Santhal communities remains relatively entrenched. Bapla is a Santhali word for marriage. Marriage holds a vital significance in Santhal society. Santhal, like most ancient communities, need a secure habitat for the continuation of the species. Although many people consider Santhal marriage to be a private expression of their love for one another, Santhal matrimony has historically been a very public institution influenced by custom, culture, religion, and Santhali regulations. Marriages in Santhals are considered pure and sacred. It is done in accordance with all customs. The first few steps are common in all types of marriages. Parents of boys and girls will pick an interlocutor named Raibaar. Raibaar is the one who mediates in commencing conversations regarding marriage proposals with either family. Raibaar is well-known across the family and has

a joking relationship with both the boy and the girl, as well as their parents. The Raibaar and parents of the boy or girl meticulously adhere to each process's customs. One can divide the entire process into phases.

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