

Report of the Silver Jubilee Celebration of Adibasi Baha Parab and a two day international conference on ‘Tribes in Transition’

by Boro Baski

The three day Silver Jubilee celebration of ‘Adibasi Baha Parab’ at Ghosaldanga ended on 14th March 2014 with great joy and enthusiasm. On the last day of the celebration was at Ghosaldanga village. Hundreds of people from different parts of Birbhum District participated in various tribal sports and cultural activities. This year 22 Santal groups with their traditional dress and musical instruments took part. Three Santali drama groups staged their plays and the last hours of the night was spent with music and dance that continued till next morning. But, the special attraction of the day was ‘Santali Kobi Gaona’ in which Santal poetess Mrs. Buri Murmu and Mrs. Mungli Murmu recited the history and folklore of Santal life and culture. This year the ‘Baha Parab Award 2014’ was conferred on to the well-known writer Dr. Suhrid Kumar Bhowmik of East Midnapur.

However, 25th year ‘Adibasi Baha Parab’ will be specially remembered for successfully organizing a two day international conference on ‘Tribes in Transition: Conflict over Identity, Resources and Development’ on 12-13 March 2014 at Santiniketan and Rolf Schoembs Vidyashram (RSV). The principal organizer of the conference was the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), New Delhi of which Ghosaldanga Bishnubati Adibasi Trust (GBAT) did the practical collaboration. Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi funded the conference. Dr. Ivy Hansdak, JMI and Dr. Boro Baski, GBAT were the convener and co-convener of the conference respectively. The first day of the conference was held at Santiniketan. Prof. Sushanta Dattagupta, Vice-Chancellor, Visva-Bharati University who inaugurated the conference said, through Sriniketan experiment Rabindranath always wanted to create the space for dialogue between the academetia and grass root workers. He expressed happiness that Visva-Bharati could be part of this process through this conference. Other two key speakers of the inaugural session were Prof. G.N.Devy, Director, Bhasha Research & Publication Centre, Vadodara, who moved the audience by his speech that was loaded with extensive knowledge and experience on the field of tribal culture and literature. He presented a panoramic view of the crisis tribals in India are going through with their historical and political legacy. Prof. Devy expressed hope by seeing the talented tribal youth coming up to address the issues that affect them in the conferences like this. Prof. Virginius XaXa, Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati & Chairman of the XaXa Commission spoke about the present scenario of the crises that exist among tribals in their cultural identity.

There were two sessions on the first day. ‘Tribal Cultural Heritage and Conflict over Identity’ was the first topic and speakers were Mr. Tonol Murmu, AISWACS, Kolkata; Mr. Kumar Rana, Senior Research Associate, Pratichi (India) Trust; the paper of Mr. Ludwig Pesch, Secretary, Tribal Cultural Heritage in India Foundation, Amsterdam was read out in absentia by Mr. Prashant Kumar Hembrom, scholar, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Kolkata. Prof. Ranjit Kumar Bhattacharya, former Director, Anthropological Survey of India presided over the session. The second session was on ‘Translation and Publication of Tribal Literature’ and speakers were Dr. Anand Mahanand, EFLU, Hyderabad; Dr. Boro Baski, GBAT; Ms. Ruby Hembrom, Adivaani, Kolkata; and Mr. A.K. Pankaj, Jharkhandi Bhasha Sahitya Sanskriti Akhra, Ranchi. Prof. G.N.Devy presided over the second session. Sr. Gemma Toppo presented a visual presentation was on ‘Tribal Women and Human Trafficking’. It was a lasting experience for

many of the audience. The presentation was followed by cultural programme. Rabindra Sangeet in Santali was sung by a well known singer Mr. Barka Soren of Kalitola village. Mr. Rathin Kisku, a well known Santali fusion singer presented Baul and Santali songs. The first day of the conference ended with Santali group dance by Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati villagers.

The second day of the conference was held at RSV at Ghosaldanga. There were three sessions here, first on 'Tribal Healthcare and Community Development'. The speakers were Dr. Shantidani Minz, Christian Medical College, Vellore; Dr. Prabir Chatterjee, Kolkata; Ms. Kirsty Milward, Suchana, Birbhum; Fr. David Solomon SJ, Johar HRD Centre, Dumka. Dr. Monika Golembiewski's presentation was delivered in absentia by her colleague in the village medical work Mr. Satyanarayan Roy of Santiniketan. Mr. Gokul Hansda, President, GBAT presided over the session. The second panel was on 'Writers' Meet' and the writers presented their speech were Mr. Marshal Hembram; Mr. Durbin Soren, Mr. Sibu Soren and Mr. Sunder Manoj Hembrom. Dr. Ivy Hansdak moderated the session. The third session was on 'Tribal Youth: Problems of Employment' and speakers were Prof. Sonajharia Minz, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, Fr. James Toppo SJ, St. Xavier's College, Maharo; Mr. Prashant Kumar Hembrom, MBA student, IIM, Kolkata; Mr. Abhay Xaxa, Ph.D scholar, JNU, New Delhi. Fr. David Solomon SJ was the moderator.

The two day conference ended with the Valedictory Session. The speakers were Dr. Boro Baski, GBAT; Dr. Martin Kaempchen, Santiniketan, and Prof. Kumkum Bhattacharya, Dept of Social Work, Visva-Bharati delivered the valedictory speech. Vote of Thanks was given by Mr. Sona Murmu, Trustee, GBAT.

Successful completion of the Jubilee celebration and the conference gave a huge boost up to us as organizers. Prof. Devy's brief visit to RSV school and Santal Cultural Museum at Bishnubati and his kind words of appreciation also has been a great encouragement for the villagers. In larger perspective, the conference too gave a special message to the people especially the tribals who are in various ways struggling to find their space to express their cultural identity in the multicultural Indian society.