

RASI NATO (Bustling village)

The story behind the song

This song is one of my favourite Sohrae songs. There are two reasons for saying so. First, I grew up hearing this song during the Sohrae festival in our kulhi (village dusty throughfare) sitting on my mother's heap as a child while she happily danced. Even to this day I hear the old women and men singing while drinking rice wine during Sohrae in a family courtyard, sometimes for whole nights on. Sohrae songs always tell of the past and listening to this song makes me nostalgic.

The second reason for liking this song came much later when I was researching some traditional songs for our upcoming Santal cultural programme in Germany two years ago. This song was included in our list of presentations. The song narrates an important phase of the Santals' historical migration to the land of 'Sikh̄ar' disom. Indian history does not throw much light on the lives of Adivasis during Pre-Vedic, Vedic and even medieval period. The little reflection we get is from the writings of Christian missionaries during the British colonial period. Adivasis, however, have been preserving their culture and journeys through their way of life, songs, music, art, folk tales and their collective memory of struggle and happiness.

Santals are one of the tribes who have been transmitting their collective memory since ages through their songs more than any other mediums. These include the places, through which they had travelled, stationed and also the events that happened thence. Our ancestors had named the land they lived in as disom (country). The disoms were demarcated by hills, jungles, lowland, water bodies, rivers etc. Even today Santals of our generation in their normal conversation use the names of those particular disoms, such as, Sir disom, Sikh̄ar disom (Marañ Sikh̄ar & Huḍiñ Sikh̄ar), Jubdi disom, Tunḍi disom, Dumka disom, Bhoñj disom, Bařin disom, Dhař disom, Bugri disom, Tuñ disom (Marañ Tuñ & Huḍiñ Tuñ), Man disom, Khorar disom, Jhař disom, Sāt disom, Moḷ disom, Moḷoḅ disom and so on.

A great part of Santal history is the history of struggle for survival and displacement by the intruders. Despite the intrusion and cultural incursions conducted by Aryans, Mughals, British and Missionaries, Santals still survive along with their strong social, cultural and moral ethos. They are resisting vehemently the ongoing onslaught of Sanskritisation even today. The Santal nation is extended to a vast geographical area, it is having different socio-economic positioning and it carries different cultural legacies. Santals today in different regions speak different accents of Santali and practice several religions; nonetheless, the passion for their language and culture has always been intact. The internal differences like script, religion etc will be mitigated

by with the passage of time. The Santal unity and the ancestral wisdom lie within their collective memory, the way of life and the language itself. We are very optimistic about the fact that as long as a 'Mañjhi Than' (worshiping alter of the village) and 'Jaher Than' (Sacred grove) will exist in a Santal village, the existence of Santals as a cultural community will continue to exist in the modern world.

The present song 'Rasi Nato' reiterates and tries to reinstate the same fact about the perennial on-going flow of Santal way of life.

- Dr. Boro Baski, co-authored with Sunder Manoj Hembrom