



---

## In Quest of Identity of Indigenous People of Jhargram

**Tapan Hazra, Assistant Professor**  
Department of History,  
GouravGuin Memorial College,  
Chandrakona Road, Paschim Medinipur

### Abstract

*The indigenous people of Jhargram exerted their identity by demanding their original homeland to the Indian Government with the creation of separate state as Adibasisthan. The tribal people especially the Santals put up a strong agitation during the period of independence of India in the year 1947 with abhorrence of the Hindu domination in the western part of Midnapore. The movement was involve with the currents of Jharkhang movement and inspired by separatist politics. The movement not only demanded the homeland of the Santal but also tried to eradicate the social evils of their own community and economic deprivation of Hindus as well as Bengalee people. They failed to uphold their identity as the movement was in vain.*

**Key Words:-**Adibasisthan, Santal, SantalMahasabha, Gero Message, Bidhuchandan, Direct Action, Hindus, Gero Message

### Introduction

During the time of Independence of india, the indigenous people, particularly the Santals, in the Jhargram sub - division of the Midnapore district put up a strong movement, especially for the purpose of demanding their own sovereign state within the territory of India to preserve their tradition, culture, as well as identity. The philosophy and leadership of a Dhalbhum and Mayurbhang movement, which came to be known as the Jharkhand Movement, had a massive effect on the Santal people who lived in the this area. In this sense, the movement of a Santals in Adibasisthan again for establishment of a separate territory for them would be also seen to be a component of the Jharkhand Movement.<sup>1</sup>In reality, the British Government's capitulation of Hindustan and Pakistan sparked the idea of an independent province for aboriginals. When Delhi's uniform law re-established an committee for the participation of minorities, the movement gained momentum. Furthermore, this was the British administration which first awarded freedom to Pakistan and Hindustan. The indigenous peoples' complaints against the higher caste Hindus had already been going on for a very long time and were, for most cases, completely justified. Santals, Bhil, Kols, Hons, Bhumijia, as well as Mahali's and such other splinter groups had been disposed of their lands in an indefensible way, and they revolted in the old days as well; even so, they did not do as much on a large scale as they have in the existing one, which really is the one that is being discussed. When this region of the country was enveloped in jungle, the landlords gave these guys freedom to settle anywhere they chose, and



they used the forest to clear out fertile land for them. After that, greedy landowners set a high price on the property and pushed out the simple people, who have been forced to move deeper into the jungle in order to clear more arable before being pushed out once more. Then came the moneylenders, who would lend the money or paddy in exchange for compound interest as well as at the very least seize the victims' fertile land. A revolution led by Santals came out in the border region between Midnapore as well as Bankura district in 1923. Their goal was to free themselves from the exploitation of moneylenders and make room to breathe.<sup>ii</sup>Threatening the government, they started robbing tanks as well as cutting trees in the forest in order to reestablish their cultural independence. However, this trend was not as popular as this one. The revolt came to a close when agitators were caught and jailed.

### **Area Under the Movement**

The Santal people thought that the establishment of the separate state will eradicate their woes and sorrows. They would dominate their own land by upholding their culture and religion and would be free from the domination of the Bengalee and Hindu people. The pressurized situation of cultural and economic subversion by the Diku people forced them to agitate once again during the independence period of India. All of the Chhoto Nagpur division of Bihar as well as the towns of Birbhum, Bankura and Kharagpur in the Midnapore district of the Adibasisthan state were included in current movement. There appears to have been a clear focus on a campaign for a distinct territory for the Santals in the Midnapore district, Bankura, and Chakuliya regions of Bihar during the movement, according to the I.B.'s assessment.<sup>iii</sup> This report identified some Santals deeply influenced by the men and ideology of Dhalbhum and Mayurbhanj movement. This report also revealed that there were not a single person in the Gopiballavpur and Nayagram area influenced with the ideology of Jharkhand Movement. Hence it was not wrong to say that the Santal people in Gopiballavpur and Nayagram was not influenced in the Adibasisthan Movement in its initial stage.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Identity Agitation Gaining Ground Connected With Separatist Politics:-**

During the time of independence the identical notion of India was separated. Communal politics destroyed Indian nation and culture. The two large communities of India gained their ideological identity on the basis of ethno- political dogmas by dividing the nation. Taking this situation in the mind the Santal community launched a programme of agitation to revive their ethno – cultural identity within the territory of India by demanding a separate province. As the Muslim Community attained success by launching a separatist movement so that the Santal community inspired to launch the movement in the style of Muslim league. The movement was connected with the separatist movement. It is very well known that a certain Sk. Allah Rakhya,



who's most likely the Tehesildar of the Chilkigarh Raj ty but whose exact position could not be determined for definite, maintained communication with the Muslim of Chakulia. Sk Allah Rakhya was perhaps the most vocal and influential backer of this Santal rebellion. This fact was confirmed by one of secret information kept in the archive of the West Bengal state govt. According to the file, one Muslim students who enrolled a campaign contribution of Rs.1000 (One thousand only) to this movement, but he also assisted this very conference of Santals by providing a truck to transfer men from the train station to the place of the meeting. Both of these behaviour helped the Santals. In fact, the dossier said that one Muslim undergraduate assisted the Santals in their conference by providing a vehicle to drive men from the railway station to the location where the conference would actually occur.<sup>v</sup> It was not clear why did the Muslim league support the Santals movement.

Some speculate that just by starting 'DIRECT ACTION,' the Muslim league aimed to create control over the area, intended to force the Hindus, the dominant population, to flee their homes. The Muslim League's 'Direct Action' Program proved to be successful when they started their campaign to divide India. Aside from the name of 2 or 3 Santals from each hamlet in the Jamboni region, this Sk. Allah Rakhya also had revealed the chief of Chakulia, who'd been characterised by the Board was created as "Uparwala." We were unable to determine whoever the Santals referred to as 'Uparwala'. It's possible that he had been Jaipal Sing From the perspective of agitation, the Santals described here were trustworthy individuals who may be trusted with task of hearing the "Gira" word and unifying the population for the sake of establishing a separate state.<sup>vi</sup>

The agitation was purely a Political Movement (demanded for political gaining) with covered up some economic and social background.<sup>vii</sup> It was stated above that through this agitation the Santals demanded their separate province from the Hindu dominated as well as from the Bengalee dominated people of Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia. They thought that if they would successful in gaining the separate state, there would be free from the all kinds of exploitation by the people of Bengalees and Hindu. To involve more number of Santals in the demand of the separate land, the Santals leaders added some economic and social issues to this movement.

### **Movement involved with Community Development Programme**

To involve more number of Santals in the demand of the separate land, the Santals leaders added some economic and social issues to this movement. The agitators were trying to popularize agitation, spreading agitation to the all sections of Santals People with these following agenda.



---

Fight against illiteracy, forsake the art of Hariya, don't let Santal females dance outdoors, don't let Santal workers work for Bengalees, don't sell anything to Bengalees, can not let Hariya be practised in Bengalee-owned businesses, and so forth and so forth. The agitation also led to an increase in the requirements of three pios of paddy for female labor and four pios of paddy for male labour, as well as a tiffin one and meal for each person, the restoration of all lands that had been discarded of, and the enforcement of the right to acquire paddy, which they was already dissatisfied with.

### **Phases of agitation**

The identity movement for setting up separate state had been developed in three stages. These were :-

i) Some people were conscious of social evil only

ii) Some Santal were conscious of their economic backwardness and they thought the establishment would eradicate their woes and sorrows

iii) Some Santals wanted the separate land of adibasisthan being conscious of two above and it would the ultimate expression of their own identity as original people within the territory of India.

At the beginning of the campaign, the Santal people of Sankrail, Nayagram, and a section of Gopiballavpur were only concerned with eradicating social evil. They did this in the hope that they would soon be able to emerge as a powerful community while still maintaining their religious purity. The inhabitants of these areas stayed in the initial stage of a uprising during its whole. The remainder of the Gopiballabpur region, and also parts of the Jamboni and Jhargram regions, are now well aware of the economic disadvantages they confronted and were already far into the second phase of the movement. The rest of Jamboni, Jhargram, and Binpurarea'ssantals were aware of all the demands placed during the identity quest movement, and they had moved on to the third phase of the protest at this time.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Progress of Agitation:**

Whenever the movement progressed, the wave of the movement touched to the sandals of each and every locality in the Jhargram sub- division and they were conscious to the movement and joined in the agitation. To get popularity of this agitation Giras were sent to the every village dominated the Santals and sometimes drummers were played to attract them. Along with the meetings, the Santali dances and songs were also arranged. Round the area of danced and sung, there were secret discussions were carried on by the Santal leaders of this movement.<sup>ix</sup>

It was extremely difficult to get at what they deliberated. Men who had involved of the development of the agitation were to make conscious enough to perceive the demand of



separate state. They were making to understand that economic benefits could not be fulfilled until and unless to get separate state. Therefore they called for all the tribal communities and other backward tribal communities to join in the agitation. It was also known that the all the tribal had been addressed to launch for an agitation of increment in their daily wages as a mark of beginning the adibasisthan movement.<sup>x</sup>Those from the Muzra, Bhumij, Kamar, as well as Bagals groups were the most prevalent members in the Direct Action Programme from among the other tribal communities. At the beginning of 1947, Santals have been the ones who were clandestinely stirring up support for the development of the Adibasisthan. In order to maintain their current Tempo, we held a number of meetings in the Jhargram Division.<sup>xi</sup>In some areas of the subdistrict, they removed the paddy by coercion from the fields that have been owned by Bengalee people, Uriya Brahman, major zamindars like the Raja of Jamboni, as well as extremely wealthy peasants like Kali Kar in Jhargram. In several other parts of the subdivision, Santals had stopped performing any type of labour for Bengalees. In addition to these features, a large number of Santals in some parts of the subdivision were pushing for a rise in the quantity of money they were paid every day. Later on in the course of this agitation, the Santals' focus has shifted to an organize a boycott of Bengalese goods since it accused the Bengalee for the complete confiscation of their landed assets. Biram Soren and Muchiram Soren, and both are from ChhotoBansaro, KalipadaBasui of Bamaris, and others were trying to intensify the agitation for Adibasisthan while Chaka Ram Santal, MukundsTudo, and BitambarMurmu have been the primary supporters of a boycott campaign. At addition, they held a demonstration in the hamlet of Ramchandrapur, which is situated near to the Gopiballavpur Police Station. "Jaipalsinghki Jai" and "Adibasiski Jai" put on posters depicting how the Hindus gradually expelled the Santals off their lands and how they brought barren fields under agriculture. These groups held many secret meetings inside the different sections of this sub-division.<sup>11</sup>

### **Intensification of Identity Agitation And Launching Direct Action**

The lock stock and barrel was stored. There was a need for an ignition to shape this movement in an organized manner with large scale. Police firing at Garhbeta gave the Santals opportunity to organize their movement. An significant turning point was reached when the police fired at Garhbeta, where an angry mob of 500-600 santals was hired through one SasadharShogh of Bathanfore to remove rice off BibhutiMahapatra's land at BathenTrore on November 18th, 1947.<sup>xii</sup>In fact, several Santals were frightened to death and fled back to their homes when the police fired on Garhbeta. However, the majority of the Santans became more discontented. With crossbow in hand, they were claiming their land, which they've been expelled from, was theirs. They believed that only the purchase of 'Adibasisthan' would fulfill their needs.



Consequently, the Santals were making more preparations to carry out Adibasisthan's demand under their own. The Santals of Dhalbhum as well as Mayurbhang, as well as Muslim as well as Christian Santals, all came to their aid. Leaders of the Santals received training from 'Uparwala' on how to organise agitation and distribute it throughout the region.<sup>xiii</sup>The Santals had a great number of meetings for themselves to discuss the formation of Adibasisthan in order to satisfy the needs of their own community. They made the decision to start the 'Direct Action' campaign this time. The Santals made an effort to start the direct action in a manner comparable to something which was taken by Muslim League. After the conclusion of the Bidhuchandan festival, they reached the conclusion that the Radical Action would begin on November 15, 1947, at 23:00 hours, in the hamlet of Bend, which has been located on the Bombay Road and bordered the area of the Jamboni Police station. In point of fact, the Santal used the Bidhuchandan procedure in order to select their leaders from among the younger generation. It was a very significant day for all the young Santal community leaders who were elected to take on future leadership positions in the Santal community. They planned an event known as Bidhuchandan in order to show their gratitude to the new leaders..<sup>xiv</sup>

The Direct Action consisted of sending this same women folk to harvest the paddy, regardless of lawful or actual possession, and if anyone objected to it, the males in groups of 100 and 1000 will indeed attack the opposer with crossbows and extended it to looting and setting houses on fire. In addition, the Radical Action consisted of sending the women folk to harvest the paddy. Every Santal was issued the instruction to arm themselves with real weapons in preparation for the "Direct Action." It was said by some Santals that they were uneducated and consumed a great deal of alcohol, and that trouble could break out at any level of intoxication they were in..<sup>xv</sup>It was also mentioned that the Santals will indeed celebrate the "Gajan" festival beginning just on evening of November 15th, 1947. In connection with this event, roughly 10,000 to 12,000 people, male and female, would gather in the village of Parsule, which would be located in the Chakulia Police Station neighbourhood of Bihar and boundaries the Midnapore district. A significant number of Santals would show up to the event that was being held in Parasule, that served as the kickoff site for the Direct Action..<sup>xvi</sup>

The Hindus, the Bengalees, and especially people Zanindar were thrown into a state of panic as a consequence of the surge of direct action that was started by the Santal people. The Zamindar of Chilikigarh stated that his trusted Santals commanders were betraying the cause but refused to share any information about it. Caused by the gravitational from the Nayagram region refused to engage with Hindus. They had dedicated themselves to a plan for the benefit of society and had given up Haria. The Santals had cut the paddy in the various villages that were located in this region. Santals from the regions around the Jamboni, Gopiballavpur, Binpur, and Jhargram government buildings joined in on this movement as well..<sup>xvii</sup>

### **Failure of The Agitation:-**



But the agitation did not last long due to some external and internal weakness of the agitation. It was stated on the basis of the report of the Intelligence Branch, that most of the Santal in the Sub-division of Jhargram would not take any initiatives for succeeding the programme of direct action.<sup>xviii</sup> Therefore, it was stated that the failing of the Santal leadership was one of the main reasons for the loss of this movement since they were unable to contact all parts of the tribal persons for the benefit of completing this task. This information is mentioned in the report that was compiled by the B.P.A. on September 13th, 1947. It was said that the agitation by the Santal in Jahistan (Adibasi) has not made headway due to the hesitation of several Santanls to join the cause. At the same time, it is important to recognise that fact that the police were quite active in its attempts to disrupt the Direct Action programme that was being carried out by the Santals. The government had adopted fair policies in an effort to quell the popular uprising. The locations of Chichira, Belpahari, and Parihati all had one armed officers picket stationed there. There was a meeting on this action that took place in Chaibasa (Bihar). It was held jointly by the policemen of Bengal and the police of Bihar. During this conference, several steps were made to calm the movement. In fact, armed police were sent to Chakulia as a preventative step in an effort to calm the irate Santal crowd. In the meantime, both the Congress as well as the Communists were quite concerned about the current situation. B.P.A. noted that the Congress workers were given propaganda that backed, to some degree, the fundamental principles of the movement, which were the abolition of the Zamindari system and the return of the lands that were farmed by the Santals in the past.<sup>xix</sup> In an effort to bring calm to the crisis and put an end to the unrest, the Communists arranged a series of meetings with the Santals' tribal chiefs. In light of all of these kind efforts, the Caused by the gravitational decided to ditch their quest for the territory called "Adibasisthan."<sup>xx</sup>

### **Conclusion**

They prime objectives for the santal identity movement was to set up a separate state to eradicate their woes and sorrows from their daily life and the state would provide them enough space for their livelihood without any exploitation and extortion. Their designed covered the area from chhotonagpur extending up to kharagpur in Midnapore district. They considered that they would make their own state by their own way and it would be governed the people of their own community. Another major fact was that they wanted to liberate their land from the Hindu especially the Bengalee people who (considered as Diku) dominated this area by dint of their merit. The Bengalees were not only the Zamindars or the administrative classes but they imposed their language and culture upon them in the land of the Santal. Therefore the Santal were forced to lose their own tradition and culture. The agitation of adibasisthan may be considered as a challenge to restore and save adibasi tradition and culture subduing Brahmanic culture in their own province.



---

## References:

- <sup>i</sup>West Bengal State Archives (W.B.S.A.) I.B. (File 635B/46)
- <sup>ii</sup>Report of District Investigation Officer on 13.11.1947.
- <sup>iii</sup> Circle Inspector, Jhargram submitted a report on 18.11.1947 (File 635B/46)
- <sup>iv</sup> Circle Inspector, Jhargram submitted a report on 18.11.1947 (File 635B/46)
- <sup>v</sup> D.I.O. Midnapore reported on 11.11.1947 (File 635B/46)
- <sup>vi</sup> D.I.O. Midnapore reported on 11.11.1947 (File 635B/46)
- <sup>vii</sup> West Bengal State Archives (W.B.S.A.) I.B. (File 700/39)
- <sup>viii</sup>D.I.O. Midnapore reported on 11.11.1947 (File 635B/46)
- <sup>ix</sup> D.I.O. Midnapore reported on 11.11.1947 (File 635B/46)
- <sup>x</sup>Circle Inspector, Jhargram submitted a report on 18.11.1947 (File 635B/46)
- <sup>xi</sup>S.P. of Midnapore Report on 29.11.47.
- <sup>xii</sup>As stated by D.I.B. Midnapore report on 19.11.1947
- <sup>xiii</sup>S.P. of Midnapore reported on 13.11.1947
- <sup>xiv</sup>D.I.O. Midnapore reported on 11.11.1947 (File 635B/46)
- <sup>xv</sup> As stated by D.I.B. Midnapore report on 19.11.1947
- <sup>xvi</sup>As stated by D.I.B. Midnapore report on 19.11.1947
- <sup>xvii</sup> West Bengal State Archives (W.B.S.A.) I.B. (File 700/39)
- <sup>xviii</sup> West Bengal State Archives (W.B.S.A.) I.B. (File 700/39)
- <sup>xix</sup> West Bengal State Archives (W.B.S.A.) I.B. (File 700/39)
- <sup>xx</sup> West Bengal State Archives (W.B.S.A.) I.B. (File 700/39)