

# Philosophy of Life of Indigenous People: In Perspective of Santali Literature

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**Abstract**— Philosophy of life plays a crucial role in shaping human understanding of existence, purpose, and ethical responsibility. Among indigenous communities, such philosophy is not confined to written texts but is deeply embedded in oral traditions, rituals, and songs. This paper explores the philosophy of life of the Santal community as reflected in Santali oral literature, mythology, and socio-religious practices. Special emphasis is given to Santali songs, which express cosmological ideas, emotional experiences, and ethical values. The study also examines Santal creation myths, their relationship with nature, and their social ethics. Using qualitative methods such as field surveys, interviews, and textual analysis, this paper argues that Santali philosophy represents a holistic worldview grounded in nature, collective life, and moral consciousness.

**Index Terms**— Santali Literature, Indigenous Epistemology, Santal Philosophy of Life, Oral Tradition, Eco-criticism, Santal Mythology, Nature–Culture Relationship, Tribal Cosmology, Santali Rituals, Santali festivals, Tribal ethics,

## I. INTRODUCTION (PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE)

Philosophy helps us to understand the true meaning and purpose of life. The philosophy of life is a deep reflection on existence and the role of human beings in the world. It includes our understanding of happiness, dignity, independence, and social responsibility. The philosophy of life determines the direction and movement of human life and shapes our actions in society.

Among indigenous communities like the Santals, philosophy is not written in formal texts but is preserved through oral traditions, especially songs, prayers, and myths. These oral expressions contain deep philosophical meanings about creation, life, suffering, and human existence.

One such Santali prayer expresses a profound understanding of creation:

“Ot janam len,

Dhubighas janam len,

Manmi janam len,

Dah haun janam len,

Kasa pital janam len,

Achur bihur janam len,

Manmi janam len,

Raah jaung janam len.”

This song suggests that the world, nature, human beings, material objects, and even sorrow were created together. It reflects a balanced philosophy of life where joy and suffering coexist. This indicates that Santali philosophy does not separate happiness from sorrow but accepts both as essential parts of life (Soren, 2022).

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on three major theoretical perspectives: Indigenous Epistemology, Eco-criticism, and Moral Philosophy.

Indigenous epistemology emphasizes that knowledge is generated through lived experience, oral traditions, and collective practices. In the Santali context, myths, songs, and rituals function as sources of knowledge that explain the origin of life, human duties, and social structures (Patnaik, 2016). These oral traditions act as philosophical texts.

Eco-criticism focuses on the relationship between literature and nature. Santali philosophy is deeply ecological. Their myths and rituals reflect harmony between humans, animals, and the natural environment. Nature is not seen as separate but as an integral part of life (Hembram, 2022).

Moral philosophy, especially virtue ethics, is reflected in Santali social life. Their society emphasizes moral character, community responsibility, and ethical conduct. Values such as respect for elders, social unity, and purity are central to their way of life (Soren, 2022).

Thus, Santali philosophy can be understood as a combination of ecological consciousness, ethical living, and experiential knowledge.

### III. SANTALI COMMUNITY: ORIGIN AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Santal community is one of the oldest indigenous groups in South Asia. They are mainly found in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and Tripura, as well as in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan.

They identify themselves as Kherwal or Hor, meaning “human.” Their language belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language family. Some scholars associate their origin with ancient civilizations like the Indus Valley Civilization, though this remains debated (Archer, 2016).

Despite the influence of modern religions, the Santals have preserved their cultural identity, language, and traditions through generations.

### IV. SANTALI LITERATURE AND ORAL TRADITION

Santali literature is primarily oral in nature. It includes myths, folktales, songs, rituals, and prayers. These oral traditions serve as repositories of philosophical ideas and cultural values.

Songs play a significant role in expressing the philosophy of life. They reflect emotions such as joy, sorrow, fear, and hope. At the same time, they convey knowledge about creation, nature, and social responsibilities (Patnaik, 2016).

### V. CREATION MYTH OF THE SANTALS

Santali cosmology presents a unique and detailed account of creation. According to their mythology, in the beginning, there was only water. The creator formed aquatic creatures and later created land with the help of the turtle and earthworm (Guru & Skrefsrud, 2015).

The first human beings, Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Budhi, were born from eggs laid by divine birds, Hans and Hansli. When these birds could not find a place to stay, they cried in distress. Their cry is expressed in the following Santali song:

“Hi hi jala puri re

Hi hi nukin manwa

Hi hi busar akana kin

Hi hi akar in dahkin

Hi hi do se lei abin

Hi hi marang thakur jiu

Hi hi busar akana kin

Hi hi nukin manwa

Hi hi akare dah kin.”

This song reflects existential suffering and the dependence of living beings on divine power. It shows that struggle and uncertainty are part of the beginning of life (Soren, 2022).

Later, when light appeared in the world through the grace of Sing Bonga, another song emerged:

“Ot digir digir hale serma barang barang,

Ho okoi medoy rakap en.

Ot digir digir hale serma barang barang,

Ho okoi medoy ophelen,

Ot digir digir hale serma barang barang,

Ho Sing ja bongay rakap en

Ho Marang deoyay ophelen,

Ot digir digir hale serma barang barang.”

This song celebrates the transition from darkness to light and symbolizes order, hope, and harmony (Hembram, 2024).

## **VI. RITUALS, FESTIVALS, AND SONGS**

Santali rituals and festivals are deeply connected with their philosophy of life. Festivals such as Baha, Sohrai, and Sakrat reflect their agricultural life and relationship with nature.

These rituals are accompanied by songs and dances that express both happiness and sorrow. Through these performances, the Santals communicate their collective emotions and philosophical beliefs (Soren, 2022).

## **VII. RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE**

Nature plays a central role in Santali life and philosophy. Trees, rivers, animals, and land are considered sacred. Worship is often performed in natural spaces such as sacred groves.

Their ecological worldview emphasizes harmony between humans and nature. Nature is not treated as an object but as a living entity that must be respected and protected (Hembram, 2022).

## **VIII. SOCIAL ETHICS OF THE SANTALS**

Santali society is based on strong ethical values such as community cooperation, respect for elders, and moral discipline. The clan system regulates social behavior and prevents internal conflict (Reska, 2010).

Rituals such as Bapla (marriage) and Bhandan (death rites) reinforce social unity and ethical responsibility.

Through the rituals like Hoyo ruar and Chhatyar the Santal people introduce their new born babies to their God and Goddess and the Society in general as the Santals believe. They do everything in the presence of Marang Buru , Jaher Ayo and More ko Turui ko.

Their philosophy emphasizes collective well-being over individual interests.

## **IX. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on qualitative methods, including:

1. Field surveys
2. Interviews
3. Analysis of oral literature
4. Use of secondary sources

These methods help maintain authenticity and preserve indigenous knowledge.

## **X. DISCUSSION**

The philosophy of life of the Santals reflects a holistic worldview that integrates nature, society, and spirituality. Their songs and myths show acceptance of both joy and sorrow, emphasizing balance in life.

Their ecological and ethical values offer an alternative perspective to modern individualistic and materialistic philosophies.

## **XI. CONCLUSION**

The philosophy of life of the Santal community is deeply rooted in oral traditions, especially songs. These songs carry profound meanings about creation, existence, and morality.

Santali philosophy teaches harmony with nature, respect for life, and collective responsibility. In the modern world, this philosophy is highly relevant for sustainable living and ethical reflection.

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