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**Topic: Karam Binti: The Oral tradition of Santals.**

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For Santals, there is no aspect of society untouched by religious beliefs. Social power accompanies religious power. The Santals believes that the Thakur Jiv (Creator) created the Santals and that they are surrounded by *Bongas* (invisible supernatural power) who protects and guide them from every evil. The *Ato More* are the people within the Santals who are the guardians of the village in all respect and also acts in as village representative to communicate with *Bongas*. Normally each Santal village has the following officials in its hierarchical order: *Manjhi* (the village headman), *Paranik* (the deputy headman), *Jog Manjhi* (the overseer of village morals) and *Godet* (the village messenger). And there are two religious or sacral officials; the *Naike* (the village priest) and *Kudam Naike* (the assistant village priest).

*Karam Binti* is an oral recitation of the Santal creation myth recited during various religious and social occasions. It is also a legacy of oral tradition that affirms and defines the religious belief of Santals or their faith on the Supreme Being. Santals, the subject of this study are the largest indigenous groups in India. With a population of over 7 million, they are concentrated in the Indian states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Assam. They are also sporadically located in the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan in Asia. Biologically they belong to Proto-Australoid group.

The present work is an attempt to closely analyze their oral traditions and its value in understanding the religious belief of indigenous people in general and Santals in particular. Santals have no written documents or scripture, so in the absence of text are they to be

considered people without history? No. This work argues against such a reductionism. Though they have no written documents they are quite rich in oral traditions, and a variety of genres such as *Kahni*, (stories) *kudum* (riddles), *siring* (songs), *bhentakatha* (euphemism), *menkatha*, (idiom), *gidrabauli* (lullaby), *Binti* (Prayers) etc can be seen. There is therefore a need to study oral tradition of the societies without written text.

Oral tradition can be understood better as the phase of societal evolution. It is intangible in nature and is a very abstract form of knowledge passed from generation to generation through word of mouth often through mother to daughter, father to son and so on and so forth. Perhaps in the absence of written script oral text was the only medium to preserve the knowledge and history of any culture. The memory though invisible is an important part of human anatomy. In lack of visible script people preserved the knowledge in their memory which gradually filtrated to the subsequent generation through oral tradition.

Every human race in all times of history, whether big or small, can be seen in possession of its own creation myth or the origin myth. It is a near universal phenomena found across cultures and races to ponder over the beginning of their world and the humankind. It is understood that the mankind could not have witnessed the creation because the scripture as well as science suggest that the evolution of human being took place much later than the evolution of world. The inquisitive brain of the human being legitimizes the origin of humankind through creative myths across culture and race. Santals are no different – and they too have their own creation myth, broadly known as *Karam Binti*, often recited in various cultural, religious and social settings and occasions. In the absence of the written text *Karam Binti* was preserved in oral form as a tradition. It has been handed down from generation to generation verbally. It was never codified and Santals are often labelled as people without history. But in reality they do have a myth and

history which is preserved in the form of the oral tradition i.e KaramBinti. The thesis suggests that the Karam Binti can also be seen as the voice of the subaltern, as the voice from below.