

## Reconstructing identities among Santhal: An anthropological perspective

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### **Abstract**

*This study of evolving identities is based on instrumental approach in a way that present identities are the product of historical forces and situations as the culture and society of Santhal from Haldibari Rural Municipality have always been in the form of evolution and acceptance of changing realities. It explains the changes seen in the origin, shifting nature, and their agentive space with resistance which has helped to create new space in their own life. This research is in quest of the ways of evolution of Santhal identities and their transforming relations due to various causes. It has uncovered Santhal of their 'being' and their subjective experiences as Santhal in the more significant eastern part of Tarai Nepal, particularly in Haldibari Rural Municipality.*

**Keywords:** Evolution, ethnography, Santhal and Non- Santhal

**The article introduces the highly marginalized ethnic group of Jhapa and Morang**

**The research aims to explore how the Santhal identity evolved, forming and transforming**

### **Introduction**

The present research highlights an anthropological study of an ethnic (Santhal) group of eastern Tarai region. Despite the extreme and heavy influences from all surrounding scenarios in their social and cultural parameters, the Santhal community and its intellectual figures have been very conscious of analyzing and preserving their frame of identity and social heritage in the newly declared Republican country Nepal. The present study tries to explore the evolution identities of Santhal in Haldibari of Jhapa.

A larger portion of the Santhal population is found in the Jhapa and Morang districts (NSO, 2023). The government of Nepal has enlisted Santhal as an ethnic group and NEFIN categorized it as a marginalized ethnic group. Literature claims that they are the old habitants of Eastern Tarai of Nepal. Dahal (2050 B.S.) wrote that they came to Jhapa and Morang districts nearly 150 years ago from the Santhal Pargana Region of India. Santhal call them 'Hor,' meaning 'man.' They call 'Pahadiya' people who migrated from the hills 'Munda' in general and the upper-class Brahmins 'Diku' in particular. In India, the term 'Diku' represents those people who are cruel to Santhal (Gautam, 2012).

The identity of humans has been majorly evolved due to three factors which I prefer to call the 3Cs i.e. Curiosity, Collectivity, and Compassion; that are interrelated to one another. With the dominance of intelligence comes curiosity to meet our insatiable desires and know or learn about new ways of adjusting ourselves to stay collectivity. That same insatiability takes us to a state where

new ideas and innovations are derived from multiple personalities living in the collectivity. Many such derivations lead us to a whole new level, to some extent, in the evolution process. Compassion remains a driving factor, depending upon an individual, to become empathetic as well as curious while adjusting oneself into the collectivity.

Evolving identities have been less prioritized in our everyday discussion. But, this particular topic needs to be kept in consideration for understanding our core norms and values as human beings. I personally think that seriousness should be shown to understand it on a deeper level, just to stop existing rather than to start living as a superior being in this world. The evolution process can be really useful to review ourselves and our activities that have caused pros and cons to everything, present in the biosphere.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This article highlights the nature of evolving identities and their relation to Santhal community. Many scholars and researchers have studied their origin, history, and cultural identities descriptively. They have depicted the basic descriptive nature of history, origin, migration, and cultural identities only. However, my research has focused on how the Santhal identities have been evolving and forming new forms that make them exist in the new transformative world with lots of outcomes.

### **Literature Review**

The evolving identities and relations of Santhal have been depicted to be triggered by the constitutive interplay among multiple factors or variables. Identities can be constructed through the interac-

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tion of dialects of historically evolving political, socio-cultural, economic, and ideological forces and processes. Here, the Santhal identities have been the outcome of dialectical dialogue between larger political structures of Nepali society and the capacity to act or respond to Santhal with different forms like resistance and movement which forces them to advance their changing forms of identities. This research paper has attempted to synthesize the previous works regarding the forms of evolution of ethnic identities and their relations.

### History of Santhal in Nepal

According to legend, Dalton writes,

*“A wild goose coming from the great ocean lighted at Ahiripipiri and laid their two eggs. From these two eggs, a male and a female were produced who were the parents of the Santhal race. From Ahiripipiri, their progenitors migrated to Hara Duttie, and there they greatly increased and multiplied. Thus, they were there called Kherwars or Kharwars. Then they moved to Khairagarhi and eventually settled in Chair Champ in the Hazaribagh district where they remained for several generations (Dalton, 1872, p, 209-210)”.*

It depicts only the historical originality of Santhal but it does not deal with the issue of how historical originality helps to form a new type of identity in the multicultural and multiethnic society.

Santhal is seen to have migrated to Nepal from Indian states like West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa. According to information achieved from the field research, their migration to Nepal from India and Bangladesh is due to their low economic condition and they settled in the dense forest area of Jhapa and Morang districts. According to informants, more than 30% of them migrated to Nepal from Maldaha Village of West Bengal province of India about 60 years ago. Some of the informants informed me that seven percent of Santhal arrived in Nepal to settle permanently from Bangladesh.

According to Mr. Risely (1908, P-31) in Grierson's book “Munda and Dravidian Languages” a large and important Santhal colony was once settled in Paraganas Chai Champa in Hazarib-

agh. From Hazaribagh, the Santhal are settled to have wandered into Manbhunu and further into SonthaleParaganas. There is no authentic proof of where Santhal came and settled in Nepal's Tarai. Poffenberger argues that the Santhals are the aboriginal of Nepal. The Tarai region is for the most part inhabited by two groups. Firstly, there are aboriginal inhabitants of the malarial forest, such as Tharu, Danuwar, and Satar (Poffenberger, 1980, p-9).

After reading their origin, Bista writes “The Name of Satar” is derived from their earlier ancestral place ‘Sount’ which lies Midampur (Bista, 2024 B.S., p-31). Similarly, Ghimire writes that the Satarlive in Morang and Jhapa districts in the easternmost part of Nepal's Tarai. They have migrated to Nepal from Santhal Parganas and Chotanagpur Plateau of Bihar in India. Satar and Santhal are known as common origin. As far as their migration to Nepal is concerned, it is believed that they entered Nepal from Dumka in the process of escaping from exploitation, and suppression of local gentry of that very place and these Satar actively took part in the liberal revolution of India but unfortunately due to the failure of the revolution they were forced to migrate to Nepal for the sake of their lives (Sharma, 2054, p-4).

The basic argument of this research is that the causes are forming new forms of identities of Santhal, their relations with other communities, and the basic condition them at this present time which might have created a kind of identity discord among them. For instance, I have found the dialectical power relations in the book, “Land and Social Change in East Nepal” by L. Caplan (1970) which is based on a study of Hindu tribal relations. It studies an ethnic group and the processes by which it maintains a sense of identity, and in addition, considers, what happens to the group in the face of the long-continued and exploitative domination.

### Constructive Approach to Identity

The central argument of the constructive approach is how identities have been constructed over time one after the other in primordial and constructionist ways, respectively. The concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity has been based on two prominent concepts “primordialism” and “instrumentalism”. It is relevant in terms of my research how identities are evolving and which forces are playing key roles in transforming the relations. Primordialism is a form of essentialism in the sense that it involves an ongoing, relatively

*This review explains some mythologies about Satar, who is Santhal, now*

unchanging, or static group identity. In the primordialist's view, the participant perceives ethnic ties collectively, as an externally given, even coercive, social bond (Geertz, 1967). At the same time, the instrumentalist approach treats ethnicity primarily as an ad-hoc element of a political strategy, used as a resource for interest groups to achieve secondary goals such as, for example, an increase in wealth, power, or status (Cohen, 1969; 1974). Another debate is on Constructionism and Essentialism. Constructivists view national and ethnic identities as the product of historical forces, often recent, even when the identities are presented as old (Gellner, 1983; 1997). Essentialists view such identities as ontological categories defining social actors, and not the result of social action (Smith, 1986).

### **Agency, Resistance and Hegemony**

The agency is the resistance capacity of human beings, but it is not only resistance. Moreover, people can create their own space in their social structure and bring remarkable changes to their respective society. It focuses that the concept of resistance is required for the formation of new space which is connected to the Santhal ethnic group as well. The basis of this situation is none other than the dialectical inter tribal-relations. When the Santhali people became collectively conscious about their 'subordinate/subaltern being,' their exclusion and marginalization from national social life then they began to challenge the state's hegemony. This is the situation of shifting power relationship between the state and the Santhali people can be illustrated through the Gramscian (1999) concept of hegemony. We are familiar that for Gramsci (1999), hegemony is a form of power relations that sustains inequality and domination of subordinate groups by continuously producing and reproducing them. He treats hegemony as the activities of the state in which ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance on coercive grounds, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules through civil society. It implies that state encompasses both force and consent.

Transformation of identities is the process of making one which is not always stable according to the moving nature of identities. Ethnic boundaries are fluid and flexible but not indefinitely. So, it is always fluctuating. Fisher (2001) has dealt with the opinion that fluid boundaries are a notable contribution to the anthropological study of identity formation. As such theory can express simplistic

notions about the nature of social change as well as a whole set of dichotomies that have prevailed in South Asian studies for too long a time. According to Fisher (2001)

*"Individuals have access to numerous dimensions of identity for example those based on kinship, class, marriage, locality or religion some of which become more important at certain times. Historically in Nepal as is true elsewhere, it has been moments of political or economic crisis that have often been the catalyst that brings forth aspects of group and individual identity. Locked at over time, the interactions within and between groups and the conflicts between national identity and other identities reveal a changing set of relationships"* (p. 15).

Santhals are also adapting various things in relation to the changing environment though they are either excluded or included by the manipulating policies over migration media and language, in terms of socio-cultural and economic factors like access to resources and opportunities, education, and feast and festivals whatever the root ways for the evolution, constructive approach or instrumental concept expresses that the identity is relational and thus dynamic, constantly changing, emerging over time through interactions with other groups and with the state.

Ethnicity emerges in a political field that shapes in unequal terms, different cultural communities engaged in a competition for resources (Comaroff, 1987, P.307). It expands or narrows as circumstances makes it necessary or possible. Wimmer, (2008) made a comparative study of the sociology of ethnic boundaries and introduced the multilevel process theory to understand how ethnic group characteristics are generated and transmitted over time. He described how an ethnic group has different ethnic identities under certain circumstances and why characteristics varied so dramatically across cases, displaying different degrees of social closure, political salience, cultural distinctiveness, and historical stability. Moreover, ethnicity is not a shared boundary with culture; rather it is self-reflective and self-conscious which becomes salient under

specific historical circumstances. A particular ethnic identity may subsume many cultural identities, for example, Tharu of Nepal. An ethnic group is self-consciously aware of culture; it has become a symbol of its separate identity. Ethnic identity does not require any degree of cultural distinctiveness but it does require that the members of a given ethnic group believe in their cultural distinctiveness (Guneratne, 2002, P- 13).

According to Cohen (1978), the identification of ethnic groups in the usage of social scientists has depicted inaccurate labels more than indigenous realities; he has shown the fact the identification of an ethnic group is mentioned by outsiders, e.g. anthropologists, may not coincide with the self-identification of the members of that group. He has described that in the first decades of usage, the term ethnicity had often been used instead of older terms such as “cultural” or “tribal” when referring to smaller groups with shared cultural systems and shared heritage, but “ethnicity” had the added value of being able to describe the commonalities between systems of group identity in both tribal and modern societies. Cohen (1978) also has suggested that claims concerning “ethnic” identity are often colonialists’ practices and effects of the relations between colonized peoples and nation-states, he has summarized that ethnicity is “a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness” (Cohen; 1978).

### **Methodology and Materials**

This study has made it accessible to be familiar with the Santhal as I was just like a native of that community as well. I visited in Haldibari several times and found many of the people were conscious of their identities. I spent three months in a field area located in the Jhapa district. This study had collected both the primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected from the ethnographic fieldwork and the secondary data was obtained from various sources, such as published literature, books, daily newspapers, libraries, the internet, and previous dissertations of anthropology and reports of different national and international organizations. In the same way, this study had predominantly used qualitative data and also a limited amount of quantitative data to supplement and complement the qualitative data according to the necessities.

### **Ethnographic Approach of the Study**

Ethnography is understood as a detailed account of the people or culture from the inside in an

anthropological sense. A broad conceptualization of ethnography goes beyond it without undermining it. Brewer (2000) has defined ethnography in two ways – as a qualitative research as a whole, a ‘big’ ethnography, and as a fieldwork, a ‘little’ ethnography. The former implies that ethnography is a theoretical and methodological perspective on research and the latter refers to ethnography simply as a field method of data collection. To some extent, they are interlinked with each other. In such context, my study has undertaken ‘little’ ethnography, ethnography as fieldwork, a particular way of doing qualitative research. ‘Little’ ethnography uses several methods that access social meanings, observe activities, and involve close association with, or participation in, a setting or ‘field’ (Brewer, 2000, p. 18). As the attempt of my research has been to understand the shifting nature of Santhal identities as understood by them, I had integrated the multiple methods of data collection which are largely flexible, open-ended, unstructured, and semi-structured to reach the fact of the research.

For every study, the data collection tools are very important to get reliable information. Methods are technical rules at lay down the procedures for how reliable and objective knowledge can be obtained (Brewer, 2000, p. 2). Fieldwork-based ethnography has been the basic method of data generation in my study. I employed integrative methods to collect the data. For the triangulation of data, I combined various techniques such as participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, and key informant interview.

### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation is one of the ethnographic methods to document the everyday life of any particular group.”To understand a strange society, anthropologists have traditionally immersed themselves in it, learning, as possible as they can, to think, see, feel, and sometimes act as a member of its culture and at the same time as a trained anthropologist from another culture, this is the heart of the participant observation method-involvement and detachment” (Powder Maker, 1966, P-9. It is such a method by which I have become able to capture the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of Santhal people as manifested in their everyday life. Through participant observation, I attempted to delve into the everyday behavior and activities of the Santhali people, especially in terms of their socio-political

*The method adopted in the research is a review of the literature and the author’s observation*

*Conceptualization of big ethnography versus little ethnography*

domains, activism/resistance, identity politics, and other socio cultural practices that keep them distinct from others for evolving identities and their relations.

### Discussion

This research has primarily depicted the significance of the history of Santhal and their development process from one area to another area along with the concept of the metamorphosis of their relations as we have found lots of facts about their root of origin and how did they shift their life style from nomadic to semi-nomadic and normal lifestyle. They have various processes to shift from one lifestyle to another life style. As a result, through all these things, it has become the process of forming and evolving identities.

### Changes and Forming Identities

With the evolution in the lifestyle of human beings, we have traveled a long way from a savage to a barbarian and then finally, into a civilized social being. Throughout the journey, we have had many faces of our identity that determined of who we were. But, every time we gain recognition, we slowly drift from it, into the path of dynamism that leads us to obtain a new name for ourselves. We have been calling ourselves civilized humans but we all know that we still need to grow and do a lot more things to prove to get out of the fake imagery of so-called civilization.

Identity is something that makes us diverse from other beings. It has helped us to grow and to adapt to ubiquitous lives. It has taken us from no where to some where and maybe, is yet to take us everywhere. It teaches us to live in collectivity. Transformation is what shows us the path to choose our desires and dreams. It is what makes one feel about one's importance and definition of happiness and other multiple emotions that exist in our world. It guides us to keep our lives balanced. The same evolution of identity then, makes us hungry for a change or maybe an upgrade of one.

Santhal is one of the largest homogenous Scheduled Tribes of India. They live mainly in Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, and Orissa. The majority of Santhal are found in the Chotanagpur Plateau. Rajmahal Hill, Damodar River, and Forest of Dolma since time immemorial. Fahien, a Chinese pilgrim to India (399 -414 AD) was the first to describe the Santhals. He described the Santhal's residence pattern, religion, and lifestyle on the foothills of Rajmahal Hill (www. JharkHandi.

com.htm). At the very outset, their primary ways of subsistence were hunting and food gathering. The agrarian way of living was brought by Aryans who came to their homeland at about 1500 B.C. (www.wordlingo.com).

There is no authentic shred of evidence of when and where Santhal came from to settle in the Eastern part of Tarai Nepal. According to the Santhal informants, I found that their original place was India. Santhal entered Panjab and Sindhu Province crossing Khaibar and BelanGhati. In ancient times, they used to lead their lives in the Jungle in a primitive manner. Santhal or Satar belongs to Kol, Milla and Munda Varna. At that time, they would not stay in a single place for two or three months. According to their statement, Hihidi (Hihiri) Pipiri was the place where they settled somewhat permanent sort of way, they claimed that HihidiPipiri was once the part of Pancha. The others opined that the HihidiPipiri was a part of Bihar. Thus, it is found that Hihidi Pipiri is strongly associated with the life origination and history of Santhal.

Most of the people in the study area were unaware about their origin and history except little bit of information from old age people. They had attempted to tell with the help of the published books basically from India. Time and again, they had taken support the books to tell about their history and origin. Some literate Santhal like BadaramHemram had told me in such a way about their origin:

*"We are the nature worshiper. Our origin also belonged to nature. That is why; we pray nature as equal to the god"(2075,Ashoj).*

In the same way their origination, according to the Late Kupit Narayan Kisku quoted by Bhupesh Mardi

*"We have always been enjoying Mother Nature and there has been a trend of accepting nature as our source of existence. This is also our practice that has come into existence since the ancient period. This is our culture, too" (2075, Mangsir).*

From the above statements, I had come to the conclusion that they are nature lover and they want to worship nature from which they can get the meaning of life and salvation. To some extent, we can connect their view with the romantic poets of English literature where they had defined nature as the best teacher. It means everything is found

*There are divided opinions about the Santhal, so the author suggests further investigation*

in nature. Similarly, Dilli Tudu from Haldibari -2 had also told something new about their origination. He said in such a way:

*"We are consanguineal to Eklavya. It is believed that Dronacharya learned the skills of archery from our ancestors (Here Eklavya). Earlier, Santhal used to shoot arrows. Dronacharya, who was Eklavya's insurgent, wanted him to sacrifice his thumb which he used while holding arrows. Eklavya had given up his thumb. They say that Eklavya became a little bit less in archery after giving to Dronacharya but Dronacharya got speciality in archery. Dronacharya heated on Eklavya. Being the Brahmin (Dronacharya) spoiled the technique of Eklavya (Santhal). Nowadays, they don't believe the Brahmin because of that event as it was the loss of special technique in shooting Eklavya. Then, Santhals also followed his new way of shooting and referred to calling themselves as Eklavya's descendants" (2076, Ashoj).*

This above statement has proved that Badaram Hemram (Haldibari 4), Budarai Kisku (Birtamod 7), Jayaram Murmu (Haldibari 2) and Sundar Besra (Teacher of Taganduba) had told the same story. Now a days, they are also excellent in their archery genre. I have also learnt this properly from them.

There is the simplest historical history of Santhal about migration, history, and origination of Santhal in different places and their entry into Nepal. Moreover, Santhal is one of the ethnic groups belonging to the Kherwal/Kharwal of India. They had a nomadic life and they used to spend life from one place to another for their settlement and food. They believed that the first human creations in the world were their parents, the "Haram" means "Old Man" related to the name of their first father, and "Ayo" means "Mother". Due to the speculative historical settlements and events their original place of Santhal is not fixed. The large numbers of Santhal have been inhabited in the Chotanagpur Plateau

of India particularly in the districts of Hazaribagh, Singhbhum, and Palamum and nearby areas like Birbhum and Midnapur during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Chotanagpur area is considered their original land. On the other hand, regarding the origin of them, different scholars made efforts to identify the countries, rivers, hills and forests mentioned in the Santhals' legends but due to the lack of proper supporting evidence, it has never been possible to offer any definite and universal theory (Troisi, 1979). Owing to the migratory habits of the Santhal and the system of shifting cultivation that they practice, it is difficult to determine their origin (Hunter cited in Murmu, 2004).

Nextly, according to Mukherjee's (1943) version, all were covered by water and Thakur Jiu called upon several animals to bring up the earth; none of them succeeded until the earthworm was asked. The earthworm vowed to bring up the land imparted the tortoise would stand on the water for it. The earthworm had its tail on the back of the tortoise, ate earth with its mouth, and let it come out on the back of the tortoise. Now, the Thakur Jiu harrowed the earth, thereby producing hills and valleys. The froth mentioned adhered to the earth and Thakur Jiu sowed different seeds of grass, trees, and at last all kinds of vegetation. Then the birds made their nest in a clump of Sirom grass (*vetiveriazizanioides*) where they laid two eggs. From these, a boy and a girl hatched out. The Thakur Jiu instructed the birds on how to feed them. They should let the juice of what they ate fall on the cotton and put it in their mouth to suck. The next trouble was to find a place to raise them. They again implored Thakur Jiu about it, he told them to fly away and find a place. They flew toward the direction of the sun found a mythical place and kept them there. It was the place where the first human pair lived. The legends do not say what happened to the birds afterward (Mukherjee, 1943).

Similarly, based on totemism as the origin of their ancestors, there are the social hierarchies of their ancestors; there are social hierarchies of these twelve clans in the Santhali society. For instance, the members of the clan 'Hansdak' claim to be of the highest status as they have derived the name of their clan from their first ancestors. The second clans are Murmus the two superior clans of the Santhal. Likewise, the Kiskus have the Kingfishers bird as their totem and come third in the hierarchy. They are regarded as Kings and are given Royal status. Hemrams are fourth in order

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and betel nut is their totem. Marndis or Murdi are linked with grass or type of weed and are traders. Then, the Sorens are soldiers or warriors who are linked to the constellation of stars. The Tudus are musicians and have accepted the owl as their totem. After this, Baskes are cooked and associated with stale rice. Bedeas possesses the tenth position in series, sheep are their totem. But Bedeas do not exist nowadays and are believed to have mixed with other clans. Finally, the puris and chores belong to the eleventh and twelfth rank in the society which has pigeons and lizards as their totem respectively.

Later they migrated to Khojkaman, where they lived as beasts losing their sense of morality in sexual behavior. The Thakur Jiu destroyed mankind except for a couple of virtuous persons sending them to Harata/Hara cave. The Santhal again increased there and moved to Susan Beda, where they lived there for a long time. Then they divided into five clans (Baske, Besra, Pauria, Core, and Bedea). The Bedea clan is considered extinct. Mr. Mohan Tudu said the same thing about the origins of Santhal. At the same time, BadramHemram also spoke the same thing about the origin of the Santhal.

There is fundamental claim that Santhal are lightly influenced by the Hindus in various areas of the different places. One of the areas is the Sikhar area, the Santhals' Raja adopted the Hindu religion and converted himself a Kshatriya/ Rajput, but his people didn't agree to convert and they moved towards the present Santhal Parganas leaving the Raja behind. The Santhal felt that along with the loss of land, Hindu acculturation was a potential threat to their identity. If they lived without any symbol of identity then they would be induced to Hindus. They introduced some symbolic markers such as Tattoo marks on the woman body and Sika marks on the man's forearm to highlight their group identity. Before arriving at Santhal Pragana, they migrated to many places including the Saont area of the Midnapur district (West Bengal) which lies some 300 miles south and west of Damin-i-koh (Somers, 1977). They got their new name "Santhal" after the name of the Saont area.

One of the Majhi Hadams of Goldhap of Jhapa Thakur Soren informed me that during the last of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they started many of the works like the extension of the railway tracts near the Nepal-India border as well as tea gardening in Assam and East Bengal near the Nepal border (Naxal Bari, Siliguri). The same thing was informed by the

BadramHemram and Bhupesh Mardi while I was conducting an interview with them. It is informed that during those days a large number of Santhal were taken to Assam including West Benagl to work in the tea garden and railway construction as laborers (Chaudhari, 1993; Somers, 1977). During that time many Santhal were entered in Nepal in quest of new works as laborers towards Nepal's eastern Tarai, basically in Jhapa crossing the Mechi River.

Similarly, the hill people migrated only after the eradication of malaria in 1960 (Dahal, 1992). At that time, many Tarai indigenous people like Santhal had suffered immunity to malaria disease and eventually being the dwellers of the Tarai belt, became called Awuali (awali means low land dwellers) ethnic groups (Walter, 1975). Tarai was of considerable economic significance to the Nepalese government, being the source from which much of its revenues were derived, however, it pained from the scarcity of labor throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Guneratne, 2002). To increase agricultural production and money, Nepal Government pursued an official policy, beginning in 1968, of encouraging immigration from the adjacent districts of India (Dahal 1983, Regmi 1978: 139-148, Guneratne 2002, 28).

Ethnicity raises the experiences of their community and society. This research also satisfies the central concern of Santhal's experiences of life in a multiethnic rural country like Nepal. It draws heavily upon Santhal upbringing and their life as the quest for self-identity, quest for social adjustment, and the establishment of socio-cultural identity. The issue of transforming identity is something assumed to be fixed or stable but it is to be questioned with experiences of doubt and indeterminacy. One of the questions that identity's question is because of globalization. Thus, today's identities are not static and they are not absolute of nature and culture.

On the other hand, Santhal have their own ethnic experience and they move for their settlement and food and quest for their identity. In doing so, they have spent the nomadic life that gives them a new space and can be able to author new identity. They always used to move like the water of the rivers which their position always had changed. They moved for permanent settlement and subsistence. It is considered that they are not aboriginal people of Nepal but immigrated from the Central Eastern part of India (HMG/N, 1974).

Due to the illegal deprivation of the landlords', money lenders and unsupportive administrators they were always under pressure to leave their native place for their new settlement and food. As a result, their agentive skills and identities were not fixed and created new ones or recreated time and again which helped to evolve new space for them. According to the Badaram Hemram, they were migrated from Bangladesh due to the Muslim domination. He also said to me that they were the generations of Eklabya because they were very talented in archery as Eklabya was an expert in archery education. About the dissertation of Olee (2013), it is also considered that Santhal could have entered Nepal during the year 1855/56 to avoid involvement in the insurrection, or as the revolt was crushed by the British Indian government then several Santhal could have fled to different parts of India and adjoining countries, including Nepal. The process of migration was made to continue by the drought of 1871 and subsequent years (Chaudhary, 1993).

This study about moving identities and their relations is based on the instrumental approach in the sense that present identities are the product of historical forces and situations as the culture and society of Santhal have always been in the form of evolution and acceptance of changing realities. The Santhal history and origin say that they used to live the primitive forest life but due to the development of the agro based economic life; they were under pressure to leave forest life. In agricultural life, they attempted somehow for the cultivation of land but again it was being sabotaged the certain groups. Based on various documents and pieces of evidence associated with Santhal they were compelled to leave or disperse in different directions from their homeland due to various internal and external forces. There are no authentic records about the arrivals of them in Nepal. Based on the records in history, it is believed that they arrived in Nepal during the Santal revolt in Santal Parganas in 1855-56 and subsequent years including the great famine of 1871. We have found the identity of Santhal from Kherwal to Saountar, Sountar to Santal, Santal to Satar then Satar to Santal. This has become the process of changing the identities of ethnic groups or ethnicity. It is not static but ever-transforming

subjectively constructed as a matter of fact. This is strongly connected to the changing theory of Barth (1969).

Regarding the issue of transformation of identity we know that identity is not stable and fixed, and it is always changing or evolving. The notion of identity is ignored unless it is questioned. So, the evolution of identity may happen due to the lack of location to the specific notion. Kobena Mercer (1990) quoted by Hall says, "Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable, is displayed by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (1990, P-43). Constructivism expresses the feature of forming of identity constructed in constant flux. It is not natural. It is constructed based on social interest and movements. It is flexible and fluctuating. Whatever, identities like personal, ethnic, regional, state, national, and international identities are in the process of change within the domain of agency or agentive qualities of people which can create a new space for the formation of identities. In terms of the nature of identity, there are lines like "there is little accord about the definition of such terms of 'ethnicity' and 'national' about the nature of identity; about how identities are created, reproduced and transformed" (1940 PP; 90 -91).

Similarly, the concept of resistance is required for the formation of a new space which is connected to the Santhal ethnic group. The basis of this situation is none other than the dialectical inter-tribal relations. When the Santhal people became collectively conscious about their 'subordinate/subaltern being,' their exclusion and marginalization from national social life then they began to challenge the state's hegemony. This is the situation of shifting power relationship between the state and the Santhal people can be illustrated through the Gramscian concept of hegemony. We are familiar that for Gramsci (1999), hegemony is a form of power relations that sustains inequality and domination of subordinate groups by continuously producing and reproducing them.

### Conclusion

I have discussed the evolving nature of Santhal's identities and how they have created their space for the formation of identity. I have disclosed about a simple glimpse of the shifting nature

*Transformation is inevitable and a fundamental law of nature. How does this impact the identities and status of Santhal in Nepal?*



of identities rather than focusing fluidity of identities, identity crisis, recognition, social justice, redistribution, and many more. Many other scholars might have depicted about basic situation of identity politics and space of Santhal in the context of identity discourses in Nepal. They might have put forward the argument like identity politics, social and cultural recognition along with the concept of redistribution and recognition for meeting the roots of social justice. Moreover, they have disclosed discriminatory state policy, access to political rights, powers, representation economic opportunities, and many more. They try to explore contextual trajectories of identity-making among Santhal, not only, with the larger social and political processes of state formation, nation-building, and globalization but particular history and place. The concept of this research has depicted the position of Santhal and their rhetoric enabled me to justify the concept of the moving nature of identities and their relations. Haldibari is the mosaic of people and in the study area; Santhal has maintained social solidarity and subordination with the changing realities of progressive society. As we know transformation is the basic law of nature and it is universal also and so is the case for my study area. With time, they have been changing their lifestyle and progressing way of behavior to settle and manage in a fixed socio-political space. But, such changes have not only made their comfortable life style but also destroyed many distinct behaviors of ethnic groups like Santhal were identical.

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