

Tribhuvan University

Nature and Culture Praxis: Life-Ritual Performances of Santhal Tribe

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of M. Phil in English

By

Dipendra Gautam

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

August 15, 2012

Date:.....

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Recommendation

This dissertation entitled "Nature and Culture Praxis: Life-Ritual Performances of Santhal Tribe" completed by Mr. Dipendra Gautam under my supervision in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of M. Phil. in English has been recommended for viva.

Supervisor

.....

(Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi)

Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

The thesis entitled “Nature and Culture Praxis: Life-Ritual Performances of Santhal Tribe” by Dipendra Gautam submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of Research Committee:

---

---

Internal Examiner

---

---

---

External Examiner

---

---

---

Head

Central Department of English

---

## Acknowledgements

I am most fortunate to have had Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi, as an advisor and mentor throughout the research journey. This research would never have come into its present form without the scholarly and invaluable guidance and encouragement of Prof. Subedi. Under his tutelage, I was fully able to explore my own interests in research and practices.

I also appreciate insightful discussion with my professor *gurus* in different courses of getting insight to this research paper. My honor sets out to Dr. Shiva Rijal who showed me a way in early venture of writing research when I was much confused.

In addition, I would like express my deep appreciation to my friend Mr. Suresh Subedi, Mr. Giriraj Sharma, Mr. Rosan Gautam, Mr. Suresh Gautam and Mr. Dilip Kumar Baske for their incessant intellectual support and encouragement. Similarly, I am highly indebted to all the writers, critics, and editors of the source materials of this research.

Finally, I wish to thank all my friends of M. Phil. first semester for their mutual cooperation and wish thank to Ms. Srijana Subedi, my spouse, for her sincere cooperation to complete this thesis.

August 15, 2012

Dipendra Gautam

## **Abstract**

Performance is that area of study, which generates curiosity in any scholar even in his/her first encounter. I was amazed to see its charm and depth. This thesis is an outcome of an attempt of analyzing performance and performative qualities of Santhal tribe of eastern Nepal. They are, by nature, performative with dances, songs, ideas of colors, decoration, feasts, and celebrations. They display a great deal of performance activities in their special celebrations and also show their unparalleled love and attachment to nature. From their settlement pattern to social practices, Santhals are found in close proximity to nature. Festivals are designed to celebrate changes in nature. In fact, Santhals are attuned with nature, agricultural term and seasons. They enjoy nature and celebrate it in each and every cultural and ritual act. But, the important feature of Santhal community is that Performance is essential to carry out such transitions. Even, cultural transitions are also celebrated through rituals. Rituals, in Santhal community, are complete only by means of performance. But, the unique feature of performance in Santhal community is that it brings culture and nature together. Nature is turned into cultural space by means of performance. Performance, which is intrinsically attached to Santhal's culture, plays the role of a bridge between nature and culture. Nature and culture are brought together into the house, yard, 'gramthan' and public places by means of performances. Life rituals: birth, marriages and death in Santhal community engages both nature and culture. There is frequent encounter and interplay between nature and culture, which is made possible through the performance in Santhal community.

## Contents

Page No.

Acknowledgement	
Abstract	
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Santhal as People	1
Historico-anthropological Introduction	2
Location and Settlement Areas	4
Society and Social/Political Practices	4
Village Administration	6
Judicial System	7
Language	8
Origin Myth: Nature at Supreme	8
Life-Cycle Ceremonies	10
Birth Ceremony	10
Marriage	10
Death Rites	10
Religion	11
Proximity to Nature	11
Chapter II: Santhals and Nature: Proximity and Distance	13
Chapter III Santhals and Performance	19
Dancing and Singing	19
Religious Belief: Sun is Father and Earth is Mother	22
Festivals	22
Ero	24
Jamtala Bongo	24

Karam Festival	24
Makar Festival	25
Chapter IV: Nature, Culture and Performance	27
Nature and Culture: Interconnectedness	27
Nature and Culture in Cultural Ecology	30
Chapter V: Performance	34
What is Performance?	34
Origin of Performance	40
Origin and Development of Performance Studies	40
Origin of Performance: From Ritual to Theatre to Performance	43
Performance: Modes and Dimensions	46
Performance and Nature	49
Chapter VI: Life-ritual Performances	52
Chhatiyar: Space Performed with Sacred Bow and Arrow	52
Naming Process: Repetition of Ancestral Names	56
Marriage in Santhal Community	57
Space Performed with Symbols and Natural Colors	60
‘Janti’ Playing Roles of both Audience and Actors	65
Wedding Dance	65
Marriage as Play	72
Some other Varieties of Marriage in Santhal Community	73
Death Rites: Repetition and Reiteration of Ritualized Behaviors	76
Chapter VII: Conclusion	82
Works Cited	85