

## The moral and conceptual universe of cock fighters: symbolism and rationalization of santal society in Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal

Bimal Duari

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Geography, Seacom Skills University, Bolpur, West Bengal, India

### Abstract

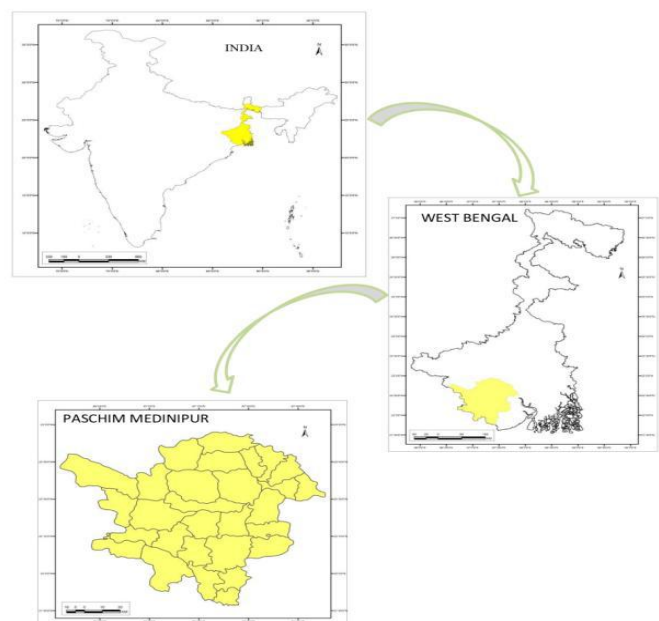
The entertainment sport of santal tribes is cockfighting. It is an ancient sport that has deep roots in rural parts of the world as well as India and West Bengal. The result of this bloody and dangerous game is the death of defeated birds. Most of the fights were held in an inn that was specially prepared or in a cockpit. The Cock-fighters select two types of fighting cock—one is called Desi Morog and another variety is called Pahari Morog. Social dignity of santal society depends on this game. Only Santal males and sometime children get the opportunity to participate in the game. At present, the high court and the supreme court of India have declared it illegal due to criminal sanction and informal social disapproval, cock-fighters have developed rationalizations which they use among themselves. Yet this game is openly running. The Research article is discussed about the society and religion with the cockfighting of santal tribes living in Paschim Medinipur of West Bengal. This Research article also highlights the rules and regulation and various stages of Cockfighting in the santal society.

**Keywords:** cockfight, bloody game, santal society, high court, religion, criminal

### Introduction

Cockfight is a blood sport between two roosters (cocks), or more accurately gamecocks, held in a ring called a cockpit. The history of raising fowl for fighting goes back 6,000 years. The first documented use of the word gamecock, denoting use of the cock as to a "game", a sport, pastime or entertainment, was recorded in 1646, after the term "cock of the game" used by George Wilson, in the earliest known book on the sport of cockfighting in *The Commendation of Cocks and Cock Fighting* in 1607. But it was during Magellan's voyage of discovery of the Philippines in 1521 when modern cockfighting was first witnessed and documented by Antonio Pigafetta, Magellan's chronicler, in the kingdom of Taytay. The combatants, referred to as gamecocks, are specially bred birds, conditioned for increased stamina and strength. The comb and wattle are cut off in order to meet show standards of the American Game fowl Society and the Old English Game Club and to prevent freezing in colder climates (the standard emerged from the older practice of severing the comb, wattles, and earlobes of the bird in order to remove anatomical vulnerabilities, similar to the practice of docking a dog's tail and ears). Cocks possess congenital aggression toward all males of the same species. Cocks are given the best of care until near the age of two years. They are conditioned, much like professional athletes prior to events or shows. Wagers are often made on the outcome of the match. Cockfighting is a blood sport due in some part to the physical trauma the cocks inflict on each other, which is sometimes increased for entertainment purposes by attaching metal spurs to the cocks' natural spurs. While not all fights are to the death, the cocks may endure significant physical trauma. In some areas around the world, cockfighting is still practiced as a mainstream event; in some

countries it is regulated by law, or forbidden outright. Advocates of the "age old sport" often list cultural and religious relevance as reasons for perpetuation of cockfighting as a sport.



Source: NATMO, Kolkata, 2014

Fig 1: location map of study map

### Location of the Study Area

Paschim Medinipur located in the southern part of West Bengal, has been carved out from the east while Medinipur district, the then largest district of India and came into

existence in the present form on the 1st January 2002. Paschim Medinipur district which forms the southernmost Hugli and Purba Medinipur districts in the east and Singbhum district of Jharkhand and part of Odisha in the west. The total geographical area of Paschim Medinipur district is 9345.00 Sq. km. It has twenty nine blocks distributed within four subdivisions. Total population of the study area is 5,943,300(2011)

### Review of Literature

Darden and Worden (1996) in his research article examine the marketing of the deviant and stigmatized activity of cockfighting and show how the two differ. His research is based on several years of active participant observation with cockfighters and the examination of several publications devoted to the sport.

Prus (1989) in his article use a qualitative approach to the marketing of game fowl and the sport of cockfighting to illuminate problems which may be common in the deliberate spread and diffusion of other deviant activities, and he note the game fowl world's attempts at solutions. Cockfighting is a hobby and sport for all of its.

Dundes (1994) in his research article studied on Cockfighting, is a very old sport - some even claim "the oldest". Augustine (1986) used a description of a cockfight in his "De Ordine" to illustrate evil in the world. Although cockfighting is not universal, it may be the closest to a universal sport, occurring almost everywhere that chickens live. Crews (2000) in his research paper study on some Colonial American circles, people crowd about cockfighting. As repugnant as pitting two metal-spurred roosters to slash at one another may seem to us, not a few of our ancestors enjoyed the preparations, the crowds of onlookers, the spectacle of combat to the death, and the gambling. Bryant and Capel (1974)<sup>[4]</sup> have pointed out, cockfights attract people from all levels of the stratification system, our data show that people from the high-end of the social hierarchy are underrepresented; rural poor, construction workers and agriculturists predominate at most cockfights. Barber (1993)<sup>[3]</sup> would definitely disagree with the notion that birds are too simple to feel pain. In his book *The Human Nature of Birds*, he demonstrates that birds are intelligently aware.

Adler & Adler (1983)<sup>[2]</sup> have described the various techniques of drug-dealing. Two major differences or major differences between drug-dealing and cockfighting are the relative ephemerality of drug dealing compared to cockfighting and chicken-raising, and the relative visibility of the contraband which the owner must hide or disguise.

### Objectives

This study is oriented towards understanding the some specific aspects. These are-

1. To study the history of Cock fighting.
2. To explain the different stages of cockfighting in the santal society.
3. To understand the rules and regulation of cockfighting in the study area.
4. To analysis the social relation and rituals which are related with cockfight in santal society.

### Methodology

The study based on primary data from filed survey in different santal living villages of Paschim Medinipur during cockfighting and also different secondary data source which have been collected from different gram Panchayet office, B.D.O and S.D.O. office, Various journal and Newspaper, Webside, census record (2011) and district statistical handbook etc.

### Result and Discussion

#### 1. History of The cock fighting

- Cockfighting is an ancient spectator sport. There is evidence that cockfighting was a pastime in the Indus Valley Civilization.



- The sport was popular in ancient times in India, China, Persia, and other Eastern countries and was introduced into Ancient Greece in the time of Themistocles (c. 524–460 BC). For a long time the Romans affected to despise this "Greek diversion", but they ended up adopting it so enthusiastically that the agricultural writer Columella (1st century AD) complained that its devotees often spent their whole patrimony in betting at the side of the pit.
- Based on his analysis of a Mohenjo-daro seal, Iravatham Mahadevan speculates that the city's ancient name could have been Kukkutarma ("the city [-rma] of the cockerel [kukkuta]"). However, according to a recent study,<sup>[9]</sup> "it is not known whether these birds made much contribution to the modern domestic fowl. Chickens from the Harappan culture of the Indus Valley (2500–2100 BC) may have been the main source of diffusion throughout the world." "Within the Indus Valley, indications are that chickens were used for sport and not for food" (Zeuner 1963) and that by 1000 BC they had assumed "religious significance".
- Some additional insight into the pre-history of European and American secular cockfighting may be taken from the the London Encyclopedia.
- At first cockfighting was partly a religious and partly a political institution at Athens; and was continued for improving the seeds of valor in the minds of their youth, but was afterwards perverted both there and in the other

parts of Greece to a common pastime, without any political or religious intention.

- An early image of a fighting rooster has been found on a 6th-century BC seal of Jaazaniah from the biblical city of Mizpah in Benjamin, near Jerusalem. Remains of these birds have been found at other Israelite Iron Age sites, when the rooster was used as a fighting bird; they are also pictured on other seals from the period as a symbol of ferocity, such as the late-7th-century BC red jasper seal inscribed "Jehoahaz, son of the king", which likely belonged to Jehoahaz of Judah "while he was still a prince during his father's life".
- The anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote the influential essay *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight*, on the meaning of the cockfight in Balinese culture.

## 2. Different stages of cockfighting in the santal society

**a. Accumulation of fighting Cock:** The Cock-fighters selects two types of fighting cock—one is called Desi Morog and another variety is called Pahari Morog. The fighting cocks are purchased from the market of Jhargram and Panshura. Sometimes some of the cock fighters select fighting cock from their own poultry. Once a hen gets broody and set to start setting eggs and set on the nest. In the first two weeks, hen and chicks are kept in enclosures. The hen is and her chicks are tethered together. After two weeks, the chicks may be allowed on outside for freely moving. After three month owner of the chicks select chicks for making fighter cocks and developing for training. The most critical age for ranged chickens is when they are still about 3 months old. This is because they might not be hardened enough for exposure to the elements.



However, the chickens that regularly take pro-biotic are less prone to coccidiosis. It is no exaggeration to say that the owner of the cock love their cocks more than their children. They always show their deep concern for the cocks. The fighting cock always dwells separately from other cock. Sometimes light presents and sometimes darkness have seen in cage of cock dwells at night.

After six months fighting qualities can be tested by help of another cock as sparring partner. In this phase the knife is mostly covered by a leather cover. In a few months later a chicken mature enough for fighting at about 9 months of age. Before a fight the cock is mostly not allowed to have sex, because this could weaken the fighting spirit. It is told, that some cockers take care, that the cock is not touched by a

woman who is in the phase of menstruation. Such touches are regarded as a premature death judgment. Sometimes fighting cocks get more care as children.

## b. Fostering of fighting Cock

The modern methods of feeding are eight to ten days for chickens and stags, and ten to fourteen days for cocks. First step of feeding is 1st day to 3rd days the cocks when empty are given some amount of grains of rice, with plenty of water and no exercise; 4th day to 7th days, in the morning, fly them five or six times, and give the cocks a tablespoonful each of scalded wheat and the same of scalded cracked grain mixed, half the amount at noon and evening, with a little water, no exercise. 8th day to 10th days, in early morning, give each cock three table spoonful of broken rice, cracked corn, and wheat scalded, no dinner, and before feeding at night in the same, give them five or six fly's each. After 10th days, fly eight or ten times in morning and again in afternoon, increase feed and exercise a little if cocks are doing well. Beginning the 15th days, increase work and feed a little (the flying is done by tossing the cocks in the air two or three feet so they will alight on a stuffed cushion in a box or barrel in front of you). This day begin feeding the white of one boiled egg to each cock morning and night mixed with crushed oats and crushed corn, scalded. Later the 20th days, spar the cocks of equal weight until they are blown and get to billing, of course putting muffs on their heels, same work and feed as yesterday and the cocks well work done in the morning and very little at night, feed twice on white and cracked corn. After the 25th days, muff put to cocks and spar them until they come to billing, feed as before. With regard to feedings every breeder has his own nutritional-plan onto which he known from other experienced persons. The cock fighter or the ownership of the cocks feeds perhaps his cock with broken rice and wheat, vegetable and old bread. Wealthier owners select different grain sorts, Snail, various types of small fish like a tiny fresh-water fish, small frog and different types of insects as well as food additives like vitamins, minerals, electrolytes or even amphetamines. Sometimes fighting cock eats small snake. On the other hand fighter cocks freely ranging allows foraging which enables to eat all the varied plants, grass, and insects they can find. Eating large proportions of living greens, seeds, insects and myriad other natural commodities, makes ranged chickens more vibrant than those raised in limited space. In addition the offering of strychnine is reported in order to increase the appetite and to stimulate heart and blood circulation. Nevertheless, the majority of cockers refuse such special diet. On the other hand, before the sporting day owner of the cock feedings to his cock very low amount of the drug (Locally known as Affing) mixed with grain sorts of broken rice and wheat and also they feeding red mirchi and Haria, local alcohol to their fighting cock.

## c. Training of the fighting Cock

The training of a fighting cock is very interesting. When age of the cock will be six month, then the owner of the cock bring his cock in the fighting area, in every Sporting day. And owner of the cock will "drive" his cock. The cock runs near at the fighting area and makes a pair with the other fighting cock. After this the pair of the cocks becomes aggressive



against each other. Sometime the pair of the cock run faster and faster and the pair of the cock attack each other in the training time. The training time is longer and longer. It may be twenty days to thirty days. After the training, the owner of the cock will let the cock have a rest and drink some water, every day. At about 10 o'clock morning, the cock will be let free from the cage or be reduce to the tight rope for a walk on an open ground so as to relax its tension of spirit. The cock will be fed at about 12 and then it will have a rest in the cage. At 3 or 4 o'clock the cock will have another walk and then it will be trained for another hour. Before the evening, the cock will be given an additional meal. These routines or the methods of the training continue from day to day before fully preparation for the fighting of the cock and the method of training can make the cock strong and quick for fighting. Rearing and training try to improve primarily "gameness", that means fight strength, aggression and endurance of the cock. Cockers want to have a light-footed, hilly cock with strong legs and wing musculature. Too much muscle mass can make the cock immovable. Most important, in the care of stags for fighting, is to keep in mind that in stag fighting we are trying to hasten the development of the chicken. Other procedures to enforce the aggressiveness especially before a fight are caging of cock in darkness, blowing of smoke of cigarettes in the eyes of cock and the spreading of chilli on the anus. No mating acts before a fight - but before fight the cock can receive injection with digitalis drugs.

### Preparation for the Fight



Cockfighting was not being a very lucrative endeavor in Paschim Medinipur. With mean spending lot of times, lot of rupees and their heard labour on nurturing, preparation of area and also a prize for a fight. Training begins at a very early stage with the owner sparing no expense to guarantee his cocks the best chance to be a winner. At the times, these fighter cocks were treated even better than family members, receiving better care and more attention. Preparation for a fight begins close to two hours before starting the fight. The cocks ever steps into the ring. From birth they are fed a diet of special grains, vitamins and antibiotics. When the bird is fight-ready, sometimes professional groomers trim some of the cock's feathers, the underbelly is shaved and its combs and wattles are surgically removed. Groomers also cut the cocks spurs with a sharp knife. The new spurs can be metal and are used to inflict more pain, which could lead to a cock's death in an even quicker fashion. Sometimes owners rub tobacco or other chemicals like desi alcohol or affing injects into the

roosters body, to make the cocks fight harder or to affect the opponent fighter cocks.

The fighter cocks defend their area aggressively by help of their rear spur. As I know, there are no systematic investigations on the results of such fights in free nature. However, as far as I see it. In case of institutionalized fights the cock can be "upgraded" on different kind and manner.

### 3. The rules and regulation of cockfighting in the study area



Cockfights are held in a ring about eight meter squares area. Usually they begin toward 3 P.M. and run three or four hours until sunset. About nine or ten separate matches comprise a program. Each match is precisely like the others in general pattern: there is no main match, no connection between individual matches, no variation in their format. The man who attaches the spurs also provides the fighter cocks, and the spurs are affixed by winding a long length of string around the foot of the spur and the leg of the cock. Most of the time, in any case, the cocks fly almost immediately at one another in a wing beating, head-thrusting, leg-kicking on the opposition cock. Within moments one or the other drives home a solid blow with his spur. Before the combat the fighting spirit of cocks gets stimulated by bringing them together, so that they go in feint attacks. This gives an impression to the audience, which cock is the favourite. They become visibly exited as the two handlers enter the pit with Kathkars in hand. The cocks are raring to fight, with neck feathers erect, feet clawing at the ground and fire burning in their eyes. Suddenly they are released. The fighter cocks fly up against each other.



The crowd reacts with each blow delivered. Each peck, slash and heart stopping leap elicits a grunt from the now standing audience. Both fighter cocks fall on the arena of fighting ground. One of them is maimed, its feathers tainted with red, but it carries on the fight. So spirit of these fighter cocks was ended that they battle to the death. Feathers fly. Blood flows.

It is all in a matter of seconds. At that moment blood rushed into their tiny brains, their anger flashed like lightning and with all their natural courage they hurled themselves impetuously upon each other, beak against beak, and breast to breast, steel spur against its fellow, wing to wing: but the blows were parried masterfully, and only a few feathers fell. Blood soaked the ground of the pit; the brave encounters were repeated again and again; but victory remained uncertain. At last, in a supreme effort, the wining cock hurled itself forward to give a final blow; it nailed its spur in one of the loser cock's wings. The loser cock, bound to it by the wing, remained standing beside it, but little by little its own legs crumpled and eyes closed.

If the fight has several rounds it may happen that the Kathkar sucks blood from the throat of a wounded hurt cock in order to make his cock fight-fit again. A fighter cock was declared as dead, when it gives no life sign after three times lifting. A dead cock can be declared as the winner if he dies in an offensive attitude. If a cock kills his opponent, he is not yet a winner automatically. A regulation demands, that he must peck still twice the defeated cock. If the pecking does not take place, because the fighter was injured too strongly, he loses the victory and the draw is declared.

#### **4. Social relation and rituals which are related with cockfight in the santal society**

Most of the cock fighters in Paschim Medinipur have adopted that the participating in the cock fight as symbolic view because if they participating in the bloody game then their social status are high. Where, cockfighting is illegal game in India and as well as West Bengal. However, it even became a sport, the fighter cock was regarded as an admirable animal, drawing respect from men of the Santal community.

Although forbidden game openly organize where the bloody game had a social value of the Santal society in Paschim Medinipur. May be or may not be local governments do worry about the social disruption about the game. Some of the santal participators are well educated and they are working on different government institutions. But they also participated in this forbidden bloody game for the reasons behind social value. Frequently I have seen cock fighters with misty eyes leaving the pit cradling their limp, winged champions. However nostalgic the cocker may feel about his fighter cocks, I have never noted a theme of fighter cock as friend or companion among mature cock fighters, foreign or domestic. The cock fighters may raise the cock from a chick, feed and work with the cock every day for months; and yet may not relate to the fighter cock other than as a fighter or, if the fighter cock lacks vital aggressive abilities, a meal. Clearly, the cock fighter views the fighter cock on several levels: fighter cock as totem, and perhaps symbolic sacrifice. Where cock fight as a social myths as well as a symbolic status.

The cock fighters of Santals in Passchim Medinipur have some rituals which are related with cock fight. Before the starting of the fight, when Kathkar attach the spores with the cocks legs then Kathkar make obeisance to knife or spore which as a sign of worship. And before the coming of the arena of the cock fight, Kathkar had done his worship with knife and spores. Because after that god of Bishawkarma may be gratified and as result the fighter cock should be won the

fight. On the other hand owner of the fighter cock who are Santals, they also practice spiritual of Marang Burung because in this worship they sacrificed chicken for the gratified of these gods. So, cock fight have spiritual: "in every motion of these fighter cocks un-endowed with reason there was nothing ungraceful since, of course, another higher reason was guiding everything they did"

#### **Conclusion**

Cocks are given the best of care until near the age of six month old. Most of the people involved in cockfighting are men, although there are some women are indirectly involved in cock fighting in terms of either rearing of cock or ownership of the fighting cock. But woman cannot participate as a cock fighter nor is she allowed to carry her fighting cock near the arena of cock fighting. It is observed that not only the Santals but also the people of other castes and communities take active part in cock fighting. The rural peasant, construction workers usually participate in large number in cock fighting. After the fight, which cock had lost the fight and dead then owner of the wining cocks gave 50 rupees to the Kathkar and wining Kathkar also gave 20 rupees to the organizing committee. And owner of the wining cock take the defeated cock. The defeated cocks name is *Sara*, this is locally known. Cockfighting can be said to have a mythos centered on the purported behavior and character of the fighter cocks itself. Cocks are seen as emblems of bravery and resistance in the face of insurmountable odds. In fact, boys are frequently exhorted to follow the example of the fighter cock in protecting his "turf" and family constellation. While cockpits are violent and loud, and at times, bloody places, fighting between human male competitors or gamblers is taboo. Many cock fighters had been adopted the fighter as a totem. At arena of cock fight one may expect to see men with displaying the cock in a combative or terrifying aspect.

#### **References**

1. Abacherli, L. Defense Fund Committee. *The Gamecock*. 1991, 172.
2. Adler P, Adler P. Relationships between dealers: The social organization of illicit drug transactions. *Sociology and Social Research*. 1983; 67:260-278.
3. Barber TX. *The human nature of birds*. New York: Penguin. Bigus, O. (1972). *The milkman and his customers*. *Urban Life and Culture*. 1993; 1L131-165.
4. Bryant C, Capel W. Profiles of the American cocker. *Grit and Steel*. 33. Cogburn, R. (1991, May). Letter to the editor. *The Gamecock*. 1974; 157-8.
5. Crews H. *Cockfighting: An unfashionable view*. Florida frenzy, Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1979, 35-41.
6. Dundes A. *The cockfight: A casebook*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.
7. Dutcher M. You are what you eat! *The Gamecock*. 1991; 148-149.
8. Hearne V. *Animal Happiness*. New York: Harper Collins, 1994.
9. Kotler P. *Marketing management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991.
10. Long Spur. Bubblefoot cure. *The Gamecock*. 1991; 76-

77.

11. Prus, R. Pursuing customers: An ethnography of marketing activities. Newbury Park: Sage, 1989a.
12. Roberts B. Tools of the trade. The Gamecock. 1991; 68-69.
13. RWN. Beginners only. Grit and Steel. 1991, 30.
14. Schiff S. Geek shows. The New Yorker. 1995; 9-10.
15. Trull J. Letter to the editor. The Gamecock. 1991, 156.
16. Warbird. A few thoughts. The Feathered Warrior. 1991; 29-30.
17. White B. Obituary for M. M. White. The Gamecock. 1991; 214.