

LIFE AND SOCIETY OF THE ETHNIC SANTALS OF BANGLADESH: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE AND TRADITION

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Abstract:

One of Bangladesh's oldest indigenous groups is known as the Santals. Several historians refer to and regard them as Bengal's first settlers. They mostly belong to the pre-Aryan, Austro-Asian stock of settlers. Since they are the original people of the country, they should have had more power and development. But the truth is otherwise. Santals are frequently denied regal privileges and rights. It has a long history of exclusion and hostility. The Santals were never given the required care since they are secluded from mainlanders. Instead, colonial and post-colonial governments beat and tortured them, which made them, start different forms of resistance. These resistances, however, eventually failed to halt the starvation. Even with all these problems, Santals still fight to keep their social and cultural traditions alive. There were no written records of the history of the Santal civilization, so it was hard to figure out what had happened. As a result, this research mostly utilized secondary sources. With the help of historical information, this study tries to figure out the social norms, ways of making a living, and cultural traits of the Santal group. The fact that they are able to keep most of their own cultural traits shows that they have been poor in many ways in the past.

Keywords: Santal, Ethnic Group, Culture, Tradition, Custom

1. OUTLINE:

Bangladesh is a multicultural country that is home to several ethnic groups. It is diverse in a wide range of ways, especially with regard to race, culture, language, religion, and tradition. In Bangladesh, a diverse culture has emerged as a result of these differences. One of the most important components of the richness of this culture is indigenous people, often known as Adibasis. However, Adibasis frequently have their rights infringed, and their identity is in many ways at danger. In this case, the UN, indigenous people, and academics who support indigenous rights all support an open definition. On the other hand, the governments of other countries often lower the requirements in a way that makes it easier to deny the identities of many native tribes. Jeff J. Corntassel says that the discussion in international forums about defining criteria for indigenous peoples versus giving them unrestricted rights to self-identify has shown that developing standards under international law is a bit of a problem. Some native tribes can't get the protections they need because they don't meet the strict criteria for defining them. This strengthens their sense of self (Corntassel 2003). Clarifying the phrase 'Indigenous' or 'Adibasi' is very essential. Sanskrit is the source of the term 'Adibasi.' 'Adi', which means 'original', and 'basi', which means 'resident', are the two components that make it up. The closest term for Adibasi is 'indigenous.' This is because the many Adibasi communities that lived in Greater Bengal before Europeans arrived can be thought of as native peoples. It should be noted that the Indigenous community is a group of people who have existed prior to the arrival of Europeans and retain a distinct identity. Some scholars have tried to define 'indigenous' in terms of point of view because it can mean different things to different people. So, they focused mostly on how different people see things, with some saying that only indigenous people should be able to say what they think (Bodley 1999). Indigenous people make up around 400 million, or about 5%, of the world's population. It demonstrates the deplorable state of the native community. The situation is more critical in Bangladesh. They are not only underprivileged in this place, but also denied their rights. Sometimes their identification is questioned (Gerharz 2014). The Santals of Bangladesh are a group to whom this applies even more. Their state makes them somewhat more susceptible. The recent savage assaults on the Santal people have demonstrated how helpless they are. In 2009, land thieves attacked a Santali community in the Naogaon area, causing damage to 74 homes. Even though indigenous, civil society, and human rights groups complained, neither the police nor the government did anything about it (Iva, 2009). This type of human rights abuse continued after that. Another assault occurred in 2015. Land speculators assaulted Santali village in Dinajpur on January 24, 2015. At least 65 homes were damaged and stolen in this incident.

In addition, several fraudulent charges were brought against numerous Santal individuals (Chowdhury & Chakma, 2016). In Gobindagonj, Rangpur, there was a recent assault on the Santals over land ownership. Three Santal men were killed on November 6 and 7, 2016, in a deadly altercation between Rangpur Sugar Mill employees and local Santals over this land. Officials at the Rangpur Sugar Mill had the support of influential locals. The destruction of the Santals' traditional culture is a result of several ways in which their rights are abused. In order for Bangladesh to maintain the cultural variety it has enjoyed for so long, it is crucial to safeguard the rights and culture of Santals.

2. Aims and objectives of the research:

This study intent to look into Santal social and cultural practices from different angles, with special attention to how their community has changed over time. The focus will also be on the changes and problems that their way of life had to go through in the past because of the spread of various opportunist groups and the surge of modernity.

3. Study methods and materials:

This study combines sociocultural and anthropological research, focusing on changes in history where cultural traditions have been written down. This study tries to look at the Santal culture in "Bangladesh" as a whole, even though it relies heavily on observations made in Rajshahi Districts. There aren't many first-hand sources available for this endeavor since there isn't any old Santal writing. As a result, we looked to oral myths, sections of academic books, articles, journals, census data, and reports from both government and non-government organizations.

4. Rationale of the study:

Bangladesh is said to be a hybrid of various extinct races. "Indigenous communities" are the term used now for many of them. About 54 indigenous communities living in Bangladesh (Chowdhury & Chakma 2016). In Bangladesh, there are 1586141 different ethnic groups, according to the 2011 census. This represents around 1.10 percent of the nation's overall population (BBS 2011). A total of 143425 Santal people reside in various districts in Bangladesh. Santals are dispersed throughout the world, different regions have distinct cultures. Even yet, the nation as a whole still adheres to the same core values and traditions. The study will underscore the Santals way of life and culture, customs and their traditions in depth.

5. Origin and nomenclature of Santals:

Bengal has long drawn people because of its rich terrain. As a result of migration and settlement, several communities from all over the globe eventually made their way to Bengal. Proto-Australoids are a subset of pre-Aryan immigrants, who are the oldest of all (Chowdhury A. M. 2004). Since there are no written records of the Santals, it is hard to figure out where they came from (Hembrom, 1948). This is because multiple research studies have come to the same conclusion (Singh, 1988). Speaking is preferable to writing, according to a Santal proverb. To recreate their historical growth, further sources were required, however. Following the Chakma, the Santals are Bangladesh's second-largest tribal community. Physically strong and diligent, they work hard. Their features include shady skin, a stout face, a wide-mouthed, sensual

lips, and a hefty nose. They are normally of middle height. The town of Saint in West Bengal, where the Santal people once resided, is where the term "Santal" originates. They also refer to themselves as the "Sons of Man" (Horhopon) (Debnath, 2010). They think their former name was "Kherwar," according to several of them.

The oral tradition of Santals has its own mythology and stories that attempt to explain the mystery of creation. Several academics claim that Babylon was their first home. After crossing the Khyber and Bolan Passes into India, the Santals settled near Bolan, about 300 miles southwest of Chota Nagpur. In Parganas Chai and Champa in Hazaribagh, however, a sizable colony was originally based there. Invading Manbhum and the Santal Parganas from Hazaribagh, the Santals (Murmu 2016). Later, because of a growing population, the loss of forests, and a lack of wild resources, Santals had to roam around places like plain lands. There aren't many sources, it's hard to say exactly when Santal arrived in Bengal. But many scholars think that the Aryans forced the Santals to live in the forests of Bengal. They fought because they did not recognize the Aryans' dominance. Later, as the British and Muslims moved in, they became more spread out and vulnerable (Sharif 2014). Colonial laws during the British period enforced them to work as welded labor. The Santals struggled to pay back debts, which eventually led to their enslavement for many generations. Some British-Indian Acts and other land reforms and land rights laws passed during this time all hurt the interests of the Santals (Sarker, 2014). The Santals eventually rebelled to assert their rights as a result of this deprivation.

The Santal uprising, also called "Santal Hul" in their language, began when they were abused and tortured in different ways. Tilka Murmu was in charge of the 1784 uprising against British repression. He and his followers were later captured and handed the death penalty (Drong 2001). The Santals, who were headed by Sidhu and Kanu, took an oath on June 30, 1855, promising to create a free nation for themselves. The grueling march into Kolkata was started by around 50,000 Santals. They claimed to be the ones who came up with the concept of a lengthy march in protest. Some of them were detained by the police, which sparked a conflict between the Santals and the British. 19 troops were slain by the insurgent organization. In the beginning, Santals made the British afraid. However, the "British" had sophisticated armaments that outclassed the antiquated Santal firearms. However, they paved the way for subsequent uprisings, such as the establishment of nation-states in 1947 and the Sepoy Revolution in 1857.

After 1947, the Santals lost their land rights because they didn't have the right paperwork. Santals actively participated in Bangladesh's freedom struggle. They took part in several missions with the tools they had, and they fought bravely against the Pakistani army. Their forebears were anti-injustice revolutionaries who dedicated their lives in the sake of improved destiny. Regrettably, a free Bangladesh was incapable to pay for its obligations. Following independence, the Santal family experienced the worst poverty as a consequence of illegal land grabs, unfairness, and injustice. The effects of poverty were still felt. Another instance of their human rights being violated is the recent murder of at least three Santal men in Gaibandha, where they were battling for the right to their ancestors' land (Star, 2016). The Santal socio-cultural heritage is now, as a whole, in a state of change. However, Santals may often maintain their own cultural practices with minimal change.

6. Domestic practices of Santals:

The foundation of civilization is the family. In the Santal community, both the nuclear and joint family systems exist. Their traditional, close-knit family structure, in which everyone lives together, is quickly breaking down. Changes in values, poverty, uniqueness, etc. all have a significant impact. In the patrilineal society of the Santals, the father is the center of the family (Chakma, 2002). In the family, the father is in charge and has ultimate decision-making authority. The mother also has a big effect because she helps bring in money for the family. According to cross-cultural research conducted in Rajshahi District, the majority of Muslim spouses govern and guide their families using autocratic power (62.07%), whereas the majority of Santal couples use syncretic authority (71.33%) (Uddin 2008). Women and children work alongside the male residents of the village to generate revenue. Santali women put forth a lot of effort and support the family in a big way. They cannot, however, inherit real estate. When the male head of the household dies, the power will go to the widow, but when her son becomes an adult, she will give it to him. As a result, in terms of patriarchy, the Santals of Bangladesh are comparable to the Muslims of the Plains.

7. The Santal community:

The Santals are divided into a number of clans. In Santali, these clans are known as "Paris." The twelve clans of the Santal people are Hnasda, Kiscu, Hembrom, Marnadi, Murmu, Mardi, Tudu, Soren, Baski, Besra, Guasoren, Chnorey, and Pauria, (Toru, Santal 2007). However, throughout time, various ethnographers' estimates of the number of clans altered (Hasan M. 2006). These clans are grouped hierarchically according to their professions, such as Kisku Raja, the king; Marandi Kipisar, the wealthy; Murmu Thakur, the priest; Soren Sipahi, the warrior; and Tudu Mandaria, the musician, etc. Most Santals are born into a clan. According to the Santals, there is a close connection between a clan and its totem, and every clan has its own. Animals (like bison and sheep), plants (like grass), and birds (like geese and pigeons) are often used as totems (Ali 1998). There are taboos and things that are banned in certain tribes. Because of these taboos, many clans are not allowed to eat certain foods or do certain things. For example, it is illegal for Soren to consume deer meat, for Tudu to consume the fruit "Data Jisinga," and for Besra to slaughter a cow. The Santal Community's way of life and culture are evolving significantly as a result of factors such as market expansion, the legacy of colonial education, employment prospects outside of the village, social and economic advancement, etc. They need to mix more with Bengalis

from the majority culture to live better or stay alive. Their manner of life is significantly impacted by this. The Santals, however, have close ties within their clan.



Figure- 01: Santal Community, Dinajpur
Source: Ecojesuit

8. Santal wedding wystem:

The Santals' and the Muslims' wedding traditions are identical. The bride moves in with the groom's family after the wedding, leaving her own home behind. Santals pay the bride's father the bridal price (den mohor), which varies depending on the location. The bride's in-laws give her a new name. In their society, planned weddings and affair marriages are also common. They mostly practice monogamy, although polygamy is also acceptable. For Santals, marriage is a sacred institution mandated by 'Thakur Jiu,' the all-powerful God (Toru, Santal, 2007). Most of the time, they can't marry someone from the same clan, but there are a few exceptions. When it is necessary, the bride is taken in by people from a different clan, legalizing the union. They are also forbidden from getting married outside of their tribe. Sometimes Santal Christians defy the prohibition on intra-clan marriage. These former Muslims became Christians, yet they maintained their clan names.



Figure- 02: Santal Marriage Ritual (Tarwari dak)
Source: Internet

9. Living and livelihood of the Santals:

The Santals were hunters and gatherers. They were completely reliant on and dependent on nature. Previously, they would get their nourishment from the environment. Their main line of work was farming. They were extremely conscientious, as were the landowners. But because the people on the mainland are simple and can't read or write, their lives have been reduced to numbers. Due to unlawful land grabs, they lost their land. Additionally, the destruction of their food supply and the resulting crisis in their means of subsistence are the results of industrial and technical progress. Consequently, the Santals are enforced to leave their own surroundings since there are few jobs in the villages. They are now trying to make it in the city, but they don't have the education or skills they need.

10. Administrative practices of the Santals:

Santals are a small minority in society, so there aren't enough of them in national politics. They need to get more involved in politics because they aren't moving forward and don't know enough. They have a village management structure and are a highly peaceful society. "Manjhi" is the title of the village's administrator. Naeke is typically seen as more of a priest than a member of the village's administration. Second, pargana: village officials include certain manjhi harams, or village leaders. "Organic" is the title given to the village chief of Pargana. The committee for Pargana village authorities typically has four or five members, however, this might occasionally change. Thirdly, the Des Manjhi Council is made up of six Parganas and its Manjhi Harams (Jalil 1991). Although the Santals are uninterested in politics at the federal level, they remain together within their community. They developed several methods of resistance to colonial and post-colonial oppression throughout history.

11. Religion and belief System of Santals

The natural world is extremely important to the belief system of the Santals. In addition to the benevolent spirits of the deceased, they think a variety of supernatural creatures exist. These ghosts wander the world, managing the affairs of their heirs. The "supreme being" or "life-giver" among all supernatural creatures is also referred to as "Marang Buru" or "Thakur Jiu" (Big Hill). When referring to the Supreme God in Santal traditional religion, the phrase "Thakur jiu" is Sanskritized (Murmu 2016). All that a man needs is given to him by the Supreme Being, who also establishes his life expectancy. He delivers heat, cold, rain, and sunshine. He also offers days and nights. When someone commits a sin and offends him, he punishes them. Bonga is the name of the other spirit. Sonatan, a Santal religion, is comparable to Hinduism. By worshipping and participating in various festivals, they carry out their religious obligations. There are no temples of their own. The Santals, however, hold that only these spirits can keep them safe since they think that spirits are all about them. Consequently, people regularly think about the Bongas. Even when they eat, they leave some of the meal on the ground as a little sacrifice for the Bonga. Nevertheless, changes are being made to the Santals' distinctive religious tradition. Many of them are becoming Christians and beginning to follow Jesus in order to make a better livelihood and escape poverty.



Figure- 03: Santal People worshipping Belboron Bonga
Source: Santal Edisom.com

12. Santal customs:

The Santals have a wide range of supernatural practices and beliefs that they have long engaged in. Witches are revered among Santals. Toru claims that witches are responsible for all illnesses and other unpleasant things in his 2008 book *Indigenous Culture of Bangladesh*. Witches are very strong and deadly, especially female ones. However, "Ojha" has the power to undo their enchantment. In addition to using plants, herbs, and roots to manufacture medicines, the spiritual healer Ojha also uses them to cure smallpox, cholera, leprosy, fevers, low vitality, and other diseases. They make sacrifices and recite spells. Depending on the severity of the patient's condition and their financial situation, Ojha gets compensated for his services. Santals frequently burn the corpses of the dead. However, a large number of them now bury the dead in graves. They hold the view that after death, the spirit departs for an unidentified location where it needs stuff from this one. The ceremonial gestures performed at burial and the last ceremony done in remembrance of the departed, known as the bhandan, make this very obvious. Previously, Santals would conduct Bandhan immediately after the funeral. However, nowadays it takes a poor family 1-2 years and a wealthy family 2-3 months to accomplish the salvation of the departed person. During Bandhan, relatives often give animals as gifts in memory of the departed and with the hope that their ancestors would utilize them in the afterlife (Marandy 2015). Marking Tattoo, which the Santal people call a "Sika sign," is another interesting practice that has been around for a long time. They think that the death angel will punish them in the hereafter if they pass away without getting tattoos. Because of modernization and education, these kinds of superstitious beliefs are changing in Santal communities.



Figure- 04: Santali Bapla or Santali Wedding Customs
Source: Internet



Figure- 05: Santals in Traditional Dress Celebrating Baha Parab
Source: Wikipedia

13. Recreation and festivals of the Santals:

Santals celebrate a variety of holidays and other special occasions. The Santal festivals and fairs are not complete without dance. They sing several Santal melodies known as Serena in addition to dancing. Agriculture-related holidays include Irokism. (the spreading of paddy seeds). The largest festival is Sohrae. On this day, people give thanks to the gods for the favorable conditions, rain, and sunshine that promote agricultural development. Even though the celebration happens before the Bengali month of "Poush," the exact date is not set. After the first monsoon rain, Erok is the first celebration dedicated to agriculture. The new year's celebration known as Baha (flower) includes dancing, singing, and water throwing. Baha means blossom in the Santali language. So it is also known as a flower festival that takes place during Falgun. Cutting the first rice product is done to honor Janthar and express thanks. They celebrate festivals like Karam in addition to these agriculture-related holidays. Jom Sim is a one-time celebration. It must be performed at least once during the life of every Santal. The wealthy can visit five or six times. The Sun God is honored at this pricey event. The birth of a kid is another joyful event in the Santal neighborhood. The hosts provide the visitors with a lot of food and alcohol. So, festivals and festivities are a big part of Santa's life. They become more unified as a community as a result of these festivities.



Figure-06: Santal Festival 'Sohrai'
Source: Cinebuzz Times.com



Figure- 07: Village Festival, Bishnubati/ Photo: Boro Baski
Source: UiO Museum of Cultural History

14. Traditional Santali foods and beverages:

The Santals eat mostly rice. Vegetables, seafood, and meat are among their favorite foods. Jute spinach and tortoise eggs are their favorites. Chicken, beef, duck, hog, and goat meat are among the animals they consume. Additionally on their menu are red ants, crabs, tortoises, rabbits, rats, and squirrels. Sweets and pastries are also favorites of theirs. The saying "Give me wine or death" describes the drinking addiction of the Santals (Toru, Santal 2007). They like to drink hariya, or rice beer. The Santals were reportedly given the order to produce rice beer by the Supreme Spirit. Worn-out grains and occasionally palm juice are used to produce the brew. Males and females both use tobacco and alcohol. Both drinking and smoking are still a big part of their celebration, but as younger people learn more, they are becoming less and less popular.



Figure 08: Santali Food Habit
Source: Internet

15. Costumes and ornaments of Santals:

Santal women wore two portions to cover the lower and upper sections of their bodies, while males wore a loincloth or other piece of cloth to hide their private areas. They are currently adapting gradually to the Bengalees' clothing (Hasan M. 2006). Nowadays, sarees are worn by most Santal women. Also becoming more fashionable are salwars, kameez, and orna. The heads of Santali women are uncovered. They neatly coiffed their hair before tying it up in a bun with lovely flowers in it. It is clothing for guys, such as a shirt, a lungi, jeans, and other items. To adorn themselves, Santali women use vermilion, oil, jewelry, and various trinkets. Silver and nickel are the main materials used to make decorations. They enjoy wearing bracelets, necklaces, glass bangles, wristbands, nose rings, tiaras, and other jewelry.



Figure-09: Traditional Santali Costumes
Source: Internet



Figure 10: Santali Traditional Ornaments
Source: Internet

16. Santali language and literature:

Bangladesh has over 45 indigenous groups and about 40 distinct languages (Azad 2003). The "Santali" language is used by Santals to communicate. The Austro-Asiatic language family includes this language (Dey 2015). In the 20th century, Santals had a written language. Prior to the creation of the Santali script, Bengali, Oriya, or Roman scripts were used to write it. Pandit Raghunath Murmu developed the Santali script, sometimes referred to as "OI Cemet," in the 1930s. There are thirty letters in the Santali Script, plus five fundamental diacritics. In addition to the six basic vowels, it also has three other vowels that aren't used as often. Santali was best written using the Roman alphabet when the British were in power (Cavallaro & Rahman 2009). Paul Olaf Bidding, a Norwegian missionary and linguist, developed the first Santali alphabet (1865–1938).

Bangla, which predominates in the plains, is causing the Santali language to disappear. They are giving up their native language and learning Bangla so that they can build a stable society and economy. The Santali language is not even spoken by certain populations. They feel ignored because Bangla is the medium of instruction in schools. The use of ethnic community languages in the elementary grades is guaranteed by the national education policy and other initiatives, although they have not yet been put into practice. The Santal youngsters find it challenging to learn because the books, friends, and teachers all speak various languages. As a result, they experience discrimination, isolation, and abandonment. The dropout rate is significant, and they lack enthusiasm in learning. The United Nations says that native people can set up and run their own schools and other educational institutions that teach in their own languages (UNO, 2009). Because of this, the Santal people should be able to get a bilingual education based on their own language.

17. Major problems of Santals:

The Santals are not actually connected to the 21st century, due to their inability to read or write. They are poor, and their families and society look down on them, they don't know what their legal rights are, and other things. There is no local administrative assistance to safeguard the Santal people's property rights in addition to human rights, and they are routinely tortured by their neighbors and the local government. Due to their unstable lives, Santal people are less likely to do things like work, get involved in politics, or make important decisions outside of the home. In addition to teaching them about their rights and worth, it is important for the growth of the country as a whole to change the laws and make new policies and laws that help the Santal people of Bangladesh. By doing this, they will be able to use their opportunities to change their current problems and make the most of their opportunities by getting involved in the country's main developmental sectors.

17.1 Taking of land and resources:

Without a doubt, the Santal community's most important resource is its land. The most terrible issue facing the Santals of Bangladesh, like other indigenous peoples, is resource and land grabs. Land has been taken from the people primarily in two ways: first, by the powerful majority, and second, by the Forest Department (FD) of the Government of Bangladesh. Land grabs by the powerful majority all of the people who took part in the FGD agreed that the majority takes the land of the Santals and other marginalized tribes in many different ways.

17.2 Employment and the state of the economy:

The Santal community as a whole depends heavily on agriculture. However, only few of them cultivate their own land; the rest are engaged in non-farm activities including non-agricultural work, small-scale commerce, services, etc. In the peak and lean seasons, the average daily salary of a Santal agri-laborer is Tk. 50.00 and 35.00, respectively. Male and female workers are treated differently in terms of pay.

17.3 Inability to pay:

Santal people's inability to pay for education is the biggest barrier. Due to their extreme poverty, they are unable to provide their children with the necessary resources (such as books, papers, fees, clothes, etc.) for their education, which has a negative impact on the education of the community as a whole.

17.4 Language barrier:

Santal children cannot comprehend Bengali at school because they speak Santali at home and in the neighborhood. As a result, Santali pupils struggle to interact with both their instructors and classmates. Even they are unable to ask for permission to use the restroom. Because they can't talk to each other, they get hurt physically and emotionally, lose interest in school, and eventually drop out.

17.5 Women's rights and status:

Indigenous men predominate in the village of Santal. However, practically all adult women work on farms in addition to their domestic responsibilities. The majority of them are day workers in agriculture. In addition, women in the Santal community are responsible for caring for their husbands, aging relatives, and children, as well as cooking and tending cattle. As a result, women do more than twice as much labor as men do. Men rarely beat their wives and then say they weren't taking care of their responsibilities.

18. Expert observation and views on Santals struggling life and society:

Observation- 01

Taslima Nasrin

Writer, Activist and Author

The following observation of the experts is a part of a commentary written in Bangla on the Banginews website which was published by thebengalitimes and translated form of the piece indicates as follows:

Santals are poor. Has any government ever taken any initiative to alleviate their poverty? I don't think so. I heard that the government is trying to evict the Santals. Government gunmen went to the Santal area of Gaibandha and burned their houses and shot them dead. The British also took up guns to kill the Santals. In the year 1855, 6,000 angry Santals attacked the British, armed with bows and arrows, because of the tyranny of landlords, moneylenders, and the British. The British killed more than fifteen thousand Santals. The villages of the Santals were burned. In 2016, too, Santal villages were set on fire. What is the difference between the colonial government and the native government? Although the face of the ruler is different, the face of exploitation is the same. In 1855, the two best heroes of the Santal rebellion, Sidu Majhi and Kanu Majhi, were killed. The Santal rebellion was crushed by the British. An English army officer said, "It was not a war." The Santals did not know how to accept defeat. As long as their drums beat, they would stand and shoot. Their arrows also killed our men, so we fired at them while they stood still. When their drumming stopped, they would walk sickly, but when it started again, they would stand. Then we also fired at their chests. "There is not a soldier of ours who has not suffered from the guilt of this war." Charles Dickens wrote, "Among the Santals, the sense of self-respect was very good." They poisoned their arrows when hunting, but never shot poisoned arrows at an enemy. One hundred and sixty-six years have passed since the Santal revolt, but still, the Santals are as poor, deprived, and humiliated as before. Land grabbing, violence, false cases, forged documents, discrimination, and harassment are being faced every day. In their own country, on their independent soil, they are living under extreme neglect ("Santalder Katha" or *Stories of Santal*).

Observation- 02

Gidison Pradhan

President, Greater Sylhet Adibasi Forum

In response to the demand of the Santals, the first people of Barendra land, to get their land back, they were killed, injured, and dispossessed in 2016 in Gaibandha. The ancestral lands of the Santals in the Sahebganj-Baghda farm area were encroached upon for sugarcane cultivation. It was said that if sugarcane is not cultivated, their land will be returned to them. Even though the situation seems simple, it isn't because the land wasn't given back to the Santals after the sugarcane wasn't grown. As in the past, the Santals have been or are being exploited about the land ("Bhumihara Santal Jati O Bhumir Odhikar" or *Landless Santal caste and land rights*).

Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) and Bonik Barta jointly organized an online meeting on 'State and Citizens to Protect Land Rights of Poor Community including Santals of Gobindganj Bagda Farm' organized on 16th September 2021. The expert's observation and views in the discussion are translated in English indicates as follows:

Observation- 03

Sanjeeb Drong

General Secretary, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum

The state does not reflect our hopes in the way we wanted it to. This state is far away from Santals, tribals, religious, and ethnic minorities. It is very good to read the constitution. There are many beautiful words here. Everyone is equal in the eyes of the law. No one will be discriminated against. There are such beautiful words. But we are tribal people, and marginalized people are deprived. Coming to the golden jubilee of independence, the words of the constitution have become the adornment of the constitution, but in reality, the sufferings and pains of the tribal, ethnic, and religious minorities are increasing at a compound rate. Three Santals were killed in the Gaibandha clash with law enforcers; their houses were burnt, and there was no justice ("Santalder Krishi Jomite Orthonoitik Onchol Sthapon Noy" or *Not the establishment of economic zones on the agricultural lands of the Santals*).

Observation- 04

Sirajul Islam Babu

General Secretary, Gaibandha District Bar Association

After November 6, 2016, those who tortured, killed, set arson on tribals have been shown as important witnesses in the charge sheet of PBI and CID. They are not shown as accused. How horrible, the accused have become witnesses! And we are not getting justice. This is the situation. We keep trying. The judicial magistrate set a date for two and a half months in the future. We have given him documents, rulings, all necessary support. It is with great regret that the 90 accused were not apprehended during the course of the investigation; they were not arrested, and they did not request remand. I am extremely dissatisfied with the activities of such Daisara groups in relation to the tribal people, or Santals.

We are not getting justice even after seeking justice. We also had appropriate evidence. On November 6, 2016, three of us were killed. Many lost their eyes, many were crippled, and many were shot. Houses were evicted, and looted—that's what happened. However, 46 people have been charged against those who were agitating on that day and the Bengalis who were on the side of the Santals. We tribal Santals are dealing with those cases. It is a sad history (Babu).

Observation- 05

Shamsul Alam

Executive Director, ALRD

In 2016, the Santal movement in Gaibandha became bigger. The government was repulsed, and there were massacres. The houses of the Santals were set on fire. The most unfortunate thing is that some people in government uniform also took part in setting the fire. Shots were fired. Three Santal tribals were martyred that day while protesting. The police did not take cases, did not investigate, and did various tricks to hide the criminals. Then we were forced to resort to the High Court. Center for Law and Arbitration, BRATI, and ALRD jointly filed a writ petition. According to the High Court's order, they had to accept the complaints within 20 days of the incident. A trumped-up charge was filed earlier. The court said that both allegations should be investigated with equal importance. Proper investigation and report should be given (Alam).

Observation- 06

Comrade Pankaj Bhattacharya

President, Oikko Nap

Police firing on Santals in Gaibandha was illegal on that day. They did not have any legal documents. On that day, the police set fire to the house of the Santals. It was highlighted by the international media. Then the media of my country picked it up and reported that the Santals' houses were set on fire by the police. This incident has not yet been judged. Even so, the High Court took the issue seriously and ruled against the government for not doing anything. They gave the Santals their rights back and told them to give back their homes. Both the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police have apologized to the High Court. Where the state has apologized, the claim that the state will right the wrong should be strong (Bhattacharya).

Observation- 07

Khusi Kabir

Coordinator, Nijera Kori

After the closure of the sugar mills, the sugar mill authorities, the government, and some politicians were trying to convert the land to commercial use rather than return it to the Santals. We have seen the acquisition documents, and most of Santal's names were there. There are some Bengali names. It is clearly written there that sugarcane land will be returned if it is not cultivated. Instead of doing that, they wanted to take it for commercial purposes, and that's when the movement happened. During the movement there were clashes, and some Santals were killed (Kabir).

Observation- 08

Sultana Kamal

Huma Rights Activist and Former Adviser to the Care taker Government of Bangladesh

We could not move forward in the way we were supposed to, the way we fought to gain the country's freedom. After liberating the country through the liberation war, we could not progress as we were supposed to. We all know the scene. How Bagda Farmland was acquired It was not returned to those who were supposed to return it. After much agitation and struggle about it, we saw the killing of some people. We have also seen the police behave like criminals. What came up prominently in today's discussion is not the establishment of an economic zone on the agricultural land of the Santals (Kamal).

19. Recommendations:

Where there is a will, there is a way. There are many ways to expedite by which Santals may come out of many difficulties and social distress.

- Proper education should be rendered to the Santals.
- Basic educational institutions must be established.
- Santals be accommodated in health care service.
- Government should be supportive to Santals farmers.
- Santals rights should be protected lawfully.
- Proper steps should be taken to safeguard Santals by which they can enjoy their rights.
- Santals be taught and facilitated to modern cultivation system.
- NGOs should extend hands to lift the Santals communities for economic emancipation.
- Coordinated plan be adopted to protect Santals land rights.
- They should be given easy access to bank credit facility.

20. Conclusion:

In search of a better environment to live in, the Santals, one of Bangladesh's oldest human populations, came to ancient Bengal. They have experienced several repressions throughout history, nevertheless. They frequently suffered under pre-colonial and colonial regimes. They were taken advantage of even in the post-colonial era. Even now, there is still a history of exploitation. Some Santals were killed when they tried to claim the land of their ancestors. This terrible event had an effect on the latest attack on the Santal community in Gobindagonj, which happened in November 2016. For a variety of additional causes, they are progressively deteriorating and becoming weak. These days, the Santals experience continuous transformation. They still try to keep many parts of their traditional culture, like marriage, family, community, festivals, education, customs, and beliefs. The study demonstrates that, for the most part, the Santal community is able to maintain its own cultural customs with only minor deviations brought on by amalgamation with mainlanders and the surge of modernization. They could struggle in the future to preserve their traditional customs, though, if the correct actions are not taken immediately. So, the rights and culture of the Santals and other indigenous groups should be protected, and national and international authorities should take the right steps.

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