

# Santal Community in Bangladesh: A Socio-historical Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

The Santals are one of the most ancient indigenous communities in Bangladesh. Many historians denote them as the earliest settlers in greater Bengal. They mainly belong to Austro-Asiatic group of pre-Aryan settlers. Being the indigenous community of the country, they should have been more influential and developed. But the reality is different. Santals are deprived of stately rights and privileges in many aspects. It has a historical legacy of isolation and clash. As Santals live isolated from mainland people, proper attention was never given to them. Rather they were tortured and oppressed both by colonial and post-colonial rulers, which led them to launch many resistances. But ultimately those resistances could not completely stop the deprivation. In spite of all these challenges, Santals are still struggling to uphold their socio-cultural tradition. The absence of written document in Santal society created a paucity of information in the reconstruction of their history. Therefore, secondary source was mainly used in this research. This study tries to explore the social customs, livelihood and cultural features of Santal community keeping a special focus on the historical development. It indicates that they have historically been deprived in many ways, but they are still able to uphold their distinct cultural features in most of the cases.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, Culture, History, Indigenous Community, Santal

## INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is one of the most diversified countries of the world. It has diversity in many aspects, viz., ethnicity, culture, language, religion, tradition and so on. These diversities have created a composite culture in Bangladesh. Indigenous peoples or Adivasis are one of the most significant contributors of this diversified culture. But often the rights of Adivasis are being violated, and their identity goes under threat in many ways. Here indigenous people, pro-indigenous scholars and UNO are in favour of an open definition whereas the authorities of different countries are in favour of the denial of the identities of many indigenous communities by narrowing down the criteria. This is also reflected in the following statement of Jeff J. Comtassel where he said, "Debate within global forums over establishing definitional standards for indigenous peoples versus an unlimited right of indigenous self-identification has exposed something of a dilemma over standard setting in international law. Requiring strict, definitional standards excludes some indigenous

groups from the very protections they need while reifying their identities.” (Corntassel, 2003). Therefore it is important to discuss the term Indigenous or Adivasi first. Adivasi is a Sanskrit word which contains two parts where the first part ‘adi’ means original and ‘basi’ or ‘vasi’ means inhabitant. Indigenous is considered as the closest synonym of Adivasi. Tone Bleie noted to define Adivasi as “The numerous Adivasi communities who populated greater Bengal when the European colonists arrived qualify to be recognized as indigenous peoples” (Bleie, 2006). Here one thing is noted that the group of people who used to exist even in pre-colonial era and still exist with distinct identity is known as Indigenous community. Mesbah Kamal emphasized on culture to define Adivasis which makes them different from others. He stated: “ ‘Adivasi’ means such a group of people who are more or less organized in a region having a cultural unity and whose members feel that they are included in the same cultural unit.” (Kamal, 2007). Some scholars focused on the perspective as the basis of defining Indigenous, because it varies a lot. So they mainly emphasized on the relativity of perception whereas some other stated that only indigenous people should have the right to define themselves (Bodley, 1999). This school of thought mainly focuses on self-identification. On the contrary, in many countries, authorities tend to characterize Adivasi people as ‘small tribe’ or ‘small ethnic group’. Thus, the way of defining Indigenous or Adivasi differs from one to another and country to country. Keeping this in concern, ILO Convention No. 169 adopted in 1989 defined Indigenous more inclusively and elaborately. In its Article No. 1 it states:

- tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
- peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions. (ILO, 2013)

This is how various international organizations have tried to protect the right of indigenous communities by enlarging the prospect of their living and hope. But worldwide, their position is not that much satisfactory. Although Indigenous are 370 million or approximately 5% of the world’s population, but they are 15% of the world’s poor. It clearly indicates the disadvantaged condition of the indigenous community. In case of Bangladesh, the condition is more severe. Here they are not only poor but also deprived of their rights. Sometimes their identity goes under question (Gerharz, 2014). This is even more applicable for Santals of Bangladesh. To some extent, their condition is more vulnerable. The ruthless attacks on Santal community during last few years portray their vulnerability. In 2009, some land-grabbers attacked a Santali village of Naogaon district and destroyed 74 houses where police and authority remained passive even after protest done by indigenous, civil society and human rights organisations (Iva, 2009). This sort of violation of human rights did not stop there. Another attack took place in 2015. On 24 January 2015, Land grabbers attacked Santali village in Dinajpur. In this incident at least 65 houses were vandalized and looted. And many false cases were filed against many Santal people (Chowdhury & Chakma, 2016). Even in recent time, an attack on Santals took place in Gobindagonj, Rangpur about the ownership of a land. Rangpur Sugar Mill authorities, supported by local influential people, locked in a bloody clash over this land

with indigenous Santals on November 6 and November 7, 2016, which caused the death of three Santal men. Later on December 16, 2016, a Gaibandha district administration investigation has found the Gobindaganj Santals' claims valid on their ancestral lands in the Rangpur Sugar Mills area (Hasan M. , 2016). Many researchers and writers explained that the land was for Santals (Partha, 2016). This is how the rights of Santals are violated in many ways which is contributing to the disintegration of their traditional culture. So it is very important to secure the right and culture of Santals for the sake of the traditional diversity that Bangladesh has been carrying for centuries. We believe a comprehensive socio-cultural analysis will play a significant role in this process. The present work is an attempt towards that.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims to explore the socio-cultural practices of Santals from different dimensions focusing light on the historical development of their community. It will also focus on the changes and challenges emerging in the traditional life of them due to penetration of different interest groups as well as the wave of modernization.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is a combination of socio-cultural and historical analysis where cultural tradition has been described focusing on historical progress. Although the present study often depends on the empirical observation in Dinajpur and Rajshahi Districts, but it tries to explore the overall culture of Santals in Bangladesh. The unavailability of Santals' ancient script has created a paucity of primary source in this attempt. Hence we relied on oral myths, chapters of scholarly books, articles, periodicals, census, governmental and nongovernmental report and so on.

## ANALYSIS

Bangladesh is considered as a melting pot of various ancient races. At present, many of them are known as indigenous communities. There are over 54 groups of indigenous communities, covering about 2% of the total population, have been living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and in different pockets in the plains along with Bengalis, the majority population of the country (Chowdhury & Chakma, 2016). According to the census report 2011, there are 1586141 ethnic populations living in Bangladesh who cover 1.10% of its total population (BBS, 2011). Santals are 8.96% of the total ethnic population and 0.09% of the entire population of the country. Approximately, 143425 Santal people are living in different districts of Bangladesh. The following chart shows the district wise distribution of Santal community in Bangladesh.

Following table shows that most of the Santal people live in the Northern region of Bangladesh whereas more than one-third of them live only in Dinajpur. Since Santals live in different areas, therefore their culture varies from place to place. Nevertheless, the fundamental beliefs and customs remain same in all over the country. At this stage of the paper, various facets of the life and culture of Santal community will be assessed with a short historical overview.

Table: District wise Distribution of Santals in Bangladesh

Name of the Districts	Santal Population
Dinajpur	49861
Rajshahi	26469
Nawabganj	6228
Natore	2496
Naogaon	24409
Sirajganj	621
Joypurhat	2689
Bogra	881
Gaibandha	3087
Nilphamari	9
Panchagarh	920
Rangpur	5645
Tagoregaon	6382
Hobigonj	6450
Moulavibazar	6245
Meherpur	8
Chuadanga	590
Satkhira	105
Total	143425

Source: Sarker (2014)

### A Historical Overview

The fertile land of Bengal always attracted people. In the course of time, different groups of people from various parts of the world migrated towards Bengal and settled here. Among them, the most ancient are the Pre-Aryan inhabitants of whom Proto-Australoid is a group. Santals belong to the proto-Australoid group (Chowdhury A. M., 2004). It is very difficult to come to a conclusion about the origin of the Santals as different research works approve that Santals do not have any written records of their own (Hembrom, 1948) (Singh, 1988). The Santals have a saying: "The spoken word is better than the written word." As is the case with all the other groups within the Santali cluster, this outlook is reflected in their rich oral tradition of songs, stories, and histories (Kim, Kim, Ahmad, & Sangma, 2010). But it created a lack of source to reconstruct their historical development.

Santals are the second largest tribal group, only after the Chakma in Bangladesh. They are physically very strong and hardworking. Usually, they have medium height, dark complexion, round shaped face, high cheekbones, large mouth, voluptuous lips and wide nose. The name Santal came from Saont, an area inhabited by them in Midnapur district of West Bengal. They also call themselves 'Horhopon' which means 'Sons of Man' (Debnath, 2010). Some of them believe that their previous name was 'Kherwar'. Santals have their oral tradition to explain the mystery of creation using myths and legends. They believe that the whole horhopon (human beings) came from 'Pilcu Haram' and 'Pilcu Budhi' the first human couple on the earth. Many scholars identify their original homeland in Babylon. The Santals entered in India through Khyber and Bolan Pass, and established a homeland three hundred miles to the Southwest near Chota Nagpur. But a large colony was once settled in Parganas Chai and Champa in Hazaribagh. From Hazaribagh the Santals have wandered into Manbhum & into the Santal Parganas (Murmu, 2016). Later on, increased population, deforestation, and scarcity of wild animals, etc. forced them to move in different areas, especially in plain land.

It is hard to mention the exact period of Santal's arrival in Bengal due to the paucity of sources. However, many scholars suggest that the arrival of Aryans pushed Santals towards the jungles of Bengal. They did not accept the supremacy of Aryans and had clashes. Later on, the arrival of Muslim and British made them more scattered and vulnerable. Another opinion suggests that the Santals came to Bangladesh from Indian State of Bihar, especially Santal Pargana, for settlement in the period between 1840 and 1940 (Sharif, 2014). During British period, colonial rules made them bonded labourers. It became difficult for Santals to repay loans and ultimately made them slaves for generations. In this period all land reforms and land rights laws by the British, for instance, The Permanent Settlement Regulation of 1793, The Bengal Tenancy Act 1885, The State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950, and so on, went against the interest of the Santals (Sarker, 2014). This deprivation finally turned the Santals into rebels to establish their rights. Countless oppression and torture gave birth to the Santal rebellion which is also known as 'Santal Hul' in their language. In 1784, there was a resistance against the British oppression which was led by Tilka Murmu. Later he along with follower was captured and sentenced to death (Drong, 2001). On June 30, 1855, Santals under the leadership of Shidhu and Kanu, took an oath to establish a free land for them. Around 50,000 Santals started the long march towards Kolkata. It is said that the idea of long march as a protest came from them. The Police arrested some of them, and this led to the battle between the Santals and the British. The rebellious group killed 19 Soldiers. Santals created fear among the British in the initial period. But the primitive weapons of the Santals were not enough against the modern weapons of the British. However, they gave inspiration for the later movements' i.e., the Sepoy Revolution in 1857 and the emergence of nation-states in 1947. Unfortunately, after 1947, Santals were also deprived of their land rights due to an absence of the required legal deeds knowing that the risk of legal prosecution was minimal, some Muslims targeted indigenous individuals and households with brutal attacks, land grabbing, and more subtle forms of legal trickery. It is almost impossible to document quantitatively the massive losses of indigenous land in the Pakistan Period. (Bleie, 2006). Santals actively took part in the liberation war of Bangladesh. They were active in different operations with their local equipment and attacked the Pakistan army courageously. Rebellion against injustice is in their blood, and they sacrificed their lives in the war for the hope of a better future. But unfortunately, the independent Bangladesh could not pay their debt. Santals started getting the victim of illegal land grabbing, inequality and injustice after independence which made them poorest among the poor. The legacy of deprivation continued. The recent incident at Gaibandha is another example of the violation of their human rights where at least three Santal men were killed while claiming the right of their ancestor's land (Star, 2016). This is how the Santal community is going through a lot of challenges. It is also reflected in the following statement, "the social solidarity and homogeneity of the ethnic minority of Santals are weakening and disintegrating." (Hossain, 2008). As a whole, the socio-cultural tradition of Santals is now in a transitional state. Nevertheless in most of the cases, Santals are able to retain their distinct cultural traditions with a little deviation.

### **Family Tradition**

The family is the fundamental unit of society. Both the nuclear and joint family systems are found in Santal community. Traditionally they have a joint family system with strong family bonding with each other which is decreasing gradually. Change in values, poverty, individuality, etc. is contributing deeply in this regard. Santals are a patrilineal society where the family centers on the father (Chakma, 2002). The father exercises supreme authority in the family and possesses decision-making power. The mother in the family also plays an important role as she takes part in income generating activities for the

family. In a cross-cultural study in Rajshahi District, it is found that most of the Muslim couples follow autocratic authority (62.07%) while most of the Santal couples practice syncretic authority (71.33%) compared to other authority patterns to manage and lead their families (Uddin, 2008). Along with the male members of the community, women and children also take part in income generating activities. Santali women are hardworking, and contribute significantly to the family. But they are not allowed to inherit property. After the death of the male head in the family, the widow can exercise the authority but will handover immediately when the son gets eligible. Therefore, Santals in Bangladesh are quite similar to the plain land Muslims by being patriarchal in nature.

### **Society**

The Santals are divided into many clans. In Santali language, these clans are known as 'paris'. Santals are mainly divided into 12 clans those are Kiscu, Hnasdak or Hnasda, Murmu, Hembrom, Marnadi o Marandi or Mardi, Soren, Tudu, Baskey or Baski, Besra, Pnaoriar or Pauria, Guasoren and Chnorey (Toru, Santal, 2007). But the number of clans suggested by other ethnographers during different times varied from each other (Hasan M. , 2006). Key functions of the clans are to regulate marriage and divorce, inheritance, succession and association. These clans are hierarchically ordered on the basis of profession, such as kisku raja or king, Marandi Kipisar or wealthy, Murmu Thakur or Priest, Soren Sipahi or Warrior, Tudu Mandaria or Musician, etc. Santals usually become member of a clan by birth. The Santals believe that each clan has its own totem, and there is a firm relationship between a clan and its totem. Totems are generally birds (such as goose, Pigeon), animals (such as Bison, Sheep), plants (such as grass) (Ali, 1998). Some of the clans have their own taboos and forbidden things. These taboos prohibit many clans from eating some food items and doing some types of jobs. For instance, Soren is forbidden to eat the meat of deer, Tudu is not allowed to eat a fruit named 'Data jisinga' and Besra are forbidden to kill a cow.

Expansion of market, the impact of colonial education, employment opportunities outside the village, social and economic betterment, etc. are bringing major changes in the society and culture of Santal Community. For a better life or sometimes for survival they are to have greater interaction with the mainstream Bengalis that affects their lifestyle to a great extent. However, Santals have a strong bonding among their clans.

### **Marriage System**

The marriage system of Santals is quite similar to the Muslims. After the marriage, the bride leaves her family and stay at the groom's house. Santals give bride price (den mohor) to the bride's father which varies in different regions. The bride gets her new identity from the in-laws. Both the arranged and affair marriage are seen in their community. They mostly follow monogamy whereas polygamy is allowed as well. Santals consider marriage as a holy system ordered by 'Thakur Jiu', the supreme God. They believe that marriage ensures bond and security. Marriage is known as 'bapla' in their language. There are four types of marriage in their community i.e. Dangwa bapla (contact marriage), Angir bapla (love marriage), A-r bapla (forcible marriage) and Ittu bapla (marriage by tricks) (Toru, Santal, 2007). Customarily they are not allowed to marry within the same clan with some exceptions. In case of necessity, the bride is adopted by members of another clan and thus makes the marriage legal. They are also not allowed to marry outside their tribe. Santal Christians sometimes violate the rule of exogamy and get married within the same clan. But these converted Christians, keep their clan patronyms.

## **Livelihood and Occupation**

Basically, Santals were the hunters and gatherers. They were very close to nature and dependent on it. They used to collect their food from nature. Agriculture was their main occupation. They were the owner of the land and very hard working. But unfortunately, taking the advantage of their simplicity and illiteracy, the mainland people have made their life measurable. Illegal land grabbing had resulted in their loss of land. Moreover, industrial and technological advancement have destroyed their source of food and created the livelihood crisis. Therefore, limited employment opportunities in the villages are driving the Santals out of their comfort zone. They are now in search of their livelihood in town, but the lack of education and technical knowledge has made that more difficult. Nevertheless, some Santals are also involved in modern professions. Interestingly, there is not any tradition of begging in Santal community.

## **Politics and Traditional Administration**

Santals are the minority in society and thus are not represented in national politics. They are not very active in politics due to lack of education and advancement. They are a very peace loving community and have their own system of village management. The administrative head of the village is known as 'Manjhi'. A. Jalil classified the traditional Santal political organizations into following categories: First, village: village officials consisting of five personnel viz., manjhi haram, jog manjhi, jog paranik, godet and naeke. Naeke is usually not considered a member of village officials rather he is considered to be something like a priest. Second, pargana: village officials comprise of some village heads or manjhi harams. The head of pargana village officials is called parganit. Pargana village officials' committee is constituted of four or five members; but sometimes the number of the committee differs. Third, five to six or more parganas and its manjhi harams constitute Des Manjhi Council (Jalil, 1991). Although Santals are not interested in national politics, still they are very united within their own community. Historically they came up with many resistances against colonial and post-colonial oppressions.

## **Religion**

Santals have a strong belief in natural spirits and forces. They believe that various kinds of supernatural beings exist along with good spirits of the dead ancestors. These spirits roam around and look after the affairs of their successors. Among all the supernatural beings, the 'supreme being' is known as 'Thakur Jiu' (Life-giver) or 'Marang Buru' (Big Hill). The word "Thakur jiu" is a Sanskritized term used for the name of the Supreme God in Santal traditional belief (Murmu, 2016). The Supreme being provides all that a man needs and specifies the span of life. He is the provider of days and nights, heat and cold, rain and sunshine. He punishes people when they make mistakes and displease him. The other Spirits are known as Bonga.

Santals' religion is known as Sonatan which is quite similar to the Hinduism. They perform their religious duties by worshipping and through different festivals. They don't have any temple of their own. However, Santals believe that they are surrounded by the spirits and only those spirits can assure their wellbeing. Therefore, the Bongas are remembered every day. Even when they take a meal, they sacrifice a small portion of the food for the Bonga by dropping it on the floor. However, the distinct religious practice of Santals is going through changes. For a better living and to run away from poverty many of them are getting converted to Christianity and have started following Christian culture and tradition.



## Supernatural Beliefs and Customs

Santals have a lot of supernatural beliefs and customs which have been practiced by them for years. Santals believe in witch. Witch is considered as the cause of all diseases and other ominous incidents (Toru, Bangladesher Adibashi Songskriti (Indigenous Culture of Bangladesh), 2008). The witches, especially women, possess special power and can harm to people. But their spell can be withdrawn by 'Ojha'. Ojha, the spiritual healer, also prepares medicines from plants, herbs and roots to cure fevers, low vitality, madness, small pox, cholera, leprosy, etc. They recite conjuration and perform sacrifices. For his services Ojha gets compensation based on the intensity of the disease and the economic condition of the patient. Santals usually burn the dead body. But now, many of them bury the dead in graves. They believe that the spirit of the deceased goes to a shadowy world where the person requires the materials of this world. This is well expressed in the ritual practices done at the time of burial and during the 'bhandan', the last ceremony done in honor of the dead. In the earlier period, Santals used to perform Bhandan immediately after the funeral, but now it is done within 2-3 months in rich family and 1 or 2 years in poor family for the salvation of the deceased person. Usually, the relatives donate animals during bhandan in honor to the deceased person and believe those animals will be used by their ancestor in the other world (Marandy, 2015). Tattooing is another interesting traditional custom which is known as 'sika sign' in Santal community. They believe that if they die without tattooing, the angel of death will punish them hereafter. Now-a-days, these kind of supernatural beliefs are being changed in Santal communities because of modernization and education.

## Recreation and Festival

Santals have many festivals and occasions for enjoyment. Dance is the most important part of the Santals' fairs and festivals. Along with dance they also sing a lot of Santali song which is known as Sereng. There are a number of festivals related to agriculture i.e. Irokism (Sowing of paddy seeds in the field), Sohorae (harvest festival), Baha (flower festival), Janthar (offering of the first fruits of the winter rice crop). Sohorae is the biggest festival among all. In this day they show their gratitude to the gods for suitable weather, rain, sunshine which ensures the growth of a crop. Though the festival takes place before the Bengali month 'Poush', the day isn't fixed. Erok' is the first agricultural festival which takes place after the first monsoon rain. Baha (flower) is the new year festival where they dance, sing and sprinkle water. In Santali Language Baha means flower. So it is also called as flower festival which is observed on the month of Falgun. Janthar is celebrated in connection with the cut of first rice product to show the gratefulness. Apart from these agriculture-based festivals, they also celebrate some other festivals, like Jom Sim, Mak' More and Karam. Jom Sim is not an annual festival. Every Santal must perform it at least once in life. Those who can afford can go for five or six times. This festival is dedicated to the Sun God and expensive. Another festive occasion in Santal community is the birth of a child. They offer a lot of food and beer to the guests. Thus, the life of the Santal is full of festivals and celebrations. These festivals also bring them closer as a community.

## Food and Beverage

Rice is the main food of Santals. They are fond of vegetable, fish and meat. They love jute spinach and egg of tortoise. They eat the meat of chicken, beef, duck, pork and goat. Squirrels, crabs, tortoises, rabbits, rats, snails and red ants are also found in their menu. They are fond of sweets and cakes as well. Santals are very much addicted to drinking



which is reflected in the Santal proverb, "Give me wine or death" (Toru, Santal, 2007). 'Hariya', the rice beer is their favorite drink. It is believed that the Supreme Spirit had instructed the Santals in the brewing of rice beer. They make the beer from rotten rice and sometimes from palm juice. Both men and women do smoke and drink. Smoking and drinking are also an integral part of their festival which is gradually decreasing due to increasing awareness among the new generation.

### **Costumes**

Santal men used to wear loin or a piece of cloth to cover the private parts of the body whereas women used to wear two pieces to cover lower and upper parts of the body. At present, they are in the process of gradual adaptation to the dress of the Bengalees (Hasan M. , 2006). Now-a-days, most of the Santal women wear saree. Salwar, kameez and orna are also getting popular. Santali women do not cover their head. They comb their hair nicely to tie that at the back and decorate with beautiful flowers. For men, it is Shirt, Panjabi, lungi, pant, trouser, etc. to wear. Santali women use oil, vermilion, rings and different ornaments to decorate themselves. Most of the ornaments are made of nickel and silver. They are fond of earrings, nose rings, tiara, ornament around the waist, wristbands, necklaces, glass bangles, etc.

### **Language and Education**

Bangladesh has many languages. There are around 45 indigenous communities in Bangladesh, and they have around 40 different languages (Azad, 2003). Santals speak in 'Santali' language. This language is a part of the Austro-Asiatic language family (Dey, 2015). Santals did not have written language until the twentieth century. Before the development of Santali script, Santali was written using the Bengali, Oriya or Roman Scripts. The Santali Script, which is known as 'OI Cemet', 'OI Chiki,' or simply 'OI', was created by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in the 1930s. The Santali Script uses thirty letters and five basic diacritics, and includes six basic and three additional vowels. During British rule the Roman alphabet was established as the preferred written form of Santali (Cavallaro & Rahman, 2009). The first alphabet of Santali language was created by a Norwegian Missionary and linguist whose name was Paul Olaf Bodding (1865-1938). He also wrote the first grammar for the Santali-speaking indigenous people in Eastern India.

Due to the dominant plain land majority language Bangla, Santali language is getting extinct. To be established socially and economically they are shifting away from their traditional language to Bangla. Even there are groups who don't know Santali language. Since the medium of education in schools is Bangla, therefore, they feel neglected. Though the national education policy and other programmes ensure the use of ethnic community language at the primary level but these are not implemented yet. The different language of the teachers, peers and books make learning difficult for the Santal children. Thus, they become isolated, abandoned and discriminated. They do not find interest in school and dropout rate is high. UNO stated indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages (UNO, 2009). Hence, mother-tongue based multilingual education should be provided for Santal community. This method will improve access to education and learning outcomes as mentioned in a report of World Bank (Education Notes, 2005). Therefore, Santal students should get a multilingual education at the very early stage of their schooling with special focus on their mother language.

## CONCLUSION

Santals, one of the most ancient human groups in Bangladesh, migrated to ancient Bengal in search of a better place for living. But historically they have been going through a lot of repressions. They were often oppressed by pre-colonial and colonial rulers. Even in the post-colonial period, they were exploited. This legacy of exploitation continues until the recent time. The recent (November 2016) attack on Santal community in Gobindagonj bears the mark of the tragedy which killed some Santals while claiming the right to their ancestor's land. Because of many other reasons, they are gradually getting feeble and disintegrated. Now, Santals are going through constant changes. But they are still trying to uphold their traditional culture in terms of family, society, marriage, administration, religion, festivals, education, customs, beliefs and many other aspects. The study shows that in most of the cases, Santal community is able to retain their distinct cultural practices with a little deviation caused by assimilation with mainland people and the wave of modernization. However, it might be tough for them in future to remain with their traditional cultures if necessary steps are not taken immediately. Therefore, national and international authorities should take proper steps to protect the right and culture of Santals and other indigenous communities.

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