

The Issue of Identity: State Denial, Local Controversies and Everyday Resistance among the Santal in Bangladesh



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To my parents

Noor Afshan Khatoon and Ghulam Hossain Siddiqui

Who transitioned from this earth but taught me to find treasure in the trivial matters of life.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to trace transformations among the Santal of Bangladesh. To scrutinize these transformations, the hegemonic power exercised over the Santal and their struggle to construct a Santal identity are comprehensively examined in this thesis. The research locations were multi-sited and employed qualitative methodology based on fifteen months of ethnographic research in 2014 and 2015 among the Santal, one of the indigenous groups living in the plains of north-west Bangladesh. To speculate over the transitions among the Santal, this thesis investigates the impact of external forces upon them, which includes the epochal events of colonization and decolonization, and profound correlated effects from evangelization or proselytization. The later emergence of the nationalist state of Bangladesh contained a legacy of hegemony allowing the Santal to continue to be dominated. All these periodic events and actors' involvement have polarized the issues of the Santals' identity and rights. To respond to these hegemonic power structures, the Santal demonstrate their underlying power in both periodic and everyday events. Thus, the central theme of this research is Santal identity and their struggles to construct this identity through the lens of rights. In scrutinizing their struggles, this thesis uncovers the subtle meaning of "everyday resistance," which the Santal contextualize through ritual practices, behavioral acts, and traditions, propagating its rational meaning not only through practice but also through invention. From that point of view, the ethnographic exploration of this thesis uses a number of key concepts and issues. First, the thesis analyzes how the Santal produce power in their everyday lives and deploy forms of everyday resistance. Second, the thesis demonstrates the complexities and juxtaposition between being Santal and becoming indigenous Santal, or the tensions between Christian and traditional believers among the Santal. Third, this thesis speculates over the complexities through which controversies emerge concerning their identity, thus polarizing their struggle for rights. Fourth, this thesis explains the nationalistic construction of the state which denies indigenous identity, providing limited services and thus expanding the area of marginalization. In the same vein, this thesis argues that these processes how encourage evangelizers to intensify evangelized developmentalism. Fifth, the thesis examines how the Santal undermine all the hegemonic power that is exercised over them. Finally, the thesis explains how, by practicing and inventing, the Santal provide their traditions and ritual practices with political and rational meanings and invites us to rethink the power of subaltern.

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Abbreviations

AC-Land: Assistant Commissioner, Land.

AEC: Asia Energy Corporation.

ASA: Association for Social Advancement.

BAL: Bangladesh Awami League.

BMDA: Barind Multipurpose Development Authority.

BNP: Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

BSS: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

BRAC: Building Resource Across Communities.

CHT: Chittagong Hill Tracts.

CPB: Bangladesh Communist Party.

DC: Deputy Commissioner.

FY: Fiscal Year.

GDP: Gross Domestic Product.

ICDP: Integrated Community Development Project.

IHDP: Integrated Human Development Project.

IYWIP: International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

JAP: Jatiya Adivasi Parishad (National Indigenous Council).

JKS: Jatiya Krishok Somity (National Peasant's Association).

Manowa: An indigenous Santali cultural organization.

MIC: Middle Income Country.

Morcha: Jatiya Adivasi Mukti Morcha (National Indigenous Peoples' Liberty Coalition).

National Committee: National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Ports and Power.

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization.

PCJSS: Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (United People's Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts).

SSNPs: Social Safety Net Programs.

Taka: Bangladeshi Currency (sign, Tk. and code, BDT). One taka equivalent to the 1 Euro cent coin (€0.01).

The Academy: Rajshahi Division Ethnic Minority Cultural Academy.

UN: United Nations.

UNDRIP: The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Union Parishad: The lowest layer of local government of Bangladesh.

UNO: Upazila Nirbahi Officer.

Upazila: Sub-district, the second layer of local government of Bangladesh.

URO: Upazila Revenue Officer.

VGD: Vulnerable Group Development.

VGf: Vulnerable Group Feeding.

Vision 2021: Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010-2021 or Vision Bangladesh 2021.

WB: World Bank.

WHO: World Health Organization.

WPB: Workers' Party of Bangladesh.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Why will you speak for us? Arrange for my travel; I will go; I will speak about us, and you will translate.

—Antonio Hembram, headman of Situngtola village

When I had completed my fieldwork and was bidding adieu to the villagers of Situngtola, Antonio Hembram made the above comment. His words express the reflexive relationship between the observer and the observed. He was anxious and broached the issue of the historical continuity of indigenous people's representation by others, where indigenous life is objectified by rhetorical categorizations. In the British colonial administration and Christian mission enterprises, the Santal were always embodied as the "other." This "otherness" has continued as a legacy in the decolonized nationalistic state of Bangladesh, as reflected in Bangladesh's 47-year journey to independence. Moreover, the dimensions of social subjugation place the Santal in an "inferior" position and are the cause of many disputes. Antonio Hembram's statement draws attention to the power relations, as well as disclosing power, among the Santal. I considered how to respond to this comment from an anthropological point of view, coming to the conclusion that I should maintain the continuity of historical consciousness by acknowledging the constant cultural changes that have been occurring among the Santal. My fieldwork should acknowledge qualifications regarding observation; the reflexive role of the researcher should be accounted for in writing and description. From a Foucauldian (1972) point of view, discourses develop through a series of discursive interactions and institutional relationships. According to Foucault (ibid.), discourses represent power, but power can also be understood through discourse, of which action is a correlated part. By following this notion of discourse, this thesis aims to represent the results of diverse observations and ethnographic experiences among the Santal of Bangladesh. The power within the community expresses itself in discourses and controversies, rituals and behavioral acts, and performances and revivals of ancestral memories in everyday life. In discussing these subtleties of the Santal's struggles, this thesis demonstrates the Santal's underlying power.

The Santal are inhabitants of north-western Bangladesh. They are economically the poorest people and ethnically one of the most marginalized communities. Their indigeneity has been denied since the emergence of Bangladesh. By analyzing their marginalized status and their struggle to construct and reconstruct their identity, I include in the discussion the state's denial of the Santal's indigeneity and show how indigenous people's provisional rights are connected with international instruments supporting indigenous people's rights, but are only acknowledged by states that accept those instruments. However, Bangladesh abstained from acknowledging the existence of "indigenous people" in the country, as well as from voting on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Therefore, the indigenous people living in the country found themselves on the fringes of the state. Despite their rejection in the national context, their denial is analogous to creating a nomenclature to address indigenous peoples or to bypass their cultural rights (discussed in more detail in Ch. 2). The practical relationship between the state and indigenous people, here the Santal, leads to a cultural presupposition that is concealed in the state structure but revealed in policy documents and practices.

Beyond denial by the state, the controversies regarding being Santal and becoming indigenous Santal, or Christian Santal and traditional believer Santal require the involvement of intermediaries¹ to be taken into account. Because of a long history of evangelization, the Santals' religious identity has blended with their ethnic identity, traveling in many complex ways in everyday life. By contrast, non-government organizations (NGOs)² have included the Santal in

¹ The phases of transformation among the Santal are also associated with the two significant actors, the church(es) and NGOs. As inevitable outsiders, whose implicit and explicit involvement is accounted for in this thesis, I have addressed both actors taken together as "intermediaries."

² The term "NGO" is widely used to refer to non-governmental organizations in some cases and non-profit organizations in others. In Bangladesh's perspective, NGOs are influential non-state actors that work as agents of change. However, NGOs' operational activities and categories are heterogeneous, such as service provider, rights-based, research-based, charitable or campaigning NGOs; their categories and activities are hybrid and evolving. In Bangladesh, a wide range of micro-credit-based NGOs are working as well. However, NGO categories also extend to local, national, and international NGOs, all of which are mostly dependent on the donors' funds (e.g., European Union, World Bank, etc.), whereas some of the international NGOs have mechanisms to self-generate funds, such as ActionAid, Oxfam, and NETZ Bangladesh. From Bangladesh's perspective, the shifting role of the NGOs from philanthropy to profit is controversial, as is their aim of achieving well-being, such as BRAC (previously Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and now Building Resource Across Communities) or the Grameen Bank. However, in the thesis, the NGOs' interference with the Santal is described in Chs. 4 and 6, in which the Catholic Church-supported NGO Caritas-Bangladesh's many activities could be observed in the villages in which I conducted fieldwork.

their development schemes to revitalize their traditions and introduced various agendas for change. The involvement of intermediaries (evangelizers and NGOs) has brought about manifold prescribed processes of change. To respond to these prescribed changes, forms of cultural resistance have been intensified among the Santal. Thus, the involvement of intermediaries has also been accounted for in my discussion. Indeed, the manifold communication nurtures the Santals' spirit of resistance and motivates them to graft their spirit into the infrapolitics.³ By practicing infrapolitics in different locations of everyday life, the Santal perpetuate the idea of Santal identity and accumulate the power to support their claim to indigeneity.

In the late twentieth century, the emergence of global indigenous activism contributed to opposing the presuppositions and autochthonous ideas of indigenous identity. In the late twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first century, the UN has drafted formal documents that have aggregated their rights. Anthropologists agree on the distinct notion of indigenous people's rights, though the definition of term "indigenous people" is contested. The ideological arguments between identity and culture have been widely presented in academic disciplines, and often the diversity and distinctness of different peoples has been acknowledged by academics. By considering scholarly ideas on identity, indigeneity and the political struggles of indigenous peoples, this thesis grounds itself in the conceptual understanding of "everyday resistance" (Scott 1985, 1990), Barth's (1969) ideas of identity and Clifford's (2013) analysis of the return of indigenous people in the twenty-first century.⁴

However, indigenous people's struggles to obtain their rights are subjected to "essentialities" based on how long ago their original ancestors came to their particular locations

³ According to Scott, subordinate groups have invisible power which is transformed into unnoticed actions in everyday life. These unnoticed actions are called "infrapolitics" and are embedded in forms of resistance in acts, gestures, linguistic tricks, rituals, rumor, gossip, folktales, songs, jokes, and theater (1990: 137).

⁴ The conceptual understanding of everyday resistance accounts for "the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups" (Scott, 1985: xvi), in other words, how foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson and sabotage have become the weapons of the weak in attempting to undermine hegemonic power. His idea is appropriate to revealing the implicit meanings of the ritual practices the Santal have used to maintain and create their distinct identity. To understand the notion of Santal identity, this thesis also takes into account Barth's (1969) idea of ethnic identity to examine how identity shifts. To contextualize indigenous people's struggles and to accommodate these shifts, Clifford (2013) attempts to analyze the hybrid construction of identity as meaningful and finds possibilities under the processes of political renewal among indigenous peoples at the local and global levels or vice versa. I discuss these concepts in more detail in Ch. 2.

and require their ability to prove that history. These predicaments are acknowledged through this study and are invoked to explain social relationships and political events, scrutinized with respect to controversies and claims, denials and demands, rights and ritual practices, and discourses and the production of power among the Santal. Studying people and speculating about power relations through the lens of culture provides broader perspectives with which to crystallize political moves and current events. Thus, the dynamics of the Santal's struggles described in this study, when they survive within the niches left by the state's denial of them, involve them in endeavoring to create a space in social settings and to produce forms of resistance in everyday life through ritual practices. The production and reproduction of these practices in villages and localities provide substantial materials for examining the power relations, processes of change, and possibilities under national political contents. In this way, the Santal's struggles can be understood through the lens of the twenty-first century's global "indigenous becoming."

In Bangladesh, indigenous people's demand for acknowledgement as "indigenous" was not only denied – the nomenclature used to address them increased their sense of neglect. This denial and neglect polarized social locations and created controversial contexts within which the Santal are subjugated. The Santal's social status degraded them by calling them *upajati* (subnation), and the ethnic relationship between the Santal and Bengalis⁵ is dichotomized by means of many social boundaries. Thus, by living under multifaceted forms of subjugation, the Santal struggle every day for their rights and recognition. At the same time, proselytization creates multiple controversies and divides ethnic relations by calling individuals either *bideen* (traditional believers) or *esoie* (Christian believers). Alongside this division, in struggling for their rights, both traditional believers and Christian Santals are agreed in practicing and reviving ancestral memories, which inevitably contain the core of Santal traditions and rituals. In this context, the ethnographic materials in this study reveal the dynamic role of the Santal, in which

⁵ Bengalis, or Bengali people, are mainly divided into two religious groups, i.e., Bengali Muslims and Bengali Hindus. The Hindu Bengalis mostly live in the Indian states of West Bengal, while the Bengalis living in Bangladesh are mainly Muslims. According to the 2011 census report, in Bangladesh, Muslims constitute 90% of the total population (see Population and Housing Census 2011 [Vol. 2], Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics). In this thesis, when writing about the Santal's interactions with Muslim Bengalis, I mostly use the term "Bengali." Bangladesh is home to Muslim Bengalis. The emergence of Pakistan, of which Bangladesh was once a part, was rooted in Muslim nationalism. Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation state in 1971. This historical background is briefly described in Ch. 2.

they have generated new meanings from their ritual practices and expanded on the subtleties of culturally specific behavioral acts.

Indeed, the Santal people and culture are inseparably interconnected with many issues and multifaceted situations. Therefore, in scrutinizing the subtleties of culturally specific behavioral acts of the Santal, my writing this thesis materializes experiences based on my fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork between 2014 and 2015 among the Santal in two districts of north-western Bangladesh. In addition, this study describes some significant events from 2016 to 2018, in which contextual diversity and demands, spatial political relationships, and dynamics of the Santal's struggles were examined. The main aim was to examine the phases of cultural transformation among the Santal living in Bangladesh, as opposed to prior objectifications and categorizations of culture, people and society. My fieldwork materials, however, focus on those aspects of transformation that dealt with hegemonic power structures and imposed assimilations. I thus augmented my research area and included different issues and actors distinctively connected with multifaceted historical relationships and political events from past to present. In linking Santal responses to periodic and everyday events, I explore how and why the notion of Santalness is produced and reproduced in Santal villages. In scrutinizing ethnographic details, this work argues how the Santals' intimate involvement with their rituals or behavioral acts nurtures the spirit of their resistance. In analyzing controversies among the Santal, this thesis also argues how discourses produce power and how ritual practices solidify the notion of identity—how both provided rational meanings to continue and invent traditions, as well as constructing spaces of negotiation for identity and rights.

In the midst of investigations, in analyzing the controversies regarding Santal identity and their demand for indigenous recognition, this thesis also provides keen insights into a number of specific, interrelated arguments. The following questions are derived from these arguments: First, what thematic interests create controversial local discourses among the Santal? Second, how do these controversial situations incite Santal to find paths of consensus? And third, how do Santal determine their identity in their everyday life? By investigating these micro-questions, the thesis also responds to the following interrelated macro-questions: First, which political aspects do the Santals invoke in making their demands for indigenous identity? Second, how does the

state produce areas of denial, and how does evangelization distribute its agendas? Third, how do intermediaries influence the Santal and inspire them to embrace prescribed changes? By responding to these questions, the overarching aim of this thesis is to describe the dynamics of the Santals' everyday lives and their constant struggles for rights.

1.1. Santal in the Field Area and Terms and Definitions

The Santal or *hor* (human being) are the largest indigenous group in north-western Bangladesh, and numerically the second largest indigenous group in Bangladesh. Others call them “Santal”, although they call themselves “*hor*.”⁶ Because they are widely known in English bibliographical material as “Santal,” this thesis uses this term as well. In addition, to characterize Santal identity and intensify Santals' affinity for Santali ways of life, I often use the word “Santalness.” Moreover, the Santal consolidate their indigenous claims by struggling for culturally specific as well as human rights. In dealing with Santals' rights, this thesis therefore uses the term “indigenous people” in order to validate it. The political standpoints and positioning involved in how the term is used are discussed further in Ch. 2. However, like “others,” the Santal have their own terms for addressing others and neighboring communities. For example, to speak of Muslims and Hindus, they use the terms *Muslewo* and *Diku* respectively. The word *Diku* also designates a stranger or outsider.

Linguistically, the Santal are characterized as a part of the Austroasiatic language family, being related to the Munda language branch and ethnically designated Pre-Dravidians, Dravidians, Kolarians, Proto-Australoids, Nishadics, and Austrics.⁷ The Santal were mainly peasants, their way of life and traditions reflecting their enriched peasant life. They had an ingrained cultural relationship with the land, but were massively dispossessed of their land, which compelled them to sell their labor. Now, most Santal are either wage-laborers or agricultural laborers. Although their relationship with the land has been curtailed, today they still love to say, “we are farmers” and “our occupation is agriculture.” This self-consistency is not only affirmed in their way of living, it also indicates their affinity to the peasant way of life. Till

⁶ Variations in naming the “Santal” are discussed in more detail in Ch. 4.

⁷ These categories have been described in colonial documents, such as Dalton (1872), Risley (1892), Hunter (1868) and O'Malley (1910).

now, their rituals, festivals, and ceremonies have been determined by the agricultural calendar. Their ritualized peasant way of life has been subordinated, but by saying, “we are farmers” and “our occupation is agriculture,” they create a space for resistance.

Although the Santal are mainly concentrated in villages, a comparatively small number of formally educated Santal have left their villages to work in cities or towns. In these urban settings, as I discovered through my interviews, most members of the Santal community have an explicit awareness of their socio-cultural and political rights. Many of them are familiar with the internet and campaign for indigenous rights on social networking sites. They are aware of the collective rights of globally produced indigeneity, and through local activism, they are strategically involved with the international arena. They are not only affiliated with each other but also with many local activities,⁸ such as organizations’ cultural events, NGOs development programs, and Santali literature and newsletters. By involving themselves in these activities, the indigenous people of the Kakonhat⁹ area challenge the state’s denial of their indigenous claims.

In the national context, since the formation of the state of Bangladesh in 1971, the identities of indigenous people have been strongly subjected to assimilation to Bengali or Bangladeshi nationalism. The subjectivity of how this policy is applied in the case of the Santal is discussed later in this thesis. However, in dealing with diverse forms of external penetration, the Santal endeavor to retain and revive their notion of Santal identity by means of many traditional practices. This thesis therefore often uses the terms “tradition” and “traditional practice.” The idea of tradition refers to followers of ancestral lifestyles. The continuity of traditional practices includes memories of the past. For Santals, tradition is defined as follows:

⁸ I observed many activities during my fieldwork in Kakonhat market place. Particularly, I found a young Santal-established computer center educating a group of young formally educated local indigenous people about the basics of computers. Two NGOs headed by indigenous people have been founded. One, a cultural organization, was founded by a young Santal, Manowa. Manowa’s activities are discussed in Ch. 8. These organizational activities frequently produced a series of leaflets, pamphlets, posters, newsletters, and booklets. Through these local activities, the Santal are explicitly connected at the national level and are implicitly interconnected with globally circulating notions of indigeneity.

⁹ Kakonhat was the local marketplace near Situngtola village where I conducted my fieldwork. The significance of this place in promoting the rights of indigenous people plains is documented in various parts of this thesis.

What our ancestors did, we intend to do to maintain our Santalness. Thus, by performing rituals, such as continuing the celebration of *baha* and *sohrai porob* (spring and harvest festivals), we try to nurture our communal harmony. We attempt to minimize our religious divisions in wedding rites. We live under pressure to leave our traditional practices, but despite that, we are strict about continuing our traditional salutations (*johar*, *dobok*, and *janga-abuk*) and welcome rituals (serving and drinking *handi* [rice beer]).

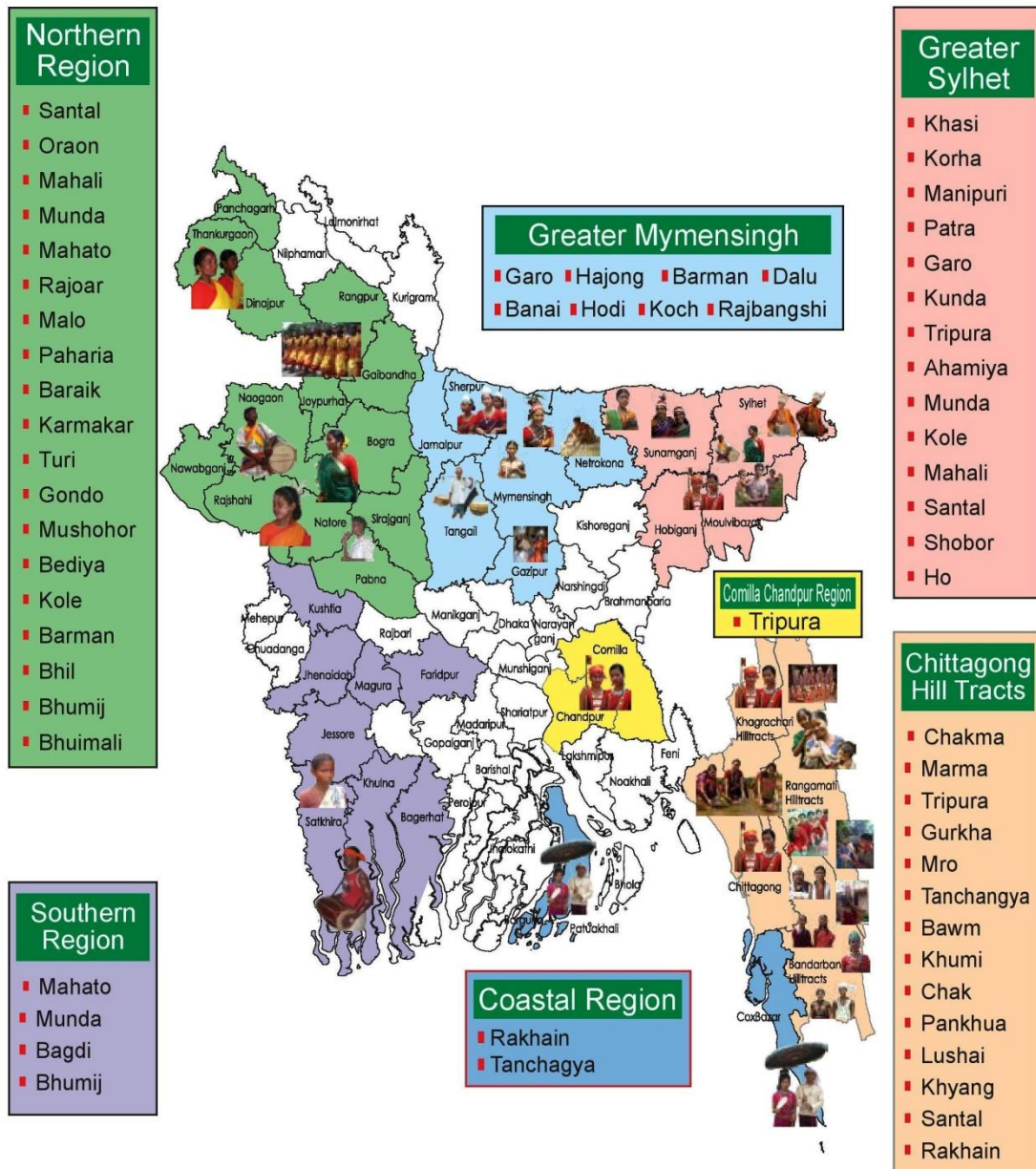
In brief, for the Santal, maintaining their ancestors' lifestyle became a source of tradition. Regarding the anthropological perspective on tradition, I also include Hobsbawn's (2000) understanding, which links the term with the construction of "nation" and "nationalism": "traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (Hobsbawn 2000: 1). In the Santals' case, traditional practices are "partly invented and partly evolved," and tradition implies following the rituals their ancestors performed instead of traditions to fulfill nationalistic aims, as argued by Hobsbawm (ibid.). The survival of traditions depends on inherited memories, which Santal transfer through their oral narratives from one generation to another. Today, the Santal's perceptions of tradition refer to elderly adults' sayings and narratives, which were later documented by nineteenth-century colonial rulers and missionaries. These narratives have boosted the construction of the Santals' contemporary claims to be indigenous, as well as sharpened the idea of Santal identity. In addressing the followers of ancestral beliefs or traditional practices, I admire their beliefs and use the term "traditional believer," although scholarly and colonial attempts to identify the Santal religion have been contested, and Santal's self-assertions about their faith contain different notion, which I briefly discuss in Ch. 2. In Santal villages, the practice of their traditions broadly depends on the collection of inherited memories. Indeed, the revival of tradition can be viewed as a Santal weapon.

Regarding the indigenous peoples of plains,¹⁰ this thesis pays particular attention to the Santal, although a large number of indigenous groups live in the north-western region of

¹⁰ The indigenous people of Bangladesh are mainly concentrated in the south-eastern, north-western, and north-eastern regions of the country. These regions comprise of the following divisions: Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT),

Bangladesh who are widely known as indigenous people plains, and the indigenous people of the north-eastern and central parts of the country belong to the same category. Thus, the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh are widely divided by geographical affiliation, i.e., indigenous people of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and indigenous people of the plains, although a large number of indigenous groups exist in these geographical locations. Among the indigenous plains people, the Santal are the most numerous at about 30% (Dhamai 2014: 10). However, the socio-economic status of the north-western indigenous people is more critical than the status of those in other parts of the country (Roy 2012: 6). Figure 1 shows the geographical locations and names of indigenous people living in Bangladesh.

Sylhet, Rajshahi, and Rangpur and the districts of Mymensingh, Netrakona, and Patuakhali. The indigenous people living in CHT are widely known as *pahari* (hill people), where 11 distinct indigenous groups live, as per the CHT Peace Accord of 1997. According to the Kapaeeng Foundation (a human rights organization for indigenous peoples in Bangladesh), the indigenous peoples of the plains include 34 distinct indigenous groups. The indigenous people living in the north-western region are predominantly known as “Adivasi” (indigenous people). My research work concentrates on the north-western part of the country, which particularly focuses on the Santal, who are considered the indigenous people of the plains as well.



বাংলাদেশে ৪৬ টির অধিক আদিবাসী জাতিগোষ্ঠীর বসবাস

Figure 1. The geographical locations of indigenous people of Bangladesh. Source: Kapaeeng Foundation (a human rights organization for indigenous people in Bangladesh).

Figure 1 also shows the Santals' residential locations. However, there is a discrepancy over the number of Santal in Bangladesh. According to the World Bank (2008: 3), in the 1991 census, there were 202,744, while in the 2001 census report, there were 300,061 Santal in

Bangladesh. There is no reference to the number of Santal in the census conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2011. The World Bank report (2017: 5) commented on this fact, stating that “the government statistics are sketchy at best; the most recent census figures (2011) do not provide ethnically disaggregated data, so the only useful reference point is the previous census conducted in 1991, which put their [indigenous people] total population at 1.2 million.” The report (*ibid.*) added that “taking into account the average demographic growth rate of the country, their [indigenous people] population at present should be around 1.5 million.” However, the countries’ indigenous peoples’ organizations disagree strongly with the government’s figures. The Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples’ Forum, a national indigenous peoples’ platform widely known in Bengali as the “Bangladesh Adivasi Forum,” emphasized in their press conference (Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples’ Forum 2016) that three million indigenous people live in the country.

This disagreement is not only limited to numbers but also to groups. The 1991 census mentions 29 groups, and the Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institute Act (2010) initially mentioned 27 “ethnic groups,” but after long negotiations, in its revised version it acknowledges 50 different “ethnic minority groups” living in Bangladesh that had to be approved by the government. The government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP 2009) refers to “45 indigenous communities” living in the country. The Bangladesh Adivasi Forum also mentions 45 indigenous groups in Bangladesh (Tripura 2016). However, according to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Bangladesh is home to more than 54 indigenous peoples, and the indigenous population is comprised of 1,586,141 people or 1.8% of the country’s total population.¹¹ By referring to the numerical status of the Santal and the 2011 census, in which the state avoided giving ethnically disaggregated data on indigenous people, this thesis draws attention to the state’s denial of the Santals’ indigenous status in government documentation. Thus, not only their numbers but also their distinctiveness as an ethnic group have been denied. These forms of denial travel from national to local levels, as well as from local to national. Their positioning indicates that social subjugation also cultivates forms of denial.

¹¹ “Indigenous People in Bangladesh.” *IWGIA*. <https://www.iwgia.org/en/bangladesh?start=4>. (accessed 31.12.17).

1.2. Interaction with Bengalis and the Testimonies of Santal Social Subjugation

The social subjugation of the Santal became evident through the recognition voiced by Jahangir Ahmed Sarkar, the chairman of the Rishikul Union Parishad¹² (community council) in the Rajshahi district, when he said, “I am the first chairman of the Rishikul Union Parishad who has allowed the Santal to sit on chairs in the Union Parishad office” during our interview. He explained he was showing modesty toward the indigenous people living in his constituency. The acknowledgement “to allow Santal to sit on the chair” also documents the local history of the embargo, based on the Santal being considered “impure” and “inferior” by Bengalis. However, the Rishikul Union Parishad consists of 47 villages, among them 23 “Adivasi” villages, of which most are Santal settlements. Allowing Santal “to sit on chairs” secured Sarkar votes, as a large number of voters in the area are Santal. Jahangir Ahmed Sarkar is affiliated to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP),¹³ which is pro-Islamic. Since the indigenous people in the country tend to support the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL),¹⁴ Sarkar garnered votes by permitting the Santal access to the chairs. The strategy seemed to be successful, as he was elected twice as the chairman of the Union Parishad.

Beyond this politicized acknowledgement, the Santal in the field area are confronted with much neglectful behavior from their Bengali neighbors. The Bengali’s domination and subjugation of indigenous people is apparent in public places, such as rural market places. The Santal, particularly in restaurants, are considered “impure,” and food is served to them in

¹² Union Parishad is the bottom level of the country’s local government and works as a community council within the constituency of the Union. As a bottom-level local government structure, the Union Parishad is responsible for implementing rural infrastructure, education, health, welfare, entertainment, and the social safety-net programs (SSNPs) so as to satisfy all the fundamental rights of local people. As an integral actor in local development, the links between the Union Parishad and the Santal are discussed further in Chs. 4 and 6.

¹³ The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was founded in 1978 by former military ruler Ziaur Rahman. The BNP maintains the core ideology of Bangladeshi nationalism, which inserted religiously biased nationalism and officially brought Islam into politics in Bangladesh. At present, the party is the largest opposition in the country and led the opposition alliance (18 Party Alliance), called “Jatio Oikya Front” or the National Unity Front. The opposition alliance mostly includes the country’s Islamic and pro-Islamic political parties.

¹⁴ The Bangladesh Awami League ([BAL] Bangladesh People’s League) is one of the major political parties in Bangladesh and is currently the governing party of the country. The party is popularly known as the Awami League. It was established as an alternative to the Muslim League in 1949 and talked about the centralization and dominance of West Pakistan over East Pakistan; it swiftly became the most popular political party of former East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The ideology of the party was inspired by Bengali nationalism and acquired the political space to lead the independence war of Bangladesh in 1971.

different dishes than Bengali customers are given. Due to the protestations of local human rights organizations, restaurant owners currently keep secret pots, which seems similar to their previous practice. Thus, the majoritarian concern for “purity” is practiced offstage, and the Santals are apparently “pure” in the public arena; yet, behind the scenes, they are methodically “impure” to the Bengalis.

I observed the distinction of “pure” and “impure” at the Tanore¹⁵ market place. Shaymal Murmu, a young Santal man, was helping me move around the Santal villages, and during my fieldwork we were in main market place of Tanore. At noon, we decided to enter a restaurant for a meal. I noticed that Shaymal Murmu seemed uncomfortable in his chair; he said, “as an indigenous person, I am not comfortable sitting in a restaurant. There is secret dishware reserved for the indigenous people in the restaurant, and they serve them on these plates. I feel neglected because of their way of serving us food.” He informed me that there was only one restaurant in the Tanore market where indigenous people are not discriminated against in this manner. We left that restaurant and went to the “indigenous-friendly” restaurant, called Tripti Hotel. After two days, I spoke with the owner of Tripti Hotel, and he said, “Many NGO workers are regular customers of my restaurant, and I am a regular food supplier for the NGOs’ local seminars and workshops. It’s the local NGOs who have motivated me to ensure access for indigenous people in my restaurant.” He understood that avoiding discrimination while serving food, even on secret plates, was not only a way of expressing solidarity with indigenous people but also a strong marketing strategy. Since the other restaurants secretly practiced the majority understanding of “purity,” local indigenous people avoided them. In the Tanore market place, no shop or restaurant is owned by an indigenous person. However, I did not find this type of discrimination in serving food in any restaurant at Kakonhat market place. Although the Santal and people of other indigenous groups of plains do not own any larger local business, their occupations are predominantly in agriculture-related activities, or to a lesser extent in the education and administrative sectors.

¹⁵ Tanore is the Upazila (sub-district) with the largest number of indigenous settlements and is located in the Rajshahi district. I clarify the significance of the Tanore market place, which I have visited several times, later in this chapter.

The experiences of those who are low in rank have influenced the Santals' everyday discourse; for example, the term for a pig in the Santali language is *shukri* (in Bengali it is the similar *shukor*). However, if a Santali ate or cooked pork during an interaction with a Bengali, he/she would say, "today, I ate (or cooked) *khasi*."¹⁶ Thus, the Santali word *shukri* was replaced by the Bengali word *khasi*. Notably, in Bengali Muslim's discourse, the word *shukor* is also pronounced *shuor*, which refers to an offense and culturally implies having treated someone badly. In this context, the Santali way of talking about pig-rearing and eating pork is an expression of defiance. Therefore, the Santal compromise when communicating with Bengalis and use *khasi* instead of *shukri*. The hierarchical inequalities are maintained by the interactions between Bengali and indigenous people. The Bengali ranking is "higher" (pure), and the Santal ranking is "lower" (impure) in social locations. These rankings are taken into account in the use of drinking water and seating, as well as in eating habits and gestures. The concepts of "purity" and "superiority" are deeply embedded in the behavior of the majoritarian Bengalis. These social subjugations implicitly motivate the Santal to nurture their spirit of resistance and break social domination through traditions and ritual practices as well as everyday discourse, which they do by using the word *khasi*. In the context of Santal life, the links between identity politics, national denial, and social subjugation determine the subtleties of resistance. Thus, past Santali practices or ways of life were emphasized to create new meanings of resistance.

1.3. "Being There": Locating Myself as a Researcher

To follow the Santals' everyday lives, I placed myself as close as possible to them as a researcher, while being careful about the majority practices of performing "impurity" and "inferiority," as mentioned above. Although I belong ethnically to the Bengali identity and religiously to the Muslim identity, I was cautious about Bengalis' bigoted and repressive treatment of the Santal because of the latter's negative experiences in interacting with Bengalis. Thus, locating myself in the field was not easy, despite my being in my home country. However, "being there," in the anthropological field is a process between the researcher and the field, a metaphorical relationship that grounds the researcher in the field. The researcher's prior conceptual understanding of him- or herself in the course of fieldwork changes (Watson 1999). I

¹⁶ *Khasi* refers to a castrated male goat or wether, which is widely eaten by Bengali Muslims. The meat is more expensive than beef; eating *khasi* also increases social status.

too experienced this in my fieldwork. At the beginning, establishing relationships in the Santal villages was not easy. Like most other ethnographers, initially I approached relationships with the villagers tentatively and experienced them from afar.

In addition, I grappled with questions about my own identities as a female, a researcher, a Bengali, and a Muslim in the local market place (i.e., Kakonhat) because I often went there during my field research since it was close to where I worked, Situngtola village. To enter the village and to return to my accommodation I had to cross the market place. Moreover, the place has significance in promoting the indigenous activism of plains peoples (see Fns. 8 and 9). In the market place, however, all shopkeepers are Bengali. They were curious to know about me, and most of them asked many questions. One question in particular was common – whether I am Muslim or Christian. My religious identity as a Muslim was questioned by local Bengalis. Sometimes, they commented, “We don’t believe that you are Muslim; if you were Muslim, you would not stay in a Santali village.” The statement indicates that by living and eating with the Santal, I was polluting my “purity” as a Muslim Bengali. This also stresses Bengalis’ belief that “they don’t believe” my religious affiliation as Muslim. To observe their reactions, I deliberately replied a few times, “I am a Christian.” The answer satisfied them, which I understood by watching them laugh. Afterward, they commented, “Indeed, we didn’t believe you when you first said that you were a Muslim Bengali. As a Muslim, you cannot stay and eat with the Santal, but as Christian, it is okay.” By sharing their opinion, the local majoritarians also transmitted the principle of religious “purity” and ethnic “superiority” associated with Bengali Muslims. However, I usually avoided responding to such questions, preferring to keep silent and to reply with a smile. In fact, this was my strategy for completing my fieldwork peacefully. I was often questioned about my work in the Santal village. They became curious about why I ate and stayed in the Santal village when many Bengali houses were available, and they wanted to know whether I ate pork. Eating pork is religiously prohibited for Muslims, and as Santal eat pork, they think it is *haram* (forbidden) to eat or drink anything from their kitchens. These sorts of inquiries and reactions not only reveal their officious behavior but also invite a careful examination of Santal-Bengali relationships, in which the Santal are always subordinated. The aggressive Bengali social hostility to the Santal added additional unpleasant situations to my fieldwork experience.

However, in Situngtola I was welcomed, which I discerned by watching their affable smiles and accessible gestures. Indeed, the cultural atmosphere in Santal villages made me feel secure and reassured me that, as a woman, I would not face unexpected difficulties. However, as a cultural construction of Bangladeshi society, my female identity restricted my movement in the adjoining local market places, particularly at night. In rural Bangladesh, the mobility of woman at night is culturally unaccepted and socially insecure. Therefore, I chose to employ a male research assistant to make my mobility easy at night, which is culturally appropriate in Bangladesh.

Although I belong to the same country, due to cultural differences with the Santal I had to acculturate myself to working with them. Thus, I generally attempted to involve myself in micro-interactions with the villagers. Initially, to acquire their approval, I met with the *manjhi haram* or *manjhi* (village headman), who is the traditional authority in the village. I explained to him why I had come to the village and said in Santali, *indo Santalkuyak jiyon o arichowli talare gobeshonai da* (I am conducting research on Santal life and culture). As a result, all the *manjhis* of the three villages in which I carried out fieldwork consented to my work. After receiving the consent of the *manjhis*, I started talking with the villagers. First, whenever I met any villager, after the formal greeting, their main question was, “Have you informed the *manjhi haram*?” I would reply, “Yes, I have spoken with the *manjhi haram*, and he has allowed me to work in the village.” Thus, my first steps in the Santali villages were primarily taken to gain acceptance from the traditional Santal village authority. However, the religious division among the Santal had broken the unity of their Manjhi Parishad (village council) in many of their villages. This was also the case in the villages of Burutola and Champatola, which I had also selected for research. Therefore, in each village, there were two or more *manjhi harams*. When I entered the villages, I met each of them separately, explained the purpose of my research to each of them and received each *manjhis*’ consent to work there.

Along with these initiatives, I found it challenging to reduce the distance between the villagers and myself in two villages, Burutola and Champatola, because the villages were located in a coal-mining area. The Santal in the mining area feared eviction, and the entry of any outsider into these two villages was socially restricted and watched by local leaders, who had resisted

implementation of the mining project. When I had developed a good relationship with the villagers in the mining area, I also knew that the Champatola village council had called a special *kulhi durup* (village council meeting). In the meeting, they discussed the issue of my entry into the village and told the villagers to be cautious when talking with me if I asked any information related to the land and houses. Thus, initially they informed me that I could talk to them, “but you cannot use a recorder, a camera, or even your notebook to document any information.” I stopped using such resources to document any information. I moved around in the villages and tried to build relationships with the villagers. I involved myself with informal-formal greetings and gossiped with the people, which went beyond my research goals. This strategy worked in helping me build good relationships with Gabriel Mardi and Anthony Hembram, who lived in the Champatola and Burutola villages respectively. Both helped me to build trust and convinced the villagers that providing information was not harmful to them, but rather, would be helpful in documenting their resistance. I explained the objectives of my fieldwork and reassured them that I was not an agent of the Asia Energy Corporation (AEC).¹⁷

Slowly, my mobility as a researcher was established in the villages, and I was allowed to use a recorder, camera, and notebook. When I had completed the first phase of my fieldwork in the villages, I moved to Rajshahi to work in Situngtola. After a couple months, I again entered the villages with the printed photographs of villagers I had taken in my previous period of fieldwork. The pictures themselves helped me to further develop a trustful relationship with the village communities of the mining area. Some people—those who did not allow me to take photos—commented, “During your last visit, we did not trust you enough. Thus, we did not allow you to take our photos. Now, you can take our photos and bring a print with you when you come again.” I replied, “I will not come back to the village soon, but I can take your photograph,

¹⁷ The Asia Energy Corporation is a London-based company that had signed an agreement with the government of Bangladesh regarding implementing the Phulbari Coal Mining Project. The area of the mining project spread across part of four sub-districts (Phulbari, Birampur, Nawabganj, and Parbatiur) of the Dinajpur district of Bangladesh. Due to widespread protests, the Bangladesh government postponed the project in 2006 and, finally, canceled the agreement with the AEC on 11 January 2007. Later, the AEC changed its name to Global Coal Management (GCM) and is now trying to induce the government to restart the project. However, in people’s discourse, the AEC is widely known either as “Asia Energy” or “Company.” In the successive chapters discussing how the AEC established the coal mine project in the Santali villages, this thesis uses the name Asia Energy because the company is known by that name in the Santali villages.

and I will send it to you.” Later, when I came back from the field area to another field in Rajshahi, I sent the printed photos to the villagers through personal contacts.

Despite grounding myself in the villages, I had initially difficulty to establish my identity as a researcher because most of the villagers assumed that I was an NGO worker and would try to convince them to become involved in an NGO development program. Some thought that I was affiliated with a Christian missionary and that my purpose was to proselytize them. In the initial stage of the fieldwork, my research assistant, who was a Santal and an inhabitant of the same locality, helped me clarify these misconceptions. In particular, I learned how to greet, how to introduce myself, and how to explain the purpose of my fieldwork in the Santali language. This played a vital role in breaking the ice between the villagers and myself, despite most of the Santal being bilingual and speaking fluent Bengali. Introducing myself and conveying greetings in the Santali language increased my acceptance among the villagers.

Over a period of time, the villagers realized that I was associated with neither NGOs nor churches. In this time, I continued to eat with them, using the same plates as they use in their everyday lives. I attempted to break the barrier and convey the idea that I did not view the Santal as “impure,” but the essential act was to drink *handi* (rice beer) with them.¹⁸ This act rooted my acceptance in the villages. Drinking *handi* had a huge impact on increasing my acceptance and trust among the villagers. Subsequently, the villagers created numerous spaces in which I could interact with them. I received special invitations to marriage ceremonies; they offered to teach me Santali dances and songs, as well as show me how to prepare *handi*. Some of them commented, “Initially, we thought you were like the others,¹⁹ but we later realized that you are like us—you eat with us, you drink with us.”

In the villages, I was widely known as *apa* (elder sister), instead of by my name. I was welcomed into family events within the village community, and I could easily enter any

¹⁸ In light of the majoritarian embargo on drinking *handi* and the Santal’s cultural distinctiveness in continuing to drink *handi*, my attempt to drink *handi* with the Santal conveyed my respect for their culture and was also supportive of grounding myself in the field. However, the intermediaries have intervened to stop the drinking of *handi*. The Santal’s wiliness in continuing to drink *handi* and its cultural meaning are discussed in Ch. 7.

¹⁹ When referring to “others,” the villagers mean the majoritarian Bengali Muslim people.

household in the village. I was also invited by the members of the Manjhi Parishad to ask them for further information whenever I needed to. They assumed that this was an opportunity for their traditions to be documented, and they extended their cooperation by providing all the data available to them. Some members of the Manjhi Parishad reacted by saying, “Everybody (outsider) comes to our village to document our poverty. Nobody has any interest in knowing about our culture and life. We are happy that you are interested in knowing about it.” In engaging myself with the villagers, I was trying to acculturate myself by eating, drinking, singing, and dancing with them. In other words, I critically engaged myself in the field and simultaneously asked questions for my research.

In Situngtola, I stayed in the house of either one of the members of the village community or one of the officials of Manjhi Parishad, instead of choosing a host family from the village community. Meanwhile, I had also made housing arrangements in Rajshahi. Travel from Rajshahi to Situngtola village took about 40 to 60 minutes by auto-rickshaw²⁰ or other local transport. The villages of Burutola and Champatola are in the district of Dinajpur, where I was living in the house of Nuruzzaman,²¹ a local frontline leader of the Phulbari movement.²² The villages were near to his house, within a seven- to ten-minute motorcycle ride. Burutola and Champatola are neighboring villages—a ten- to fifteen-minute walk from one village to the other—though the villages’ administrative legacy is associated with two different Upazilas.²³

²⁰ Auto-rickshaw is a motorized upgraded version of the traditional rickshaw pulled by humans.

²¹ Nuruzzaman, one of the local leaders of the Phulbari Movement that is opposed to the coal-mining project, was detained, arrested, and tortured by the police and paramilitary forces because of his active participation in the Phulbari Movement.

²² The Phulbari Movement is considered a grassroots resistance movement against corporate mining in the proposed “Phulbari Mining Project” area. This project is an open-pit coal mine planned to be implemented in the northern part of Bangladesh. The mining project will acquire 14,660 acres (about 60 sq. km) of land in an area of Bangladesh, where many indigenous people live (International Accountability Project Report [n.d]). The Santal are certainly the largest indigenous group in the project area. I discuss the Santal’s overt participation against the project and covert resistance to its activities in Santal villages in Chs. 3 and 7 respectively.

²³ The Upazila works as a sub-unit of a district. One district consists of several Upazilas. This is the second lowest local government layer of Bangladesh. The Upazilas are responsible for implementing the money allocated for the indigenous people of plains, which is allotted by the state, as discussed in Ch. 4.

In locating myself in the field and viewing my critical engagement, I acknowledge the contextual challenges of writing ethnography: this “interdisciplinary phenomenon [and] its texts opens onto the wider practice of writing about, against, and among cultures” (Clifford 1986: 3). Moreover, the acceptance of anthropological work and the collection of knowledge are widely embedded in fieldwork, though “the field” is a “mysterious space” (Gupta 1997). Meanwhile, locating oneself in the field can be questioned in many ways; there is no single identity, and the identity of the researcher, as well as his or her informants, can change (Gardner 1999). For me as a researcher, locating myself as an insider or outsider was almost conceptual.

1.4. Relationships across Place and the Multi-Sited Field

My field was multi-sited. I focused particularly on my interactions with the Santal in order to understand power relations and to critically perceive the hegemonic power structure exercised on the Santal in both past and present. Thus, I focused on observing the Santal’s everyday experiences of survival and their struggles to construct their identity. Thus, to grasp the legacy of historical and cultural encounters, I focused on the frontline and backline Santal’s struggles in local situations for rights and recognition rather than on a single geographical location. Moreover, my various field sites are related in various ways, such as the interconnectedness of their particular local discourses and relationships with intermediaries and with practicing and producing forms of everyday resistance. These links influenced my interactions in this multi-sited fieldwork. Although Marcus (2005) has a critical view of multi-sited fieldwork, he argues that multi-sited ethnography itself threatens the identity of the ethnographic research, but by doing fieldwork, it also produces new terms of ethnography. In my fieldwork, thus, I emphasized the interconnections between people and places, as well as the connectivity of local situations.

There are 16 districts in north-western Bangladesh. Of these 16, the indigenous people live in nine districts. I chose the districts of Rajshahi and Dinajpur as my fieldwork area because they have the highest density of Santal. Thereby, after arriving in Rajshahi, I met with Rabindranath Soren,²⁴ President of the Jatiya Adivasi Parishad ([JAP] National Indigenous

²⁴ Rabindranath Soren is currently the president of the Jatiya Adivasi Parishad ([JAP] National Indigenous Council) and chairperson of the Kapaeeng Foundation (a human rights organization for indigenous peoples of Bangladesh). He is a member of the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Affairs, and Politburo member of the Workers’ Party of

Council).²⁵ I discussed the purposes of my research with him, and he guided me in the selection of the villages. I selected, as my first area of fieldwork, Situngtola village in Rajshahi district. This village contains both traditional and Christian Santal, and one Manjhi Parishad (village council) exists to govern village life, irrespective of the Santals' religious identities. Furthermore, Situngtola village is located near Kakonhat, which is the hub of north-western indigenous activism. Therefore, Situngtola not only provided meaningful observations of the Santals' everyday lives but also allowed me to scrutinize the plains indigenous people's activism. Beyond that, in my time of living in Rajshahi, I went to the Tanore Upazila, only 30 kilometers (approximately) away from Kakonhat. Tanore market place and Mundumara Church were located there. This fact, combined with the large number of Santal settlements, NGOs interventions, and intense proselytization activities, were reasons to go there.

My second fieldwork area was Burutola and Champatola villages in Dinajpur district. There, the Manjhi Parishads were divided. In Champatola, the villagers followed two Manjhi Parishads, one for traditional believers and the other for Christian believers. In Burutola village, group conflicts had created four Manjhi Parishads,²⁶ even though *atu sagai* (village oneness) is of the utmost important to the Santal, maintenance of one Manjhi Parishad determining this oneness. From that point of view, both villages are relevant in understanding the production of controversies among the Santal and in examining the religious fissions surrounding Santal identity. Moreover, the Santal of Burutola and Champatola indicated their stance against capital expansion by participating in the Phulbari Movement. This location was significant for finding links between overt and covert resistance. Therefore, to crystalize the nature of plains activism, the divisions in the Manjhi Parishad, religious fission, the production of power, and emerging forms of resistance, I decided to locate myself in these villages. My field locations are marked in the map displayed in Figure 2.

Bangladesh. He has been involved in the indigenous peoples' rights movement for over three decades and of the JAP for over two decades, serving as national spokesperson for the plains indigenous peoples.

²⁵ Jatiya Adivasi Parishad ([JAP] National Indigenous Council) is a platform of the plains indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. Its involvement in advancing plains indigenous people's rights is discussed in Ch. 4.

²⁶ The controversies between Christian and traditional believers are evident through the divisions in the Manjhi Parishad. Such villages are significant in crystalizing the distinctions between fixity and flux, and transformations and traditions. The ethnographic explorations of Chs. 5 to 8 underline the causes behind this selection.



Figure 2. Field Sites (highlighted in red). Source: Map data, 2018, Google Map.

Among the Santal, considerable changes have happened, and they struggle in different locations, but interconnection within larger wholes links them in diverse ways. In finding contextual and culturally specific meanings for the Santals' struggles, the selected sites crystallize cultural realities by accounting for the political dynamics and the historical legacy. By situating myself in the three villages, I intended to adopt qualified anthropological methods to describe the ethnography of these areas.

1.5. Methods of Observation and Sources

Indigenous people in Bangladesh still experience the legacy of colonization, and the shift of the colonial paradigm keeps evolving in indigenous people's lives. Colonialism's profound impact is reflected in the marginalized status of indigenous peoples worldwide (Smith 1999). Indeed, Smith (ibid.) provides a critical overview for research on indigenous peoples and invites speculation on the researcher's conceptual understanding, influenced by colonial discourses and Western research methods of cultural assumption. Her reflections are insightful and help identify

the locus of power between research and representation, as well as participation and presentation. In this study, I too recognize that the Santals' marginalized status contains the footprints of colonial domination. Thus, my intention was to write an ethnography on wide-ranging cultural change among the Santal to avoid prior objectifications and categorizations, as mentioned in the previous section. I was therefore careful to follow the "emic" point of view. I also intended to avoid viewing the Santal as "disadvantaged" or speculate on their recognition as "victims;" instead, I focused on interpretations of culture in various contexts.

In doing so, I focused largely on the following ethnographic methods, though I utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, conference papers, and monographs, particularly those on the Santal and other indigenous people in north-western Bangladesh. The secondary material also included leaflets, pamphlets, posters, flyers, national population census data, press releases, and organizational documents, as well as local publications, such as newsletters and magazines. To document the Santals' way of life, I concentrated widely on ethnographic techniques, such as participant observation, group discussions, formal and informal interviews, walking interviews, informal discussions, and informal conversations. To accomplish this, I learned about the Santals' norms and values, which helped me establish relationships with the villagers. I noted my day-to-day observations in my fieldwork diary, and I conducted over a hundred formal and informal interviews. To verify the local controversies and examine the various forms of everyday resistance, I spoke with different age groups and people of both sexes. To collect demographic data in the villages, a structured questionnaire was used. Besides the ethnographic fieldwork, I also interviewed administrators, people's representatives, and local as well as national, indigenous leaders and organizers in Bangladesh.

When socializing in the villages, I primarily viewed myself as an outsider. To make my appearance more acceptable to the villagers, I started wearing a long *kameez* and *orna*.²⁷ To save myself from the scorching heat of north-western Bangladesh, I used a *gamcha*²⁸ instead of an

²⁷ The *kameez* is a traditional woman's long shirt and the *orna* a long scarf-like shawl. According to Bengali clothing habits, the *orna* is regarded as essential additional clothing for women to hide their breasts.

²⁸ The *gamcha* is a thin, local cotton towel, mainly used by the poorer section of society.

umbrella (umbrellas are generally used by the well-off). To move around in the villages and neighboring areas, I avoided using a motorcycle and preferred to walk to increase the chances of more vibrant interactions with the people; thus, I even tried to avoid using *van-gari*,²⁹ although sometimes I used this means of transportation to move from a village to the nearest market place. In walking and interacting with people, I tried to avoid social class distance, endeavoring to gain the villagers' trust. I involved myself in kitchen work, sometimes cooking, sometimes helping as an assistant cook, and sometimes only gossiping with the people in the cooking area. As noted, in eating, drinking, and taking part in ceremonies as an outsider, as well as by documenting Santal culture, I found myself also becoming an insider and experienced the feeling of being "like inside-out/outside-in research" (Smith 2001: 5).

In participating and observing the Santals' everyday lives, I realized that building trust was a core aspect of being given the cultural narratives of their lives. Simultaneously, I was aware of the profound role of confidentiality in building trust. Therefore, I kept the participants' names anonymous. Hence, the village names Situngtola, Burutola, and Champatola are pseudonyms. In renaming these villages, I selected Santali words that were intended to endorse the notion of Santalness. In naming them I tried to avoid any bias, although names consciously contain affirmative notions. Thus, *Situng* means sunshine, *Buru* means mountain, and *Champa* refers to a flower. *Champa* is also associated with the land *Chai-Champa*; according to Santali mythology, the Santals' ancestors migrated there from Hihiri Pipiri. The word *tola* refers to a cluster of villages or a single village. However, to make the Santal's struggles for survival notable, I have purposefully retained the actual names of political leaders, organizers, and organizations in this document. The localities, rather than the villages, remained the same as well.

During my interactions, I was aware that the village communities were not only respondents but also active participants in the research. It was not just confidentiality that

²⁹ The *van-gari* is a local three-wheeled passenger cart without a hood, generally pulled by one man; it is used to carry goods and from four to six passengers as well. Usually, the vehicle is used by laborers, agro-laborers, or the poorer sections of society. This vehicle is widely used in north-western Bangladesh for movement across small distances.

mattered; accessibility was also crucial. This concern is raised by Smith (1999), who suggests “researching back.” In viewing accessibility, she opines:

They [indigenous people] are “factors” to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood (Smith 2008: 15).

With regard to the respective role of research, Smith viewed the act of transforming research into practice as “reporting back” and “sharing knowledge” (ibid.: 15-16). A similar concern was voiced by the villagers of Situngtola when they requested a copy of my thesis to keep at their Manjhi Parishad. Furthermore, they requested I also have it translated. However, while I lived in the villages, I was careful to provide them with access to immediate outputs (i.e., photographs, recorded versions of interviews, and even sometimes field information). To transfer the photographs of the villagers, I made hard copies because they did not have digital devices. Instead, they mostly used old button-type mobile sets. If anyone requested I transfer his or her interview to him or her, I transferred it to neighbors who had the appropriate technology. Sometimes they asked me to display their photos on the camera screen, and sometimes they asked me to play back the recording so they could listen to their voices. I acceded to their requests accordingly. In contrast, by ensuring the villagers’ access to immediate outputs, I increased the trust between themselves and myself beyond what I expected.

During fieldwork, I also received invitations from local NGOs and cultural organizations for a wide variety of events related to indigenous people’s issues. I consciously declined many of these invitations because my focus was exclusively on the villages. Sometimes, I accepted invitations when there was an opportunity to observe the variety of changes to Santal traditions and to understand the local nature of indigenous activism. For example, I participated in a Santali poetry reading and recitation program, visited the celebration of the day of the Santal rebellion, watched Santal dramas and dance competitions, and observed several rallies, processions, and conferences. During these programs, I was often invited to take the chair as a guest on stage and deliver a speech, which I always declined because I was aware of my role as a researcher.

I conducted informal and unstructured interviews and had informal conversations while walking and moving around different places: for example, houses, courtyards, and tea stalls in the villages, and sitting under the big tree in the village where villagers rest after work, as these are important places for an ethnographic study. My participation in wedding ceremonies (*hapla*), feasts after funerals (*bhandan*) and festivals (*sohrai* and *baha*) became a large source of information. Initially, I participated in the programs as an observer. However, I engaged in playing the *tamak* (traditional Santali drum), dancing in groups, drinking *handi* in ceremonies, accompanying the *nayeki* (priest) in the *baha* festival, and spreading flowers and smearing *sindoor* (vermillion) on the foreheads of villagers in welcoming them to weddings. These activities transformed my role from an observer into a participant. I attempted to be an insider to some extent in order to understand the considerable cultural changes from the participants' point of view, though the insider-outsider situation is a methodological dilemma in the anthropological field (Gregory and Ruby 2010). Along with these constraints, I aimed to interpret the data from the "emic" point of view. Participation in different ceremonies throughout the year was a meaningful source of the observation of rhetorical changes between traditions and their transformation into rights-based claims for distinct identities. Furthermore, the literature related to the Santal was a significant source for tracing my collected fieldwork materials.

1.6. Existing Literature, the Santal of Bangladesh, and the Continuity of Categorizations

Writing about the Santal certainly includes existing literature on Bangladesh pertaining to Santal life. The Santal are also a large indigenous group in India, and many studies have been conducted on them, but in connection with this research, I emphasize the existing studies in Bangladesh. In reviewing the existing literature, I found some sources significant in understanding Santal culture and its considerable changes, although those materials were written based on the experience of the Santal living in India. In studying publications, however, I have included some books.³⁰ From a similar perspective, colonial documentation is also cited.³¹

³⁰ Among the scholarly contributions in researching the Santal of India, those I reviewed that relate to this study are as follows: P.C. Hembram. 1988. *Sari-Sarna (Santhal Religion)*; J. Troisi. 2000 [1979]. *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals*; Martin Orans. 1965. *The Santal: A Tribe in Search of a Great Tradition*; George E. Somers. 1977. *The Dynamics of Santal Traditions in a Peasant Society*.

³¹ Although colonial administrators and missionaries produced a large number of literature, I only considered those significantly related to this study: Bodding (1925), Campbell (1891, 1899), Skrefsrud (1873), Hunter (1868), Dalton (1872), Risley (1892), Archer (1974, 1984), Mukherjea (1962), Culshaw (1949) and O'Malley (1910).

Publications related to the Santals of Bangladesh include Jalil (1991), Ali (1998), and Hasda (2009), which are all greatly influenced by the majoritarian hegemony and colonial legacy. A limited number of scholarly works have broken the previous colonial lens in studying the Santal (e.g., Debnath [2010] and Knight [2014]), although Knight's fieldwork area included both India and Bangladesh, as did Ali's (1998) work.

In independent Bangladesh, Jalil's (1991) book is a comprehensive publication on the Santal, although in discussing the changes among Santal he proposes aggressive assimilation and asks why they did not assimilate to either Hinduism or Islam, but instead have been inclined to become Christians. In particular is he concerned about the following:

The Santal are the inhabitants of this land. They live in Hindu-Muslim majority areas. Nonetheless, the Hindu community did not create intimacy of kinship with them, nor did the Muslims show any courage in converting them into Muslims. They were inspired to take to the Christian religion due to their neglect by the Hindu-Muslim community. If the tendency continues, it is not so far for any traditional believer Santal to exist in this country (Jalil, 1991: 100).

Disregard and denial are reflected in the explanation of why the Santal have not been assimilated to the "superior" Hindu or Muslim Bengalis. As noted in previous sections of this chapter, the Santal experienced bigoted Bengali hegemony in interacting with neighboring Bengalis, similarly to what is reflected in Jalil's writings. Despite this, he categorizes the Santal lifestyle as the colonizers did. Ali's (1998) book originated from a doctoral study. The introduction to the book acknowledges that the Santal are in "transition," are suffering from "xenophobia" and are separate from the majoritarian society (ibid.: 3-5). However, the book does not succeed in critically analyzing the "transition", but rather represents categorical descriptions. Conversely, Hasda (2009), himself a Santal, lists traditional Santal rituals and compares them with today's practices. However, his descriptions of rituals do not move beyond selecting, listing, and noting which have been lost. The colonial period in South Asia ended in the last century, but Smith's (1999: 1) concerns are still relevant when she says, "colonialism remains a powerful remembered

history for many of the world's colonized people.” Indeed, these works (Jalil 1991, Ali 1998 and Hasda 2009) have been influenced by the colonial world view and have shaped the knowledge that is used against subalterns.

Kamal, Samad and Banu's (2003) book appears to be a disquisition on the problems of the Santal, which it documents beyond the analytical perspective. Hasan (2006) attempts to observe the changing livelihood of the Santal in Joykrishnapur village in Rajshahi district. However, he states that although “this book cannot make an overarching claim of incorporating (these) dynamics into research, it at least makes some hints toward looking into the trends and patterns of change...to find significant change indications for future investigation and research” (Hasan 2006: xiii). The study claims to be an anthropological work, but in its proceeding analysis it embraces discursive descriptions with huge amounts of statistical information.

Comprehensive studies on the Santal in independent Bangladesh are limited. As I have already noted, colonial objectification has repeatedly been documented in different publications, such as the “Cultural Survey of Bangladesh of Indigenous Communities” by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, where Toru (2007: 352–372) lists Santal customs, clans, religious beliefs, houses, festivals, and so on, accompanied by some photographs. The influence of colonial documentation is vividly expressed in this publication. In nationalist Bangladesh, Toru's (2007) texts invoke colonialist attitudes in describing the Santal. Indeed, Debnath (2010) states the danger of colonial legacy in his PhD thesis: “the surge of nationalism that has replaced colonialism retains the oppressive sites and has caused more devastation to the indigenous communities than colonial times” (ibid.: 78). This thesis is a considerable initiative in portraying Santals' lives in independent Bangladesh, investigating the Santals' trajectory from a critical perspective and analyzing the legacy of colonialism in the nationalist structure of Bangladesh. His work is to be appreciated, as he attempts to break the continuity of the colonial approach in studying the Santal in Bangladesh.

Knight's (2014) book also originated from a doctoral study and includes some ethnographic evidence about the Santal living in India and Bangladesh. In the book, the culture's continuity and constant change is observed through the lens of legal pluralism. The book

analyzes the social relationships of the Santal against the backdrop of social law and power relations. The power relations involving the Santal family, village, and state were investigated, including inequalities among the Santal themselves. Knight shows how the analogy of power is applied to arranged and forced marriages within South Asian families in Britain. Academically, the book is well-articulated. However, the contemporary Santal struggle for rights and recognition, the controversial situation among them, and the substantial Santal involvement in advancing the rights of indigenous plains peoples in Bangladesh are not dealt with in the book. For those topics, readers require additional publications.

In journal articles, books, and reports related to the plains indigenous peoples, the Santal are widely included as one of the largest indigenous groups in north-western Bangladesh, but their identity is mainly framed as that of an “economically oppressed” and “marginalized” people (Kamal, Chakraborty and Nasreen 2000; Bleie 2006; Barkat *et al.*, 2009). Kamal, Chakraborty and Nasreen’s (2000) book describes the oppression and marginalization of the indigenous peoples of northern Bangladesh. Bleie’s (2006) book widely discusses the human rights violations and livelihood crises of the indigenous people in the north-eastern part of the South Asian subcontinent. The Santal are included as a case study in the book, and the massive land dispossessions among them are documented. Bleie (*ibid.*) also acknowledges the NGOs’ involvement in addressing the human rights of indigenous people in Bangladesh. Barkat’s (*et al.*, 2009: 241-261) book analyzes the land rights of the indigenous people of the plains and includes the Santal as one of these indigenous groups. The book contains a broad range of numerical information to discuss land dispossession. The study’s findings are helpful in designing development projects among the Santal.

Hembram (1988), himself a Santal, attempts to describe the distinct attributes of the Santal religion in his work, *Sari Sarna: Santhal Religion*. He discusses the notion of Santals’ religious ties in their socio-cultural life. According to him, traditional practices are the inspiration of the Santal religion, as they determine Santali religious norms and communal solidarity. Meanwhile, Troisi (2000) also deals with Santal religion in the Santal Parganas of India. Troisi’s anthropological work documents the role of Santal religion and comments that “the life of every Santal is cast within the framework of his religion and magical beliefs” (2000:

239). The changing context and impact of Hinduism and Christianity are included in his discussion. He groups (ibid.: 246) the Santals' ability to cope with constant changes under three main processes: assimilation, fusion, and reaction. According to his view, the Santal religion represents a synthesis of mundane and material practices and works as a cultural institution. The ethnography illustrates the everyday details of the Santals' rituals. Troisi's work is significant in supporting future ethnographic research among the Santal.

Orans (1965) deals with the historical shift between the "great tradition" and the "little tradition" among the Santal in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India. Jamshedpur is an industrial town in which the Santal and others indigenous groups comprise the largest part of the population. The author observes the Santal's cultural shifts as industrial workers and their migration trajectories from rural to urban settings in 1956 and 1957. In the context of a market society, he demonstrates the emergence of middle-class Santals influenced by Hinduism, but the distinctness of the Santal culture also opposes cultural assimilation. Orans's (ibid.) ethnographic documentation describes the contextual and contradictory acculturation of Santal, which he frames in terms of an "emulation-solidarity conflict." His ethnography is useful in clarifying the paradoxical socio-cultural changes among Santal.

Somers' work (1977) describes the traditional institutional structure of the Santal, where a headman or *manjhi haram* is the "key to cultural continuity" (ibid.: 2). Working in the Santal Parganas in Bihar, India, he discusses how the *manjhis* (village headmen) are authorities in Santal villages and acknowledges that the Santal are exposed to the "assimilative pressures" of Sanskritization, Christianization, and Islamization. Despite many external and assimilative pressures, the *manjhis* roles in dealing with legal, social, traditional, and mundane life issues are articulated well in this book. To varying degrees, the study adds value to the analysis of the dynamic role of the Manjhi Parishad in Bangladesh.

The evolution of evangelism among Santals began in the middle of the nineteenth century, but only a few articles address the proselytism and other activities of Christian churches among Santal. For example, Brandt (2010) describes the historical phases of evangelism among Santal and draws empirical examples from her fieldwork, in particular, from the primary school

activities of the Seventh-day Adventist church mission in Joypurhat district, Bangladesh. She describes a materialistic perspective of religious conversion and acknowledges that this perspective leads to “a certain degree of cultural alienation” (ibid.: 65). For knowledge of the historiography of proselytization in eastern India and Bangladesh, her working paper is an important addition. However, in analyzing the perspective of proselytization in Bangladesh, Marandi (2006) justifies the activities Christian missions in seeking to reconcile the Santal. Marandi himself preaches Christianity to the Santal, though he acknowledges that “the Santals remain artificially divided into two camps—a small number of Christians and the majority remaining out of reach—certainly cannot be a good sign for the Santal Society.” Recognizing division, he admits that the Santal are suffering an identity crisis because they have failed to face the rapid changes that have affected them, and thus they remain on the edge of marginalization.

Carrin and Tambs-Lyche (2003) discuss the process of evangelization in which Santal chiefs or village headmen have sought to convert their communities. In addition to Carrin and Tambs-Lyche, Andersen and Foss (2003) also discuss the historical background to evangelization, as well as the critical intentions of missionaries. From an academic perspective, both articles are significant in understanding the context of proselytization and in gaining a critical perspective on the evolution of evangelization among Santal.

Over time, missionaries and British administrators have written many books about the Santal. These books contain significant information on the historical background of Santal culture, despite having been written to fulfill colonial purposes. Missionaries attempted to document Santal folklore (Bodding 1925; Campbell 1891) and contributed to writing dictionaries and documenting Santali grammar (Campbell 1899; Skrefsrud 1873). British administrators used discursive and exotic descriptions, categorizations, and naming in their documents to describe the indigenous people living in British India (Hunter 1868; Dalton 1872 and Risley 1892). Hunter’s (1868) book, which became a resource for British colonizers in handling Indian administration, calls the Santal a “primitive forest tribe” (ibid.: 256). The colonial administrator Dalton (1872) also describes the life of the Santal, acknowledging that they had a glorious life with beautiful tales that they could not write down (ibid.: 212). Risley (1892), another British administrator, also produces other descriptive detail to document the Santal. O’Malley (1910),

another British administrator's documentation, did not go beyond objectified production, and shied away from describing the Santal resistance to British domination that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The purposes of these documents have been criticized by scholarship, but they are worthy of analysis in order to determine the processes of change and to understand how the Santal have been objectified by outsiders.

Before official colonialism ended, some publications were added by British administrators and missionaries (Archer 1974; Mukherjea 1962; and Culshaw 1949) to fulfill colonial needs. Although these books were published after the departure of the British from the Indian subcontinent, they were written between 1930 and 1940. Archer's (1974) book presents numerous Santali proverbs, lyrics, riddles, folktales, poems, and songs. Although the collection of folklore is a significant documentation of Santali oral literature, the socio-cultural changes to the Santals' way of life are absent from the work. However, Archer's (1984) second work on *Tribal Law and Justice: A Report on the Santal* (in three volumes) is noteworthy, as he wrote down the unwritten laws and their practice among Santal. Mukherjea's (1962) book is a reproduction of colonial categorizations, while Culshaw (1949) successfully serves the missionaries, although proselytization among the Santal began long before. However, these publications are useful in finding the nexus of transformation among the Santal.

The life of the Santal has been described many times and been categorized in various ways, either for colonial purposes or to fulfill the goals of evangelization. Since the independence of Bangladesh, the continuation of the colonial approach has been observed in attitudes to indigenous people. These people have been rejected by othering or essentializing them, and consequently colonial categorizations have been retained in studying indigenous peoples. There is a long-standing lack of scholarship providing ethnographic details and anthropological analysis of the Santal, particularly in Bangladesh. In discussing the existing literature, I adopt the following challenges from the previous literature. First, the Santals' way of life is not a subject of storytelling or categorization based on the discrete idea of autochthony. Second, they cannot be an object for the interventions of intermediaries. Thus, instead of treating the Santal as a subject of study, I sought to determine the cultural particularities of the Santal, in which endless relationships can be discovered between periodic and everyday events, and the

Santals' underlying power in revitalizing their traditions or practicing rituals. Using this approach, I argue that their struggles cannot be used solely for academic research or to fuel local or global activism; instead, everyday events invite anthropologists to uncover a critical distance and intimacy between the power of the oppressed and the oppressors because ethnographic practices attempt to provide an in-depth look within a political spectrum. Thus, this ethnographic study attempts to recount the history of denial in order to investigate the niches of policies which make people unequal and to refute the idea that the identities of "indigenous people" places individuals in an irreversible category. From that perspective, with reference to the fixity and flux of identity politics and existing development policies, I search the area of possibilities that tended to make all people differently equal regarding their rights.

1.7. Chapter Outline

After providing a backdrop to the socio-cultural and political context, how I position myself in this research, and the overview of existing literature on the Santal, I clarify the conceptual framework in Ch. 2. Subsequently, the overview of the state and intermediaries' involvement provides underlying facts related to the discussion in the successive chapters, as well as an explanation of the connections of the contested term "indigenous." Ch. 3 explores the history of the Santal's subordination and exploitation from the British colonial period to the current political arrangements in Bangladesh. This chapter also discusses the theme of overt resistance, in which the notion of Santal identity is publicized. The discussion depicts the colonial oppression now ingrained in the decolonized peripheral state. The shreds of historiography indicate how the Santal have retained the spirit of resistance from the Tilka Manjhi revolt (1772–1795) to the Shahibganj Bagda Farm incident (2016).

In Ch. 4, I describe the Santal villages and their links with other local institutions, such as the Union Parishad, the local market place, the school and neighboring Bengali villages. In discussing these institutions, this chapter provides evidence for the Santal's social subjugation. Meanwhile, the ethnographic details in this chapter deal with the institutional arrangements of the state, showing the disorganization of government institutions when it comes to providing even the nominal services which the Santals survive under the weight of hegemonic power dynamics. The chapter also addresses how evangelism expands the area of philanthropic work

with the niches of state denial. The diverse forms of dispossession discussed in this chapter are illustrated with ethnographic examples. Ch. 5 reveals the uncertain situation in which controversies in Santal villages demonstrate the challenges involved in constructing their identity and in nurturing the notion of Santalness. The chapter also shows how controversies travel from villages to the national sphere, or vice versa, the religious fission being the core reason for the assorted controversies. However, the disagreements offer the potential to discover the complexities of a political setting in which the Santal have lived for ages. Therefore, this chapter views the risk of Santal essentialism, whether as a Christian or a traditional believer, and uncovers the fluxes of past and present that lie under the produced controversies.

Dealing with these paradoxical controversies, Ch. 6 reveals the features of Santalness in maintaining the Manjhi Parishad, most of which are now religiously divided but still govern village life. Thus, this chapter examines the potentialities of the Santal village council or Manjhi Parishad, although the apparently independent Manjhi Parishad is variously dependent on the churches and influenced by NGOs. The domain of the Manjhi Parishad's power is explained in the case studies taken from the fieldwork in which the Santal express their identity, connect themselves in phases of transformation, and prove that the survival of the Manjhi Parishad is paramount, despite its divided status.

The Santal's underlying power is vividly presented in Ch. 7, which provides the practice of traditional salutations (*johar*, *dobok*, *janga-abuk*) and welcome rituals (drinking and serving *handi*). The ingrained character of Santal resistance is explained in maintaining the welcome ritual, which opposes over a century of evangelized prohibition. The prescribed development for the Santal also contains an analogy of the forbidden, though concealed knowledge of *handi* production prevails among the Santal. These subtleties of everyday resistance in this chapter are illustrated with ethnographic details. Ch. 8 demonstrates the dimensions of the Santals' power in practicing, performing, and staging traditions. In the villages, wedding rituals became a means to minimize the religious division among the Santal. This chapter also reveals that by observing, changing, or even abstaining from the traditional festivals, the Santal sharpen their togetherness in the wedding rites. In the same vein, the performance of these rituals not only opposes the derived schemes of intermediaries but also creates a space to accumulate communal power in

which new discourses for resisting the conflicting structures of power can be produced. Furthermore, by staging or inventing traditions, the Santal have not only rewoven patches of tradition but also rationalized the relationship between resistance, rituals, and rights.

Finally, in order to describe the underlying power of the Santal, this thesis shows the trajectories of controversies over how to consolidate Santalness through semantic memories and embed the notion of Santalness based on either ancestral or traditional values. By examining the potential meaning of everyday resistance, Ch. 9 presents the niches of negotiation that refer to ethnographic and political events and concludes by describing three crossroads of reconciliation: first, the emergence of meeting points within the niches of state denial; second, drawing attention to the endemic nature of Santal resistance, from which they gain the power to resist repressive power structures and to perpetuate a distinct identity; and third, how, through the subtleties of tradition, they establish a rational meaning for their ritual practices and for their marching for their rights. In conclusion, I identify the opening of possibilities for the Santal in their struggles by means the three concluding crossroads of reconciliation I have briefly alluded to here and which are mainly exemplified at the end of the thesis.

Chapter 2

“There are no Indigenous People:” Conceptual Overview

*Bangladesh adhered to all major international human rights instruments and supported the rights of indigenous peoples. However, the Declaration, in its present form, contained some ambiguities, particularly that “indigenous people” had not been identified or explicitly defined in any way. Further, the text did not enjoy consensus among the Member States. Under such circumstances, Bangladesh had abstained in the vote.*³²

—Statement by Bangladeshi representative at the UNDRIP adoption session, September 2007

This statement was delivered when the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) adopted a landmark declaration, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The Bangladeshi state’s denial of the presence of any indigenous peoples within its territory poses the following questions: in what circumstances does the Bangladeshi state decide to ignore the existence of indigenous peoples, namely tribes (*upajati*), ethnic minorities (*khudrojatishaotta*), and what it calls “ethnic sects and communities” (*nrigoshthi o shomprodai*)?³³ Also, how did the demand for “indigenous” recognition create political chaos in Bangladesh? In seeking to address these questions, I found that the word “indigenous” is a much-debated term not only in the Bangladeshi nation state, but also in the field of academia, as well as among activists world-wide. In the field of anthropology, researchers are widely engaged in studying issues surrounding indigenous peoples, and they frequently cooperate with the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples. Anthropologists are greatly concerned to study the politics of indigenous peoples’ struggles. The term “indigenous” is a global political term, which also covers the socio-cultural and political rights of indigenous peoples. There are many discussions about the strategic connections between the state and indigenous peoples and the latter’s collective rights, not just about how they should be classified. However, to validate arguments regarding “indigenous peoples” is not a task for anthropologists. For this reason, in my thesis I

³² General Assembly Adopted the Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples; “Major Step Forward” Toward Human Rights for All, Says President. 13 September 2007. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2007/ga10612.doc.htm>. (accessed 05.04.2017).

³³ These categories are used of indigenous peoples by the Bangladeshi state.

attempt to analyze how manifestations of the term “indigenous people” are employed in different social locations and how the term denotes the power of indigenous peoples to negotiate their rights in local and global contexts. By following this idea, I aim to make explicit my anthropological position in working with the Santal, who claim they are “indigenous,” despite the term “indigenous peoples” being highly controversial in the Bangladeshi national state. Despite the controversy, “the term has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena” (Smith 2008:7). By labeling themselves “indigenous,” indigenous peoples of Bangladesh are challenging the structural injustices that have been imposed upon them by the state. Indeed, the statement quoted above by the Bangladeshi state representative is a manifestation of the state’s denial of their existence.

Against this backdrop, this chapter reviews the various responses of the Peoples’ Republic of Bangladesh to the presence in the country of indigenous peoples, the most frequent of the government’s statements being that “there are no indigenous people in Bangladesh.” The chapter deals with the strategic issues of assimilation and exclusion that the government uses to reject their identity as “indigenous” or “Adivasi.” While researching the ways in which Santal identity is being transformed, this thesis focuses primarily on controversial local discourses and forms of everyday resistance that contribute to aligning the Santal with the global notion of indigeneity. The historiography of independent Bangladesh and the nationalist structure of its state indicate that indigenous identity is always denied. In addition, however, the development of evangelization is an inevitable consequence of this for the Santal, as, through the churches giving them spatial opportunities they appear to be surviving, though this then becomes a reason to drop the notion of indigeneity in relation to them. Alternatively, the term “indigenous” is also problematic, despite the persuasiveness of the global notion of indigenous activism regarding the worth of indigeneity, where acquiring an “indigenous identity” is itself a passage to upward mobility in local and global contexts.

By investigating this paradoxical situation, the chapter discusses the circumstances surrounding the state’s denials and the circumstances in which the development of evangelization separated the Santal from their claim to be indigenous. Thus, arguments emerge about what types of impact lead to proselytization? Also, how does this affect the Santals’ sense

of belonging to the category of the indigenous and thus give rise to local controversies? Indeed, state denial and proselytization have both introduced multifaceted changes and led to the group's own definition of itself being examined, others' views being denied, and what I shall call "intermediaries" being invited to restore their identity. From Barth's (1969) point of view, such transformations struggle to include the situational, fluid, and dynamic aspects of identity in discussions of it. The dynamic aspect acknowledges the political promotion of indigenous identity through a series of UN instruments, which become "weapons of the weak" that aid them in demanding their collective rights. Moreover, the consciousness of indigeneity recalls Scott's (1985, 1990) conceptual understanding of everyday forms of resistance, which can be used to seek the production of "hidden transcripts"³⁴ among the Santal. Therefore, the thesis also describes the subordination, dispossession, denial, and assimilation of Santal in the context of the production of discourses of resistance, their increased visibility, and their struggle to maintain their Santalness and indigenous recognition or vice versa.

The ways in which the regeneration of global indigeneity in the twenty-first century has empowered the world's indigenous peoples has been addressed by Clifford (2013). He draws attention to how the historiography of the development of modernity and culture is always constructed from a Eurocentric and ethnocentric perspective. However, in respect of the twentieth century's historical events, he talks about

...decolonization, globalization, and indigenous becoming. They represent distinct historical agencies, scales of action, and politics of the possible. They [indigenous people] cannot be reduced to a single determining structure or history. Nor can they be held apart for long. The three histories construct, reinforce, and trouble each other. (Clifford 2013: 8)

In particular, Clifford addresses the "dialectical tension" in indigenous struggles. From this viewpoint, in the twenty-first century the resurgence of indigenous peoples challenges

³⁴ Scott (1990) argues that the interaction between dominators and subordinated creates a "public transcript," though the power of the dominators is condemned offstage by the subordinated, being what is called a "hidden transcript" (ibid.: xii-xiii).

hegemonic power relations by using the UN's instruments as weapons. Clifford (2013) illustrates indigenous peoples struggle against hegemony through the performance of culture, including how indigenous people must enter into a political maelstrom in order to obtain their socio-cultural and political rights. By referring to native studies in California, Alaska and Oceania, Clifford maps out the paths of possibility from various indigenous standpoints. Thus, in working with the Santal, my aim is not to examine who can legitimately claim to be "indigenous", but to describe the Santals' struggles to be granted an indigenous identity in Bangladesh.

The term "indigenous peoples" has become established through a series of UN initiatives which began in the 1970s.³⁵ The establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (1982) through a decision of the United Nations Economic and Social Council was a significant beginning to the task of promoting transnational notions of indigeneity. A substantial advance occurred in 2007 when the UNDRIP was adopted.³⁶ It became a benchmark in accelerating indigenous peoples' rights, as it advocated including the rights of indigenous peoples in the democratic practices of nation states. In fact, to claim an indigenous identity is a political act marked by the UN's instruments in defense of indigeneity, and empowering indigenous peoples. Global progress with indigenous issues also stimulates interest in human rights-based non-governmental organizations.³⁷ Thus, two consecutive UN decades (1995–2004 and 2005–2014)

³⁵ In 1970, the UN's study of "Problems of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations" was acknowledged to be an iconic initiative to advance indigenous people's rights. For this reason, in 1971 José R. Martínez Cobo was appointed to head it, and the study report was submitted from 1981 to 1984. However, before this the International Labor Organization (ILO) had adopted Convention 107 concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries in 1959. For a detailed chronology, see "Addressing Indigenous Rights at the United Nations," <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/addressing-indigenous-rights-united-nations>. (accessed 26.09.2018).

³⁶ Smith (2008) states that "indigenous people" is a contemporary term coined by the American Indian Movement in the 1970s. However, the idea of indigeneity is nurtured by globalized activism and enriched by the United Nations' (UN) series of initiatives already mentioned, which began with Cobo's study. The success of the validation of indigenous terms and rights includes many actions, such as the establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982, followed by two International Decades of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995–2004, 2005–2014), the announcement of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in 1994 to be observed every year on 9 August, the announcement of the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples in 1993, and the establishment of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2000. Finally, in 2007, the UNDRIP was adopted as a benchmark initiative to accelerate indigenous peoples' rights in practice. Thus, global progress was made in developing the idea of indigenous identity from 1970 to 2007.

³⁷ Human-rights based organizations among NGOs, such as the International Work Group of Indigenous Affairs, the Global Forest Coalition, Survival International, the Center for World Indigenous Studies, and the Minorities Rights

have seen contributions being made popularizing indigenous peoples' weapons in their struggles over rights, as well as particular controversies (Shah 2010). However, indigenous activists utilize the UN's instruments in order to confront the hegemony of nation states. Globally articulated indigeneity thus becomes meaningful in establishing connections with transnational indigenous networks.

In Asia, the term "indigenous" is widely used to refer to marginalized and disadvantaged peoples, unlike in America, Australia, and most parts of Russia, where the term is used to denote those members of the population whose ancestors did not come from Europe (Benjamin 2017). In colonial India, indigenous people are predominantly identified as "tribal." The terms "Adivasi" and "indigeneity" reflect social facts in India, as "being indigenous is a new way of placing the self in the world, and therefore, of pursuing a new type of politics, cultural politics" (Shah 2010: 24). In Bangladesh, the state's categorizations imply political subordination, and in Bengali discourse, the terms "*upajati*" or "sub-nation" connote social subjugation. Use of the term "*upajati*" has the meanings of "uncivilized, less developed, and innocent peoples who are more or less isolated from the 'mainstream' of 'civilized' Bengali Society" (Bal 2007: 10). In the socio-political context of Bangladesh, the Santal are also framed using the terms "tribal," "small ethnic minorities" and "*upajati*" or "*khudro-jatishaotta*." In working with the Santal, I therefore pay attention to their struggles for rights through the difficult politics of indigenous rights, instead of validating and discussing the term "indigenous." Thus, in considering critical scholarly arguments, I focus on the north-western region of Bangladesh in order to examine the objectification of identity production and to aid the Santal in advancing their right to self-determination. This is the political and moral aspect of this research, and by presenting the ethnographic details I aim to avoid subjectivity, to be cautious about academic romanticism, and to place myself in a detached emotional position. As a consequence, and as I have already mentioned (Ch. 1), this thesis is grounded in investigating the underlying power of the Santal and measuring their forms of everyday resistance. Hence, the remaining sections of this chapter will

Group International, as well as a long list of indigenous organizations, deal with indigenous issues by working around the world. Though the types of work these organizations do are different, they collectively follow the UN notion of indigeneity.

scrutinize the practical and historical backdrop to the Santali experience of multifaceted forms of repression.

2.1. The State's Discourses Denying Indigenous People

The state's rejections or denials of indigeneity not only mark its political control over indigenous peoples, it also invites intermediaries to penetrate into their necessities of life. The colonization and proselytization of the Indian subcontinent played a significant role in subordinating indigenous people, although there are also plenty of examples of this from Africa, Asia and the Americas. In the post-independence era, as part of the nation-building process, many indigenous peoples like the Santal were further marginalized. However, the Bangladesh nation-building process institutionalized the process of denial step by step. Moreover, the statements of government officials justified the denials and restricted indigenous identities within narrow frames.

In addition to the statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the state's representatives denied the existence of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh in various formal discussions. Thus in 2011 Iqbal Ahmed, the first secretary of the Bangladeshi Mission, denied that indigenous people existed in his country during the UN's special session on the implementation status of the Peace Accord³⁸ regarding the Chittagong Hill Tracts of 1997. He commented, "Bangladesh does not have any indigenous population."³⁹ This statement reflects

³⁸ The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord is a political agreement between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS, [United People's Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts]), and was signed on 2 December 1997. The agreement is also known as the Peace Accord. This agreement officially ended the decades-long conflict between the PCJSS-controlled armed force, the Shanti Bahini, and the state's armed forces, which began in the 1970s. The conflict began by demanding the cultural autonomy of the CHT people and protection from the hegemonic constitutional affirmation of Bengali nationalism, as well as opposing the designation of all citizens of Bangladesh as Bengali. By demanding cultural autonomy, the CHT leader, Manabendra Narayan Larma, founded the PCJSS in 1973 and established an armed force between 1975 and 1977. Since the 1980s, the PCJSS has comprised a new identity consisting of thirteen indigenous communities living in the CHT, collectively known as the Jumma Nation. Under the Peace Accord, indigenous people living in the CHT are recognized as hill people, a Regional Council was formed to represent the three hill districts of the CHT, a special Ministry of Tribal Affairs of the CHT was set up, land ownership was returned to the indigenous people living in the CHT, and the state's armed forces were to be withdrawn. Although after the Peace Accord some armed forces' camps have closed, many troops are still stationed in the CHT. The status of the implementation has been criticized, and after ten years of the Peace Accord, the University of Notre Dame scored it as 49%. *Peace Accord Matrix 2015*, <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/accord/chittagong-hill-tracts-peace-accord-cht>. (accessed 07.01.2018).

³⁹ "No Indigenous People in Bangladesh." *The Daily Star*, 28 May 2011. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-187527>. (accessed 23.11.2017).

the denial of indigenous identities by asserting that the notion of “Bengali/Bangladeshi nationalism” did not end with constitutional institutionalization between 1972 and 1979, but has been spread endlessly in many public statements and official communications. In 2011 Dipu Moni, the foreign minister of Bangladesh from 2009 to 2013, justified the notion of the hegemonic creation of a Bengali identity in a briefing for foreign diplomats and UN agencies on the CHT Peace Accord in Dhaka by quoting from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “Indigenous people are those who belong to a particular place, rather than coming to it from somewhere else.”⁴⁰ She also pointed out that “CHT people were late settlers on Bengali soil compared to the Bangalee native.”⁴¹ According to her statement, cultural and geographical purity is essential in order to be considered indigenous. These statements show that colonial practices and categories are continuously enacted in the country and simply prolong the history of subjugation.

These discourses of denial have existed since the emergence of Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, visited the CHT in 1973. During his visit, he invited the indigenous people of the region to join the Bengali population and “to become Bengalis, to forget the colonial past and join the mainstream of Bengali culture” (van Schendel 2009: 185). This statement reveals a preference for a notion of acculturation based on hegemony, announces an expectation that indigenous peoples will assimilate to the majority Bengalis, and asks the indigenous groups in the CHT to abandon their ethnic identities. In state documents, the term “*upajati*” is used instead of “Adivasi” or “indigenous”, reflecting the adoption of colonial practices by independent Bangladesh and perpetuating the history of disregarding the indigenous peoples living in the country. This perpetuation of denial has been implemented through administrative procedures. For example, during my fieldwork in the Phulbari Upazila, a confidential letter was provided by a junior employee of the sub-district administration. I took a picture of the letter using my smartphone. The letter, issued by the Deputy Commissioner (DC)⁴² of Dinajpur, ordered the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO)⁴³ to reject

⁴⁰ “Ethnic minority, not indigenous people.” *The Daily Star*, 27 July 2011. <http://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-195963>. (accessed 23.11.2017).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (accessed 23.11.2017).

⁴² The Deputy Commissioner is the chief administrator of a district and the general controlling authority for all activities in the district. The position is popularly known as DC. It is one of the prestigious official positions of the government of Bangladesh.

the terms “Adivasi” and “indigenous.” The letter stated that in any certification where previously the terms “Adivasi” or “indigenous” would have been used, those terms should henceforward be avoided; instead of “Adivasi” or “indigenous,” the term “small ethnic group/class” should be used. The letter also mentions prohibitions against using the term “Adivasi” in cases where the term has been used in previous certifications. The image and a translation of the letter follow below:

⁴³ The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) is a chief executive of an Upazila (sub-district). The position is ranked as a senior scale officer within the administration cadre of the Bangladesh Civil Service.

উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসের কার্যালয়
নেত্রবাড়ী, দিনাজপুর।
প্রতি নং- ১৮২৮
তারিখ- ১৯/৮/১৫

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, দিনাজপুর।
(সাধারণ শাখা)
www.dinajpur.gov.bd

স্মারক নং- ০৫.৫৫.২৭০০.০০৬.০৪.০০১.১৫- ১৮২০(১৩) তারিখ-১৯/ আগস্ট, ২০১৫ খ্রিঃ।

বিষয় : "ক্ষুদ্র নৃ-গোষ্ঠী/ শ্রেণীর প্রত্যয়ন" প্রদান প্রসঙ্গে।

উপর্যুক্ত বিষয়ের প্রেক্ষিতে জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, 'ক্ষুদ্র নৃ-গোষ্ঠী/ শ্রেণী' এর জনগোষ্ঠীকে প্রত্যয়ন পত্রে সরকারী নীতিমালা মোতাবেক ক্ষুদ্র নৃ-গোষ্ঠী/শ্রেণী উল্লেখ না করে 'আদিবাসী' উল্লেখ করা হচ্ছে যার ফলে জটিলতা সৃষ্টি হচ্ছে।

এমতাবস্থায়, তাকে প্রদত্ত প্রত্যয়ন পত্রের শিরোনামে ক্ষুদ্র নৃ-গোষ্ঠী/শ্রেণী'র উল্লেখসহ গেজেটে উল্লিখিত ক্ষুদ্র নৃ-গোষ্ঠী/শ্রেণীর নাম উল্লেখ পূর্বক সু-নির্দিষ্টভাবে প্রত্যয়ন পত্র প্রদান করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

বিষয়টি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

(মীর খায়রুল আলম)
জেলা প্রশাসক
দিনাজপুর।

☎ ০৫৩১-৬৫০০১
dcdinajpur@mopa.gov.bd

উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসার
নেত্রবাড়ী (সকল)
দিনাজপুর।

Figure 3. Confidential letter issued by the District Commissioner of Dinajpur on 19 August 2015. Photo by the author.

The translation of the letter is as follows:

People's Republic of Bangladesh
District Commissioner's Office, Dinajpur
General Division

www.dinajpur.gov.bd

Serial No. 05.55.2700.006.04.001.15-1420(13).

Date: 19 August 2015

Subject: Regarding the certification of "small-ethnic group/class."

In considering the issue mentioned above, "small-ethnic group/class" peoples identified in certifications as "Adivasi," as per government policy, should be referred to as "small-ethnic group/class." This should be done to avoid complications at work.

In this case, when labeling someone a "small ethnic group/class," please provide certificates in accordance with the Gazette. The title of the certificate given to him/her should bear a reference to the "small ethnic group/class."

This matter is important.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer
(Chief Executive of Upazila)
Phulbari, Dinajpur

Signed on 19 August 2015
(Mir Khairul Islam)
District Commissioner
Dinajpur
Tel: 0531-65001,
Email: dcdinajpur@mopa.gov.bd

The restriction on using the term “indigenous” is not limited to the circulation of this letter, as the term has also been forbidden in government correspondence from different departments. For example, in 2012 the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives of the Government People’s Republic of Bangladesh circulated a letter⁴⁴ that referred to the Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institute Act 2010, the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution, calling indigenous peoples “small ethnic groups.” Based on the Act, the letter includes the following recommendations:

- a) Necessary retractions may be sent to the persons concerned so that (on Indigenous Day) high government officials do not give any speech or make any comments that conflict with or contradict the policies of the government, as undertaken from time to time.
- b) It might be mentioned that no government patronage or support is provided during World Indigenous Day.
- c) Steps might be taken to publicize and broadcast the fact that there are no indigenous peoples in Bangladesh by providing releases of information in the print and electronic media.
- d) The month of August is recognized nationally as the month of mourning.⁴⁵ Hence, unnecessary entertainment programs in the name of Indigenous Day in this month should be avoided.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The letter was issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government People’s Republic of Bangladesh on 11 August 2011. The memorandum number of the letter is: xxx-xxx/4-6/2011-881. But the letter was circulated on 11 March 2012 by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives of the Government People’s Republic of Bangladesh. The memorandum number of the letter is 46.045.022.10.04.004.2011-546. Although the letter is marked “confidential,” it is available for reading on the internet by following this source: http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session16/BD/JS10_UPR_BGD_S16_2013_Jointsubmission10_E_annex%204.pdf. (accessed 08.01.2018).

⁴⁵ In Bangladesh, 15th August is observed as a National Day of Mourning because a group of army officers killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members on that very day in 1975. His two daughters survived because they were living abroad. One of the daughters, Sheikh Hasina, has served as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for three terms: 1996–2001, 2009–2014, and 2014 to the present. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is remembered as a charismatic Bangladeshi nationalist and is regarded as “the Father of the Nation.” His speech on 7 March 1971 is considered to be the turning point in the country’s liberation war. In the political history of Bangladesh, his killing is deemed to represent the death of democracy and the start of military rule, which lasted for fifteen years (1975–1990). In 1996, after the return of the governing party, the Bangladesh Awami League, Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister and declared 15 August a National Day of Mourning.

⁴⁶ “Bangladesh: Celebrating Indigenous Day Amidst Government Bangladesh.” 2012, http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session16/BD/JS10_UPR_BGD_S16_2013_Jointsubmission10_E_annex%204.pdf. (accessed 08.01.2018).

As can be seen, the circulation of these letters imposed a severe prohibition on the part of the state against use of the terms “indigenous” or “Adivasi,” despite these terms already having been employed in some official state documents, such as the National Education Policy of 2010 and the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPPS-II-2009). The term “indigenous” was also used in the 2008 election manifesto (paragraph 18 [1]) of the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), in which it was stated: “all laws and other arrangements discriminatory of minorities, indigenous people and ethnic groups will be repealed. Special privileges will be made available in educational institutions for religious minorities and indigenous people.”⁴⁷

In using the term “indigenous,” the election manifesto wanted to ensure that indigenous people would be given constitutional recognition if the BAL were to win the election. The BAL was elected and became the governing party. The irony is that the denial was institutionalized under the Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institute Act 2010 through adoption of the term “*khudro-nrie-gosthi*” or “small ethnic group.” Although government correspondence emphasizes that the term “*khudro-nrie-gosthi*” or “small ethnic group” should be used, still today the reference to the word “*upajati*” in the constitution makes it evident that the Santal and other indigenous peoples are subordinated institutionally within the state. The denial was reinforced by the Fifteenth Amendment to the Bangladesh Constitution⁴⁸ of 2011, which states, “the State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes (*upajati*), minor races (*khudro-jatishaotta*), ethnic sects, and communities (*nrigoshthi o shomprodai*)” (Part-II, Article 23 [A]).

The denial of their existence was seen as a political betrayal by the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. Later, the denial of indigenous identity was replaced by the BAL’s election manifesto of 2014 (Article 22.1). Subsequently, the events of 1993 provoked memories of another refusal when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was in government and refused to

⁴⁷ “Election Manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League, 9th Parliamentary Election.” 2008, <https://www.albd.org/~parbonc/index.php/en/resources/articles/4070-election-manifesto-of-bangladesh-awami-league,-9th-parliamentary-election,-2008>. (accessed 17.04.2017).

⁴⁸ The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh has been amended several times so as to serve each successive governing party’s interests. Institutionalized democratic practice was objectified to obtain electoral advantages to win the next election by means of most of the amendments to the constitution. The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Bangladesh was one of its most controversial.

observe the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples (IYWIP) in 1994 by stating that "there were no indigenous people in Bangladesh." The BAL, in opposition at that time, extended its own support by sending a message of solidarity to the indigenous peoples (Tripura 2013). However, its support for the "indigenous" identity was withdrawn when the BAL, now the main party of government, officially institutionalized the existing practice of rejecting indigenous peoples' demands to be recognized. As an opposition party, the solidarity of the BAL was identified by the indigenous activists of the country as a strategy to win an electoral advantage on the backs of the country's indigenous peoples.

The state's discourses of denial are not evident at the present day but have existed since the adoption of the Constitution of Bangladesh in 1972, when "Bengali nationalism" became one of the core principles⁴⁹ of the state. Bengali nationalism was defined in the constitution as:

The unity and solidarity of the Bangalee nation, which, deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained a sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bangalee nationalism. (Article 9)

Thus, the construction of Bengali nationalism ignores the diversity of the population and the country's ethnic minorities. Cultural hegemony in the form of Bengali nationalism was institutionalized, and Bangladesh became "a true nation-state, a homeland to the Bengali community" (van Schendel 2009: 184). Thus, the majority and minority issues polarized the political environment in the country.

Over the course of time, the country has experienced a political shift from Bengali to Bangladeshi nationalism. The Fifth Amendment of the Constitution (1979) replaced the phrase "Bengali nationalism" with "Bangladeshi nationalism." This change, however, did not

⁴⁹ According to the Constitution of Bangladesh 1972, the four core principles are nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. Secularism was changed, and nationalism was redefined by the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution in 1979. Afterward, secularism was restored by the Fifteenth Amendment in 2011. Since then, the Sixteenth Amendment has been enacted, most of the amendments being designed to support the position of the governing party in next the election, even though disregarding institutional democratic practice.

acknowledge the diversity of identities; rather, it emphasized a political shift based on religious affiliation. The shift has made Islam a core area of politics and proclaimed it to be the religion of the majority Bengalis. Thus, one of the core fundamental principles, “secularism,” was dropped from the constitution and replaced by the principles of “absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah.” The sentence “BISMILLAH-AR-RAHMAN-AR-RAHIM” was added to the preamble of the constitution, meaning “in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.” This is also the first verse of the Quran, which Muslims recite before starting anything, including work. The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution also dropped Article 12, which banned communalist political parties in Bangladesh. The Eighth Amendment to the Constitution in 1988 established Islam as the state religion. In the midst of many amendments, “secularism” was reinstated by the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution, but Islam remained the state religion of the country. Thus, Islamization was implanted in politics and increased minorities’ feelings of insecurity in the cultural setting of the country. This was voiced by Josef Hasda, one of my respondents in the field, who said, “I feel insecure in this country, but I have no alternative to which to move. I assume someday it will be a land only for Muslims.” This statement indicates distrust in the Bangladeshi political system, which has been changed by the long process of the politicization of Islam.

Political Islam was revived under the various military regimes (1975–1990) to occupy a place in the state’s structure of power, and the religious attitudes of the majority were nurtured to obtain an electoral advantage. Asad’s comment (1986) is relevant to the task of analyzing the articulation of Islam in the politics of Bangladesh, when he said, “...it is important to emphasize that one must carefully examine established social practices, ‘religious’ as well as ‘nonreligious,’ in order to understand the conditions that define ‘conservative’ or ‘radical’ political activity in the contemporary Islamic world” (1986: 14). In fact, the political articulation of Islam has been hybridized since the days of the British colonizers and their policy of “divide and rule.”⁵⁰ Later, the emergence of Pakistan was patronized by Muslim nationalism. In Pakistan, West Pakistani domination was promoted to advance the ethno-linguistic-based Bengali nationalism and

⁵⁰ The “divide and rule” policy is a product of British colonizers in India, who used it strategically to break up existing power structures and to improve their domination of the sub-continent; the people’s religions were subjected to the government of the people. To do so, this strategy was adopted to strengthen the British colony, but it led to communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims. India was divided based on religion, resulting in the creation of two countries, India and Pakistan, in 1947.

encouraged Bengalis to separate religion from politics, while secularism was also used to boost Bengali nationalism. But after a few years of independence, religion replaced in the politics of Bangladesh. Therefore, Islamization and nationalism were both promoted by the majority's religious sentiments and their feelings of their own indigenous ethnic status. The state's national development programs failed to prioritize the human rights of the country's minorities. In Appadurai's view (2006), majorities and minorities are engaged in a geopolitical game. Muslims were once the minority in colonial India, but then they become the majority in Pakistan. However, in every power structure, the "minority" of indigenous peoples, including the Santal in the country, grows successively poorer, and their basic human rights are restricted.

Nevertheless the state has demonstrated some ambiguity by acknowledging certain policy documents and legislative decisions.⁵¹ These acknowledgments on the part of the state continually remind us that the relationship between the state and its indigenous peoples is pursued as a relationship between superior and subordinate. They "survive as a culture-bearing group" (Eriksen 2010: 152–53) because the recognition of "small ethnic groups" perpetuates the restrictions that apply to "indigenous" status. The indigenous peoples find that they have become non-state peoples within a nationalist state. Therefore, in this thesis, I show how the state's denials are at the forefront of the subordination, ignoring distinct cultural identities and disregarding customary rights. How has the correlation between ignorance and reluctant acceptance created controversies concerning indigenous claims? How do the spaces between the state, its policies, and indigenous peoples welcome intermediaries to work among and ostensibly for the Santal? I will answer these questions in more detail in Chs. 4 and 5. For now I simply note that the background to the state's denials of indigeneity contributes to increasing the scope for evangelized philanthropism to be undertaken. Taken together, the multifaceted happenings among the Santal and the introduction of evangelization have also helped create controversies and produce forms of everyday resistance.

⁵¹ To acknowledge "ethnic minorities'" rights, the state has drawn up some policy documents and implemented decisions such as the formation of the National Adivasi Coordination Committee (NACC-1997), signing the CHT Peace Accord (1997), the formation of the Ministry of the CHT (1998), approval of the amendment to the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act (2001), the adoption of the Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute Act 2010, the formation of the Indigenous Caucus in the National Parliament (2010), and an agreement "to teach indigenous children in the mother tongue" in the National Education Policy of Bangladesh (2010), etc.

2.2. Evangelization: Controversies and the Continuity of Santalness

Those who do not practice traditional rituals do not observe “baha” (spring festival) or “sohrai” (harvest festival); they are not Santals anymore. They are Christians.

— Silis Hasda, one of the village community members of Situngtola and a follower of the traditional Santali religion.

There are no Adivasi (indigenous people) anymore; once they (the Santal) were Adivasi. Now, they are all Christians.

—Muslemuddin, a resident near a Santal village, who is a Muslim Bengali.

What is our religion? Are we followers of our traditional beliefs, or are we Christians? It doesn't matter; I think we are Santal, as we all belong to our Santal clan system, whether it is Murmu or Tudu or one of our twelve clans.⁵² And our Santal identity is associated with the clan system, not religion. Our second identity is our own language. Thus, based on the traditions, Santal identity cannot be ignored just because of conversion to [another] religion.

—Babulal Murmu, a Christian Santal and the inter-village chief of the traditional Santali social council of Godagari Upazila.

These oral discourses from my field area feature people speaking about the notion of a fixed identity that categorizes affiliation as a Santal. Babulal Murmu's counter-statement demands “authenticity” to be a Santal, and he asserts that a fixed connection should be established either with the Santali language or the traditional clan organization in order to decide issues of Santal identity. Muslemuddin, a Bengali Muslim neighbor of the Santal, denies that Santal belonging amounts to indigeneity, while nonetheless acknowledging that their cultural characteristics were rooted in that notion. However, affiliation to Christianity is the main focus in the denials of

⁵² The Santals' ethnic identity is tied to their clan organization, as they are divided into twelve clans: Hasda or Hasdak, Murmu, Kisku, Hembram, Mardi or Marandi, Soren, Tudu, Baskey, Besra, Chore, Pauria, and Bedeya. The clan divisions are each associated with an occupation: for example, Kisku means king's root, Murmu suggests religious activities or the priesthood, Soren is a soldier, etc. In this way, every clan has a distinct identity, but these are not relevant in contemporary times. Nonetheless the Santal have practiced these clan organizations adamantly and defined their distinctiveness with reference to the clan organization, which also firmly regulates marriage relationships, marriage in the same clan being prohibited. These clans are also divided into sub-clan or *khut*. Troisi (2000) mentions 405 sub-clans among the Santals, but these have disappeared today. For details, see Troisi (2000), Mukherjea (1965) and Culshaw (1949).

indigeneity in the aforementioned oral discourses. According to a Foucauldian understanding, discourse creates knowledge, and knowledge is produced by discourse. Discourses are multidimensional, connected with power and knowledge. They are also a means of social communication; the production of discourse follows social procedures and negotiates with the practices of language, dialogues, and dialects within the community (Foucault 1972). According to Foucault, discourse also constitutes power relations and encounters other relationships. The Santals' discourses about "indigeneity" and "identity" are produced in everyday life and generate knowledge, as well as expressing the influence of the hegemonic power structure.

Therefore, the production of contested discourses begs the following questions: Can evangelized Santal claim indigeneity? If so, what arguments are used in claiming indigeneity? How do Santal reconcile traditional cultural practices with religious conversion? Indeed, to analyze these questions and the controversies surrounding indigenous Santali identity, the historical development of evangelism among the Santal must be discussed. This section describes how proselytization developed among the Santal and the characteristic of relations between traditional and Christian Santal. The discussion also investigates how evangelism contributes to producing controversial discourses and reproducing transformative forms of Santal identity.

Evangelism among the Santal is one of the most controversial issues surrounding Santali indigeneity both within and outside the community. Officially⁵³ the Santal belief system is classified as animism, although the Santal call their religion "*hor dhorom*" (human religion) or "*Santal dhorom*." Hembram (1988), himself a Santal who investigated the relationship between rituals and religious practices among the Santal, prefers to use the word *dhorom*, and in dealing with the Santal religion he chooses the terms "Sari-dhorom" and "Sarna-dhorom." The villagers where I carried out my fieldwork say, "The word 'Sari' refers to truth. Thus, the term 'Sari-

⁵³ Troisi (2000) mentions that tribal religions in India were identified as animism in the census of 1901. Troisi worked mainly on Santal religion and remarks that Santal believe in *bongas* (spirits). As a consequence, to identify the Santal religion, D. N. Majumder coined the term *Bongasim* in his book, *A Tribe in Transition: A Study in Cultural Pattern*, in 1937 (quoted from Troisi 2000: 9). Mukherjea (1965) comments that the Santal religion should be characterized as *Spiritism* (1965: 284). In contrast, Troisi (2000: 240) comments, "Santal religion is essentially social," and he refuses to characterize it by means of any "-ism". However, in my field area, the Santal call their religion *Hor Dhorom* or "human religion."

dhorom' corresponds to the meaning 'the religion of truth.'" Hembram says that the Santal call their religion "Hor-dhorom" and describes it as "the benevolent organized thought and activities gradually [taking] the established form known as *Dhorom*. *Dhorom* is an integral part of human life (*hor*)" (Hembram 1988: 1). He also says that the name "Sarna" is of comparatively recent origin. This term is widely accepted among the indigenous people of Austroasiatic groups living in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, who call their religion *Saridhorrom*, *Sarnadhorom* or *Adidhorom*. The word *dhorom* refers to religion (ibid.: 14). In doing fieldwork in the Santal villages of Situngtola, Burutola and Champatola, I observed that Santal generally call the "traditional Santal religion ... *Hor dhorom* or *Santal dhorom*." In fact, Besnao Murmu came up with the idea of "*Hor-dhorom*" and founded this religious movement in 1970, calling it "*Sarna-dhorom*." Initially, it had only a religious form of expression. Later, it became politicized and was promoted as a pan-Adivasi religion of eastern India (Carrin 1991, 2012).

These changes in nomenclature regarding the Santal religion have kept up with the dialectical discourses. For example, the literate Santal among the traditional believers stated that "our religion is *Sari-Sarna*." In the Santali villages, however, traditional Santal religious identity is called "*Santal dhorom*" or "*hor dhorom*." The term "*dhormo*" is also used to refer to religion in Bengali, although the Santal have their own beliefs and practices that are different from those of the Bengalis. Ironically, the concept of "*Santal dhorom*" is not mentioned in colonial documents.⁵⁴ Historical evidence was careful not to describe the Santal religion as *Santal dhorom* or *Hor-dhorom*, and "Santhal religion, 'Sari' or 'Sarana' conspicuously escaped the attention of the social scientists, scholars, and philosophers" (Hembram: 1988: 2).

Ignoring the existence of *hor-dhorom*, Christian missionaries started their activities in the Santal settlement areas during the first half of the nineteenth century. The evangelical missionaries initiated proselytization, but currently most Santal in Bangladesh are associated

⁵⁴ The British administrator and writer W.W. Hunter asserted the opposite in the *Annals of Rural Bengal* (Volume-1), where he states: "of a supreme and beneficent God the Santal has no conception. His religion is a religion of terror and deprecation" (1868: 181).

with the Catholic Church.⁵⁵ Carrin and Tambs-Lyche (2003) describe, at the beginning of the proselytization, it was mainly Protestant missionaries who worked among the Santal. At the outset of the nineteenth century, Baptist missionaries began to convert Santal in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent. One such missionary, R. Leslie, worked in Monghyr, today Munger District in Bihar, from 1824 to 1841, while American Baptists were present there from 1838. During this time, the missionary Jeremiah Philips⁵⁶ produced a Santali grammar in Latin script. The Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Church and other Protestant churches started work in Bhagalpur District in 1850. In 1867 two Baptist missionaries, Skrefsrud and Börresen, arrived in the Santal settlement areas, established their mission station in the Santal Parganas,⁵⁷ and managed to convert many Santal. Initially the Santal chiefs (*manjhis*) were chosen to promote Christianity, although “the chiefs feared that the new religion would destroy the distinctive character of the Santals” (ibid.: 279). However, by 1873 the number of converted Santal had reached 275, and by the end of 1874 about two thousand adults and four thousand children. Despite a serious conflict between the Baptist missionaries over theological differences, the number of Christian Santal continued to grow (ibid.: 276–81).

Skrefsrud and Börresen were concerned to preserve the traditions of the Santal. For example, the Santal kept their clan names after conversion, and instead of infant baptism, Skrefsrud incorporated the traditional name-giving ceremony (*janam chatiar*)⁵⁸ into the Christian

⁵⁵ The Christian Santal in my area of fieldwork were mainly affiliated with the Catholic Church. In Champatola village, I found that only five households were affiliated with the Protestant Church (Seventh-Day Adventists). The religious situation in the villages where I carried out fieldwork is discussed in Ch. 4; see Table 1.

⁵⁶ Jeremiah Philips (1812-1879) was an American Baptist missionary with the Free Baptist Missionary Society in India. He worked to baptize the Santal of Orissa (now known as Odisha) in India, and contributed to the development of a Santali grammar, *An Introduction to the Santali Language*, published in 1852 in Calcutta (Calcutta School-book Society Press).

⁵⁷ The Santal Parganas are one of the divisions of Jharkhand, formerly part of the undivided state of Bihar in India. The division comprises six districts collectively called the Santal Parganas. The division was created during British rule in 1855 as part of the Bengal Presidency. It was the famous land of the Santal Rebellion, where the Murmu brothers (Sidhu, Kanu, Chand and Bhairab) organized thousands of Santals to rise up against the British colony in 1855–1856. The background to the establishment of the Santal Parganas is discussed in Ch. 3.

⁵⁸ *Janam chatiar* is a purification ceremony that takes place after childbirth. The Santal believe that after childbirth, the family and village become unclean. Thus, a purification ceremony is performed by giving the baby a bath and by cleaning the family’s house. This ceremony takes place after the childbirth, within three to five days. On the same day, using the father’s clan title, a name is given to the infant to ensure that the child’s identity is that of a Santal. It can be considered a name-giving ceremony.

ritual (Carrin and Tambs-Lyche 2003: 281). Nevertheless the missionaries' activities faced challenges in associating with the traditional lifestyle of the Santal, and "missionaries were struck by the democratic tradition of the Santals" (ibid.: 284). Thus, the *kulhi durup*, a traditional village council meeting, was used by the missionaries to preach Christianity. The initiative succeeded in its endeavors, and the participation of the Santal in Christianity increased in 1881–1882. The number of European missionaries increased throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Börresen and Skrefsrud worked until their deaths in the Santal settlement area in 1901 and 1920 respectively (ibid.: 284-291).

During the time of the great Santal rebellion (1855-56) the agency of British rule had also been led to focus increasingly on providing social services for the Santal because the Santal rebellion was an expression of resentment at the extreme level of oppression and exploitation (described in more detail in Ch. 3). Troisi (2000: 37) remarks that the brothers who led the rebellion, Sidhu and Kanu, claimed that they had received a divine message from *Suba Thakur* (Supreme Being) to lead the Santal in rebellion. But their defeat in the rebellion upset their faith in the traditional beliefs, and the missionaries observed that those Santal who participated in the mission schools did not take part in the rebellion. In fact, the main Christian missionizing activities among the Santal started after the rebellion (Troisi 1979: 254-63). In 1881, the Church Missionary Society had 57 schools with 982 Santal students. During this time, Scandinavian missionaries also started working with the Santal, as did the United Free Church of Scotland. In the Santal Parganas, the total number of Santal Christians in 1911 was 7,896. The missionaries also aimed to work to convert the Santal by intervening in their everyday lives, for example, by providing social services such as medical care (Brandt 2010: 26–28).

However, like many missionaries, Skrefsrud and Bodding translated the Scriptures in order to evangelize the Santal, as well as contributing strongly to writing down their oral literature. Philips, Skrefsrud, and Bodding made many contributions to the study of the Santali language.⁵⁹ Bodding's evangelical approach was inspired by Skrefsrud, who contributed to the

⁵⁹ Skrefsrud made a significant contribution in the Santali language; for example, after Philips (1852), he published *A Grammar of Santhali Language* in 1873. Furthermore, he made many contributions in respect of Santali language and folk-literature, such as translating Santali hymns, as well as writing his own hymns by using traditional Santali tunes. In 1887, he published *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, a collection of Santali myths and traditions,

development of the Santali alphabet in Roman script by adding various diacritic marks and wrote a Santali grammar in 1922, which included folk literature.⁶⁰ However, the contributions of the missionaries were criticized by activists and academics. It has been argued that the collection of traditions and folklore and the contributions to the development of the Santali grammar and script were weapons for spreading Christianity among the Santal (Andersen and Foss 2003). But regardless of these criticisms, there is no doubt that today's Santali language has been enriched by these contributions.

Along with their contributions, the missionaries introduced many prohibitions into the day-to-day lives of the Santal. For example, Carrin and Tambs-Lyche (2003) remark that Skrefsrud documented Santal traditions, but he also launched a strong campaign against rice beer (*handi*), the traditional drink of the Santal, by drinking which their day-to-day lives were enriched in drumming, dancing, and singing (discussed in detail in Ch. 7). By contrast, the missionaries perceived the lives of the Santal as having “no point in moral conduct as a means to gain benefit after death,” and condemned them for being “unable to think of tomorrow” (ibid.: 289). The day-to-day lives of the Santal, led in ignorance of the benefits of the afterlife, were also condemned for lacking any planning for the future (ibid.). The discourse of resistance is very much related to the beginning of proselytization, when Christian missionaries ignored traditional Santal lifestyles. Mallick (1993) writes that elderly Santal refused to convert because of the many prohibitions, and he illustrates their reaction by quoting a report from Houlton (1949: 79) that an old Santal had said: “Will the Christian God allow the old people to get drunk twice a week?” he asked. “Certainly not,” was the reply. “Then, teach our boys and girls,” said the old man, “but leave us alone” (Mallick 1993: 162).

Despite the resistance, at present most Santal in Bangladesh are Christians, most of them associated with the Catholic Church. Francesco Rocca was the pioneer in promoting the work of Catholic missionaries in what is now Bangladesh; in 1906 he arrived at the village of Dhanjuri at

and in 1890, he started a Christian monthly magazine in Santali called *Hor Hoponren Pera* (Carrin and Tambs-Lyche 2003).

⁶⁰ Bodding contributed to the development of a Santali dictionary in five volumes from 1933 to 1936, three volumes of Santali folktales from 1925 to 1929, three volumes of Santali medicine-related folklore from 1925 to 1940, and one book on Santali riddles and witchcraft in 1940.

the invitation of Fagu Mistri Soren. In 1909, on his second visit, he baptized Phudon Mardi⁶¹ and his elder son Pitor (Murmu 2004). Dhanjuri village is in Dinajpur District in Bangladesh, and is where the Catholic missionary activities among the Santal began. Today, it is an important center of Catholic evangelism. The two villages of Burutola and Champatola, which I selected as my fieldwork area, fall within the jurisdiction of the Dhanjuri mission.

The Catholic missionaries tended to be more accommodating and liberal about Santal customs. For example, they did not completely discourage the drinking of rice-beer (*handi*), nor dancing (Troisi 2000: 267). They worked to assimilate Santal festivals into the Church's liturgical rites; thus, *sohrai* (the harvest festival) became Christmas, and *janthar* (the first fruits festival) became New Year (ibid.: 272). From 1900, by schooling and providing medical care and social services, the Catholic missionaries embarked on proselytizing the Santal, whose economic destitution and social subordination forced them to become Christians. The converted Christians benefited directly from their new faith, while the traditional believers also benefited, but indirectly (ibid.: 262-264), later leading traditional believers too to convert to Christianity. Their ability to find employment increased after they joined the Catholic missionaries, and in most cases literate Santal Catholics found jobs either in the Church or with philanthropic organizations the Church supported. Shah (2010: 15–16) notes that Christianity produced “Adivasi” middle-class elites who negotiated with the British for better schooling and economic facilities and established a number of “Adivasi” organizations.

Catholic missionary activities continued to grow, and by 1927 a total of 12,503 Santal had been converted to Christianity in Dinajpur District (Murmu 2004). The activities of foreign missionaries were embedded in social-cultural affairs. For example, in the same year that the first book on Christian literature was printed in the Santali language, two other mission centers were established, as well as a seminary for the Catholic education of boys. During that time, Lambert Mardi became the first Santal Catholic priest in Bangladesh. Missionaries also responded to the

⁶¹ Phudon Mardi was a formally educated Santal from Dhanjuri. For details of Phudon's and the Dhanjuri Mission's activities, see <https://dhanjuri.jimdo.com/mission-history/> (History of our Mission: Saint Benedict Dhanjuri Boarding [accessed 11.01.2018]).

Great Bengal famine⁶² of 1942 and 1943 by distributing relief to the affected Santal areas, leading many more Santal to embrace Christianity (ibid.). The development of evangelism was also influenced by schooling and philanthropic activities. As Murmu remarks (ibid.): "...medical care, a feeling of security in the midst of oppression and massive injustice, social and economic welfare, political security, fraternal love and care, goodwill, respect, etc."⁶³ helped the expansion of Catholic mission activities. Brandt (2010: 33) also mentions that, after the devastating cyclone of 1970 and the independence war in 1971, the activities of NGOs in Bangladesh increased, some being funded by Christian churches. There is thus a link between material disadvantage and religious conversion among the Santal, which also led many to become Christians. The expansion of evangelism cannot be reduced to well-being and schooling among the Santal—it also gives them increased social status in their localities (Brandt 2010).

At the same time, by converting to Christianity the Santal discovered that their sense of belonging in respect of the notions of indigeneity, communal solidarity, and oneness as Santal caused divisions in their villages. Troisi (2000: 266) observes that Santal society was disintegrating. He comments: "The most deep-rooted objection, however, is the fact that the Christian method of evangelization often tended to draw the Santals out of their own milieu, consequently posing a serious problem to tribal solidarity and making the converts feel insecure." Ali (1998: 23) makes a similar comment: according to him, conversion to Christianity brought about disintegration and changes in Santal ways of living. In the present context, the Santal have the same fear of their dropping their indigeneity by being Christian; in addition, the controversies between supporters of Christianity and of indigeneity add crucial contradictions to claims to an indigenous identity. However, the Christian Santal reject their critics, and an overview of proselytized Santal penned by Marandi (2006), himself a Catholic Santal, rejects the findings of Troisi (2000) and Ali (1998). Regarding the task of evangelization, he comments,

⁶² The Bengal Famine of 1943-1944 was a massive famine in British-ruled India, the result of a major crop failure in 1942. Maharatna (1992) shows that two million people died because of this famine. The British government failed to provide humanitarian aid. Being mostly peasants, the Santal suffered severely because of the famine.

⁶³ Marcus Murmu. 2004. *The Santals: Their Traditions and Institutions in Bangladesh*. <http://srpbypst.blogspot.de/2009/05/the-santals-their-traditions-and.html> (accessed 28.11.2017).

The task of evangelization among the Santals is not proselytism, or bringing new converts for the extension of the Church, or multiplying the Christian population, but the task here would be to make the Santal society a progressive community without cutting them off from their tribal roots.⁶⁴

From the viewpoint of a Christian Santal, this evaluation of evangelism represents a rather modest view of Christianity. In contrast, Rabindranath Soren, President of the JAP, who is also a traditional Santal believer, offered a more critical perspective regarding proselytization. When I interviewed him, he said:

Christianity grabbed everything, including the names of villages and places. When I ask a converted young Santal, “Where are you from?” he/she replies, “From Dhanjuri.” Then, I ask, “Is Dhanjuri the name of your village?”, and he/she replies, “No, the name of my village is Bushki, but as a Christian, I am associated with the Dhanjuri Mission.” Thus, the place of origin, the village, has been replaced by the jurisdiction of the church. The manner of identity production not only pushes them to leave behind their place of origin, but also provokes them to adopt the reformed Christian identity.

These discourses simultaneously demand and deny the notion of Santalness. In the same vein, they are manifestations of the endeavor to reconstruct Santal identity, which is not independent of the community but rather derives from the powerful forces of the state and Christian churches. Indeed, the state denies indigeneity by invoking a geographical legacy, the Bengali majority disregards Santalness by questioning the continuity of traditional beliefs, and evangelization stresses proselytization by intervening in the area of bare necessities. These multifaceted disparities provoke the Santal to argue over their religious affiliations among themselves, thus giving rise to controversies. The discourses and counter-discourses of the Santal and “others” include lists of categories. However, ethnic identity is not a matter of imposing or listing by religion, political geography, language, dress, dance, song, music, and so on. Rather, it

⁶⁴ Joseph Marandi. 2006. “Evangelization of the Santals in Bangladesh.” Vol. 43, *East Asian Pastoral Review*. <http://www.eapi.org.ph/resources/eapr/east-asian-pastoral-review-2006/volume-43-2006-number-3/-of-the-santals-in-bangladesh/>. (accessed 26.11.2017).

is a process of constant change and a relationship between past and present maintained by listing and choosing items (Nagel 1994). As Barth (1969) suggests, changes in ethnic boundaries and culture are interconnected, and they can be constructed and reconstructed. Therefore, in this thesis I ask how the interaction with evangelization has reshaped Santalness and reorganized Santal ethnic organization? How does the Santal history of past and present correspond to Barth's (1969) ideas of ethnic identity?

2.3. Everyday Resistance and the Production of Indigeneity

The state's denials of indigeneity, the evangelization, and the Santals' response to these two forces demonstrate that the issue of "indigenous identity" arises both within and outside the Santal community: the controversies about indigeneity reflect the respective perspectives of opponents and proponents in Bangladesh. From the indigenous point of view, the state denies the existence of indigenous peoples and thus perpetuates the legacy of the latter's subordination. Evangelism provides upward social mobility but stresses assimilation and thus contests the Santals' claim to indigenous status. In viewing indigenous peoples' rights anthropologists often sympathize with indigenous movements, but they are still careful when it comes to analyzing the issue of indigeneity.

Therefore, in this thesis, I will discuss the implicit and explicit areas of controversy in processes of claiming an indigenous identity and the Santals' struggle to demonstrate one. The epistemological thoughts of Barth (1969), Scott (1985, 1990) and Clifford (2013) provide insights into reviewing essentialisms, constant changes and indigenous people's attempts to establish their rights. Barth's concept (1969) invites us to consider the phase of transformation in which both insiders and outsiders can maintain ethnic boundaries. Clifford's analysis (2013) provides a backdrop against which to scrutinize indigenous peoples' struggles to reclaim and renew their roots. In this context, Scott's aim (1985, 1990) is to reveal the unnoticed but powerfully subtle character of everyday forms of resistance. There are clear connections between constant flux, everyday resistance and indigenous struggles to revive indigeneity. Hence, in examining the Santals' struggles and the ritual practices which represent tradition but contain covert messages from the Santal concealed within the open dancing, drumming and singing, their

habitual practices, and ceremonial occasions, this thesis builds on insights drawn from the conceptual analyses of Barth (1969), Scott (1985, 1990) and Clifford (2013).

Indeed, the case of the Santal is not unique, raising the question of what is required in using autochthony to claim an indigenous identity; across the world, indigenous peoples' identities and cultural distinctiveness are objectified in multiple ways. In Santal life, three forces are mainly involved in dichotomizing Santal indigeneity. The first is the nationalist construction of the Bangladeshi state, which proclaims the supremacy of the Bengali majority and the subordination of the indigenous people living in it. The second is the state's instrumental interdictions, such as the circulation of government letters, the deliberation of state representatives' statements, the adoption of policies, and amendments to the constitution designed to make and keep Santal subservient. In the same vein, the everyday discourses of the majority Bengalis are influenced by these documents, in which the identity of indigenous peoples is reduced to the status of an "upajati" (sub-nation), their social position being subordinated by virtue of their "inferior" status. The third force—representatives of the various churches, primarily philanthropists, and their activities and agendas—is linked to the controversies surrounding the Santals' claim to be indigenous. The exploitation and subordination of the Santal are also linked to the state's policy regarding resource distribution and the links between it and subordination, which create a space in which to penetrate the process of evangelization and invite the missionaries to extend the range of philanthropic activities among the Santal.

As mentioned earlier, the Santals' indigeneity is also argued to exist by neighboring majority Bengalis. Therefore, the question that arises is whether religious conversion is opposed to indigeneity? Do majority opinions conceal a legacy of colonial categories? Bal (2007) finds that there is continuity, as the discourses of the majority Bengalis take the form of a symbolic hierarchy that disregards the indigenous people living in the country. I have already mentioned that the demand for cultural authenticity and autochthony is also voiced in government statements and formulated in policies. The denial discourses of the majority Bengalis are linked with the national practice of denial and increased by demanding religious affiliations. In anthropology, the construction of identity focuses on the ties made by social relationships and explains others' reactions: it cannot be reduced to religious affiliation alone. To analyze the

fluidity of ethnic identity, Barth's theoretical framework is helpful when scrutinizing the differences between ethnic boundaries and the nature of ties with others. In this context, the present thesis takes Barth's (1969) work, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, as one of its starting points, as his theoretical framework focuses precisely on the interconnectedness between ethnic identities and the continuity of ethnic groups, which is correlated with the maintenance of ethnic boundaries, an alternative to following a set of cultural characteristics.

Barth's work also incorporates the perspectives of both group members and outsiders. In his analysis he stresses the significance of cultural change within ethnic boundaries and argues that culture can be changed without eliminating such boundaries: a new culture can emerge, and culture can be produced. Barth's works strongly reject any notion of the rigid, static formation of ethnic identity determined mainly by pre-set biological, territorial, and cultural characteristics. Barth introduced these ideas on ethnic identity, ethnic relationships, and shifts in ethnicity five decades ago, but today his framework is still appropriate for analyzing the fluidity of Santal ethnic identity. In fact, identity itself involves the notion of fluidity: it is not a fixed notion, but involves a process of exclusion and inclusion. From this point of view, the production and reproduction of identity in respect of the Santal demands self-identification through belonging to the notion of indigeneity. My fieldwork materials show traditional believers questioning the identity of Christian Santal, while the latter in response denied that religious conversion can be a reason for undermining Santal indigeneity. There is also evidence of the Santal arguing with each other over Santalness, while in the same spirit they agree in proclaiming the global notion of indigenous identity.

Nevertheless, the introduction of evangelism created a dialectical relationship among the Santal: "ethnicity is the product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture" (Nagel 1994: 152). Thus, interaction with others becomes a factor in constructing and reconstructing identity. Christian missionaries interfere with the Santal to reform their religious values while addressing their socio-economic needs. These interactions are implicitly significant in discussing the fluidity of Santal identity. Thus, this thesis aims to analyze the construction and reconstruction of Santali identity through a consideration of the development of evangelization.

Consequently, to produce indigeneity by engaging with these controversies, Santal generate forms of resistance in their everyday lives. For example, Christian Santal and traditional believers consciously practice the Santal modes of salutation (*johor*, *dobok*, and *janga-abuk*) and the traditional way of serving *handi* (rice-beer), the customary ritual welcoming guests (see more details in Ch. 7). Christian and traditional Santal practice identical Santal rituals during *bapla* (marriage) and intensify their Santalness in observing *sohrai* and *baha* (the harvest and spring festivals, discussed in more detail in Ch. 8). By practicing these traditions, the Santal are trying to nurture the global idea of indigeneity to fit their own indigenous claims. These practices are disguised forms of defiance that persist in everyday life but that might not be politically organized or easily identified as a form of popular revolution or resistance. They are typically not visible at public events, but are rather embedded in their way of life and oral discourses, which undermine power somewhat (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). Thus, here the notion of everyday resistance includes the ritual practices underlying both everyday and ceremonial occasions that somewhat challenge hegemonic power relations and subordination.

In analyzing these forms of everyday resistance, the present research draws on Scott's (1985, 1990) conceptual understanding of everyday resistance. Scott analyzes the context of resistance using anthropological perspectives and his empirical studies of the lives of peasants in Southeast Asia. His work is significant for understanding the nature of confrontations between superior and subordinate groups that produce forms of resistance in the latter's everyday lives. Everyday resistance is thus:

...the ordinary weapon of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on...symbolic confrontation with authority...such kinds of resistance are often the most significant and most effective over the long run. (Scott 1985: xvi)

According to Scott, these patterns of behavior constitute the infrapolitics of powerless groups (1990: xiii). He calls "infrapolitics" a form of everyday resistance that includes the individual and collective activities of everyday life. Thus, he explores relationships of domination and

subordination and opines that subordinate groups are capable of identifying their discrimination and possess the means to consciously resist their subjugation in everyday life. From Scott's point of view, the notion of everyday resistance is closely connected with the notion of "transcripts" (public and hidden). The public confrontation between dominators and dominated appears to be a "public transcript," while countering abuses of power include "rumor, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, rituals gesturers, anonymity" (ibid.: 137). These actions are often expressed with a precise intention or consciousness. But where subordinates are aware of their oppression and criticize power outside the public arena, Scott uses "the term 'hidden transcript' to characterize the discourses that take place 'offstage' beyond direct observation by power holders" (ibid.: 4). This is a powerful way of undermining hegemony and, over the course of actions, it embeds itself in the everyday lives of subordinates and persists as a form of cultural resistance.

While writing this ethnography of the Santal, I discuss how their forms of resistance produce power, undermine power, and endeavor to become indigenous by referring to the global notion of indigeneity. The juxtapositions of power relations are interconnected with the history of denial by the state and the evolution of evangelism. The most important resistance is that of a follower of the traditional Santali way of life, as they themselves constitute the power to resist hegemonies. Therefore, in this thesis I argue that, by practicing their traditions, the Santal produce new discourses of resistance. In this context, I correlate the forms of everyday resistance with the conceptual understanding of Foucauldian power relations in order to investigate ethnographic events among the Santal where resistance is tied to power dynamics. The power dynamics of subordinate groups produce discourses, such as "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1978: 95). Therefore, the multifaceted interconnectedness of power produces discourses that reproduce indigenous identity, the Santal possessing both "public" and "hidden transcripts."

The ethnographic materials collected during my fieldwork support discussion of the dispossession and revival of indigenous identity that have stimulated the disputes between traditional and Christian Santal. By analyzing assimilation and acculturation, inclusion and

exclusion, I focus on the Santals' efforts to renew their Santalness. Thus, the multifaceted events in Santal life can be used to enrich discussion of the thoughts of Clifford⁶⁵ on "how indigenous knowledge is disseminated through translation and interpretation across times, places, generations and cultures" (2013: 318). Hence, Clifford (2013: 211) comments, "incompleteness, juxtaposition, with ends unwoven and edges rough, is a more realist mode of representation than functional integration, however flexible and dynamic." His stimulating ideas have drawn the attention of academia, as his text advocates adopting different modes of discernment in order to dissect the Western world view that dominates current academic thinking. His "historical realism" is a sociocultural process that interweaves articulation, performance, and translation. By traveling along these paths, indigenous peoples accommodate historical shifts and welcome new beginnings (ibid.: 317). In this respect, in *Returns* (2013) he narrates indigenous histories not only of survival but also of transformation: "as a way of living in modernity, and a way through to something else" (ibid.: 315), indigenous peoples renew their roots. In ending the volume and reminiscing, the Barbara Shangin or "Old Gramma" experiences of Native Alaskan histories hang together among descendants, who heard them from their ancestors. From that point of view the Santal can validate their ritual practices by saying, "We want to follow our ancestral past." This requires retaining memories of how to reconcile their changes in different times and places, as I will discuss more detail in Chs. 6-8. Indeed, Clifford's thinking is useful in analyzing indigenous people's attempts to survive and to struggle to renew their identities. Thus, in evaluating the evidence from my fieldwork, I am aware that I am examining the fluidity of identity used in negotiating the material values of life. In the same spirit, the persistence and performance of ritual practices give the Santal the strength to benefit from their claims to be indigenous. In proceeding with the discussion, however, I consciously avoid romanticizing an indigenous identity that is rigidly rooted in categorization and autochthony.

⁶⁵ Clifford deals with the issues of identity and indigeneity in his three-volume work. The series began in 1988 with the *Predicament of Culture*, where he demonstrates Western hegemony in writing the ethnography of other cultures. In 1997, in *Routes*, he documents the perspective of global human movements by discussing issues surrounding immigrants, diasporas and museums. The scrutiny continues in *Returns* (2013), where he addresses the twenty-first-century resurgence of "global indigeneity," this being a scholarly work with which to rethink the cultural and moral perspectives of globally produced indigenous movements.

2.4. Indigeneity, Controversies and Sticking Up For Rights

In Bangladesh, the demands and denials stimulated by the term “indigenous” requires a review of the classifications “tribal,” “*upajati*,” “Adivasi,” and “indigenous people.” The “indigenous” label brings with it sweeping interpretations and ramifications, despite the stimulus of the development of UN instruments encouraging indigenous peoples to determine their own self-identifications worldwide. Accordingly the Santal align themselves with the global trajectory of indigenous movements and demand constitutional recognition of themselves as “indigenous” in the nationalist setting of Bangladesh. The term “indigenous,” however, has countless variants, such as “aboriginal, tribal, first people, fourth world, native” and so on, all subject to debate and used synonymously to label groups of people who are considered different, “underdeveloped,” and characterized by cultural traits that distinguish them from the dominant societies. By adopting the notion of autochthony, the government of Bangladesh denies indigenous peoples an existence, although it uses their images to promote tourism and the businesses of corporate bodies (Nasreen 2017). However, the term “indigenous” also makes it possible to claim rights, a powerful tool indirectly announcing a strategic alliance between those who are politically and culturally different: thus, “being recognized as indigenous has become an avenue for enlightenment, enfranchisement, and empowerment” (Lee 2006: 458). Although various arguments are made by international institutions and in laws when dealing with indigenous-related issues, there is no unified definition of “indigenous.” No UN system or body has adopted any official definition, nor does the UNDRIP have one. However, in 2015 the factsheet of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples’ Issues provided an overview to aid in understanding the term “indigenous,” with reference to the following list:

Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member. Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies. Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources. Distinct social, economic or political systems. Distinct language, culture and beliefs. From non-dominant groups of society. Resolved to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinct peoples and communities.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ “Indigenous Peoples Indigenous Voices: Who are Indigenous Peoples?” *UN Factsheet*, 2015. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf. (accessed 11.10.2018).

This definition opens a wider window to the acceptance of indigenous people's struggles and rights to self-identification, especially where they are suffering severe denial and discrimination in different parts of the world. Despite the introduction of the UN's instruments, indigenous peoples' political representation is still fractured by the interchangeability of different names and their rights being denied in both national and international contexts by giving them different names such as First Nations in North America, island communities in the South Pacific, Amazonian and Mayan communities in South America, Inuit and Sami communities in the Arctic Circle, Aboriginals in Australia, hill tribes in India and Myanmar, and pastoralist and hunter-gatherer groups in Africa (Hardin and Askew 2016).

Thus, examples of fragmented political identification are found not only in Bangladesh, but in many other countries as well. For example, in India a number of indigenous peoples' rights are protected, but only with reference to the debatable term "Scheduled Tribe." In Tanzania various policies have been introduced to protect pastoralists, shepherds and hunter-gatherers, despite their own conflicts with one another, by labeling them with the official title of "minority groups," not "indigenous peoples." Along with the term "indigenous people," the Australian Government still uses the term "aboriginal societies" and "aborigine," while the phrases "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders" are used in official documents to refer to the "first inhabitants" who lived in Australia and its islands. Similar political denials exist more or less across the world.

In South Asia, the term "tribe" was introduced by the European colonizers: "in colonial South Asia, the term 'tribe' came to refer to groups that were given a low rank in a hierarchical system based upon civilization and modernity. They were *uncivilized* (hence wild, primitive and savage) and *unmodern* (hence backward and ruled by custom)" (van Schendel 2011: 20). Thus, tribes came to be regarded as a group of oppressed peoples instead of different culturally specific groups. The problems with the word "tribe" are also noted by B eteille, who commented, "anthropologists in India, both before and after independence, have been concerned more with the political problem of designation than with the theoretical one of definition" (B eteille 1998: 188). Later, in the nationalist construction in India, the term "Adivasi" became popular as a

politically correct term in place of “tribal”, but this did not happen in Bangladesh. In the nineteenth century the word “tribe” appeared frequently in colonial documents and was adopted by anthropologists as well, but by the 1970s most anthropologists around the world had abandoned the term (van Schendel 2011: 22-23). Likewise, from the 1980s political activists enthusiastically popularized the word “indigenous.”

Usually, anthropologists avoid pre-determined attributes in dealing with indigenous or ethnic identities, despite which they prefer to use the term “indigenous,” extending its use beyond the quest for indigenous status. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Kuper’s (2003) discussion provoked renewed debate in anthropological circles, being extended to use of the term “indigenous.” Kuper points out the UN’s difficulties in defining the term “indigenous people.” To him, the more politically correct term is “native” or “primitive,” while indigenous rights movements are examples of apartheid. Kuper’s comments have provoked numerous debates among anthropologists. Kenrick and Lewis (2004) criticize Kuper’s (2003) thoughts about situating indigenous rights movements within a framework of racism: for them, “the indigenous rights movement is best understood as a response to processes of severe discrimination and dispossession” (Kenrick and Lewis 2004: 9).

The discussions on “The Concept of Indigeneity” (Guenther *et al.*, 2006) brought together various anthropologists’ arguments, in which they excoriated Kuper’s (2003) rejection of the term “indigenous.” Here the participating anthropologists collectively agreed that the “indigenous” concept is historical and situational and that it should not be defined with reference to a single legislative framework. In defining “indigenous”, Guenther criticizes the use of essentialism and primordialism to determine ethnic identity and argues that indigeneity is always necessarily a “hybrid construction...both tribal and modern, local, and worldly” (Clifford 1997: 154, 157, quoted in Guenther *et al.*, 2006: 19). Evie Plaice remarks that, instead of dealing with the dilemmas of indigenous peoples, the issue of social justice is paramount, while according to Michael Asch, “the status of indigenous people [needs] to be resolved in a manner consistent with the principle of social justice” (Michael Asch 2004: 150, quoted in *ibid.*: 24). Trond Thuen comments that indigeneity is a one-sided self-image constructed by subordinates, but that it is undermined by the discourses of their superiors. He also adds that anthropology should study the

changing relationship between political and economic power structures, instead of dealing with the definition of “indigenous people” (ibid.). Indeed, the notion of indigeneity is not about investigating authenticity, seeking cultural purity or finding ancestral roots, but about promoting the universal idea of human rights and putting it into practice.

In dealing with the word “indigenous,” van Schendel (2011: 28-29) reminds us of the “romantic celebration of indigeneity (or autochthony),” in which hegemonic power structures emphasizing the quest for origins are used to gain political advantage and thus become a cause of political turmoil. Correspondingly, however, in South Asia, including its many controversies and its ossification by the state, the term “indigenous” became popular in activists’ circles (ibid.). Bringing in many cases from South Asia, he suggests:

In the complex social world of South Asia almost any group can present itself as indigenous and as threatened by invading Others. For example, the creation of Jharkhand state in India, the expulsion of Nepalis from Bhutan, and confrontations between locals and the Pakistan army in South Waziristan all play upon the notion of defending the Homeland against the Others. (van Schendel 2011: 29)

Van Schendel invokes many examples from South Asia where the political stakes underlying claims to indigeneity have marked many political events. His arguments emphasize the territorial politics of making indigenous “homelands,” but he also scrutinizes the idea of a “co-managed place” that can be imagined in both places – e.g., place *in* and *beyond*, in which place *in* consists of:

...roads, dams, airfields, power stations, forests, water bodies, mines, plantations, nature parks, educational and health institutions, heritage sites – place *beyond* it – e.g. industries processing timber, bamboo, oil, coal and other resources from “indigenous” areas as well as media, educational and tourism institutions engaged in shaping images of “indigenous”/“non-indigenous” relations. (van Schendel 2011: 37)

Van Schendel’s concern is not just for South Asia, but also for indigenous peoples around the world and the question of who can claim the notion of indigeneity. Indigenous peoples have

been struggling to claim their rights, but not to claim a place. In Bangladesh the label “*upajati*” (sub-nation) has undermined their human dignity in political contexts and led to their subordination in the social milieu, although the addition of “minor races” (*khudro-jatishaotta*), “ethnic sects, and communities” (*nrigoshthi o shomprodai*) has led to degraded political treatment, which I alluded to in the previous section of this chapter. In the constitution of Bangladesh, the term “tribes” is translated into Bengali as “*upajati*.” It is used patronizingly not only in Bangladesh but also in post-colonial South Asia, because:

The anchoring of the term “tribe” in the legal frameworks of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal has ossified it by turning a colonial term into a postcolonial identity marker for selected groups whose rights claims must be made in the idioms of “tribe” versus rulers. (van Schendel 2011: 24)

In Bangladesh, however, by asserting their indigenous identity, political activists struggle for certain rights and demand affirmative action to reduce discrimination. In the social settings of north-west Bangladesh, indigenous peoples are collectively called “Adivasi” or “indigenous.” Since the 1990s the demand for constitutional recognition as “indigenous” by the JAP has swirled round the political sphere. Rabindranath Soren, the President of the JAP, comments: “the indigenous people of the plain land address themselves as ‘Adivasi’ and belong to the notion of indigeneity.” I found this attitude towards indigenous identity while talking to the Santal, who say, “while our religious conversation categorized us as *bideen* and *esoie*, we are neither *bideen* nor *esoie*; we are *hor*, we are Santal and we are Adivasi.” The nomenclature regarding the Santal is discussed further in Ch. 4, although their self-identification is “*hor*.” Nonetheless, the introduction of self-identification resists contemporary categorizations (*bideen* and *esoie*), but interestingly it accepts the term used by others (Santal) and enthusiastically aligns it with the indigenous label (*hor* and Adivasi). Thus, the discourse of being *hor*, Santal and Adivasi links them strategically to twenty-first-century indigenous political movements. In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I will show how they have used their notion of indigeneity to align themselves with global indigenous movements.

In conversation with me, Fazle Hossain Badsha⁶⁷ and SM Shamim Akter, Deputy Director of the Rajshahi Divisional Ethnic Minorities Cultural Academy (the Academy), both agreed it was morally appropriate to acknowledge the term “indigenous” in the legal frameworks of the country because this will improve the destitute situations of indigenous peoples. Thus, as I argue in the thesis, the term “indigenous” is not a matter of proving authenticity: instead it resists the historical continuity of oppression and denial while referring to certain cultural traits and the political affirmation of certain rights. Consequently, the Santals’ experiences regarding their identity are important in understanding the historiography of identity politics. There is thus value in every Santal’s discourse created in the endeavor to stand up for their rights.

2.5. Concluding Remarks

The discussion in this chapter has described the state’s denial of indigenous peoples and its policies of internal colonialism. The political discourses of the state’s representatives rationalize the politics of the denial of indigenous identity as well. As a consequence, this political subjection intensified the behavioral ignorance of the majority Bengalis, and the Santals’ claims to indigeneity on the basis of their religious conversion were rejected. Consequently, proselytization became a reason to challenge indigenous identity. In the resulting controversies the Santal both accept and reject each other’s identity. Conversely, their involvement with conversion initiatives stresses their further marginalization in social locations. Furthermore, the development of a transnational version of indigeneity indicates that culturally based notions of indigenous identity are produced politically, although the production of everyday forms of resistance in Santal villages has created a space in which to acknowledge the fluidity of identity, in which an alliance was forged to establish their rights and dignity. To investigate the Santals’ struggles, the scholarly concepts of Barth (1969) and Scott (1985, 1990) have been invoked to support analysis of the reproduction of identity and the production of everyday forms of

⁶⁷ Fazle Hossain Badsha is a politician; he has been a member of the National Parliament since 2008, representing Rajshahi constituency-2 for the Workers’ Party of Bangladesh (WPB). He is also the General Secretary of the WPB. The WPB is one of the parties in the fourteen-party alliance headed by the BAL, which, having won three consecutive elections (2008, 2014 and 2019), has constituted the government of Bangladesh. He is also the President of the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Affairs and Chief Advisor and founder member of the JAP. Therefore, not only due to his role as a government spokesperson but also because of his long involvement with the indigenous rights movement, he is an influential person in making decisions regarding indigenous affairs of Bangladesh.

resistance in Santal villages respectively. In the same vein, Clifford's work (2013) in examining the indigenous histories of survival and transformation has provided a cognitive basis for scrutinizing the twenty-first century's indigenous people's struggles for rights. By scrutinizing both contexts and concepts, this chapter has also discussed anthropological positions in respect of the use of the term "indigenous," which has provoked many controversies while also revealing the interests of indigenous people. In sum, in this chapter I have demonstrated the production of everyday resistance, power of discourse and fluxes, in which the globalized political construction of indigeneity is a way of making it possible to establish indigenous rights. In the next chapter, however, I will discuss the historical origins of Santal settlement in Bangladesh because, as well as laying claim to their identity as "indigenous," there is a long history of their presence in undivided or colonial India.

Chapter 3

Horak Nagam: The History of the Santal

*The sugar mill authorities made an agreement with the original landowners that the land would be returned if any crops other than sugar cane were farmed. They have been producing rice and tobacco for quite some time now. Despite breaching the terms they set themselves, they [the authorities] refuse to return the land, so we had no choice but to occupy it... We want our land back.*⁶⁸

—Philemon Baskey, a Santal leader and vice-president of the Shahebganj-Bagda Farm Land Restoration Committee

These remarks were made after the armed attack that occurred at the Shahebganj-Badga Farm area in Gobindaganj Upazila, Gaibandha District, Bangladesh, in 2016. The Rangpur Sugar Mill authorities, backed by the Bangladesh Police, evicted the Santal from their homes and village. The police's role in the dispossession can be seen in the three-and-a-half-minute video footage that was published in an online news portal and later widely shared on YouTube.⁶⁹ The footage shows the police moving towards a house firing on it. First, a policeman shoots at the empty field, while another sets the door on fire. Shortly after that, plain-clothes police and the uniformed police gradually move in to open fire on the other houses. On 6th November 2016, over a thousand Santal families were evicted in order to take 1,842 acres (approximately 745 hectares) of land in the Shahebganj-Bagda farm area. The clashes resulted in the deaths of three Santal, hundreds were injured, many arrested, and Santal valuables and domestic cattle looted. The armed attack occurred because of a long-standing land dispute between the Rangpur Sugar Mill authority and the Santal. The tragedy was prolonged when the Gobindaganj police station filed a case against 350 native Santal.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "Rangpur sugar mill clash." Daily *Dhaka Tribune*, 08 November 2016. <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/11/07/rangpur-sugar-mill-clash-1-santal-dies-1000-families-flee/> (accessed 03.03.2018).

⁶⁹ "Police are firing at Santal houses (Saontalder ghore police agun dichse)." 11 December 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eLoWYCupH8> (accessed 03.03.2018).

⁷⁰ "Rangpur sugar mill clash." Daily *Dhaka Tribune*, 08 November 2016. <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/11/07/rangpur-sugar-mill-clash-1-santal-dies-1000-families-flee/> (accessed 03.03.2018).

In 1962, the land had been acquired from the Santal based on an agreement that only sugarcane would be produced there and that the land would be returned to the original owners if it was to be used for any other purpose. Though the mill's activities ended in 2008, the authorities started leasing the farmland to other politically and economically influential local Bengalis for the cultivation of rice and other crops. The same year a few local Bengalis occupied some areas of the land, claiming that it had been owned by their forebears. The Santal living in the Shahebganj-Badga Farm area claimed that they had been living there for ages and that this was their ancestors' land. Currently, the state is attempting to establish an economic zone there, and local Bengalis are trying to acquire the land as well. False cases were taken out against the Santal ensuring that the repression continued. For these reasons, Santal men were forced to flee, and others took shelter in the shanties in the adjoining villages, resulting in these men losing their jobs. The evicted Santal also lodged a case against 33 individuals for evicting them, but only one of the accused was arrested.⁷¹ For years, however, the demands for rehabilitation, compensation, and justice have continued to be matters of discussion between the government and philanthropic organizations.

Although armed attacks are fairly recent events, the widespread practice of subordination can be seen throughout history. The incident illustrates a practice of exploitation in which being an ethnic and cultural minority, as the Santal are, means facing the domination of politically powerful local elites, just as they were exploited by *zamindars* (landlords) and *mahajans* (money-lenders) in the colonial period. Their resistance against oppression was openly expressed in the Tilka Manjhi revolt (1772–1795) and the Santal rebellion (1855–1856). In these periodic events, the British rulers supported the *zamindars* and *mahajans* by sending in the state's own armed forces, exactly as the state security forces supported the majority Bengalis in evicting the Santal from the Shahebganj-Badga Farm area in 2016. This practice of domination demonstrates the continuity of exploitation, showing that the hegemonic power of the state has always

⁷¹ Information on the Santal evictions comes from newspaper articles: "Eviction of Gaibandha Santals." The *Daily Star*, 06 November 2017. <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/eviction-gaibandha-santals-year-yet-no-hint-redress-1486837>. (accessed 03.03.2018) and "Rangpur sugar mill clash." Daily *Dhaka Tribune*. 08 November 2016. <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/11/07/rangpur-sugar-mill-clash-1-santal-dies-1000-families-flee/> (accessed 03.03.2018).

cooperated with repressive power structures to perpetuate the repression of the country's most destitute people.

By discussing the *horak nagam* or the history of the Santal in this chapter, I aim to shed light on the subjugation and subordination that was inflicted on the Santal, who are already marginalized in Bangladesh. This chapter also describes the Santal history of migration by using evidence from the colonial period in India. The Santals' myth of creation demonstrates their contemporary understanding of their own identity, which is deeply rooted in their cosmology, itself connected with evidence of their migrations. Their long journeys from Hihiri Pipiri to Chai Champa, Chai Champa to Santal Parganas, and Santal Parganas to the Barind Tract (today Bangladesh) shows how their struggle for survival has prevailed throughout time. Nevertheless, the exploitation and domination that they experienced during the colonial period has continued in present-day Bangladesh as well. By describing the history of hegemonic power, this chapter also analyzes the colonial repression that has seeped into the Bangladeshi state. At the same time, the participation of Santal in past and present revolts emphasizes the endemic nature of their underlying power to resist repression. As a response to repression, the Santal have adopted both open and covert forms of resistance, which at times were later embedded in their everyday lives. The circumstances of the long history of migration, the territorial and political changes, and the shifts from colonization to decolonization, and from post-colonial Pakistan to independent Bangladesh have led to the Santal being segregated across the three states of India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. In this chapter, I will focus on Santal settlement in Bangladesh and their struggle as citizens of the country. By describing the historical evidence, I reveal their shared history of struggle, migration, and cultural connectivity as they retain their Santalness and claim indigeneity in a way that goes beyond contemporary political demarcations. Thus, in this chapter I analyze the political changes that have affected them from the colonial period to the present day, revealing their history of migration and their struggles for survival, and demonstrating their increasingly marginalized status in Bangladesh, resulting in both open and covert forms of resistance.

3.1. Mythological Origins and the History of Migration

The evidence for Santal origins and memories of migration are to be found in the historical records produced by British colonizers and western missionaries in the eighteenth century. Although this colonial documentation supposedly took the form of categorical discursive productions for imperial purposes, the records have acquired archival value over time. There are no written documents available for the pre-colonial era. In fact, Santals' history, legends, folktales, and memories of migration were orally passed on from one generation to another and later recorded in colonial documents. O'Malley (1909) noted that Sir John Shore wrote about the Santal of Ramgarh in Birbhum District, West Bengal, India, as early as 1795. The colonizers first contacted the Santal in the Chotanagpur Plateau and Hazaribagh, Palamau, Singhbhum, Midnapore, and Birbhum in the middle of the eighteenth century. Regarding the Santals' origins, Hunter (1868), and Dalton (1872) agreed that they originated in India in the north-east and moved to the Chotanagpur Plateau. According to L.O. Skrefsurd (1873), the Santal entered India from the north-west, first settling in Punjab and then moving to the Chotanagpur Plateau. However, Risley (1892) and O'Malley (1910) did not arrive at any consensus about the Santals' origins, instead attempting to describe the oral traditions of their arrival and departure from one place to another.

The myth of creation, belief in *bongas* (spirits), and the religious setting show that the Santal have distinct cultural attributes. Their distinctiveness inspires them to reconstruct their claims to indigeneity at the present day. As Knight (2014: 35) says, "the origin myth, with its messages of morality, adversity and godly interventions, is revealing as a foundation of the Santal sense of cultural distinctiveness." This distinctiveness is demonstrated in their sense of belongingness when their individual actions contribute to completing traditional ceremonies, which are practiced regardless of today's religious fissioning into Christian and traditional believers (discussed in Chs. 7 and 8). According to the legend of Santal origins, Pilchuh Haram, the first man, and Pilchuh Burhi, the first woman, emerged from a duck's egg in Hihiri Pipiri, and their race was created by Thakur (supreme deity or high God). Marang Buru or the Great Mountain directed their lives and was invoked in brewing strong *handi* (rice beer), stimulating them to indulge in sexual intercourse and have children, i.e., seven sons and seven daughters. This was how the human race began (Hunter 1868; Risley 1892; and Hembram 1988).

Pilchuh Burhi and Pilchuh Haram also played a strategic role in continuing the human race, as they separated their children while they were growing up so they wouldn't know each other before getting married. The seven sons and daughters thus married each other, and the human race multiplied. The increasing number of Santal migrated from the land of origin, Hihiri Pipiri, to Khoj-kaman, from Khoj-kaman to Harata, and then from Sasan-beda to Chai-Champa (O'Malley 1910). During their journeys, they crossed the Damodar river, which became their sacred river. Dalton (1872) stated that they conducted death ceremonies in the Damodar, as it was identified as the holy river. This river is situated in present-day Jharkhand and West Bengal, India. Nonetheless Dalton (1872) was unable to find Hahiri Pipiri. The Chai Champa which was mentioned in the myth is actually Hazaribagh or Ramgarh, districts of Jharkhand. The story of the creation of the human race also covers the twelve Santal clans,⁷² some of which are named after the seven sons of Pilchuh Burhi and Haram; the other five were added later. The clan divisions are associated with the creation myth, each having an occupational affiliation. At present, the clan identity has no relevance to occupation, but it is nonetheless a distinct marker of Santal identity that reinforces how ties of kinship and marriage are formed.

Their history of migration is a direct outcome of the pressures exerted on them to assimilate, which they resisted by migrating from one place to another (Knight 2014). According to their history of migration in the Champa and Soant regions, they rejected Hindu dominions (Risley 1892). During their stay in Chai, one Santal Raja killed himself after hearing that Chai had been occupied by a Muslim army (Dalton 1872: 211). This evidence of the consequences of their conflicts with Hindus and Muslims reflects their legacy of resistance. Today's struggles to reproduce a distinct Santal identity are connected with their folk literature and spiritual beliefs, which Dalton (1872) describes through the Bagh Rai narratives. These narratives state that the Santal were surrounded by many Birhor⁷³ and that during their stay in Champa a Santal girl was forced to marry a Birhor youth with the Hindu name of Madhu Singh. The Santal refused to hand the girl over and decided to move to Chotanagpur. During this migration, Marang Buru appeared

⁷² As already mentioned in Ch. 2 (see Fn. 52), clan names are still pivotal to the survival of Santal identity. For more information on the Santal clan organizations, see Troisi (2000), Mukherjea (1965), and Culshaw (1949).

⁷³ The Birhor are another indigenous group living in Jharkhand province, India.

before them, and they prayed for his protection from Madhu Singh. As a blessing, Marang Buru allocated them a sacred place called the *jaherthan*⁷⁴ or sacred grove (Dalton 1872: 209–211). The presence of the *jaherthan* today is still relevant because, as Mahesh Murmu, a *nayeki* (priest) of Situngtola village, said, “for the prosperity of the village, every Santal village will have to allocate a place for *jaherthan*.” He also added that “due to the reduction of the forest area, we do not have a specific place for the *jaherthan*, but in order that this should continue as a part of the tradition, we have designated a place in our paddy fields as the *jaherthan*.”

The *jaherthan* is a remarkable symbol of Santal identity, its presence representing continuity and distinctiveness, even though it has been moved from the forest to the fields. The sacred area and religious beliefs are closely interrelated with what Marang Buru said when he directed them there to save themselves from domination by outsiders. Santal beliefs and religion come from Marang Buru’s instructions. Cornelius Hasda⁷⁵ told me that to learn about the Santal belief system and the Santal religion or Sari-Sarna or the root of the Santal he asked the older adults of his village about them. Based on his collected oral records, he described this as follows:

“Sarna” is a Santali word; the word describes how we started our religious practice. The word is formed from a combination of “Sar” and “Na.” “Sar” means arrow, and “Na,” in the construction of the Santali language, is the feminine of the word; for example, “dela na” means “let’s go”, but the word “dela na” is used to say this only to a female. If we want to say “let’s go” to any male, we say “dela ya,” which also means “let’s go.” The word “Ya” is the male form, “Na” the female form. However, after having children, Pilchuh Burhi and Pilchuh Haram separated their daughters and sons in accordance with Marang Buru’s instructions. They placed them in two different corners of the mountain, called Suruku Bir and Khaderai Bir. The girls’ group was led by Pilchuh Burhi and placed within the Suruku Bir, while the boys’ group was situated in Khaderai by their following Pilchuh Burhi and Pilchuh Haram. The boys became hunters, the girls mainly collectors or gatherers. One day the boys were out hunting

⁷⁴ The *Jaherthan* is a selected sacred grove usually located in bushes or trees near the village.

⁷⁵ Cornelius Hasda is a young Santal living in Kakonhat and working to revitalize the Santal traditions. He is a traditional believer Santal and founder of Manowa. Manowa is a cultural organization based in Kakonhat that aims to revive indigenous traditions. Its activities and Cornelius Hasda’s attempts will discuss in detail in Ch. 8.

when they reached the girls' place and were amazed to see the presence of another human. According to Santal mythology, the incident of the boys meeting the girls created an unforgettable moment, as it indicated that the human race would continue on earth. Thus, Marang Buru fired an arrow, which penetrated the Sarjom Dori (Sal tree). The girls saw the arrow first and shouted "Sar nio rena" together, which means "the arrow stabbed in the Sal tree." They assumed that the "sar" or arrow had come from Marang Buru. They showed great respect to the "sar" and "sarjom dori." This is why the Santal religion is called "Sarna" and why the Sal tree is considered sacred among the Santal.

A similar account is provided by P.C. Hembramin in his book *Sari-Sarna: Santhal religion* (1988: 2–3). At present, the Santal are divided into two religious groups, but the quest to know about Santal origins among young Santal and their attempts to learn about their ancestors' narratives indicate a desire to renew their roots. By retelling the story of the mythological construction of religion, they are strengthening their claims to indigeneity. Cornelius Hasda is currently motivating a group of young Santal living in Kakonhat and mobilizing them to revitalize their old traditions (I give more details on this in Ch. 8). This initiative might not be similar to that of other young Santal, but it reveals the self-awareness of the Santal and demonstrates their power to invent traditions. The power of awareness brings the young Santal together in a quest for the *Horak Nagam*.

3.2. From Colonization to Decolonization: A Depiction of Domination

The interplay between past and present contributes to constructing the contemporary demands of indigenous identity. The subordination of the Santal represents a relationship between domination and denial that is rooted in the political processes of the state. Typically it is alleged that colonialism was established in the remotest forest areas of eastern India in order to exploit indigenous people. However, the legacy of multi-layered colonial oppression was politicized in the post-colonial era as found in Bangladesh. The Santal have thereby been deprived of their rights to land and been oppressed as an ethnic and religious minority in Bangladesh.

The establishment of the Santal Parganas in the colonial period was the most significant event in Santal history, as it provided them with special geographical and administrative arrangements. In particular, the British began paying attention to the Santal in 1833 with the establishment of the Damin-i-koh,⁷⁶ or “skirts of the hills.” This increased Santal numbers in the Rajmahal Hills in a few years from 3000 to 83,000 (Dalton 1872: 208). The British colonizers patronized the Santal settlement in the Damin-i-koh, but their control of it was threatened by the Santal rebellion of 1855 and 1856, in which the Santal rose up against their oppressors, i.e., the *zamindars* (landlords), *mahajans* (money lenders), and *dikus* (Hindus or outsiders). The revolt was not successful, and many Santal were imprisoned, but the resistance drew the attention of the colonizers to the Santal living in eastern India. An administrative reform occurred that established the Santal Parganas under the Santal Parganas Act of 1855. The rebellious territory, the Daman-i-koh, was transformed into a separate non-regulation district called the Santal Parganas under the control of the Bhagalpur commissioner (Troisi 2000: 38). Later, the adoption of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 prohibited land transfers from indigenous to non-indigenous peoples as a safeguard for the former in colonial India. However, in practice, breaches of the law increased land alienations, and social exploitation greatly increased. For example, non-indigenous people were tricked by being persuaded by *dikus* (outsiders) to marry an indigenous woman so that the marriage relationship could be exploited by grabbing their land and registering it.

⁷⁶ Damin-i-koh is a Persian word meaning “the skirts of the hills.” In the eighteenth century, this was a name given to the forest dwellers of the Rajmahal Hills by the British colonizers. At present, most of the area is located in Jharkhand state, India. The establishment of the Damin-i-koh led to the British penetrating three groups of hill people, namely the Sauria, the Kumarbhag Paharia and the Mal Phaharia, collectively called the Paharia or hill people. Before the arrival of the British, the Muslim rulers, the Mughals, never seemed to have occupied the dense forest area. The indigenous people lived in accordance with their traditions and customs. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Santal first began to move to the colonial settlement area called the Damin-i-koh.

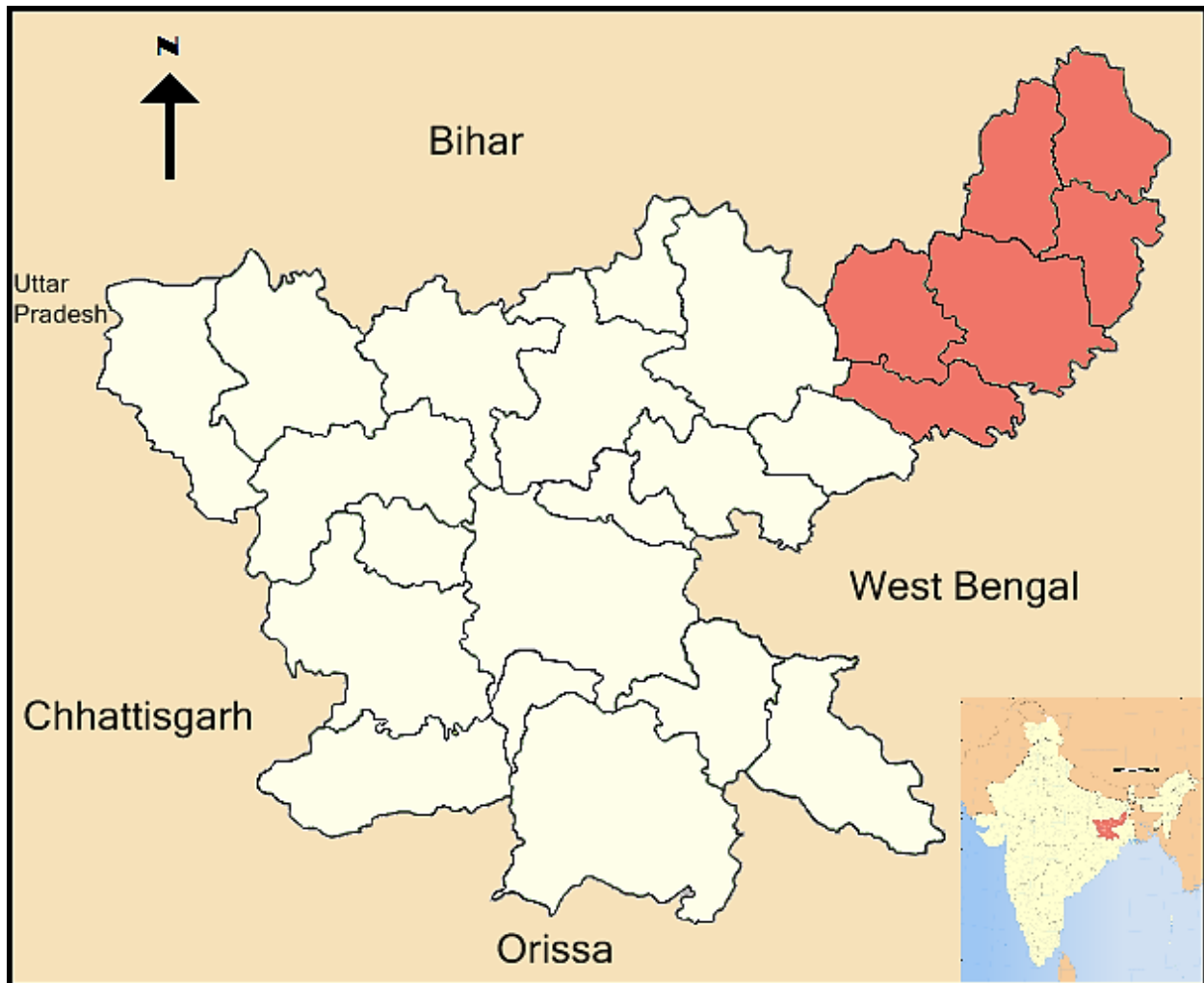


Figure 4. Location of the Santal Parganas. Source: http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Santhal_Pargana_division. (accessed 05.03.2018).

In addition, the settlement of the Santal Parganas also led to the migration of thousands of Santal to the Barind tract, which is now in Bangladesh. The uprising of 1855–56 also caused the Santal to migrate from the Santal Parganas to Rajshahi. Around this time, the British administrators also brought in the Santal to clear and cultivate the forest and wasteland in the north-west of Bangladesh (Knight 2014: 38). Rothin Mardi, an elderly adult man with whom I talked in Situngtola village, told me: “My ancestors came from India in this village to work on the railway track between Rajshahi and Chapainababganj.” Banglapedia mentions that the North Bengal State Railway was constructed between 1874 and 1879 and that the Eastern Bengal

Railway route was extended between 1899 and 1905.⁷⁷ The period of Santal migration to Bengal is also documented by O'Malley (1910), who remarks that a large number of Santal were attracted to work on the railways because of the good wages, preferring this to being bonded laborers for the *zamindars*, as he stated in the following words:

The great migration of the Santals to this district from the south and west took place during the middle part of the 19th century... The tribe is still spreading to the east and north, and the full effect of this movement is not exhausted in the districts that adjoin the Santal Parganas, but makes itself felt even further away in those parts of Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Bogra which share with Malda the elevated tract of quasi-laterite soil known as Barind. (O'Malley 1910: 63)

O'Malley (1910) also notes that not only the Santal but a large number of Muslims also migrated to Bengal, the Muslim migration having “an enormous impact on the lives of the Santals, in particular in relation to their land holdings” (Knight 2014: 39). From the nineteenth century, Islam became a prominent factor separating those of Bengali identity into Muslim Bengalis and Hindu Bengalis. The departure of the British led to the division of Bengal into two parts: Muslims in East Bengal or East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and Hindus in West Bengal, in India. After Partition, the number of Hindus fell in East Bengal or present-day Bangladesh, while two communal riots in 1950 and 1965 increased the number of Muslims in Bangladesh who migrated from India and were known as *biharis* in Bangladesh. They became involved in entrepreneurship, small trade, railway jobs, and other official government positions. The local Bengalis disliked them, as did the Adivasis (Knight 2014: 39). Knight states as follows:

The out-migration of Hindus and the incoming of Bihari Muslims changed the social landscape of the areas where the Santals lived in what is now north-west Bangladesh. The battle for resources where the Santals were living...was characterized by the confrontation between the remaining Hindus and other non-Muslims, including the Santals and the growing Muslim majority. Many Santals left the region during this

⁷⁷ “Railway.” *Banglapedia*, 2015. <http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Railway>. (accessed 05.03.2018).

period: census data showed that those belonging to other religions – including the Santals who were recorded as animist or Christians – fell most sharply between 1941 and 1951 from 4.4 percent to just 0.26 percent. (Knight 2014: 40-41)

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Padma–Mahananda river erosion in Chaipainawabganj District created another internal migrant group called the *diyara*. Sometimes, in the localities, people also called them *chapiya*, because this group of people came mainly from Chaipainawabganj District. Both terms – *diyara* and *chapiya* (used of the river erosion victims), denote neglect of these people. However, the *diyaras* became influential locally because of their occupation of agricultural land and small trade in the north-western districts of Bangladesh. They emerged as one of the buyers of Santal land, as I observed while working in the Santal villages. In the Burutora villages, seven Muslim families, who are *diyaras*, bought Santal land. Similarly, I found five Muslims households in Champatola village who are *diyaras* who had also purchased land from Santal. Like *biharis*, *diyaras* are unpopular with the Bengalis, as well as with the indigenous peoples’ of north-western Bangladesh. Bengalis claim that they are the “original” inhabitants of the region, whereas the *diyaras* are Bengali too. While working in the north-west of the country, I found that those living in the region were classified into four categories: first, Bengalis, who claim to be the aboriginal people of the land; second, *biharis*, or Muslims who immigrated because of Partition (1947) and the India-Pakistan war (1965), who are also known as refugees; third, the *diyara*, an internal migrant group created because of the Padma-Mahananda river erosion; and fourth, a large number of Adivasi or indigenous groups. Generally the Bengalis, *biharis* and *diyaras* are more affluent than the Adivasis. Among the four groups, the indigenous people are the most marginalized and face the most extreme oppression and subjugation.

In 1947, although the British colonizers had left, oppression and land dispossession continued in decolonized Pakistan. The Santal were oppressed by being deprived of their proper share of the produced crops, which were taken by the *zamindars* or landlords. Although at this time the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 abolished the landlord system, it failed to accommodate the land rights of the indigenous peoples. The legal document was useless when it came to incorporating the customary land rights of indigenous peoples, and, due to the absence

of land deeds, massive dispossessions of land occurred (Barkal *et al.*, 2009; Bleie 2006). This reflects the fact that the collective property rights of indigenous peoples are different from the western idea of private property:

The Adivasi population in tracts of Rajshahi had most probably tilled the land and harvested the forests' lavish sources for centuries. Given the Adivasi indigenous view of human claim to land, they surely convinced of themselves being the first settlers and the real "owners" of their land, clinging to the hope that good luck and ancestors' blessings would prevent the strange and incomprehensible British-made land laws from intruding on their long-established occupancy rights. (Bleie 2006: 219)

Indigenous peoples' ideas about land consider it to be an integral part of life just like the sky and the wind. To the Santal "land" connotes their home, their village, their farmland, and their sense of belonging as a member of the village community. Paulos Hasda from Situngtola village said:

Earlier, we demarcated the land between villagers by saying "this is my land and that is yours." These words were enough to determine our landownership. We never violated the boundary which we had decided in our words, and we transferred our land from one to another in the same way.

Conversely, the colonizers developed ideas about the commodification of land where land was perceived as a piece of property, a commodity, something to own by virtue of a legal deed, something to be bought and sold and used for profit. This understanding of land was quite remote from the Santals' communal and natural concept of land. Thus, the Santal were unsuccessful in addressing the shift from oral bond to deed, which occurred after the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950. The law disregarded not only the Santal concept of land, but also the customary rights of the Santal to that land. During the Pakistan period, the dispossession of indigenous land reached its zenith. However, the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 was passed prior to the permission of the Revenue Office to transfer land from the

indigenous to the non-indigenous (Article 97 [3]).⁷⁸ Nonetheless, this prohibition, which was designed to save indigenous peoples' lands, encountered problems, and indigenous people were either persuaded or forced to sign their surnames to avoid the rejection of prior permission by the Revenue Office. Thus, in transferring land, someone who had the surname "Soren" pretended to be "Sarkar", that is, an indigenous person posed as a non-indigenous person.

The dispossession of land and Partition in 1947 led many indigenous peoples, like many Bengali Hindus, to feel insecure in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). During that time, a large number of indigenous people moved to India. Uddin (2008: 19) remarks that the constitutions of Pakistan of 1955 [1956] and 1962 preserved the CHT area by giving it "excluded area" status, but this was abolished in 1963. The exploitation of indigenous peoples was perpetuated from the colonial into the post-colonial period, and in most cases they failed to obtain access to the land they formerly possessed. The Nachol revolt of 1949–50, the communal riots in 1964, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, and the independence war of Bangladesh in 1971 were all political events that led to the exploitation of indigenous peoples (Knight 2014: 40–41). Moreover, the Islam-based Pakistan regime passed the Enemy Property Act of 1965, under which many Hindus were treated as enemies. In Bangladesh, the Act was reintroduced as the Vested Property Act in 1974.⁷⁹ Thus, alienation and land dispossession were supported by the state, and the religious and ethnic minorities living in the country found that they had become stateless people within the state. When I was working in Situngtola village, an elderly woman called Minoti Mardi said to me,

During the Bangladesh liberation war my family fled to India, and after liberation we came back. From the adjoining indigenous villages, many families went to India during

⁷⁸ "The State Acquisition and Tenancy Act." 1950. <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/texts/bgd35574.doc>. (accessed 06.03.2018).

⁷⁹ In 1965, the Pakistani military ruler enacted the Enemy Property Act to force Hindus to flee to neighboring India. During the Indo-Pakistan Kashmir War 1965, many Pakistani Hindus took shelter in India. After the war, when Hindus returned to the country, they found that they were now defined as "enemies of the state" under the Act and that they had been evicted from their land. In independent Bangladesh, the Act was reinvented as the Vested Property Act, and many Hindus lost rights to their own land. A seminal work by Professor Abul Barkat (ed), "An Inquiry into Causes and Consequences of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act: Framework for a Realistic Solution," (2000), shows that 925,050 Hindu households were affected by the Vested Property Act.

the war, and most of them returned. Among them, some of them got back their land and some did not. We supported the Bangladesh liberation war, despite which we were always deprived of our rights as citizens of Bangladesh.

Similar opinions were also echoed in Burutola village. The prolonged subjugation of the British colonial period and the post-colonial East Pakistan era led the Santal to participate in the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971. Seeing that “secularism” was one of the core inspirations for the liberation of Bangladesh, they thought that this would guarantee their cultural and ethnic rights. The significance of their participation was voiced by Barnabas Soren, one of the inhabitants of Burutola, who said, “Aale hu disham le swadinakada,” or “we also fight for freedom,” before adding that “from our perspective, we have no reason to support Pakistan. Thus, we fight for Bangladesh, but in independent Bangladesh, we are dependent.”

Nomita Kisku, another elderly adult who lives in Situngtola village, migrated twice in her life, both times seeking shelter in West Bengal in India. She first migrated in 1965, during the India-Pakistan war, when the predominantly Muslim nationalistic political environment forced her to leave home. After the war, however, when she came back she did not get back her home or her farmland. She was living in Nabai-Bot-tata village, approximately 25 km from Situngtola, but the dispossession of her home and land made her destitute. Somehow she managed, with the oral consent of one of the neighbors in the same village, to live on a small piece of abandoned land. Nonetheless, she migrated a second time, in 1971, during the Bangladesh liberation war. After Bangladesh’s independence, when she returned, she lost her last refuge, and soon afterwards her husband died. Currently she is living with her younger son on a small piece of *khas* land (state-owned land) with the oral consent of the local elite, although as a poor landless person she has a legal right to obtain the piece of land.⁸⁰

In 1971, the Santal had not only migrated but also participated in the Bangladesh liberation war. The intrepid nature of the Santals’ participation was significant in the liberation war. Tudu (2013) collected the names of 235 freedom fighters from Godagari Upazila, among

⁸⁰ Santal access to *khas* land is discussed in more detail in Ch. 4. Accounts of Santal access to land include the investigative studies of Barkat (*et al.*, 2009) and Das (2011).

whom were 48 indigenous persons, most of them Santals, including 15 who had been killed. Sagram Majhi⁸¹ was one of the well-known Santal organizers who inspired the indigenous people of the area to participate in the Bangladesh liberation war (Tudu 2013). The intrepidity and involvement of the indigenous people living in northern Bangladesh is recorded by Partha (2009), who gives 35 Santal narratives of 69 indigenous freedom fighters. Through these collected case studies, he documents their courageous participation in the liberation war. However, the fifteen volumes of historical accounts of the Bangladesh liberation war issued by the Government of Bangladesh do not acknowledge the indigenous people's contributions (Partha 2009: 13). In fact, a large number of indigenous people put their lives in jeopardy to win freedom, but in the Bangladesh independence era the political shift from Bengali to Bangladeshi nationalism and from secularism to Islamization marginalized the indigenous people of the country both ethnically and religiously (an issue discussed in detail in Ch. 2). Furthermore, the denial of rights and identity makes it evident that colonial repression affected both neocolonial Pakistan and post-colonial Bangladesh.

3.3. The History of *Hul* (resistance)

“Since colonial times, the Santal have been struggling not only against domination but also for freedom.” This comment was made by Direndra Nath Baskey (1960: 4), a Santal scholar, who documented the history of the Santal uprising in his book *Saontal Gono Songramer Etihās* or “The history of Santal resistance.” In his historicizing, Baskey (1960) claims that the history of Santal struggles and their courage are overlooked in traditional historiography. His claim is justified because in written records colonial writers such as O'Malley (1910) and Hunter (1868) disregarded the intrepidity of Tilka Manjhi and others. Indeed, the British administrator O'Malley (1910) emphasized the modesty of Cleveland, another British administrator, not Tilka Manjhi's martyrdom. However, O'Malley also reveals the first cracks in the colonial penetration of indigenous peoples living in eastern India. He noted that, from time immemorial, the Paharia and other indigenous peoples had been living in the dense forests of eastern India. The Mughal

⁸¹ Sagram Majhi (1901–78) was a renowned political leader from Godagari Upazila. He was the first Santal to be elected as a local people's representative in the United Front elections led by the Awami League; in independent Bangladesh, he was also elected as the Union Parishad Chairman in 1974. He made a significant contribution to advancing indigenous peoples' educational programs. Godagari, as a place, is significant, as it is where he mobilized the Santal to participate in the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971.

rulers were not able to reach or subdue these remote forests where indigenous peoples lived in the areas of Rajmahal, Monghyr, or Bhagalpur. Captain Brooke first attempted to govern the Paharias in Monghyr and Bhagalpur in 1772, but without success. The *zamindars* also found it difficult to reach these places and collect revenue from them. In 1779 the Bhagalpur collector, Cleveland, persuaded the Paharia to divide the hills into different divisions called *parganas* and *tappas* in order to govern them. All communication with the people was directed through the *sardars* and *manjhis* (village headmen). A number of Paharia were also recruited into the security forces (O'Malley 1910: 23–60).

This process of subordination extended to the establishment of the Damin-i-koh in the southern and northern parts of Dumka (now a city in Jharkhand), where the Paharia refused to abandon their forest way of life. The Santal were persuaded to move into the Damin-i-koh. Although being forced to pay revenues for their ancestral lands in the eastern part of India must have seemed puzzling to them, indeed, it agitated them and made them rebel against their domination. At that time, Santal living areas were being affected by the natural disasters of drought and famine, and people were dying of hunger. In 1770 the great Bengal Famine occurred in the Indo-Gangetic plain from greater Bihar to greater Bengal. Amartya Sen states that the famine caused up to ten million deaths (Sen 1981: 39). The severity of the starvation conditions is described by Hunter as follows:

...In the stifling summer of 1770 the people went on dying. The husbandmen sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed-grain. They sold their sons and daughters, till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of trees and the grass of the field; and in June 1770 the Resident at the Durbar affirmed that the living were feeding on the dead. (Hunter 1868: 26)

The extreme devastation and consequent deaths fueled the Santal's anger. The agitation against colonial oppression and land acquisitions was organized by Tilka Murmu, popularly known as Tilka Manjhi, and became the first known Santal revolt. Baskey (1960) describes how Tilka Manjhi mobilized thousands of people from different indigenous groups living in Bhagalpur and trained them to be a group of freedom fighters skilled in guerrilla warfare. As a

response to Tilka Manjhi's revolt, 800 British soldiers were sent to suppress it. They convinced forty local leaders that the British were not taking any revenue from them. But Tilka Manjhi became a popular leader and gained support from the local people in mobilizing his force in the dense forest. Cleveland, who had the organizational and administrative skills to govern the remotest forest areas of eastern India, died from an arrow shot by Tilka Manjhi in 1784. After his death the colonial repression increased, and Tilka Manjhi fled into the forest. Finally he was caught by the British forces, brutally tortured, and hanged (Baskey 1960: 09–12), his death ending the Tilka Manjhi revolt (1772–1785).

O'Malley, in recounting this history, glossed over part of the Tilka Manjhi revolt and wrote that Cleveland died at the age of 29 without specifying the reason for his death (1910: 37–41). The colonialists' contempt for these events is recounted in Baskey's work (1960), where he says:

In the history of these struggles, the names of the great heroes were not mentioned once because of the vested interests of the British historians and their subservient native historians. The governing bodies in independent India did not reveal the genuine and comprehensive history to the people for 190 years, i.e., from 1757 to 1947. Till now, the people still do not know the hundreds of sacrifices made by people like Tilka and their contribution to the making of independent India. (Baskey 1960: 12)

From 1779 to 1854, the Paharia and Santal protested against these repressive structures of power, but these were not large-scale political protests. Meanwhile, the Santal had settled down to clearing jungle and farming the land, establishing an affluent peasant way of life in the Daman-i-koh (Baskey 1960). The Permanent Settlement of 1793⁸² turned them into settlers on their own land, which the Santal had traditionally cultivated as their own but which now passed to the *zamindars*. The increased amount of revenue collection and the repression of the

⁸² The Permanent Settlement of 1793 was a land settlement between the British East India Company and local landlords (*zamindars*). The idea behind the settlement was to collect revenues from lands that were run by the *zamindars*, a native landed class in India whom the British used to govern India. The landlords used oppressive methods to collect revenues.

zamindars were channeled through the *mahajans* (money-lenders). As the area of cultivation grew, so did the level of exploitation; the Bengalis (*zamindars/mahajans*) and *dikus* (outsiders) forced the Santal to sell their lands, according to Baskey (1960) because they were intoxicated with traditional drink. The Santal, who had been lords of the soil, now became bonded laborers on their own land. The discontent of the Santal and the need for good wages led them to leave their lands to find work building the railways (O'Malley 1916). But "the grievances of the Santals had for some time produced a spirit of unrest, which resulted, in 1884, in a number of *mahajans'* houses being attacked at night" (O'Malley 1910: 48). Indeed, this was a response to the repressive British revenue system and the *zamindari* exploitation.

The grievances and unrest resulted in a revolt between 1855 and 1856, commonly known as the *Santal Hul*. The spirit of rebellion spread to Bhagalpur, Manbhum, and Rajmahal. The great Santal rebellion was led by four Murmu brothers—Sidhu, Kanu, Chand, and Bhairab. The Murmu brothers mobilized 10,000 Santal, and declared they would expel the dominant government, *zamindars*, and *mahajans* from their land and establish a separate Santali state. Along with the slogan that they would destroy all repressive authority, they continued their march towards Calcutta (Datta 1940: 15–16). During the briefing, Sidhu and Kanu stated that Thakur (the Supreme or High God) had appeared to them to lead the resistance (O'Malley, 1910). They proclaimed Thakur's statement or declaration of independence, which provoked a march for independence on 30th June 1855, "the first long mass march in Indian history" (Baskey 1960: 58).

From 1855 to 1856 a series of protests continued against the repressive power structure, which colonial writers⁸³ documented but treated as an uprising against the Bengalis (*zamindars* and *mahazans*). Meanwhile Hunter (1868) acknowledged the Santals' heroism by quoting the personal narrative of Major Jervis, who was responsible for countering the Santal attacks, as

⁸³ William Wilson Hunter (1868: 240-252) and L.S.S. O'Malley (1910, 48-56) state that the rebellion was directed against Bengali oppression, not the British. Kalikinkar Datta (1940: 10) writes, "the movement was not anti-British in the beginning, but it was directed chiefly against the *mahajans* and traders," while according to Datta (1940), it was extended to the police force and officers of the East India Company. The rebellion displayed covert agitation against local forces (*zamindars* and *mahazans*) but undoubtedly decoded a protest against all forms of oppression by outsiders.

Hunter (ibid.) noted from the *Personal Narrative of Major Jervis* in his book, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, in the following words:

Their arrows often killed our men, and so we had to fire on them as long as they stood. When their drums ceased, they would move off for about a quarter of a mile; then their drums began again, and they calmly stood till we came up and poured a few volleys into them. There was not a Sepoy in the war who did not feel ashamed of himself...they were the most truthful set of men I ever met; brave to infatuation. (Hunter 1868: 248)

Unfortunately Santal bravery was not enough to achieve their aims. Sidhu and Kanu were killed, but the rebellion turned into a periodic event that inspired future peasant uprisings. Earlier I noted that the establishment of the Santal Parganas was an attempt to provide separate administrative arrangements, but it failed to check the *zamindari* exploitation. Under these circumstances the exploitation of the Santal continued, and although there were long gaps between subsequent revolts, the agitation against repression continued among the Santal and resulted in the Tebhaga Movement (1946-47). The demand for *tebhaga* or sharing a third of the crop was the pivot of the movement, which involved a significant peasant uprising in Bengal led by the Kisan Sabha (a peasant wing of the Communist Party of India). The movement spread to 19 districts of Bengal, and 60,000 farmers took part in it (Kamal and Chakraborty 2001: 109). The government acted with cruelty to the protesters, with a number of farmers being killed, many arrested, and thousands injured. However, the Hindu-Muslim Communal Riots in 1947 during the Partition of British India blunted the movement. Shortly afterwards, in 1948, the emergence of the Communist Party of Pakistan renewed the spirit of resistance and stimulated the farmers living in Nachol, an area inhabited by indigenous peoples where the number of Santal was high (ibid.: 108-172).

The Nachol revolt (1949–50) occurred in the present-day Chapainawabganj District of Nachol Upazila as a continuation of the Tebhaga Movement (1946-47). Indigenous and Bengali peasants both participated in the Nachol revolt, but the Santal were the main force behind it. The movement was led by communist activists and again demanded sharing a third of the crop for the peasants. The Santal of this region were predominantly sharecroppers and used to surrender half

of the crop to the *zamindars* (Kamal and Chakraborty 2001). In the Nachol uprising, they claimed a one third share, but the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 allocated different meanings⁸⁴ to the proclamation of land ownership. Eventually, the movement was suppressed and its organizational activities were overthrown because of the killing of policemen in Nachol. Kamal and Chakraborty (2001) suggest that the party's central leaders failed to guide the local organizers of the revolt.

Afterwards there was a long interval for organizational reasons so that the indigenous people on the plains of Bangladesh could be mobilized, continuing from after the Nachol revolt into the 1990s (described in more detail in Ch. 5). As mentioned earlier, the dispossession of land continued even after Partition, including in Bangladesh. The indigenous peoples of the plains had been demanding land rights through a series of actions (rallies, processions, human chains, workshops, etc.) from the 1990s. To avoid eviction, the demand for a separate land commission recommended the inclusion of the collective understanding of the indigenous people regarding their customary rights because the existing laws were failing to protect their land rights.

In living with the long history of political rejection, the indigenous people of the plains were gradually pushed into the fringes, where their identity was ignored and their land robbed. In 2005, the decision to establish the Phulbari Open-pit Coal Mining Project proved to be another assault on indigenous peoples living in the Project area. The Project was proposed for the north-west of Bangladesh, in Dinajpur District, the homeland of many indigenous peoples of the plains living in Bangladesh. This region is known for its significant rice production and its low-quality coal deposits. The Asia Energy Company proposed to implement the Phulbari Open-pit Coal Mining Project with the collaboration of the government. The Indigenous Peoples Development Plan of Asia Energy (IPDP 2005) shows that the project area consists of 120 villages, of which

⁸⁴ The Act of 1950 aimed to abolish the *zamindari* (landlord) system, which had been established by the British. However, the Act also prohibited land transfers from Adivasi to non-Adivasi people, though indigenous people were not successful in establishing their ownership over the land. There were many reasons for this, as Bleie (2006: 220-21) mentioned, the Act prohibited the sub-letting of land and fixed a ceiling on landholding per family, but it did not introduce any legislation regarding the relationship between sharecroppers and landowners, whereas most indigenous people at that time were sharecroppers. As most indigenous people were not legally aware and formally literate, they failed to follow the procedures of the tenants' survey and could not deal with legal deeds.

23 are indigenous villages with a total population of 50,000 indigenous people. Mostly it was the Santal who would be evicted if the coal project were to be implemented there (IPDP 2005: 33).

Accordingly the people of the area rose in anger against the project, and on 26th August 2006, about 70,000 marched against it. The Santal were also protesting, many of them in their traditional dress, with drums (*tamak, tungdak*)⁸⁵ and bows and with arrows. The protesters faced paramilitary violence: three people were killed and more than 200 were tortured. However, the protesters continued their protests and organized a national strike to shut down communications in the country.⁸⁶ On 31st August 2006, the Bangladesh government was forced to accept the people's demands, and the Coal Mine Project was officially suspended. Santal participation in the movement reminded them of the bravery their ancestors had shown in the Tilka Manjhi revolt (1772–95) and the Santal rebellion (1855–56). The continuity and connectivity of these manifestations of resistance from the past to the present were symbolized through the use made of bows and arrows and traditional drums in the present. The political character of the movement presented different critical aspects, but to force the postponement of the Coal Mining Project the Santal drew on their communal strength and the collective actions they pursued through the village verdicts.⁸⁷ The Manjhi Parishad prevented coal agents from remaining in the villages by ostracizing them. Thus Santal participation in the Phulbari movement produced some subtleties of resistance in which they wove interconnections between overt and covert resistance.

3.4. From Repression to Resistance

The above discussion describes the history of repression as well as the spirit of resistance, which was repeatedly demonstrated. The armed attack at the Shahibganj Bagda Farm led to the eviction

⁸⁵ *Tamak* and *tungdak* are traditional Santali musical instruments like the drum.

⁸⁶ International Accountability Project. (n.d.). "The Phulbari Coal Project: A Treat to People, Land, and Human Rights in Bangladesh." (n.pag). *Phulbari Solidarity Group*. https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/Phulbari_Coal_Project_Fact_Sheet_LowRes.pdf. (accessed 11.03.2018).

⁸⁷ During my fieldwork, I discovered that Manjhi Parishads (village councils) had enacted decrees to ostracize three persons in the Burutola and Champatola village who were working for the Coal Mining Project. To prevent the neoliberal development project, the Santal utilized the authority of the traditional village council, which acted through by ostracizing the members of the village community who worked for Asia Energy. I will provide testimonies on the enactment of the village verdict to resist in Ch. 7.

of the Santal, who, however, refused to accept government relief. This was reported by the *New Age*, one of the leading daily newspapers in the country, as follows:

[The] Gobindaganj Upazila administration on Monday offered 20 kg rice, 1 kg red lentils, salt, vegetable oil, potatoes and two blankets to each of the 1500 evicted Santal families. A truck loaded with the relief materials was seen standing in the road at Madarpur, a nearby Santal village where most of the evicted Santals took shelter. No Santal was seen to take the goods. Joseph Tudu, one of the evicted Santals, said that they wanted nothing from the government that evicted them from their “forefather’s land” on November 6 [2016]... Another Santal woman said that they were asked by the Santal leaders not to receive any relief materials from the government until their demand for restoration of their ownership on the farm land was met. Gobindaganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abdul Hannan told... ‘none of the Santal came to take the relief... Even I requested them to take the relief by visiting door to door but they did not come up.’⁸⁸

In the case of the Santal, refusing relief signaled that they were resisting government repression and challenging the state’s repressive structure of power. The collective refusal of the Shahebganj-Badga Farm area Santal restored their political demand for the return of their land. As Mcgranahan (2018) points out, political refusal brings with it possibilities. For example, in discussing refusal as a “political practice,” he gives the example of the Tibetan refugees who refused citizenship in South Asia as part of their demand for Tibetan state sovereignty, but accepted citizenship of the United States and Canada as political victims. This practice of citizenship in exile is not a form of resistance, but “a refusal of international norms through a present-day insistence on past and future political sovereignty” (ibid.: 367). Thus, from Mcgranahan’s point of view (2016), by refusing relief the Santal open up the possibility of their regaining their land because “refusal...[is] genealogically linked to resistance” (ibid.: 320).

The evicted Santal organized themselves under the “Shahebganj-Badga Farm Bhumi Uddhar Sangram Committee” (Shahebganj-Badga Farm Land Restoration Committee), with the

⁸⁸ “Evicted Santals Refuse Govt Relief.” Daily *New Age*, 15 November 2016. <http://www.newagebd.net/article/2767/evicted-santals-refuse-govt-relief>. (accessed 14.10.2018).

cooperation of which they have been staging a series of protest rallies, human chains, processions, and press conferences. Through these demonstrations, they are demanding compensation and rehabilitation for the evicted Santal, the return of their land, the withdrawal of false cases, and the cancellation of a plan for an economic zone on Santal land. The Santal again displayed their defiance by playing their traditional drums and brandishing bows and arrows in public places. “This is the biggest combined movement of common people since the tragic incident in Phulbari,”⁸⁹ said Pavel Partha, a researcher working on indigenous issues in Bangladesh. Indeed, by organizing these protests, the Santal have linked them to the history of *hul*, and by playing traditional drums and displaying bows and arrows they have sharpened their claims to be indigenous. Traditional drums are an essential part of Santal rituals and ceremonies, but the use of these highly ritualized musical instruments in demanding their rights and protesting against eviction conveys the message that the Santal watch over their bravery and choose their timing as a demonstration to the authorities (majoritarian and state) who have denied their identity. Although bows and arrows have lost their functionality, they have become a symbol of the worth of the Santals’ heroic participation in the Tilka Manjhi revolt (1772–95) and the Santal rebellion (1855–56). In protesting at their eviction from the Shahebganj-Bagda Farm area, the Santal have demonstrated their collective memories of their glorious past.

Despite the shift from colonization to decolonization and to the post-independence era in Bangladesh, exploitation and subordination still form part of the state structure and are something that the Santal experience in practice. The Santal have been struggling for indigenous recognition, but their rights as citizens of the country have also been curtailed and shielded from justice. Inequalities persist and are transferred from macro to micro events, as in the Shahibganj Bagda Farm incident. This is a dreadful example that demonstrates the continuity through time of discrimination, dispossession, and denial. The Santals’ experiences of migration and eviction express dyadic realities: first, they oppose assimilation and domination, and secondly, they gather up their communal power in order to resist every repression. Indeed, the cultural and political subordination of the Santal has forced them to become involved in various forms of

⁸⁹ “Rangpur sugar mill clash.” Daily *Dhaka Tribune*, 08 November 2016. <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/11/07/rangpur-sugar-mill-clash-1-santal-dies-1000-families-flee/> (accessed 03.03.2018).

resistance. By engaging in multilayered rebellious behavior, they have demonstrated that overt and covert resistance will overlap with one another over time.

3.5. Concluding Remarks

The *horak nagam* or the history of the Santal shows that they have been subjugated and oppressed for the last three centuries. Their participation in periodic resistance struggles reveals the unyielding character of Santal power, which urges them to claim a distinct identity and demand the return of their land. The primary purpose of this chapter has been to underline the complex and comprehensive history of Santal migration and subordination. The discussion has demonstrated the Santals' desire to oppose assimilation and domination and historically to resist repression by migrating. Moreover, these attitudes have led them to participate in open resistance from Tilka Manjhi's revolt in the eighteenth century to their refusal of relief in relation to the Shahibganj Bagda Farm incident in the twenty-first century. However, discrimination, domination, and denial are being perpetuated in the Bangladeshi nation state. The next chapter will therefore show how the perpetuation of a repressive power structure has also perpetuated the varieties of state denial.

Chapter 4

The State’s Denial and Evangelized Developmentalism⁹⁰

People say hard work ensures an end to poverty. We [men and women] both work hard, but why we are poor⁹¹?

—Asked Bahamoni Murmu from Situngtola

This question requires that we look for spaces of inequality in the complexities of political connectivity. There is a popular saying: “with hard work anyone can end poverty.” However, the causes of poverty lie in the nature of socio-political relationships and strategic affiliations with national and international policies. Indeed, hard work is not sufficient to achieve economic success. The person asking the above question was an energetic young woman in her thirties who works hard every day, cooking, washing, cleaning, and doing all the small household tasks for her family. In addition, in order to overcome poverty and misfortune she earns money for her family by working as an agricultural laborer. Her husband is also a farm worker, and her only twelve-year-old daughter is studying in class five in primary school. The family is absolutely landless. Thus, for housing, Bahamoni’s husband negotiated with a Santal neighbor who owns an abandoned plot of land where Bahamoni’s family built a house to live in. After constructing a house from earth-clay and a corrugated iron sheet (tin) roof, they negotiated with the neighbor to purchase the plot of land. To achieve this both husband and wife work hard, but they are still far

⁹⁰ In this chapter, I use the term “developmentalism” to refer to the manifold actions of different Christian dominations, such as Lutherans, Baptists, Angelicas, Seventh-Day Adventists and Catholics. Currently, the Catholic Church is the main implementer of development programs among the Santal, especially in the area of social benefits, such as health and educational support, irrigation assistance and credit provision for economic activities.

⁹¹ In addressing the economic condition of the Santal, I use two words: poverty and poor. These words acknowledge the dominant development ideas where people deprived of basic personal necessities, such as food, housing, clothing, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, education and employment, suffer socio-economic deprivation. However, according to my observations, Santal cultural traits include an intense commitment and a strong work ethic, a challenge to the corrupt governance structure of the country. Nonetheless, the discussion also refers to UN human rights instruments, which proclaim that “human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right of work and education and many more” (Human Rights, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/human-rights/> [accessed 22.08.2018]). In advancing pro-rights movements, the UNDRIP articulated the particular rights of the indigenous people of the world, including the struggles of the Santal in Bangladesh.

from reaching the amount they need to purchase the land, and they find it quite challenging to save while also having to pay living expenses, including schooling⁹² for their daughter.

Indeed, Bahamoni's story is not unique because most Santal are struggling like her. By asking "Why we are poor?" she extends politics as an area of investigation to issues of justice, tenure rights, and the state's responsibilities. These situations need investigation into the social factors that affect the striving of individuals to obtain the main necessities of life. The Santals' predicament invites inquiry into local and national power dynamics, as well as why and how the mechanism of national resource distribution is framed to ensure the rights of all citizens. In addition, the status of the Santals' collective and individual suffering as evidence of national denial should be determined, as should the functioning of structural failure from the local to national levels and vice versa. Finally, how the Santal are connected, individually and collectively, with national politics and how they act and react in their social contexts in resisting inequalities and injustice must be investigated.

Therefore, this chapter documents the Santals' individual and collective experiences of the inequalities and deprivations they suffer. The state not only denies the Santal claim to be indigenous, it also deprives them of the rights they are entitled to receive as citizens. The disparities among the Santal are evident, regardless of the state's limited support to them as citizens. The discussion in this chapter therefore shows how the denial of the Santals' fundamental constitutional rights is intensified politically through different government actions and how it creates a space for evangelized developmentalism, with its aim of converting the Santal by intervening in their socio-economic lives.

Thus, this chapter broadly addresses two areas of argument: first, the social subjugation and structural inequalities promoted and justified by the state; and secondly, the proselytizing developmentalism of the Catholic Church. In addressing the first area of argument, this chapter

⁹² The government of Bangladesh is responsible for primary education (from grades one to five), which is compulsory and free for all children in the government primary school. Since 2016, educational support has increased up to high-school level. Furthermore, to achieve gender parity, a female stipend was also introduced by the government. In this context, "schooling" refers to buying school supplies (e.g., paper, pencils, pens), in addition to sandals for her daughter to wear to school.

compares colonial oppression as analogous to the post-colonial and post-independence nation-building process, nationalism, both Muslim and Bengali, having intensified the difference between the Santal and Muslim Bengalis, thus elaborating on the space of social subjugation. Furthermore, this nationalist construction of the state “has achieved nothing but institutionalized terror, fear, lawlessness, and dispossession for the indigenous peoples” (Debnath 2010: 27). The failure of these institutional arrangements is visible in the bottom-level government institutions, which give well-off people instead of the extreme poor access to *khas* land (state-owned land) and politicize the Social Safety Net Programs (SSNPs)⁹³ in favor of the well-off instead of the deprived.

Furthermore, the fund allocated every Fiscal Year (FY)⁹⁴ to the indigenous peoples of the plains in the name of Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT) is dysfunctional. On the one hand, the concentrated state power allocated a nominal budgetary amount for these peoples, but on the other hand, the disorganization of the system prevents them from being able to take even minimal advantage of this allocation. The realities of the two Adivasi Community Centers in Birampur and Tanore are witness to this fact.

The second area of argument concerns the developmentalism of the Catholic Church and its increase in philanthropy, including health insurance, irrigation assistance, and microcredit. In the same vein, the developmentalism of NGOs, visible both locally and nationally, offers tentative support in overcoming poverty, but NGOs’ project-planning methods have to incorporate donor demands, which ignore the spatial dynamics of moral development. Moreover, the shift of mainstream NGOs (such as Building Resources Across Communities [BRAC] and the Grameen Bank) from supporting philanthropy to making a profit encourages local NGOs as well to liquidate some forms of poverty in the name of “the sustainability of the organization.” This situation has caused alienation for some NGOs in Santal villages, and the Santal themselves have rejected the microcredit program of BRAC and the Grameen Bank. The circumstances required BRAC to withdraw pre-primary school programs in Champatola. Moreover, the

⁹³ SSNPs are government social protection schemes providing the country’s poor with the ability to overcome poverty. The relevance of the SSNPs among the Santal is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

⁹⁴ The budgetary fiscal year of the Bangladesh government straddles two different calendar years, from July to June: for example, this twelve-month period runs from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017.

characteristics of the indigenous economy were overlooked in the NGOs' microcredit programs. This gap created an advantage in the form of intensifying evangelizing developmentalism. As a consequence the Catholic Church introduced a credit union or microcredit program adapted to the Santal and other indigenous peoples' ways of repaying credit: the payment method offers the flexibility to pay installments either seasonally or monthly. Christian developmentalism also extends to offering a health service through health insurance, which the Catholic Church also introduced in the domain of the Dhanjuri Church. Indeed, these developments extend the area of proselytization, and the Santals' destitute status forces them to accept these developments by selling their beliefs.

Hence, the malfunctioning of the state creates loopholes for evangelizing developmentalism to enter. Although the constitution of Bangladesh denies indigenous peoples their identity (Article 23 [A]), it does recognize the rights of minorities. Article 28 (4) of the constitution states, "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from taking special provisions in favor of women or children or for the advancement of any backward sections of citizens," while Article 11 (a-d) guarantees fundamental human rights and freedom for all citizens. In addition, Article 15 declares it to be the responsibility of the state to provide the necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care, employment and enhanced provisions for social security. Article 19 (1) also guarantees equal opportunities for all citizens. Beyond these constitutional guarantees, the National Education Policy (2010: 5) "facilitate[s] learning in the mother languages of the indigenous peoples and small ethnic groups at the primary level of education."

In line with this, cultural diversity is ensured by the Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institute Act 2010. Although the government does not acknowledge the term "indigenous," certain provisions to "take affirmative action ('positive discrimination' or protective discrimination) for the betterment of the disadvantaged groups" are guaranteed by the state (Barkat *et al.*, 2009: 30). However, in practice, these legal safeguards fail to protect indigenous peoples' rights, and the government grant (Development Assistance for Special Areas [except CHT]) for the indigenous peoples of the plains has failed to give them these benefits. My fieldwork materials demonstrate that massive disorganization persists when it comes to carrying

out the government's safeguarding measures, despite their aim being to protect the "backward sections of citizens" of the country. Despite the supposedly supportive governmental policies, the indigenous people of the country are living in a distressed situation. The centralized, concentrated and nationalistic structure of the state is plagued with institutional disorganization, and corruption is overlooked or normalized by decision-makers, meaning that social justice is only to be found in legal documents. Indigenous people living in Bangladesh must therefore struggle for justice and their rights.

The Christian churches have therefore turned into benefactors in providing essential social services, but to obtain these services the Santal have had to sell their beliefs: "many Santals have concerted themselves to Christian being motivated by aspirations for employment, education, healthcare, etc." (Barkat *et al.*, 2009: 244). By implementing development programs, the churches working in the research area aim to promote their religious beliefs, and the Santal accept these beliefs while attempting to hold on to their traditional social values as well. In the following sections of this chapter I provide testimonies of the injustice and inequalities caused by the state and describe some of the micro-level development actions that have been carried out among the Santal.

4.1. The Socio-Cultural Setting of the Villages

Despite constant contact with external forces and exposure to their interference, Santal life is concentrated in the village, in which all aspects of an individual's life-cycle, such as birth, death, marriage, divorce, disease, friendship, kinship, crime, judgment, and persuasion to participate in ceremonial occasions, are organized and practiced. The Manjhi Parishad (village council) is still the central pillar of the village (discussed in detail in Ch. 6), dynamically governing all social events despite its divided, and fractured authoritarian status. Currently, both traditional and Christian Santal believers are contesting each other's identities. Despite that, through the Manjhi Parishad the Santal become socially connected and aware of the role of each member of the village community. Formerly in every Santal village a *manjhithan*⁹⁵ (sacred place) and, near the village, a *jaherthan* (sacred grove) existed, from which the Santal derived their distinct identity.

⁹⁵ The *manjhithan* is a sacred selected altar in the village. Generally, the altar place is located near the house of the village headman (*manjhi haram*) or priest (*nayeki*).

However, in evangelized Santali villages, such as Burutola, these features have largely disappeared, although there are *manjhithans* in Situngtola and Champatola. Hence, the *jaherthan* is used during traditional festivals, its location varying from season to season. Presently, the villages where I conducted fieldwork have chapels, like many other Santali villages, where every Sunday the Christian Santal assemble to pray.

In the countryside, the decorative features of most Santal houses endow their villages with a distinctive character. The Santal regularly clean their dwellings; the mud-walls of houses are looked after by plastering them with clay and liquefied cow-dung and most often by painting them in red, black, white, yellow or blue to give them a decorative appearance. According to the Santal, their development was reflected in their houses. In this regard they generally said,

Earlier during the rainy season, we suffered a lot because our houses were mainly made of earth-clay, fence, and straw. Currently, nobody has such houses in the villages. Now, we make our homes with iron sheeting (tin) roofs, earth-clay walls, and pillars of bamboo or wooden planks. Thus, we do not suffer in the rain as we did earlier.



Figure 5. Decorative features of Santal houses. Photos by the author.

The photos above show the colorful images of Santal houses, taken while doing fieldwork in Situngtola and Burutola. However, the current improvements to houses are not an outcome of the anti-poverty programs of the intermediaries (NGOs or churches) but of increased work opportunities as agricultural laborers, which Santal did not have earlier. As the Santal said, “presently rice is planted in three seasons of the year,⁹⁶ which did not happen before. Thus, job opportunities have increased from before.” Usually, each house consists of two to four rooms, and a courtyard plays a central role in all internal and external family communications. A few houses have been constructed of brick walls with corrugated iron sheeting (tin) roofs in Burutola and Champatola; doubtless, these residents are better off than the other villagers.

Households are situated on both sides of the central space in the village, called *kulhi* or village road, and relations between houses, families, and the village run through the *kulhi*. Therefore, the location of the *kulhi* also preserves Santal traditions, in which “the *kulhi* (village street) expresses Santal unity” (Troisi 2000: 51). The road or *kulhi* determines each individual’s mobility in village life: as a “symbol of their bond, the village street facilitates social control through visibility” (Knight 2014: 66-67). In the past, ceremonial occasions were celebrated by dancing, drumming and singing through the *kulhi*. The multiple functions of the road were important to the Santal, as “it is at once a dance floor, a council chamber and court of justice” (Archer 1974: 19). However, although it was a sacred place, the road has lost its previous significance. The width of the road has decreased, but even today, the Santal collectively take care of it. Nowadays, like *kulhis*, the Santals’ social spaces are shrinking, including the size of their villages. Furthermore, traditional beliefs are being replaced by evangelization. Thus, the *kulhis* have lost their traditional features of the past, although as sites for the community they remain the connecting points for all types of village communication.

The Santal are connected to each other in their own villages but socially separated from the Bengali villages. The three villages where I carried out fieldwork are surrounded geographically by Bengali villages but ignored in everyday interactions. For example, if any

⁹⁶ Over the last three decades, significant growth has occurred in rice production, sustained by the government’s efforts to improve the yields of modern rice varieties. Currently, in Bangladesh, rice is usually planted in three seasons in a year. As a result, this labor-intensive agricultural sector gives the Santal more work.

cattle owned by a Santal wanders on to Bengali farmland, the Bengali reaction is mostly harsh. In such cases, the Santal have to listen to the Bengalis' insults. Josef Hasda, a forty-six-year-old man living in Situngtola village, is a small farmer, but the limited returns from his land have forced him to work as an agricultural laborer on the farm of a Bengali. He recalls his abusive relationship with neighboring Bengalis:

Outwardly, our relationship with the Muslim Bengalis is nice: we smile and smile back, greet each other and even sometimes have good conversations. Inwardly, we are subordinated to our [respective] social spheres. In the course of my life, I have never been invited by my Muslim Bengali neighbors to join any of their festivals or ceremonial occasions. Some of my neighbors are invited from my village, who mainly work as agricultural workers on Bengali farmland throughout the year and apparently have good relationships with them. If these Santal attend these Bengali occasions, they serve food for them in banana leaves. In some cases, if the Santal bring plates with them, they can eat from the plate, but a sense of abhorrence is transmitted through these actions. In such situations, the Hindu Bengalis behave in the same way. We are not even fully welcome to sit in their houses. I feel insulted and refuse to go there myself.

Josef Hasda's account provides an explicit picture of the discriminating social behavior in which the Santal are always considered "impure" and "inferior." Like Josef, the Santal have to deal with abusive social relationships, which are internalized and normalized in formal laughter and greetings. Like Bengali-Santal relations, however, Santal-Santal relations may also fracture due to religious differences, creating power dynamics among the Santal themselves (discussed in detail in Ch. 5). The controversies between *bideen* (Santal traditional believers) and *esoie* (Christian Santal) highlight the differences between the two groups, the Christian Santal acting as "superior" to the traditional believers. This feeling of superiority is explained as follows by Fabian Baskey: "By following the Christian faith we connected with the great world, but they (traditional believers) are limited in village milieu." Not all Santal are like Fabian, but clearly this sort of imposed thought positions the Santal in fractured social relationships.

The number of Christian believers is gradually increasing among the Santal, although there is no government information on what percentage of Santal are members of Christian churches. The *Santali Cluster in Bangladesh: A Sociolinguistic Survey* (2010), conducted by SIL International, shows that about 50% of Santal in Bangladesh are Christians. Professor Mesbah Kamal⁹⁷ of Dhaka University, citing his own research, said that some 55% of Santal have converted to Christianity.⁹⁸ According to my own fieldwork census in the three Santal villages, 84.25% of Santal have converted to Christianity. The religious aspect of my fieldwork area is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The composition of believers in the three villages, 2015

Type of believer	Number of households	Percentage
Christian faith	214	84.25
Traditional beliefs	31	12.20
Other	9	3.54
Total households	254	100.00

Source: Primary data 2015

In these religious settings, the different groups of Santal dwell in the same village, arguing with each other about identity, but recognizing their strength in sharpening their identity as Santal. This sense of “Santalness” plays a role in the perpetuation of some ritual practices, and by identifying social subordination and political discrimination, both groups find that they actually have the same status. Along with harmony and contradiction, the “other” nine households mentioned in Table 1 abstain from practicing any belief; five houses out of the nine are situated in Champatola. The Santal in these five households had once been converted by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, but thereafter they refused to practice. The other villagers consider them followers of neither the traditional belief system nor of Christian values, although

⁹⁷ Dhaka University Professor Mesbah Kamal’s core field of research is the rights of indigenous people. He has published a significant number of publications on the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. Currently, he is also a Technocrat Member and Coordinator of the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs, Joint Convener of the Bangladesh Campaign for Human Rights, and Chairperson of the Research and Development Collective.

⁹⁸ “Santal Children Yet to get textbooks in Mother Tongue.” *The Daily Star*, 08 January 2017. <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/santal-children-yet-get-textbooks-mother-tongue-1342030>. (accessed 06.01.18).

they joined the traditional believers in the Manjhi Parishad in claiming that they are traditional believers. The other four households consisted of elderly adults living in Burutola village. They had never been converted despite not practicing their old beliefs. They stated: “On the one hand, we are now in our last stage of life, and on the other hand, the entire village is following the Christian faith. In both situations, we did not find any reason to continue our ancestral beliefs.”

The frequent circulation of NGO workers constantly links villagers with the external world and ideas, such as rights and justice, and perceptions about health, nutrition, etc. Moreover, the chapel master lives in a Santal village disseminating all the messages of the Gospel and conveying the doctrines of each respective church. In order to introduce these ideas, the Manjhi Parishad was targeted for all kinds of plans and programs from the outside: as a traditional administrative unit, it regulates the village life of the Santals. Furthermore, the presence of government primary schools in the village or nearby villages binds Santal to the majority language and acculturates them with Bengali culture. Schoolteachers commute every day to the villages or diffuse the Santali children’s world view outside the village environment. In addition, for everyday necessities such as food, clothes, and materials for charging mobile phone batteries (Burutola and Champatola have no electricity coverage), the Santal frequently move back and forth to the nearest bazaar. Improvements have been made to road communications, and connectivity has been enhanced through mobile phone use. These were observed in the villages, although only a limited number of young Santal use social media.

The decorative and clean aspect of Santal houses and *kulhis* show that they have a good sense of hygiene, and safe water has been supplied by sinking tube-wells in the villages, which are supported by the state or NGOs. For bathing, washing and cooking purposes, villagers depend on the nearest ponds or tanks, despite the risks of open water sources that are polluted due to unhygienic latrines and open defecation, washing clothes, and humans and cattle bathing together. In some cases, Santal have sunk their own shallow tube-wells for the household and thus provided safe water for the family. However, this is only possible in northern Bangladesh, where the water is close to the surface. In the north-west this practice is costly because the water is far below ground level. Despite remarkable achievements in respect of sanitation coverage, government data state that “open defecation has been reduced to only 1%, a milestone change

from 42% in 2003” (Country Paper 2016: 4). In improving its sanitation coverage, Bangladesh has become a role model in the South Asian region, but my fieldwork data show that 28% of Santal are still unconnected, and the national development monitoring framework has been overtaken by development programs. Nonetheless, some NGOs have helped to set up toilets, but the cramped, suffocating atmosphere in the toilets and the distance from water sources discourage the Santal from using them. Furthermore, the cultural practice of defecating outside encourages people to go into the bushes or fields. This is still a matter of behavioral practice. Figure 6 presents a comparison between open defecation and sanitation coverage in Santal villages.

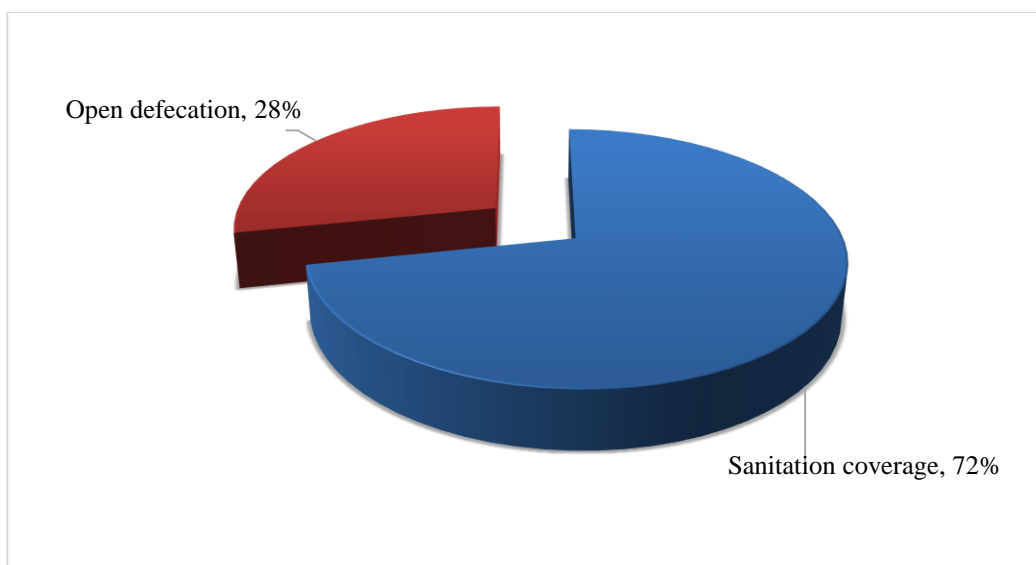


Figure 6. Sanitation arrangements in Santal villages. Source: *Primary data 2015*.

The growth of the country depends on human development. This includes satisfying the Santals’ right to health and hygiene because they are citizens of Bangladesh. Like water and sanitation, electricity is also a main benefit of contemporary living, but most Santal villages, such as Burutola and Champatola, have no electricity, whereas the neighboring Bengali villages do have it. The villagers said, “Like many things, the government delays in providing it.” Meanwhile, Situngtola village takes advantage of its access to electricity.

The internal social environment of the villages is outwardly one of autonomy, but this also isolates them in communicating with Bengali neighbors and development networks. The

villages where I conducted fieldwork form a small part of the wider and more complex structure of power relations. In discussing relations of power among the Santal in Bangladesh and India, Shariff (2008) identifies multiple fields of such relations in which the Santal are individually and collectively striving and negotiating in order to pursue justice. Therefore, for a complete understanding of Santal villages we need to consider many external socio-economic interactions, as well as the dynamics of the local political structure. Within the state, the dichotomy between social subjugation and development creates multilayered deprivations in Santal lives.

4.2. Institutional Setting: from Local to National or Vice Versa

In the Bangladeshi state, the Santal, an indigenous people of the plains, have not had any representative in the national parliament to date who can speak for them. To obtain a seat in Parliament, indigenous peoples living in north-west Bangladesh have been demanding that a seat be reserved for the indigenous peoples of the plains, someone who can be appointed by the government instead of struggling to obtain a seat by election. Indeed, through this demand, they are striving for a provision as one of the country's minorities, but the repressive power over minorities means the demand is not met. However, as already mentioned (Ch. 1), in the villages the Santal are putting themselves forward as a BAL vote bank, and the Islamic and pro-Islamic nature of the other political parties (BNP or 18 Party Alliance) pushes them into supporting the BAL as well.

As denial passes from the national to the local level, the Santal find themselves in a distant and tentative relationship with the Union Parishad. In the villages I studied in my fieldwork, I found that only one Santal candidate had been elected a member of the Union Parishad. The participation of indigenous peoples' representatives is a crucial question in this respect, as the last Union Parishad election⁹⁹ provided a contrary picture, in which five indigenous persons were elected as members of the Union Parishad in Godagari Upazila. As a bottom-level government institution, the Union Parishad is responsible for implementing local development programs. The Santal therefore have to communicate with the Union Parishad

⁹⁹ In last Union Parishad election, held in 2016, none of the indigenous communities' representatives were elected as chairpersons in the indigenous peoples' area of occupation in the plains, even though a number of Union Parishad members participated in the election. Five individuals with indigenous status were elected as members of the Union Parishad in Godagari Upazila, where two Union Parishad members are Santal.

because, as citizens of the country, they must go to it to register births and deaths. In addition, their status as indigenous (or in government terms as a “small ethnic minority”) is also certified by the Union Parishad. However, to govern village life, the Santal traditionally have a village council (Manjhi Parishad), which has not been adopted into the local-level government structure (this matter is discussed further in Ch. 6).

Furthermore, the bottom-level SSNPs of the Bangladesh government are implemented by the Union Parishad. Under these programs, various forms of support are delivered to those who are marginalized, such as food-based programs, work-based help, health care, and destitute widow and old age support, etc. Being among the poorest, the Santal are eligible for such support. A total of 145 SSNPs have been provided by the twenty-three different ministries of the country. However, only around 25% to 50% of the support reaches the actual recipients, the rest disappearing due to corruption, leakage and having incorrect targets. Additionally, only 2.2% of GDP is allocated to the SSPNs compared to other middle-income countries, where the figure is between 6% and 8%.¹⁰⁰ By taking into account the context of poverty, the government increased allocations in the 2018-19 Fiscal Year budget to 2.55% of GDP,¹⁰¹ but without a system of fair distribution and an accountable governance structure, these programs will fail to reach those who are being targeted.

By achieving the threshold of USD 1,045 in gross average national income, the country became a lower-middle-income country in 2015, its aim to become a middle-income country (MIC) being proclaimed in the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010-2021, known as Vision Bangladesh 2021 (Vision 2021). The country’s Seventh Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) also aims to increase economic growth, maintain microeconomic stability and establish good governance. Regarding Bangladesh’s LDC (“least developed country”) status, Bhattacharya and Khan (2018: 3-4) argue that the criteria for being an LDC does not include all the relevant development aspects. Bangladesh should prove the status of its graduation timeline before 2024, and

¹⁰⁰ “Allocate More for Safety Nets.” *Daily Star*, 11 April 2016. <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/allocate-more-social-safety-nets-1207297>. (accessed 12.10.2018)

¹⁰¹ “Budget FY19: Social Safety Net Widens with Additional Benefits for Freedom Fighters.” *Daily Dhaka Tribune*, 07 June, 2018. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/economy/2018/06/07/budget-fy19-social-safety-net-widens-with-additional-benefits-for-freedom-fighters>. (accessed 05.11.2018)

ultimately the figures should not matter in achieving MIC status: the level of achievement should be reviewed in terms of the previous achieved status. The government of Bangladesh has targeted development by concentrating on economic growth. However, the World Bank's income-based development classification is a matter of controversy, given the baffling nature of the terms of access to resources and the distribution of growth for the high number of poor and landless marginalized groups like the Santal.

It is not possible to avoid contact with the Union Parishad when rural development schemes are channeled through it. Conversely, the tentative nature of the relationship with the Union Parishad forces the Santal to keep their distance from it. Most Santal said, "We fear going to the Union Parishad." Moreover, the cultural treatment of the Santal as "impure" and "inferior" on the part of the mainstream Bengalis restricts Santals' social interactions to their own village milieu. A large number of Santal said,

We do not have the courage to go to the Union Parishad office to ask for any support. Many NGOs advised us to go to the Union Parishad office and claim the entitlements of the SSNPs, which we never know, but we hesitate to go there. We have found those who have good networking with the Chairman and members of Union Parishad and can therefore satisfy their requirements. Only they can get the facilities, not those who are truly poor.

Thus, in investigating the Santals' access to the SSNPs, I found only a few Santal who obtained support from these programs, despite the high poverty ratio of 67.9% (Barkat *et al.*, 2009: 265). In the villages, the best known categories of SSNP distribution are Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and Vulnerable Group Development (VGD). In the villages where I carried out fieldwork, I found thirty and nine people who have received support from the VGF and VGD respectively. Furthermore, under the programs, the widow's allowance and old age allowance were granted to two and fourteen people, respectively. These grants are nominal in comparison to the number of Santal, given that the population of the three villages is 1083.¹⁰² Meanwhile, the VGF provides a

¹⁰² According to my field survey in the three villages (Situngtola, Burutola, and Champatola), the number of households is 254, and the population is 1083.

certain amount of grain, and the VGD aims to improve income-generating capacities, but only for a minimal period in order to fight more persistent forms of poverty. Furthermore, the allowance for widows and older adults is approximately seven Euros monthly, not sufficient to sustain an acceptable quality of life, not even covering meals for a month.

The irony is that “these are not distributed among the really poor who are entitled to receive it,” as villagers stated, this being a common opinion in development circles as well. In the villages, I found similar cases to that of Shamolima Mardi, a sixty-seven-year-old widow who owned approximately 2.5 acres of land and had good living conditions and yet still received an old-age allowance. Conversely, Manik Mardi, an eighty-year-old man who was absolutely landless and had lost the physical ability to work did not receive the allowance due to a lack of the skills to negotiate with the Union Parishad or to network with local political leaders. Remarkably as well, both individuals lived in the same village. There are many cases like Manik Mardi’s, as SSNP distribution is also affected by nepotism and favoritism. Implementation of the SSNPs is baffling given the frequency of corruption (Rahman and Choudhury 2012). The *Dhaka Tribune*, a renowned English-language newspaper in Bangladesh, reports, “The representatives of the district had disbursed VGF cards among solvent people instead of the helpless.”¹⁰³ SSNP distributions are hindered by the corruption of government institutions.

Like the SSNPs, *khas* land (state-owned land) should be acquired by the country’s poor and landless. *Khas* land includes bodies of water and both agricultural and non-agricultural land. The poor and vulnerable who own less than 0.49 acres of land are eligible to obtain this land. In Bangladesh, the land distribution process among the poor and the process of obtaining landless status are set out with several policy documents.¹⁰⁴ In accordance with these policies, the Santal

¹⁰³ “The Solvent, Not Poor, Get VGF Cards.” Daily *Dhaka Tribune*, 07 September 2016. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/09/07/solvent-not-poor-gets-vgf-card>. (accessed 16.08.2018).

¹⁰⁴ The development of the distribution of *khas* land can be traced from the colonial period and is connected with a large number of policies, such as Bengal Regulation XI 1825, Bengal Alluvial [Alluvium] Act 1868, Government Estates Manual 1919, Bengal Crown Estates Manual 1932, East Bengal Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950, Bangladesh State Acquisition and Tenancy (Fourth Amendment) Order 1972 (PO 135), Bangladesh Land Holding Limitation Order (PO 98) 1972, President Order LXI 1975, Land Reform Action Programme 1987 and Agriculture *Khas* Land Management and Settlement Policy 1997. Furthermore, many circulars and memos have been issued by the authorities concerned (Barkat, Zaman and Raihan 2000b: 2). To obtain *khas* land is an extremely complicated

are entitled to receive this land when the poverty and landlessness ratios among them are sufficiently high. Barkat's (*et al.*, 2009: 254, 265) study found a high number of landless Santal: 71%. However, my fieldwork materials indicate that 53.94% of the Santal in my fieldwork area are landless and that none of them had acquired *khas* land.

Currently, there are no data showing how much *khas* land is available in the country (Herrera 2016). Although Barkat, Zaman, and Raihan (2000a: 4) estimate the figure to be 3.3 million acres, this land is not accessible to the country's landless and poor but instead is occupied by the local and national political elites, bureaucrats and the rich and powerful. Only 11.5% of landless people have access to agricultural *khas* land (Raihan, Feteihin and Haque 2009: 25-27). According to my study materials, in the three villages, no Santal has formally acquired *khas* land. Twelve homeless and landless families are living on *khas* land situated in Situngtola village, but only because they have been allowed to do so orally by the respective Union Parishad chairman or the rich and powerful who possess the legal land document. For this the Santal have to pay money. Indeed, lacking legal deeds, they are in danger of eviction.

To acquire *khas* land, the Santal should follow administrative procedures and maintain communication with the relevant local authorities. On the local level, the *tahsildar* (revenue collector), Upazila (sub-district) Revenue officer (URO) and Assistant Commissioner-Land (AC-Land) are the officials concerned with regulating this process. Besides, the poor and landless need moral and administrative support from the respective Union Parishad, given the present reality that the idea of obtaining *khas* land proves to be a fiction because the Santal are dispossessed of their land for lack of legal deeds. Indeed, the nineteenth century's periodic shifts to an individualistic land-owning system ignored traditional modes of land ownership and access to natural resources among the Santal. From colonial times until today, the Santal find themselves on the fringes of society.

Thus, the inequalities and vulnerabilities of the Santal are not only caused by the nature of official policies but by institutional disorganization and failures of governance, which also

process, made worse by the poor and oppressed status of the Santal. In addition, the social setting and the lack of cooperation from local government institutions have forced them to abstain from it.

magnify their sense of oppression and exclusion. The Santals' poor economic situation has resulted from the dispossession of their land and the lack of employment opportunities. Locally the country's partisan politics typically objectify the Santal as being only a vote bank for a particular political party. Moreover, the hierarchical cultural attitudes of the majority of Bengalis subordinate the Santal socially, and their neglect in social settings excludes them from local resources because they fear to go to the Union Parishad office. These facts explain the state's tendency to connive at socio-political malpractice, which contributes further to the Santals' subordination and exclusion. Thus, various external institutional activities coincide to increase their marginalization. The cases of land dispossession confirm the existence of the state's denial, through which the Santal are not only dispossessed of their land but also deprived of access to *khas* land.

4.3. Affinity with the Land and the Distress of Land Eviction

The Santal have always had an intense relationship with the land. In cultivating, fishing, hunting, celebrating festivals, performing rituals, and pursuing their beliefs, their lives are constantly connected to the earth. Despite over a century of exclusion, subordination, and dispossession of their land, the Santal still live an agrarian lifestyle. In transforming their occupational situation from following an agrarian lifestyle to working as agricultural laborers, they still follow a peasant culture. Their affinity with the land is evident in the following words:

The Santhals love land more than their life. Possession of land they cultivate was the most powerful motive in Santhal life. A Santhal's land not only provides economic security but is a powerful link with his ancestors. In other words, the land is part and parcel of his spiritual as well as economic heritage. (Patnaik 2001: 136)

Despite their intimacy with the land, the Santal have been dispossessed of it since the colonial period (Culshaw 1949, Troisi 2000). In the past, the extreme level of oppression induced them to rebel against repressive colonial power-holders in the Santal rebellion (1855-56), and the background to the Nachol Revolt (1949) was the same. Barkat (*et al.*, 2009) notes that in Bangladesh dispossession of Santal land started in 1947 and increased due to the Hindu-Muslim riots between 1962 and 1965, when 400 Hindu and Adivasi families left Bangladesh, their land

being taken by Bengalis (Barkat *et al.*, 2009: 257). Later, in 1971, during the war of liberation, many Santal went to India, many of them staying there. Of those who did return, a large number found their land occupied, and they did not receive it back. It was at that time that dispossession of land among the Santal reached its height (*ibid.*). Barkat, who exposed the history of the land dispossession of indigenous people, says that in the last three generations (up to 2008) the Santal living in Bangladesh have lost over 116,400 acres of land (Barkat 2016: 50).

The Santal were evicted not only from their farmland but also from their graveyards. The dispossession of their land reached an extreme level when they were evicted from their burial grounds. The establishment of cropland on indigenous peoples' burial grounds by the majority Bengali Muslims demonstrates the power to disrupt the lives of the country's minorities, a process in which the political stakes of the state support the cultural destruction of indigenous peoples. In my fieldwork area, the Santal were ejected from their burial grounds, the distress of their eviction being explained below.

4.3.1. Case Study One: Graveyard Taken by Muslim Bengalis

“Our [Santals'] 47 households are not with the eight Muslim Bengali families, who live in Nondapur village; they treat us like garbage.” The piteousness of the Santals' lives was described by Noren Kisku, one of the inhabitants of Noddapur, where a Santal burial ground is situated that served the indigenous people of the nearby area as well. They had used this site as a burial ground since the colonial period. The tenure rights to the burial ground are explained by Laxmiram Kisku, a forty-eight-year-old man living in Nondapur: “My father was also born in the same village and my grandfather too. We used it from generation to generation as a graveyard.” However, in 1978, the land was seized by Shafiqul Islam, a politically influential local Bengali. Since then the Santal, along with other indigenous people, have been unable to bury their dead in their burial grounds, using instead nearby bushes or abandoned land. Sometimes, due to the scarcity of the land, they float the bodies of their dead away in the river. The villagers of Situngtola do the same because Nondapur village is situated close to Situngtola, which is approximately three kilometers away. Thus, the burial ground was used by them as well.

Since 1978, the Santal of Nondapur and the surrounding area have been striving to retrieve their burial ground. They made many attempts to restore the graveyard, forming for this purpose a “Nondapur Graveyard Complaint Committee,” but they have not yet succeeded. The Graveyard Complaint Committee members told me:

We all went to the respective offices, communicated with relatively influential political leaders, and finally we went to the Member of Parliament for our constituency. Instead of doing something for us, he referred us to our chairman, who had been supporting the land grabber. Like you, many outsiders (journalists, NGOs, researchers) also visited us, but we did not get the burial ground back.

The burial ground has an area of 1.16 acres and is recorded as a crematorium.¹⁰⁵ There was a small pond in the middle of the burial ground, but the land grabber, Shafiqul Islam, filled it with soil and attempted to turn it into farmland. He used it as farmland from the time he acquired it, and in 2010 he gave it to another powerful member of the local elite called Nurul Islam. To harass the Santals, Nurul Islam brought a false case against twelve inhabitants of Nondapur, namely the members of the Graveyard Complaint Committee. The Committee members showed me legal documents that supported their struggle to have the land returned by showing the area as a crematorium and as *khas* land (state-owned land). The two most significant pages from the official documents and a summary translation are presented in Figure 7.

¹⁰⁵ In the legal document, the Santal burial ground is described as a crematorium because earlier the Santal cremated their dead. Bodding (1942: 176-178), Culshaw (1949: 150-160) and Archer (1974: 330-332) reported cremation among the Santal. In working with the Santals in the Santal Parganas, Troisi (2000: 191) states that the burial practice of the Santal changed because it became too difficult to obtain sufficient firewood for the cremation. The Santal living in Bangladesh are accustomed to burying their dead as well. They have been using the Nondapur burial ground since the colonial period. Thus, the land is documented in government records as a crematorium.

The form on Page 1 contains the following information:

- Header:** Bangladesh Land Office, Rajshahi.
- Table:**

স্বত্বাধারীর নাম	স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম	স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম	স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম
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- Text:**

স্বত্বাধারীর নাম: মাজহারুল ইসলাম

স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম: মাজহারুল ইসলাম

স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম: মাজহারুল ইসলাম

স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম: মাজহারুল ইসলাম

The form on Page 2 contains the following information:

- Header:** Bangladesh Land Office, Rajshahi.
- Table:**

স্বত্বাধারীর নাম	স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম	স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম	স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম
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- Text:**

স্বত্বাধারীর নাম: মাজহারুল ইসলাম

স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম: মাজহারুল ইসলাম

স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম: মাজহারুল ইসলাম

স্বত্বাধারীর পিতার নাম: মাজহারুল ইসলাম

Summary of the above two-page images: This is an investigative report on the Case of Nondapur Complained Property. The report was issued by Aminul Islam, Assistant Commissioner (Land) of Godagari Upazila, Rajshahi and was submitted to the Additional District Magistrate Court Rajshahi on 20.10.2013. The report states: the accused's 1.16 acres of land is a crematorium and is owned by the District Commissioner, Rajshahi on behalf of the Bangladesh government. After reviewing the register, it is found that the land was assigned to Shafiqul Islam on 15.06.1977 and he paid land development tax until 1416 Bengali year (liturgical year 2009-2010). The complaint against the land was rejected by the Upazila Khas Agricultural land Management and Settlement Committee on 03.06.2012, which ordered to follow the decision on 02.04.2013.

In investigating in the place of occurrence, this report found the Nondapur Graveyard Complaint Committee occupied the land. There is a concern regarding a breach of the peace between the plaintiffs and defendants. This letter is sent to you to take the necessary action.

Figure 7. Upazila Land Office Report on Crematorium Land at Nondapur. Photos by the author, courtesy of the Nondapur Graveyard Complaint Committee.

From this it can be seen that the government report acknowledges that the land is both a crematorium and state-owned (*khas* land). As mentioned, the country's laws provide that *khas* land should be given to the poor and landless. Thus, the first concern is this: since Shafiqul Islam is clearly wealthy, there should be no land settlement between him and the state. Nonetheless, the legal background reveals that the Assistant Commissioner (Land) of Godagari Upazila of Rajshahi District declared Shafiqul Islam to be the owner of the crematorium. The second fabrication in the report is as follows: "the land has been occupied by the Nondapur Graveyard Complaint Committee," a claim that should be strongly rejected because Nondapur and nearby villages of indigenous people have been unable to use the burial ground since 1978. During my visit in September 2014, I discovered that the last death in Nondapur occurred in July 2014 and that the deceased, Ruplal Tudu, had been buried in his courtyard. The inhabitants of Nondapur and those of neighboring indigenous villages said collectively, "We do not have any burial ground to bury corpses." I also found support for this statement in Situngtola because, during my fieldwork there, when two deaths occurred in the village, the corpses were buried in the neighboring abandoned land instead of the burial ground. The third issue is that the uprooting of the Nondapur graveyard shows that the state supports repressive power-holders, evades the law and encourages evictions even when the Santal concerned are also citizens of Bangladesh.

Evictions from burial grounds occurred not only in Nondapur but also (and more often) in the plains where indigenous peoples live. Debnath (2010: 163-168) describes a similar incident to those I found in Nondapur. The uprooting of a graveyard was also exposed in one of the leading Bengali newspapers, *Samakal*, which reported that within the last ten years, due to land dispossession, torture and harassment, 500 indigenous people from the plains have been forced to leave the country. These people were mostly Santal because they form the majority of the indigenous peoples living in the plains of Bangladesh. The report states that these people were evicted not only from their land, but also from their crematorium, graveyard, and religious sites.¹⁰⁶ The evictions and the role in them of the respective government authorities are evidence that the state is systematically institutionalizing the land dispossession of indigenous people.

¹⁰⁶ "Dos Bochore Desh Tag Panchso Poribar: Nana Bonchonay Uttorbonger Adivasira (In Ten Years, Five Hundred Families Exiled from the Country: The Northern Indigenous People Are in Various Deprivations)." *Daily Samakal*, 09 August 2015. <http://samakal.com/todays-print-edition/tp-special-feature/article/1508154258>. (accessed 15.08.2018).

4.4. Occupational Setting and Involvement in the Village Vicinity

Despite the Santal being dispossessed of their land, their livelihoods depend greatly on agricultural work, and most Santal are agricultural laborers. In the villages where I carried out fieldwork, most Santal are landless, as shown in Table 2 below, which also indicates that other Santal have small plots of land, but in amounts that are insufficient for life as a peasant. One's status as a farmer¹⁰⁷ depends on the amount of land one has.

Table 2. The pattern of land ownership among the Santal

Amount of land ownership in acres	Number of households	Percentage
Landless (less than 0.49)	137	53.94
Marginal farmer (0.5-1.49)	67	26.38
Small farmer (1.50-2.49)	23	9.06
Medium farmer (2.50-7.49)	27	10.63
Large farmer (more than 7.50)	00	00
Total	254	100.00

Source: Primary data, 2015

Ownership of land determines the occupational status of the Santal. Based on the amount of land they have, only medium farmers (2.50 to 7.49 acres of land) can maintain their livelihoods by depending on farmland, or only 10.63% of the Santal population. No Santal is a large-scale farmer, while the lands of marginal and small farmers are too small to support an entire family. Thus, from time to time, these farmers work as agricultural workers and sometimes as sharecroppers. Their landlessness and the seasonal nature of work as agricultural laborers force them to become rickshaw-pullers¹⁰⁸ or wage laborers or to seek employment wherever they can. This situation presents them with an acute occupational challenge that compels them to live miserable lives economically.

¹⁰⁷ To categorize farmer status, I follow the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) reported by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics ([BBS] HIES Report 2011).

¹⁰⁸ The rickshaw is a traditional three-wheeled vehicle pulled by human power, i.e. pulled by one man and carrying one to two passengers.

Consequently, to sustain themselves they increase their attachment to the village vicinity and engage in food-gathering, fishing or collecting snails, homestead gardening, and the animal husbandry of livestock such as pigs, cattle, goats, hens, and ducks. They obtain the necessities of everyday life by doing craftwork such as sewing cotton wrappers, making bamboo baskets and wicker-rope cots or seats, and weaving mats and brooms, activities that do not generate much money but that allow them to survive. These characteristics of Santal society do not merely indicate their destitute status but reveal the cultural fabric of their lives and crafts, to live from which they establish connections with the resources of neighboring areas.

To supplement the family's income, many Santali women work as agricultural laborers as well. I found that the numbers of women doing so were quite high¹⁰⁹ in the total population who work as agricultural laborers. Their daily wages during this study were 150 to 300 Bangladeshi Taka¹¹⁰ (Tk.), equivalent to 1.5 to 3 Euros; for men, the wages were 200 to 300 and, for women,¹¹¹ Tk. 150 to 200. With this money they could buy four to seven kilograms of rice, but agricultural labor costs are mostly calculated in paddy, not money. In the age of the market economy, the Santal continue to prefer non-market exchange and take their wages in paddy instead of currency. During the harvest they do contractual wage-work by forming a group, each group consisting of between seven and twenty-five workers, both men and women. In the Santal language, this group-based contractual agricultural wage-work is called *jeen kata*. The wages are calculated per *bigha*¹¹² (0.33 acre) and per *maund*¹¹³ (37.32 kg), or in terms of how much paddy

¹⁰⁹ My fieldwork data demonstrates there are 205 women working as agricultural workers when the total earning population in the villages is 625 (total population is 1083). To account for earning population, I considered the people who are involved in income generating activities instead of counting working-age population (people aged between 18 and 65 years).

¹¹⁰ Taka or Bangladeshi Taka (sign, Tk. and code, BDT) is the currency of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. One taka is approximately equivalent to 1 Euro cent (€0.01).

¹¹¹ Women's wages are significantly lower in Bangladesh. Traditionally, Bengali women contribute to agriculture in the domestic sphere, although customarily Santali women are visible in the public sphere doing agricultural work, as well as working in the household. However, the gender wage gap is determined by cultural traits. In the last two decades, a significant boom in female employment has occurred in the garments sector, but this has not been able to reduce the gender-based wage inequalities. Most often, cultural norms are used to make these inequalities acceptable and justified.

¹¹² The *bigha* is the traditional unit of land measurement in Bangladesh, and is still widely used in Bangladesh, Nepal and some parts of India. One *bigha* is equivalent to 0.33 acre.

will come from each farm. In *jeen kata*, one group receives five *ser* (a *ser* is 0.933 kg) in every *maund*, meaning that in every *maund* it receives approximately five kilograms of paddy. Usually, one group can complete one labor contract of around thirty or forty days in a season. Rice is planted in Bangladesh in three seasons of the year (i.e., summer, winter and autumn). Thus, in a year, the Santal have three group-based contractual wage-work or *jeen kata* opportunities.

In Bangladesh, farming activities are highly labor-intensive. Thus, the steps in doing *jeen kata* include a series of post-production activities: (1) reaping or cutting the paddy, (2) drying it in the sun, (3) binding it, (4) hauling or transporting it to where it will be threshed, (5) stacking or piling it before threshing (6) threshing it from the straw, and (7) cleaning or removing unnecessary matter from the grain. In the final stage, the wage is paid after weighing the paddy. In one season, each person on average receives ten *maund* in paddy, worth about Tk. 5,000 (approximately 50 Euros). According to the Santal, their highest income is from post-harvest work, or *jeen kata*, as by working as agricultural laborers year-round, they still cannot generate the same income as they do from post-harvest work.

The Santal are willing to engage in agricultural work instead of seeking employment in any other profession. Thus, in my fieldwork area, I found only five people who had jobs, one person as a school teacher, one as a local NGO worker, another as an entrepreneur, and the remaining two working on a monthly basis in shops in the local market. Despite being landless, their dependence on agriculture is another calamity in the lives of the Santal. Furthermore, there is no alternative to being an agricultural worker. The post-liberation nation-building process, economic development programs, and social protection schemes silently ignore the right to employment of marginalized communities like the Santal. Occupational vulnerability increases socio-political risks. The average income of a Santal family is extremely low: “On average, a Santal household’s net yearly income is Tk. 41,067 (approximately 410 Euros), and a majority (56%) earn less than Tk. 36,000 (approximately 360 Euros) per year” (Barkat *et al.*, 2009: 249). During fieldwork, the situation was similar, seasonal income being assessed at Tk. 5000 and daily wages at between Tk. 150 and 300. Indeed, the Santal struggle every day to live their lives.

¹¹³ A *maund* is part of the traditional system of weighing in some part of South Asia. One *maund* equals 40 *ser*s and each *ser* is 0.933 kilograms. It is often used in rural areas, although the government of Bangladesh has introduced the international unit, the kilogram.

4.5. National Budgetary Allocation and Local Features of Application

In this section the focus is on how the state projects the development of the indigenous peoples in the plains of Bangladesh. I describe the aim of becoming a Middle Income Country (MIC) under the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010-2021: Making Vision 2021 A Reality (Vision 2021), as well as the development targets for the Santal and other indigenous peoples of the plains. The development of the latter was announced in the First National Conference on Indigenous People of the Plain Land of Bangladesh, held in Rajshahi on August 25, 2014, as follows:

According to the population ratio, the budget should be five thousand crore *taka* (approximately 0.5 billion Euros) for the indigenous peoples of the plains. Nevertheless, in fiscal year (FY) 2014-2015, the “Development Assistance for Special Areas” (except CHT) issued by the Prime Minister Office allocated Tk. 16 crores (approximately 160 million Euro) to the indigenous peoples of the plains. Thus, per capita, Tk. 80 (approximately €0.80) is distributed to the two million indigenous people of the plains. (Kamal 2014: n.pag.,)

In the conference, which was organized by the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples, information was presented by Professor Mesbah Kamal. Thus, a strong demand arose from the conference to increase the national budgetary allocation for the indigenous peoples of the plains. Rabindranath Soren, a spokesman for the latter and President of JAP, demanded the formation of a separate ministry and a separate land commission, as well as the return of indigenous peoples’ lands. These demands were presented to the Minister of Liberation War Affairs and the President of the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples, who were the conference’s honored guests. In addition, leaders and activists from indigenous rights movements in Bangladesh also attended the conference, as did a large number of indigenous people and myself.

Since increasing the budgetary allocation for indigenous people is a significant demand of the indigenous peoples of the plains, the question then arises whether, in the coming years, the demand will be included in the national budget. To answer this question, I reviewed the national budgets for 2015-16 and 2016-17 and found that they had remained unchanged. However, the

National Budget for 2017-18 allocated 300 million Euros, which is still nominal in comparison to the number of indigenous people. Reviewing this budgetary allocation, the Kapaeeng Foundation comments, “In the 2017-18 Fiscal Year (FY), Tk. 150 (approximately 1.5 Euro) was allocated per head for indigenous people, whereas the national allocation per head was around Tk. 26,000 (approximately 260 Euro).”¹¹⁴ Notably, the funding was allocated for Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT), although in distributing the support, budget, and assistance, the government used the alternative name “small ethnic minorities” instead of “indigenous people.”

The allocation in the Fiscal Year budget is still inadequate based on the number of indigenous people and their destitute status, which demands special treatment for their inclusive economic development. Fazle Hossain Badsha, a national Member of Parliament for the Workers’ Party of Bangladesh, recommended the following:

The Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT) does not mention any project. There is no policy on how to utilize the fund, nor a distribution committee. The UNO owns and utilizes the fund, and the locals wrongly influence it. There is a huge space for corruption. Thus, I recommended creating a division for plain indigenous people under the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs,¹¹⁵ and through the division, the budgetary allocation should be distributed for specific projects.

This statement calls for increased attention to be paid to the marginalized people of the country, although the targeted aim of becoming an MIC is possible without inclusive economic development because Vision 2021 proposes to measure average numbers in achieving growth. In this regard, reference should be made to the previous article in the country’s constitution (Article

¹¹⁴ “The Budget Allocation for Indigenous Communities Insufficient.” *Daily Star*, 06 May 2018. <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/budget-allocation-indigenous-communities-insufficient-1572160>. (accessed 15.08.2018).

¹¹⁵ One of the ministries of the government of Bangladesh, dealing with issues of indigenous people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It was established by following the provision of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, which was signed in 1997. However, the indigenous people in the plains of the country demand that a separate ministry be set up for them.

28 [4]) regarding the “special provision...of any backward sections of the citizens.” However, a discriminatory allocation has been made through the domestic national budget, ignoring the constitutional requirements. Thus, the political accountability of the government is caught between policies and practices.

From an anthropological point of view, to investigate the application of the budgetary allocations, I inquired how they were invested among the Santal and how they benefited them. I went to the Upalaza offices for the villages where I conducted fieldwork (i.e., Godagari, Phulbari, and Birampur Upazila), as well as to Tanore Upazila, which is near Godagari and is where a large number of Santal live. The UNO of Birampur refused to provide me with such information, saying, “These are secret documents. To obtain information, you should bring written permission from the respective ministry in Dhaka.” This statement is evidence that the UNO is not willing to provide information related to budgetary allocations to indigenous people. However, I received friendly cooperation from the respective UNOs of Godagari, Phulbari, and Tanore. In August 2015, when I visited the UNO office at Phulbari, the officer informed me that the Upazila had received the budgetary allocation, but not for the last two years. The number of indigenous people is less in Phulbari Upazila than in Godagari, Tanore and Birampur Upazila. Thus, in the following discussion and in Table 3 and 4, I show how much allocation Godagari and Tanore Upazilas received and how this allocation was used to improve indigenous people’s living conditions.

Table 3. Budgetary allocation of Tanore Upazila in two consecutive fiscal years, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015

Fiscal year 2013-14				Fiscal year 2014-15			
Type of allocation	Amount	Utilization	Remarks	Type of allocation	Amount	Utilization	Remarks
Student grant	Tk. 3 lakh (approximately €3,000)	Distributed among 383 poor indigenous students	Per student allocated grant is €7.83	Student grant	Tk. 4 lakh (approximately €4,000)	Distributed among 483 poor indigenous students	Per student allocated grant is €8.28
----	----	----		Rickshaw distribution	Tk. 6 lakh (approximately €6,000)	Rickshaw distributed to 40 poor indigenous people	
Total	Tk. 3 lakh (approximately €3,000)			Total	Tk 10 lakh (approximately €10,000)		

Source: Data provided by the UNO of Tanore Upazila in 2015.

According to the information provided by the UNO, approximately 30,000 indigenous people are living in Tanore Upazila. Thus, the per capita budgetary allocations for FY 2013-14 and FY 2014-15 were Tk. 1.00 (approximately €0.01) and Tk. 33.33 (approximately €0.33) respectively. The amount of budgetary allocation indicates that development is likely to be disappointing to them in light of expectations that it will lead to development for the indigenous peoples of the plains. Table 4 provides more detailed information on the budgetary allocation of Godagari Upazila.

Table 4. Budgetary allocation of Godagari Upazila in two consecutive fiscal years, 2013-14 and 2014-15

Fiscal year 2013-14				Fiscal year 2014-15			
Type of allocation	Amount	Utilization	Remarks	Type of allocation	Amount	Utilization	Remarks
Student grant	Tk. 3 lakh (approximately €3,000)	Distributed among 282 poor indigenous students	Per student allocated grant is €10.63	Student grant	Tk. 4 lakh (approximately €4,000)	Distributed among 321 poor indigenous students	Per student allocated grant is €12.46
Rickshaw distribution	Tk. 6 lakh (approximately €6,000)	Rickshaw distributed to 40 poor indigenous people	----	To establish community center	Tk. 15 lakh (€15,000 approximately)	Infrastructure development and office arrangement	----
Total	Tk. 9 lakh (approximately €9,000)		----	Total	Tk. 19 lakh (€19,000 approximately)	----	----

Source: Data provided by the UNO of Godagari Upazila in 2015.

Indeed, the allocation for Godagari Upazila is close to that for Tonore Upazila. According to the information provided by the UNO of Godagari Upazila, the indigenous population is 42,132. Therefore, the per capita budgetary allocations for FY 2013-14 and FY 2014-15 were Tk. 21.36 (approximately €0.21) and Tk. 45.10 (approximately €0.45) respectively. The allocated amounts are thus too small. The country's targeted status as an MIC will not be reached without attending to the socio-economic development of marginalized people like the Santal. The allocation mentioned above does not improve the socio-economic welfare of the indigenous peoples of the plains. From the macro-level perspective, the average income of the country is growing, but from the micro-level perspective, the distribution of income and access to services are mostly dysfunctional and do not support every stratum of society. The connections between economic growth, injustice, inequality, and poverty are arguable and critical in nature. The amount granted to the indigenous people of the plains indicates that the government is not willing to provide the benefits of macroeconomic growth. The Santal are not experiencing any positive impact from the country's present economic growth.

In implementing Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT), the UNO is the authority in using the money. Therefore the UNO should form an Upazila Adivasi

Development Committee headed by the UNO and consisting of thirteen to twenty members. This committee must include three indigenous and two individuals of good reputation from the Upazila who are working on development and have strong social acceptance in the locality. The other committee members should be recruited by virtue of their positions, such as the Upazila welfare officer, Upazila agricultural officer and Upazila health officer and others. Furthermore, the Member of Parliament for the area dominates this committee without being formally associated with it, as was acknowledged by the UNOs during my interviews. Formally, the Upazila Adivasi Development Committee has the authority to break down the budget and to determine the sectors to which it will be applied. The indigenous people on the committee and those who are well established in the community play a significant role in selecting who is eligible to receive the benefits of the budgetary allocation.

In the villages in which I conducted my fieldwork, the *manjhi harams* (village heads) were not aware of the committee or of the budgetary allocation. Moreover, in investigating the inclusion of Santal on the committee, I found the Thana¹¹⁶ Parganas (the heads of a number of villages) are not part of the process. Kerebin Hembram, who is a *desham Pargana*¹¹⁷ (the Santal coordinator at the Upazila level) and a renowned person on the Birampur Upazila, said, “I am not part of the Upazila Adivasi Development Committee. I am in the dark. I don’t know what is happening within the Committee.” Thus, by excluding the Santal’s traditional governance structure, the initiative to ensure development becomes dysfunctional.

In investigating ethnographically the use of Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT) in FY 2014-15 in Godagari Upazila, I discovered that the Upazila Adivasi Development Committee planned to establish a community center. If this center is launched, the indigenous people living in Upazila will benefit from various vocational training programs,

¹¹⁶ Currently, a Thana is a police station. Earlier, it was a sub-district in the administrative unit of Bangladesh. The Local Government Ordinance of 1982 upgraded the Thanas to Upazilas.

¹¹⁷ In the past, the position was known as *des-manjhi*, the one who worked as an assistant to the *pargana* (*pargana* or *parganait* refers to the head of a group of villages; Troisi 2000, Archer 1984). In the Caritas-Bangladesh supported projects (IHDP and ICDP), the name was altered as a *desham-pargana*, one who particularly coordinated the agendas of the indigenous people living in the respective Upazilas. The activities of Caritas-Bangladesh-supported projects are discussed in Ch. 7.

which informed the UNO of Godagari Upazila. The initiative appears to be in the development sphere, although I observed the outcome of this type of community center in Buchki village. The following photos provide evidence of its dysfunctional condition.

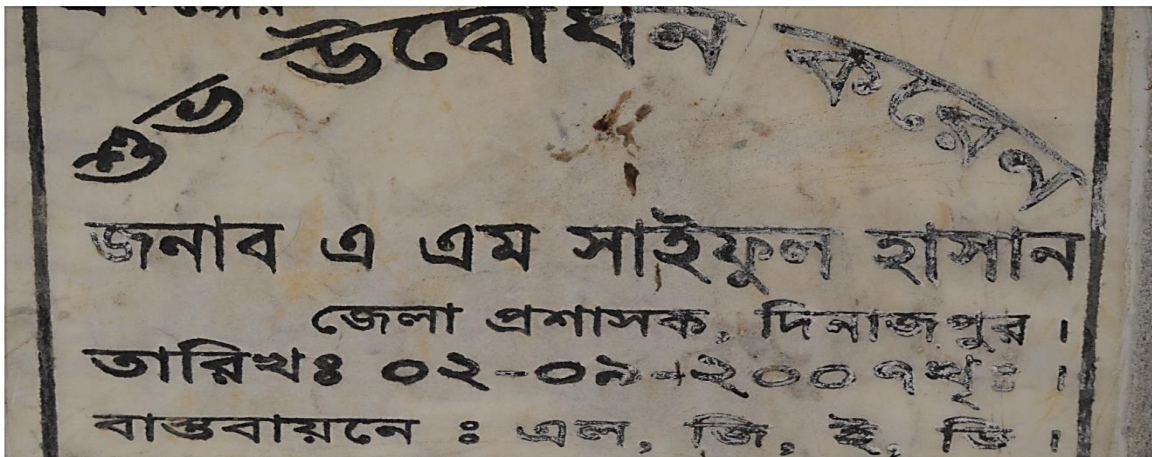


Figure 8. The Buchki Adivasi Community Center, situated in Birampur Upazila. Currently, this is an abandoned building. The bottom photo depicts the inauguration plate, which states that the construction was supported by the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) of Bangladesh and that the building was inaugurated by the District Commissioner of Dinajpur in 2007. Photos by the author.

The aim of the center was to include the indigenous people of the area in socio-economic progress and development programs so that they could improve their current living conditions. In Burutola, on one side is a government primary school and on the other side a community center, the Buchki Adivasi Community Center. Both buildings are made of brick with roofs of corrugated iron sheeting (tin). During my fieldwork, walking in the middle of the muddy path of the village, I passed both buildings every day. The school opens regularly, and it hums with the chaos of children. However, the community center is locked, the corridor is filled with dust and waste, and the yard is covered with bushes. Each of the building's rooms is covered in dust, indicating that the center has been deserted and has not been functioning for a long time.

I was curious to learn about the center's activities and the reasons for its closure. The villagers of Burutola told me, "When the center was started, it was decorated with all the appropriate furniture (chairs, tables, benches, and cabinet). It also had a television to promote the flow of information, although the village does not have electricity." However, I did not find any of these items inside the center and, regarding its activities, Nomita Hasda, one of the villagers in Burutola, told me:

To build a building for the center, one of the villagers (Jogen Hasda) donated a piece of land (six decimal), and he was primarily responsible for taking care of it. Later, he removed everything. Currently, the center is doesn't function, although sometimes villagers gather in the corridor for a discussion. Certainly, it is not related to the center.

To learn more, I talked with Jogen Hasda, who said, "Along with the television, all the things were damaged." However, the villagers of Burutola denied this and said, "In fact, all the assets of the center were embezzled by Jogen. He has sole ownership of the center because he donated the plot of land on which to build it." I also found that the center has no activities, but Jogen keeps the keys. Thus, access to the center is under Jogen's control. In the initial stages Jogen was the secretary of the center, and a twenty-one-member committee was formed to regulate the center's activities. Indeed, this center committee and the Upazila Adivasi Development Committee were connected to each other.

During my fieldwork, the villagers of Burutola said collectively, “For the last three years, the center has not had any activities.” Samuel Mardi, *union pargana* (headman of a number of villages), and Kerobin Hembram, *desham pargana*, are both renowned local leaders, but they are part of neither the Buchki Adivasi Community Center nor the Upazila Adivasi Development Committee. When I asked how the national budgetary allocation had been used, Samuel Mardi said, “I tried to talk about the matter related to the current year’s allocation with the UNO. Despite going two times to the Upazila office, I have not had the chance to meet him.” When a local leader like Samuel Mardi has no access to the UNO or government officials, the villagers’ inability to access government offices and officials, who have an institutional responsibility for providing services to the people, is clear. Further to the previous opinion of the villagers in this chapter I can verify that the Santal, as workers, fear having to communicate with the government bodies or officials concerned.

The failure of institutional ties was also admitted by Yakub Ali, Khanpur Union Parishad chairman, who remarked: “the Union Parishad is not part of the Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT). Thus, the matter is beyond Union Parishad authority.” As already mentioned, use of the budgetary allocation was decided by the Upazila Adivasi Development Committee. Conversely, the Union Parishad, which is responsible for the implementation of bottom-level development activities, was not aware of events at the Buchki Adivasi Community Center either. I found a similar situation in Tonore Upazila, where two Adivasi Community Centers had been constructed, only to be abandoned after a few years. The investment from the government’s Development Assistance program has not succeeded in creating any positive change. The functional role of using government support to the indigenous people of the plains has broken down, producing further marginalization.

Besides the Development Assistance, since 2003 the Rajshahi Divisional Ethnic Minorities Cultural Academy (the Academy) has aimed to promote the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the plains. In 2015, a foundation stone was laid to advance the establishment of the Dinajpur Divisional Ethnic Minorities Cultural Academy. The Academy aims to support indigenous peoples’ traditional dances, dramas, instruments and music. Furthermore, to revitalize these traditions, the Academy supports the holding of traditional

festivals. During my interview, S.M. Shamim Akter, Assistant Director and head of the Academy said, “The Academy is working with limited resources, which hinders the promotion of ethnic minorities’ traditions.” However, the Academy’s programs encourage young Santal to become part of the promotional programs for indigenous people, who are projected to perform and preserve traditions.

Along with the tradition-promoting programs and development assistance, many Santal remain poor¹¹⁸ and marginalized, despite the massive economic development that has occurred in Bangladesh.¹¹⁹ Sen and Ali (2015: 6) document the achievement of Bangladesh in reducing poverty, which fell from 44% in 1991-92 to 21% in 2010. However, poverty increased in 2016, to a poverty rate of 24.3% and an extreme poverty rate of 12.9%.¹²⁰ The World Bank (2018: 21) states, “the pace of poverty reduction has slowed while inequality has increased” because a large number of indigenous people and other marginalized groups are living in poverty. This situation is worse among the indigenous peoples of the plains, of whom 60% are “absolutely poor” and 39.5% are “hardcore poor” (Barkat *et al.*, 2009: 265). This ratio of absolute poverty is acute among the Santal.

These figures demonstrate the extreme disparities in distributing the benefits of economic development and the disorganization in the government’s institutions’ in implementing Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT). The budgetary allocation for the indigenous peoples of the plains implies a broader political game designed to justify the state’s

¹¹⁸ According to Barkat (2009 *et al.*, and 2016), the Santal are one of the most deprived indigenous groups among the indigenous peoples of the plains in Bangladesh. See Barkat (2009 *et al.*: 263-297 and 2016) for a detailed analysis of poverty of the indigenous peoples of the plains in Bangladesh.

¹¹⁹ The development trajectory of Bangladesh has been reviewed by the World Bank (2018), which found that the economy is the fastest growing at a rate of 7.3%, though the poverty reduction ratio is lower in comparison to population growth. The World Bank found inequality in agricultural growth, with more than half the population at risk of falling back into extreme poverty. This trend in economic development is discussed in detail in the World Bank report, *Bangladesh Development Update: Building on Resilience 2018*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29678/125061-WP-PUBLIC-Bangladesh-Development-Update-April-2018.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. (accessed 20.08.2018).

¹²⁰ “Bangladesh Continues to Reduce Poverty but at Slower Pace.” 2017. *World Bank Feature Story*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/10/24/bangladesh-continues-to-reduce-poverty-but-at-slower-pace>. (accessed 16.08.2018).

denial. The phenomenon is observed in distributing SSNPs, allocating *khas* land, ascertaining land rights, and guaranteeing employment opportunities. As highlighted in the previous sections of this chapter, the Santal are deprived by virtue of the repressive power of the state and dominated by the hegemonic social situation. It was this combination of denial and ignorance that induced the Catholic Church to extend the range of its philanthropy and proselytization. The following section illustrates the ethnographic evidence for the churches' developmentalism.

4.6. Evangelized Developmentalism

The development of evangelism in the Indian subcontinent was connected with British imperialism and its associated philanthropic activities, which were implied in the practice of colonial control. In the post-colonial period, the churches' transformative role extended the range of philanthropy in order to improve the socio-economic conditions of marginalized peoples like the Santal. In this respect, the peripheral states,¹²¹ like the Bangladeshi nation state, failed to protect fundamental human rights and even refused to recognize indigenous identities. Against this backdrop, in investigating evangelized developmentalism, I visited three churches in Shurshunipara, Dhanjuri and Mundumala. The area covered by these churches includes 74, 125 and 66 mostly Santal-inhabited villages respectively. To learn about their development activities, I interviewed the fathers of the respective churches. The villages where my fieldwork was carried out are situated within the domains of two churches, Shurshunipara and Dhanjuri. In examining the philanthropic activities of the churches, I also included Mundumala Church because it is one of the most highly populated indigenous areas and is situated within the Tanore Upaliza. During my fieldwork to collect ethnographic evidence for evangelized developmentalism, I purposely talked with the villagers in many informal conversations as well.

¹²¹ Currently, the market-based economy of Bangladesh is evolving and striving to reach the trap of the World Bank as a middle-income country. Although the persistence of inequalities and disarrangement in providing limited social services, derived the question where existing policies and practices should be focused. The Santals' individual and collective experiences of the inequalities have presented in this thesis. Hence, Professor Anu Muhammad viewed the trajectory of economic development in Bangladesh; he said, "Within the global capitalist system, Bangladesh can be considered a peripheral capitalist economy." For a detailed analysis, see "Peripheral Economy, Global Capital and Movements in Bangladesh." <https://www.cetri.be/Peripheral-Economy-Global-Capital?lang=fr>. (accessed 19.12.2018).

The developmentalism of the Christian missionaries is of interest first because of education. In educating indigenous peoples, missionaries became major patrons in the colonial world. Indeed, by introducing school education, proselytization programs were able to penetrate the indigenous peoples of colonial India. The Christian missionaries consider themselves the redeemers of the Santal. In this regard, Patrick Gomes, father of the Mundumala church, said,

The Santal did not dwell anywhere permanently. They migrated from one place to another. The missionaries came to them and offered shelter and security, and the great shadow of the Christian world. Through education, we give them the techniques of life and livelihood.

His words connoted religious superiority and alluded to the cultural baggage of the Christian world, where education was meant to advance proselytization. A similar sentiment was echoed by Anthon Murmu, the father of the Shurshunipara church: “Their destitute area of life necessitates invoke us to educate them. Thus, to improve indigenous people’s living conditions, we work on three basic areas: social, religious and economic.” Today, education is the core activity of the Catholic Church, while every church has limited schooling programs and hostel facilities because currently the major school programs are run by Caritas-Bangladesh, supplementing the developmentalism of the Catholic Church.

The education program is not limited to providing formal education; it also expanded the area of instruction by providing diverse types of awareness programs. For these programs, the churches form different committees, such as a Family Welfare Committee where the Mundumala church invites people to share the secrets of married life and offers advice on how to maintain a peaceful family life. The church also supports parenting in the everyday lives of the Santal. In addition to the Family Welfare Committee, a number of committees work among the Santal to direct their everyday lives. The following image (Figure 9) depicts eight community mobilization committees working to improve indigenous peoples’ living conditions under the Mundumala Church: (1) Worship Committee, (2) Family Welfare Committee, (3) Cultural Committee, (4) Finance Committee, (5) Education Committee, (6) Land Committee, (7) Justice and Peace Committee, and (8) Jubilee Committee.

বিভিন্ন কমিটির সদস্য/সদস্যগণ

১. ক. উৎসাহ কমিটি

১. প্রদীপ বীদিগ বন্দু, সত্বসতি
২. উদয়নাথ বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), প্রসন্ন
৩. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, সুপ্রসন্ন
৪. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন)
৫. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন)
৬. প্রসন্ন

১. খ. উদ্যোগ কমিটি

১. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), সুপ্রসন্ন
২. উদয়নাথ বন্দু, প্রসন্ন
৩. প্রসন্ন
৪. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন)
৫. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), সত্বসতি
৬. প্রসন্ন

১. গ. সাংস্কৃতিক কমিটি

১. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, প্রসন্ন
২. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন)
৩. প্রসন্ন
৪. প্রসন্ন
৫. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), সুপ্রসন্ন
৬. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), সত্বসতি
৭. প্রসন্ন

১. ঘ. শ্রম কমিটি

১. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, প্রসন্ন
২. প্রসন্ন
৩. প্রসন্ন
৪. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, সুপ্রসন্ন
৫. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), সত্বসতি

১. ব. শিক্ষা কমিটি

১. প্রদীপ বীদিগ বন্দু, সত্বসতি
২. উদয়নাথ বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), প্রসন্ন
৩. উদয়নাথ বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), প্রসন্ন
৪. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, প্রসন্ন

১. গ. উন্নয়ন কমিটি

১. প্রসন্ন
২. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, প্রসন্ন
৩. প্রসন্ন
৪. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, সুপ্রসন্ন
৫. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), সত্বসতি

১. ঘ. শ্রম ও শক্তি কমিটি

১. প্রসন্ন
২. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, সুপ্রসন্ন
৩. প্রসন্ন
৪. প্রসন্ন
৫. প্রসন্ন
৬. প্রসন্ন বন্দু (সুপ্রসন্ন), সত্বসতি

১. ঙ. জীবন কমিটি

১. প্রসন্ন
২. প্রসন্ন
৩. প্রসন্ন
৪. প্রসন্ন
৫. প্রসন্ন বন্দু, প্রসন্ন
৬. প্রসন্ন
৭. প্রসন্ন
৮. প্রসন্ন
৯. প্রসন্ন
১০. প্রসন্ন
১১. প্রসন্ন
১২. প্রসন্ন

Figure 9. Community mobilization committees of Mundumala Church. This list of the Committees along with the members' names was provided by Father Patrick Gomes in 2015.

These committees cover many aspects of everyday life, for instance, strengthening religious beliefs, raising awareness of sexual morality, teaching basic health, providing information for natural family planning, improving economic activities, guiding young leaders, nurturing leadership, and informing about current affairs. The significance of these awareness programs was emphasized by Patrick Gomes, the father of Mundumala church, who said, “Our main responsibility is to take care of their religious beliefs, but we prioritize socio-economic development as well. With parenting, we offer them security through many development programs.” Indeed, by taking care of religious beliefs, the churches explicitly shape the world view of the Santal and their inclinations, emotions, and interpretations. Otherwise, the aim of proselytization, namely to convert them, would have failed.

Conversely, regarding rural children’s education, BRAC has been the largest provider of pre-primary schooling in Bangladesh since 1985. These schools are located in contiguous administrative areas and, after completing the one-year pre-primary course, the pupils can enroll in the nearest government primary school. These schools help poor children living in rural areas in particular. They did not exist in the villages where I conducted my fieldwork, although Champatola used to have one of these schools but no longer does so. The villagers were disappointed by the pre-primary school closing, saying, “It was helpful for children when, at an early age, they did not know Bengali.” The location of these BRAC pre-primary schools helped to shape the children’s language skills, allowing them to adjust to the mainstream government primary schools.

Furthermore, over the last two decades, the Bangladesh government has achieved remarkable progress in providing primary school education because the state funds both primary and secondary school education in public schools. Currently, primary education up to class five is compulsory for all, and children can study in the government schools free of charge. This provision encourages the Santal to send their children to the state-funded schools because of the free primary school education. Golapi Baskey, mother of a nine-year-old daughter, said, “The primary and secondary education in the government schools are free now. I prefer to send my daughter to the government school instead of the church-based school.” However, primary education in Bengali remains a challenge for indigenous children. The pre-primary education

allows them to adapt to the mainstream Bengali medium primary public school. The government acknowledges the difficulty, and the National Education Policy 2010 is introducing pre-primary schooling for indigenous children (primarily six indigenous languages) for one year, but the disputes among the Santal over which scripts to adopt postponed the printing of textbooks for the children, who were then deprived of learning in their native language (discussed further in Ch. 5).

Indeed, formal education has an impact in improving living conditions, and church-supported education programs are still vital in educating the Santal formally. After completing their studies, the Santal obtain jobs in a church-supported philanthropic organization, such as Caritas-Bangladesh, Lamb Hospital, CCDB (Christian Commission for the Development of Bangladesh) or World Vision. Moreover, other secularist NGOs give a priority to appointing formally educated indigenous people in local positions. Despite these efforts, however, a large number of Santal are still not formally educated. The figures for formal education are displayed in Figure 10.

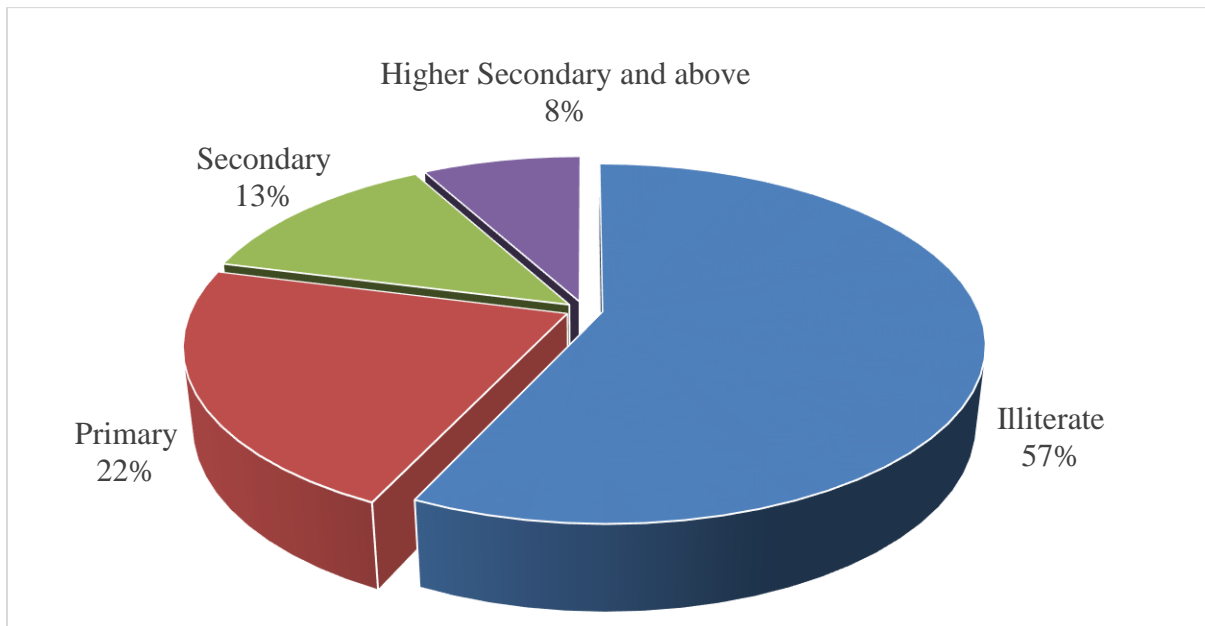


Figure 10. Educational status among the Santal. Source: Akan (*et al.*, 2015: 93).

Figure 10 shows that there are still a large number of “illiterate” or unlettered Santal, despite the long efforts of evangelized developmentalism to formally educate them. In practice the state of the economy is a basic issue in society, in which formal education is a major area of development when it comes to improving living conditions. Earlier in this chapter, I explained that the Santal belong to a peasant culture despite being dispossessed of their land. They mainly work as agricultural laborers and live destitute lives. In this perspective, as a potential means of social and economic development, microcredit was introduced in Bangladesh to eradicate poverty in the 1980s. The Santal were not excluded from the networks of the microcredit program, although the mainstream microcredit program failed to adjust itself to the distinct Santal lifestyle because the Santals’ agrarian way of life could not be reconciled with weekly interest payments under the microcredit rules. Subsequently, the transformation of the microcredit providers’ role from support to well-being to profit-making created doubts and debates.

In this context, the Catholic Church modifies the microcredit system to conform to the Santals’ lifestyle, including allowing the Santal to repay credits either monthly or in accordance with their agriculture calendar. The Catholic Church’s microcredit program is popularly known as the Credit Union, being a microcredit program for indigenous people in north-west Bangladesh. The Grameen Bank was not only an organization in distributing microcredits among rural poor women to eradicate poverty. Two larger organizations, BRAC and ASA (Association for Social Advancement), which run microcredit programs throughout the country, were not implementing them in the Santali villages where I conducted fieldwork. The Santal refused to take loans from these leading microcredit NGOs, preferring instead to take them from the Credit Union. They explained this choice in the following words:

The Credit Union provides flexibility in returning credits. By taking the microcredit from them, we can adjust the return and interest according to our agricultural calendar. But if we take credit from the Grameen Bank, BRAC or ASA, we are under pressure to pay every week. If we are not able to pay interest every week, we face unwanted harassment. Thus, we refused to take microcredit from such organizations and chose to take loans from the Credit Union.

The flexibility of the Credit Union is further documented by Moses Murmu, who is the secretary of the Credit Union in the Mundumala Church area: “Our interest rate is also lower than other microcredit organizations because we take only 12% interest, while they collect interest from 15% to 24%.” Meanwhile, the Credit Union tends to grant loans to Catholic Santal. Although it provides credit to traditional believers, it never grants loans to Calvinists or those affiliated with the reformed Christian faith. Maloti Murmu, one of the recipients of microcredit from the Credit Union, says, “To avoid the weekly pressure of installments, I prefer to take a loan from the Credit Union because nowadays most of the NGOs are doing business rather than caring for our well-being.” Reviewing the relationship between dependence and consumption in Bangladesh, Cons and Paprocki (2008:1) refers to the idea of “microcredit as a ‘silver-bullet’ for development and the limits of employing purely market-led development approaches as strategies for poverty alleviation.” The Santals’ current living conditions require increases in social services and demand assurances of tenure rights in the public sector before the microcredits are disbursed because the disorganization in the service sector prompts them to depend on microcredit programs.

Evangelized developmentalism captured the Santal by providing health services, as happens in other parts of the indigenous world to increase conversion rates. To deliver health services, the churches (Shurshunipara, Mundumala, and Dhanjuri) employ a paramedic and trained nurses and provide primary medical care and, in some cases, medicine. For advanced treatment, the Santal living in Rajshahi usually go to the Christian Mission Hospital, which is supported by the Church of Bangladesh as part of the Anglican Communion. In Dinajpur, the Santal mainly go to the Lamb Hospital, which is sponsored by the Lutheran Church. This hospital was established as a part of the American Santal Mission’s activities. To obtain health services, the Santal mostly depend on the mission hospitals rather than the government hospitals. When it comes to seeking health services from the church hospitals, the Santal collectively said, “We get better care and behavior from the church hospitals; we go to the government hospitals only in serious cases.”

The government hospitals, such as Rajshahi Medical College Hospital or Dinajpur Sadar Hospital, have better medical facilities and experts than the mission hospitals. However, like

other public-service sectors, the health sector is also striving for effective management, and poor budgetary allocations in the health sector remain a problem when it comes to achieving inclusive development. The World Health Organization ([WHO] (WHO Report 2015: 153-154) reports poor performance in the health sector, which has a low level of accountability and high levels of absenteeism and corruption. For example, “Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) reveals that 44.1% percent of the households seeking health care were somehow victimized by corruption” (TIB [2010] Problems of Governance in Bangladesh, quoted in WHO Report 2015: 153). In this context, even the poor of the country are prevented from obtaining public health services: the Santal, who experience socio-cultural discrimination, fear going to the Union Parishad Office. Thus, the situation compels them to avoid public hospitals as well, and they choose to use the church-provided health services instead.

This situation prompts the churches to expand the area of proselytization by transforming their philanthropy. Thus, the Dhanjuri Church introduced a system of “health insurance” for indigenous people. By obtaining this “health insurance,” people can use health facilities in the church-provided hospitals and even in the government hospitals, though to reimburse the costs of the government hospital, they need prior approval from the respective mission hospital. To purchase the insurance, a Santal have to pay Tk. 180 a year (approximately €1.80) to receive year-round health services. The introduction of health insurance is another way of showing generosity and creating a loophole to convert the Santal. However, the Shurshunipara and Mundumala churches have not launched health insurance policies.

When it comes to providing water for irrigation, Dhanjuri Church has also been assisting in obtaining the service from the Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA),¹²² the main provider of irrigation water in Barind Tract. Samuel Mardi from Sonajuri village, who

¹²² The BMDA is a self-regulating organization under the Ministry of Agriculture of Bangladesh. The prime responsibility of this organization is to supply irrigation water for agricultural development, as well as electricity, drinking water and road development assistance. To obtain this irrigation facility, a group of farmers pay a one-time fixed amount irrespective of the village or area. Later, based on consumption, they pay bills throughout the year. For the Santal, the administrative procedure for obtaining irrigation water is difficult, and often they do not have the money for the initial one-time fee. In this situation, Dhanjuri Church, in collaboration with Caritas-Bangladesh, supports the Santal by giving them cash and administrative support, as I have observed in the Dhanjuri Church area.

received the service, said, “To obtain irrigation facilities from the BMDA, Caritas-Bangladesh and the Church supported us by providing cash, and it was one lakh taka” (roughly one thousand Euros). In addition to Sonajuri, some other indigenous people living in the villages obtained similar support. In some cases, if the area was not covered by the BMDA, the Church funded the establishment of a deep tube-well along with irrigation facilities. This happened in Bushki and Letason villages, although during my fieldwork the irrigation system of Bushki village was out of order and the villagers depended on private sources. However, I did not find this intensive support for obtaining irrigation water in the Shurshunipara and Mundumala church areas.

Certainly, the activities of the Catholic churches have intensified their developmentalism, their aim being to increase proselytization. Thus, the Church capitalizes on the area of exclusion, endeavoring to create a dyadic relationship between the Church and the Santal and attempting to isolate the Santal from different development networks (e.g., from the state, NGOs development programs, the activism of civil-society groups). Their aim is to make the Santal solely dependent on them. In order to explore the area of dominion, I provide ethnographic evidence for what lies behind evangelized developmentalism, through which, instead of nurturing the capacity of the Santal to claim their rights as citizens, access to land, and rights to social services, the churches create an image of the Santal as excluded and vulnerable. The expansion of Christianity in Europe, Asia and Africa has been articulated by Wilken as follows:

Christianity came into the world as an ordered community and made its way as a corporate body with institutions and offices, rituals and laws. Christianity is inescapably social. Its spread among new people had little to do with the conversion of individuals and everything to do with building a new society. Many of the people who became Christians were illiterate; conduct and practices were the coin of the realm, less so preaching or doctrine. (Wilken 2012: 358).

In this way, the churches’ proselytization has to some extent been successful, but it feeds the Santals’ exclusion and pushes them into an isolated space within the state. The churches are also accused of rupturing the continuity of Santal traditions and cultural norms. In this situation, the Santal are gradually trapped between church and village.

4.7. The Limits of the State and Space for Evangelized Developmentalism

The discussion in this chapter has drawn attention to Bangladesh's economic growth, despite which the Santal are living distressed socio-economic lives deprived of social services. The ethnographic details in this chapter show how the Santal struggle to meet their everyday necessities, with seasonal and contractual agricultural labor being the highest source of earnings: approximately 50 Euros only in one season lasting four months. Ensuring the Santal tenure rights to *khas* land (state-owned land) is an over-politicized issue, increasingly influenced by political interests. In this hegemonic power dynamic, the Santal are not only deprived of *khas* land but also dispossessed of their own land. The history of the Santal explains their affinity with the land, which to them is synonymous with life. By being dispossessed of their land, their degree of marginalization is high because they are deprived of both social protection and public services. In this context, the limits of the state invite the Christian churches (particularly the Catholic Church) to exchange the practice of proselytization for developmentalism. Thus, the Catholic Church breaks with the notion of religious charity and instead provide binding development schemes, which they run as an alternative to the state programs, providing health insurance and irrigation support. In the same vein, to counter microcredit institutions, they offer different microcredit programs through the Credit Union.

In Bangladesh, NGOs have made a notable contribution to the fight against poverty, and they are also contributing to socio-economic development, although “rights-based NGO development work with the poorest has largely faded away” (Lewis and Hossain 2017: 12). In the last two decades some NGOs have entered the business field, their quasi-commercial activities and profit-generating schemes undermining their microcredit programs in Santal villages. The Santal resist taking loans from the Grameen Bank, BRAC and ASA, the leading microcredit providers in Bangladesh. This situation discourages other services from being continued, as shown by the shutting down of the pre-primary school in Champatola village I referred to earlier. Since NGO activities in Bangladesh are multifaceted and variable, making generalizations regarding them is difficult. The variable role of the NGOs has inspired the Catholic Church to increase its dependency network by forming different community mobilization committees, such as the Family Welfare Committee, under Church supervision.

In order to serve the Santal, the Church's generosity has been increased by providing irrigation facilities, health insurance and microcredit. These attempts instinctively contribute to protecting Santal livelihoods, although their main aim is to promote evangelism. Evangelization in the colonial world focuses on remote and poverty-stricken places: by establishing schools, hospitals, and social services, the missionaries also multiplied the number of Christians. Similar situations applied to the Santal regarding Christianity before, during and after the colonial period in the Indian subcontinent. Thus, given the variable characteristics within the Church, there is no reason to believe that the Church serves the Santal. Conversely, a growing number of Christian Santal are refusing to consider the Church the liberator of Santal life. On the one hand, the state has failed to provide services, while on the other hand, the centralized, donor-driven and profit-seeking character of the NGOs is unable to adjust itself to the realities of Santals' lives in their programs. The Santals' interactions are constantly limited to the Church and themselves: a state created within the state in which evangelizers like the Catholic Church emerge as a service provider, provider of livelihoods and generator of job options. In the branches of government institutions, conversely, the Santal are hidden.

Indeed, the economic growth of the Bangladeshi state is confined to the informal sectors, democracy and governance are deeply compromised, democratic participation is undermined, tax revenue collection is low, and the public services are corrupt and disorganized (Lewis and Hossain 2017). Access to the SSNPs and budgetary allocations is mixed up between local government institutions and local politicians, and the actual distribution of these allocations is immersed in a whirlpool of disorganization and corruption. However, despite the availability of church-based schools, increased government provision in primary education encourages the Santal to send their children to the government schools. The government institutions have the potential to promote inclusive development, otherwise development among the Santal will become dichotomized and be objectified by intermediaries, as has happened through the shifting role of the Catholic Church and the trend towards profit-seeking among NGOs. Indeed, development has a long-term horizon, otherwise development for purposes of well-being would fail, as it has for the Santal.

4.8. Concluding Remarks

The focus of this chapter has been the relationship between the state and the Santal. By investigating the area of social services, this chapter has demonstrated the limits of the state: the Santal are deprived of their basic rights as citizens, and as a “small ethnic minority,” their rights are either overlooked or subjected to institutional disorganization. In describing Santal living conditions at the beginning of this chapter, I provided a descriptive overview of Santal village life. To examine the political accountability of the state in relation to the Santal or the indigenous people of the plains, I have presented ethnographic evidence of the SSNPs’ functionality, the facts about the dispossession of land, evidence about public services, and an overview of the use of special grants in the name of Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT). To scrutinize the functionality of government institutions, this chapter has revealed the disorganization and dysfunctional process within the system, which hinders the implementation of allocations of public and special services. The ethnographic details regarding evangelized developmentalism reveal the substantial role of the Catholic Church in providing social services, breaking down the traditional ways of preaching Christianity by providing microcredit, health insurance, and irrigation support. Provisionally, the Santal benefit from these subsistence allowances, but they are arguably being forced into an identity crisis as a result. The next chapter will discuss the controversies over Santal identity.

Chapter 5

Santal Identity: Controversies and Continuity

“Bideen” means those who have no religion, those who do not know anything about religion, those who have no rules and regulations in life. Those who do not have any “deen” (deen is a Bengali word meaning “day”), they are “bideen.” But as “esoie” (Christians), we have a day, it is our Christmas (25 December), and across the world, we celebrate the day together. In contrast, “bideen”’s festivals and ritual dates are usually fixed by the Manjhi Parishad (village council). These “deen” (dates) vary from one Santal village to another. Sometimes, suddenly, they decide “Today we will drink and dance,” and then, they drink and dance, that is their (traditional believer’s) date and day. In fact, they have no “deen” (day) at all. That’s why they are “bideen.”

—The meaning of *bideen* explained by Sumitra Baskey, a Christian Santal and one of the village community members in Situngtola.

Nowadays, the number of Christian Santal is higher in the villages than the traditional believers among Santal. Thus, by following them, we coined the word “bideen” without knowing the meaning. Later, we came to know that we have no “deen” (day). That’s why they called us “bideen.” But we disagree with them because we have “deen” in our own way.

—Response by Logen Tudu and similar reactions widely uttered by the traditional believers among the Santal of Situngtola.

These Santal discourses on identifying themselves as *bideen* and *esoie* reflect remarkably closely the dialectic and dichotomized communal status of the Santal. By arguing against each other’s religious affiliations, they are endeavoring to accommodate the fluidities of life, which are pivotal in determining their identity. There are material and historical rationalities behind these controversies. For example, the words are embedded in the everyday discourses of the villagers when addressing the Christian Santal as *esoie* and the traditional believers as *bideen*. The term *bideen*, used by the Christian Santal for the traditional believers’, bestows an “inferior” status on them within the village. The dialectic construction of a newly dichotomized identity is a result of the engagement with evangelization. Conversely, identification as *esoie* refers to Christianity. The word “literary” denotes those who are followers of the prophet Isa, from the Arabic *Isa Ibn*

Maryam, in English *Jesus, Son of Mary*. Therefore, in Santal villages, the followers of Isa are known as *esoie*. At present, in Santal villages, the two groups usually label one another *bideen* or *esoie*.

In analyzing these contested discourses, the chapter illustrates the sorts of arguments, from local controversies to national disputes, which mark out three broad areas. First, I show how the penetration of evangelization rejigged the Santals' everyday discourses and split their unity. Secondly, I show how controversies between two believers (traditional and Christian) moved from the micro- to the macro-level, polarizing views on the adoption of the Santali script. Thirdly, it shows how the controversial positions of the two believers became a major factor in breaking up the predominant national platform of indigenous peoples from the plains. Therefore, to apprehend the Santals' struggle to renew their Santalness, this chapter focuses on their endeavor to settle their identity as either Christian or traditional, "being traditional" being contested with respect to the notion of autochthony. Although from a Eurocentric world view traditions cannot be "transformative or forward-looking," "in a context of decolonizing tribal activism, it becomes easier to recognize that native societies have always been both backward and forward looking" (Clifford 2004: 155-156). From Clifford's point of view (2004), decolonization has seen the widespread entry of subalterns or non-western peoples into public spheres, so that being traditional materializes the struggles around identity and place. Clifford also refers to "The cultures and identities that have both resisted and been created by ongoing local/global contacts" (ibid.: 155). In this view, this opens up possibilities for alignment with the global notion of indigeneity.

Thus, this chapter deals with particular arguments at some length as follows: by contesting each other's dissimilarity and sameness, transformation and continuity, it shows how the Santal are negotiating with the fluidity of their lives to create a Santal identity, how they are becoming involved in many controversies to argue for a distinct identity, how they are opposing each other's arguments, and how the controversies that arise are being connected so that they fit the global notion of indigeneity. In investigating these controversial discourses, I am not positioning myself to counter either traditional or Christian believers as rational. Instead, I will

bring into the discussion the nexus between majoritarian rudeness, communal controversies, and the claims that tempted the Santals' assertions that they are "indigenous."

For as long as I was in the villages, I paid attention to the discourses of the Santal, their way of talking, how they reconstruct their identity in everyday discourses, how they organize their national platforms, how they argue over phases of inclusion and exclusion, and the discussions over which script they should use for the Santali language. I carefully asked many questions in various informal discussions to investigate how their self-reconstruction is endeavoring to revitalize the notion of Santalness. When I reached the Santal villages, I was asked over and over again: "Please don't write about what we eat, what we wear. Rather write about our positive sides, our dazzling traditions." Such desires on the part of the community reflect their anxieties not to be objectified again, and magnify their reactions through their requests for an image showing them as they want to be shown in future documentation, as the lives of the Santal are mostly portrayed in respect of "what they eat," "what they wear," "how they look," and "how they dance and sing."¹²³ These views represent otherness and objectification in presenting people's identity. From the majoritarian point of view, the Santal have always been the "other," in the colonial period as well as in independent Bangladesh. This representation of otherness increased the fear among the Santal. During my fieldwork, once I had become accepted in the villages and had developed a good relationship with the villagers, I observed that they have many traditional dishes in their dietary habits, which they intentionally hide from outsiders. They also prolonged a meeting with me by requesting: "Don't take photos and write about the food that is prohibited for the Bengalis, but we eat these dishes as our cultural food. Indeed, we think it's delicious". Therefore, by practicing, hiding, and disclosing, they maintain their ethnic distinctiveness, as well as creating covert forms of resistance to perpetuate the notion of Santalness.

Furthermore, the request and the resistance it revealed that the cautious relationship between majority and minority is a geo-political game. Arjun Appadurai, in his book *Fear of*

¹²³ These categorizations are documented by colonial writers, such as Dalton (1872), Risley (1891), Hunter (1868), and Mukherjea (1962), a legacy that has continued in post-colonial research too. In Bangladesh, Jalil (1991), Sattar (1983), Ali (1998), and Hasda (2009) also describe the Santals' way of living in an objectified way, their descriptions producing a cynical image of the people.

Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger (2006), analyzes how, in the age of globalization, political violence against minorities has come to be associated with totalitarian regimes and tyrannical nation states. He links these factors in the period of the globalization and economic oppression of the 1990s to the minorities. States are disposing of their monopolies over resources, although they are still associated with the discursive production of identity. He argues that “minorities and majorities are recent historical inventions” (2006: 49) and relates this to nationalism, which “provides the basis for the emergence of predatory identities [which] are almost always majoritarian identities” (2006: 51-52). Appadurai’s case studies focus on India, Iraq, Nazi Germany, Rwanda, and Africa, but its implications apply to all globally marginalized people and minorities. Thus, by hiding their traditional dietary habits, the Santal are trying to minimize cultural differences, which may eventually lead to cultural genocide and lead to majoritarian “predatory identities” being inflicted on the minority Santal. Predatory majoritarian behavior is provoking them to hide what is authentic about them to minimize clashes arising from the cultural differences between themselves and the Bengalis.

Therefore, the controversies and social subordination serve binary perspectives. On the one hand, by producing fractious discourses, they obscure the idea of Santal identity. On the other hand, the traditional believers among the Santal are attacked by the opponents of transformation. In the same vein, while the successive traditions are not free from political bias, the process of transformation is constant and provides enough space to heal changes. In describing these controversies, I express hope for the processes of transition and transformation, where being traditional or holding traditions can be viewed as a historical process. Hence, the formation of an identity is not independent within the self but must negotiate with multidimensional power relations (states, intermediaries). As a result, aggressive majoritarian behavior and ignorance prolong the turmoil surrounding the idea of Santal identity and their assertions that they are indigenous. The discussion in this chapter will explore the interconnections between the production of controversies and the contingency of successive disputes which reflect the religious fission among the Santals, affecting how they occupy the political area in order to construct and reconstruct the notion of Santal identity.

5.1. *Bideen* and *Esoie*: “Others” within the Self

After starting my fieldwork, I first based myself in Situngtola village. Shortly afterwards, I found that the villagers recognize each other by means of different identities. The recognitions are divided into different discourses using phrases such as “Christian *Padra*”¹²⁴ and “*On-Christian*”¹²⁵ *Padra*,” “we are” and “they are,” and “ours” and “theirs.” This difference is extended from religious beliefs to everyday discourses, and identification of the “self” is substituted within the self by the fact of being different than others. Thus, when a Christian Santal says “they are,” he/she is addressing those Santal in the village who are not Christians and who follow the traditional Santali belief system. In the same way, when a traditional Santal believer says, “they are,” he/she is addressing the Christian Santal living the village. As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the fission of identification is magnified by widely calling the two groups *bideen* and *esoie*. Initially, these kinds of identity differences and the substitution of different identities within the community were new to me. I involved myself in many informal discussions to discover the significance of the newly produced identities.

In identifying those who are *bideen*, the villagers generally say they are “Those who are not Christians and following the ancestors’ religion.” Some villagers, who are Christian Santal, explain: “Those who have no faith, who do not have any enlightenment, they are *bideen*.” Initially, the word *bideen* was used by missionaries in oral discourses, and gradually use of the word spread in the everyday lives of the Santal. In particular, the word *bideen* connotes the degraded social status of the traditional believers living in the villages. The background of colonial history played a significant role in degrading the status of the Santal religion. In colonial writings, “tribal” religions are mainly described as “animism”. Andersen and Foss (2003: 305) remark that “the administrators worked from an evolutionary theory of society where the tribals represented a low step in the development of religions, mostly animism focused on fertility rituals.” However, the missionaries aimed to translate Christianity into Santali customs for the understanding of the Santal. The Danish missionary Rasmus Rosenlund found a High God among the Santal, namely Thakur (ibid.), though Rosenlund decided that “the primitive man

¹²⁴ The word *padra* refers to small wards within the villages, clusters of houses. Generally, a village consists of a few *padras*. The uses of *e-padra* and *o-padra* are associated with the religious fission.

¹²⁵ The word non-Christian is pronounced by the villagers as “on-Christian.”

cannot think the thought about God the Creator” (Rosenlund, [1949: 115, 2nd edition], quoted in Andersen and Foss, 2003: 306). The colonial tendency to reject the Santal religion was grafted on to the Christian Santal’s narratives and produced the word *bideen*, with the connotation of “those who have no religion.”

In contrast, the *esoie* identity is assumed to be “superior” because of its global connections. As Sumitra Baskey noted (see above), “as Christians, we have a day, it is our Christmas, and across the world, we celebrate the day together.” The feeling of superiority becomes stronger through acceptance of education, medical services, and opportunities to upgrade one’s social status. Therefore, Santal express these “superior” and “inferior” statuses by identifying people as *bideen* and *esoie*, which creates a sense of otherness within the community. This situation was expressed by Cornelius Hasda, who has been in the vanguard of reviving Santal traditions:

The word *bideen* came into the Santals’ lives from the missionaries. Nowadays, the word is widely used by the Santal, as the majority of Santal worship in Christianity; and without knowing the meaning and background of the word, traditional believers also start to identify themselves by saying, “we are *bideen*.” Even when I was a child, I introduced myself in the same way.

The term *bideen* circulated in the localities and was adopted there. For example, I found a newsletter, *Pargana Arang* (2013), published in Kakonhat, near Situngtola. It contains six articles, one of which had been written by Father Bernard Tudu on the religious belief of the traditional Santal. In the article, these traditional believers are addressed as *bideen*. The title of the article is “Bideen Santalder Jibone Deb-debi Ebong Dhormio Bisshas” (The Gods and Goddesses and Religious Beliefs in the life of Bideen Santals).” As a consequence, the degraded social status of the traditional Santal was circulated through the locality in print. The dialectic in the religious statuses of the Santal created a clear separation between the two types of Santal: *bideen* and *esoie*. The fission among the Santal is significant when analyzing the dialectic division of identity. The creation and recreation of identity is tied to groups and their different interests (Nagel, 1994). Thus, the *bideen* Santal are identified as “inferior” compared to the *esoie*

Santal. Hence, another group has been created within the group, and a class of outsiders has been invented among the insiders.

Correspondingly, the traditional believers in the villages usually do not have any objection to being identified as *bideen*. However, formally schooled, conscious, traditional believers react strongly when their identity is referred to as *bideen*. The sense of fission is increased because traditional believers reject the “indigenous” identity of the Christian Santal by saying that “they are not practicing traditional rituals; thus they are not Adivasi (indigenous) anymore.” Similarly, Bengalis, who constituted indigeneity in the light of traditional religions, also denied indigeneity to Santal converts. As noted already (Ch. 2), when I was in the field, the Santal’s Bengali neighbors asked: “Are you conducting research on Adivasi people? But you will not find Adivasi people here. Now, they are all Christians.” The Bengalis’ perceptions of the indigenous identity of the Santal have been framed in relation to notions of autochthony. The notion of an “imagined community” or a listed categorical identification is publicized in order to enforce an ethnic identity. The nationalist construction of identity is also grafted into the minds of both the majority and the minority. From that point of view, religious conversion has now become a reason to abandon indigeneity.

Out of these various controversial perspectives, the following questions arise: How did the traditional believers identify themselves in the past? How did they determine their religious identity? After learning about the recent division over identification as *bideen* or *esoie*, I asked the villagers how they had identified the Santal religion traditionally. Most of them said one thing in particular: “Our religion is ‘Santal dhorom’ or ‘hor (human) dhorom’” (cf. Ch. 2). Certainly, their statement contained the notion of self-recognition, and reveals the coining of *bideen* because of the arrival of evangelization.

However, there are different spellings of the name “Santal”, such as Saontal, Saontar, Santhal, and even Satar, though Santal are mainly known in English literature as Santal, and particularly in colonial discourses, they were identified as “Santal.”¹²⁶ The spelling and

¹²⁶ Colonial writers such as Hunter (1868), Dalton (1872), Risley (1892), Culshaw (1949), Archer (1974), and Mukherjea (1965) all use the term “Santal”.

pronunciation of the name “Santal” have regional variations: for example, in Jharkhand, they are mainly identified as “Santhal,” in greater Bengal as “Saontal,” and in Nepal as “Satar” (Soren, 2016), although the Santal call themselves “Hor” or “human.”¹²⁷ Dalton (1872) remarks that the name “Santal” is a corruption of “Saontar,” which was first mentioned by P.O. Skrefsrud. It was adopted by the tribe after their sojourn for several generations in the Saont region (situated in present-day Midnapur District in West Bengal). The Bagh Rai narrative states that, after a long sojourn in Saont, they took the name Santal. Previously, they were called “Kharwars” (Dalton 1872: 209-10). “Khar” is an alternative for “hor” or “human.” In Santal dwelling areas in West Bengal and independent Bangladesh, in everyday discourses, oral literature and writings, the Santal have also been known as “Saontal” for a long time. Direndranath Baskey¹²⁸ calls the Santal “Saontal” in his writings (in Bengali). In recent times, the name “Saontal” in Bengali has been replaced by the English pronunciation and spelling of “Santal.” When I was in the field, I observed that the Christian Santal consciously eschew the word “Saontal” and prefer to use the word “Santal.” Thus, the religious division also revolves around redefining Santal identity and extends to the use of “Saontal” and “Santal.” The adoption of the English pronunciation indicates that the Santal are aware of opposing Bengali oppression. A form of reactive resistance has evolved in everyday discourses, but, to resist their nearest antagonists, Santals stress an alliance with the colonial discourse. Both words reflect the interference of outsiders and their exercise of hegemonic power in determining, in this case, how the Santal should be named.

Still on the process of naming, Santal self-identity is rooted in the word “hor” (human), not in “Saontal” or “Santal.” During fieldwork, I observed that in their own communications and conversations the Santal say, “we are *hor*,” “this is a *hor* village,” “there are five *hor* villages,” “our neighboring villages are not *hor* villages,” etc. However, when the villagers communicate with the majority Bengalis, they say “we are Saontal,” “this is a Saontal village,” and so on. Rabindranath Soren, the President of JAP, said with reference to this,

¹²⁷ Hembram (1988: 2 and 5), Culshaw (1949: 16) and Orans (1965: 5) mention that Santal called themselves *hor* (human being).

¹²⁸ A famous writer from West Bengal, who belongs to the Santal community and has contributed writings about Santal history and traditions in Bengali.

We prefer to use *hor*, but regarding communication in Bengali, it is convenient to say “Saontal” because, in daily life, we communicate with mainstream Bengali people and make conversation in Bengali, not in English or Latin. The recent development to introduce our self-identity as “Santal” was also adopted by the missionaries. In the same way, the Santal clan or family titles are cited in the Roman script, i.e., Hasda becomes Hasdak, Mardi becomes Marandi. Indeed, these terminological shifts are ruining Santal identity.

The recent conflicts in addressing Santal self-identity requires discussing the penetration of external forces, including Santal identity, which became a controversial issue. From that point of view, the narratives already mentioned have three characteristics. First, the evolution of a sense of otherness within the self is contained within a pluralistic contradiction of identity. Secondly, others’ reactions to the Santal, as well as within the Santal themselves, include differences of social boundaries, marginalization, actor involvement, and power relations. And finally, the controversies represent the power of discourses in stating that identity is subject to continuity in creating and recreating Santalness. However, the indigenous view emphasizes that identity is constituted with regard to religion and language. From this perspective, in maintaining their Santalness, Santal become dialectical in adopting the Santali script and in generating political controversies.

In the context of Bangladesh, the next section of this chapter will discuss the controversies among Santal regarding the adoption of the Santali script. Each controversy is grounded in different pragmatic points of view in proclaiming a unified identity for Santal. The differences demonstrate the denunciations and denials regarding the differences between the traditional and Christian Santal, as well as capturing the negotiating space of the state where the Santal, as national citizens, are demanding to be allowed to begin their primary education in the Santali language. But the controversies surrounding whether to use Bengali or Roman script or Ol Chiki create hostile debates, which give rise to questions such as: Which script is relevant in continuing the primary education of Santal children? In answering this question, I shall draw on ethnographic experiences from my fieldwork.

5.2. Controversies in Adopting a Script: Religious Fission and the Politics of Identity

Hence, what happened in the government primary school in Burutola when most of the students came from different indigenous peoples? In point of fact, in Burutola village, in the government primary school, most of the students are Santal, some are from other indigenous peoples, and a few are Bengali students. The headmaster of the school told me,

The students are mainly from the indigenous communities of the area, and most of them are Santal. The Santal children are not familiar with the Bengali language when they come to the school at the age of five or six; it is difficult for them to continue education because they do not understand what the teachers teach.

The headmaster of the school added, “We are facing difficulties in communicating with the children because most of them cannot speak Bengali, and we do not know Santali.” In Bangladesh, primary education is mainly conducted in Bengali. Generally, by the age of 10 to 12, Santal children are able to communicate in Bengali. In the government primary school in Burutola there are three teachers, all Bengali. As a result, at the beginning of primary school, the drop-out rate is high. To continue primary education in Bengali is a crucial issue for Santal students.

Since the 1990s, beginning primary education for indigenous children in the mother tongue had been a significant demand. To support it, the JAP started a pilot program for pre-primary education in the Santali language, and in 1998 two primary schools were established in Godagari Upazila. The schools are situated in Borshapara and Juktipara villages, near Kakonhat, villages close to my fieldwork area. The total number of teachers in both schools is six, two belonging to the Bengali community, the other four from indigenous communities. Together, they teach hundreds of pre-primary indigenous students. The pilot project attempted to show how to impart primary education to indigenous children in their mother tongue. Initially these schools received non-government funding. At the time of my field research, the program at the pre-primary schools had not received any financial support, and the teachers had been struggling to get their honorariums paid for the last two years. Meanwhile, the schools continued teaching indigenous children, though with many restrictions. The school’s activities can be questioned in

multiple ways, but the pilot schools were a step forward in strengthening the demand to adopt an inclusive program to teach indigenous children in their native language.

The demand to begin primary education for indigenous children in their mother tongue was acknowledged in the National Education Policy of Bangladesh of 2010, marking as a step forward for indigenous peoples' rights. According to the policy, children should initially be taught in their native language for one year. As a result, the Bangladesh Text Book Board has started to print books in six languages: Chakma (for the Chakma people), Cogborok (for Tripura), Marma (for Marma), Santali (for Santal), Sadri (for Oraon), and Achik (for Mandi/Garo). But the Santal are divided on the question of which script Santali should be written in, Bengali or Roman? The other five indigenous languages pursued the plan and developed pre-primary books, which were distributed in the respective indigenous communities in 2017. But the controversy over the adoption of a Santali script has delayed the pre-primary school activities of the Santal, affecting the pre-primary education of 50,000 Santal children.¹²⁹ The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Primary and Mass Education suggested forming a committee to resolve this controversy.

On the one hand, acknowledgment by the National Education Policy indicates progress is being made with indigenous rights. On the other hand, it also reflects the rupture between traditional believers and Christian Santal. While I was carrying out fieldwork, I also observed this fission among the Santal of Godagari Upazila. In particular, those who adhere to Christianity prefer to adopt the Roman script, while traditional believers are in favor of adopting the Bengali script. As discussed earlier in Ch. 4, the religious situation among the Santal, reflecting the number of Christian believers, is continually changing, but the traditional believers are politically organized at the national level, and they aim to revitalize Santali traditions and use the Bengali script. Alternatively, the political history of the Santal language demonstrates that the adoption of a Santali script cannot be rejected by simplifying either the Roman or the Bengali script for

¹²⁹ "Santal children are yet to get textbooks in their mother tongue." *The Daily Star*. 08 January 2017. <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/santal-children-yet-get-textbooks-mother-tongue-1342030>. (accessed 17.12.2017).

use in the case of the Santali language. In fact, both scripts have a significant influence on the construction of Santal identity.

In talking with the villagers to attempt to understand their discourses, I conducted many formal and informal interviews in order to examine the nature of the controversies regarding the Santali script. I talked with teachers and students of primary schools near the fieldwork villages. I also interviewed national leaders to learn their standpoints, as well as those who are negotiating directly with government institutions regarding the adoption of a Santali script in Bangladesh. Indeed, the creation of an indigenous identity is related to multidimensional power relations, the continuity of ethnic identity with the political organizations of indigenous peoples and the power structure of the nation state (Hummel, 2014). Rabindranath Soren, president of the JAP, said,

Although it would be best to adopt Ol Chiki as the Santali script, given the context of Bangladesh, I prefer to adopt the Bengali script. There is no context for adopting the Roman script in Bangladesh. The Roman script insists on expanding Christianity.

This negative opinion regarding the Roman script is significant in taking decisions on the Santali script because the traditional believers are politically opposed to it, although the Christian Santal are numerically in the majority. Recalling my previous arguments regarding the controversial relationships between the two groups of believers, I attempted to analyze the nature of the controversy further. I talked with the Jatiya Adivasi Mukti Morcha (National Indigenous Peoples Liberty Coalition [Morcha]),¹³⁰ a newly emerged alliance among indigenous peoples of the plains, which demands that Roman be used for the Santali script. The spokesperson of the Morcha, Jogendranath Soren, said: “The Roman script is already accepted in the Santali language, and now it becomes the Santali script.” The fissures become visible in the adoption of the Santali script, and the religious differences are gradually feeding them. However, the cultural revival of ethnic identity is connected with the variety of state discourses and decisions. Identity as indigenous is denied and contested by the government of Bangladesh. Attempts have been made to determine indigenous identity in multiple layers of social locations, historical, and

¹³⁰ The Morcha is an alliance of 17 indigenous organizations in the plains. Its emergence and activities will be discussed in the following pages of this chapter.

political phases – a good example of the blended situation of which Barth wrote (1969). The quest for a unified Santal identity is causing a quasi-chaotic situation to arise in relations between the Santal and the state.

The polarization of the Santal over the question of the script has a long history. To spread use of the Santali language, in 1925 the Santal scholar Pandit Raghunath Murmu developed a distinctive script called Ol Chiki. The script was introduced for use by all Munda language communities, such as the Munda, Mahali, Birhor, Bhumij, and all those known as Kharwar. In actual practice only the Santal adopted Ol Chiki (“Ol,” “write,” and “Chiki,” “script”). Santali is a Munda language of the Austro-Asiatic family. Choksi (2014b) notes that the first record of a written Munda language was, a collection of Santali folk songs from Mayurbhanj District, Orissa, India printed in the mid-nineteenth century by the American missionary Jeremiah Phillips; this collection was published in Bengali script in 1845. Furthermore, the English missionary Dr C.R. Lepsus and the Norwegian missionary L.O. Skrefsrud devised a Santali script in the Roman notation by adding some letters. In the early twentieth century, another Norwegian missionary, P.O. Bodding, revisited the Roman script for Santali and published collections of folk tales, a Santali dictionary, extensive materials for a Santali grammar, and a translation of the Bible into Santali. In missionary writings the Santali language was written in the Roman script (Choksi 2014b: 50-51). Unlike the Roman script, Santali usually uses the respective regional scripts. For example, in Jharkhand it uses Devanagari, in West Bengal and Bangladesh the Bengali script, and in Orissa the Oriya script. In fact, most Santal are bilingual, and in order to communicate they speak their respective regional languages along with their mother tongue.

Some organizations emerged in the mid-twentieth century to promote Santali literature and culture. For example, “Aboah Gaonta” was established in Kolkata in 1952, the “Santali Literary and Cultural Society” was formed in Kolkata in 1965, and the “Adibasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association” (ASECA) was founded in Orissa in 1964. These organizations played a significant role in demanding the recognition of Santali as an official language in India. They consistently promoted the Santali language and literature, but fell into controversy over what was the official Santali script. For example, “Aboah Goanta” preferred to

use the Bengali script, the ASECA was in favor of Ol Chiki, and the “Santali Literary and Cultural Society” promoted the Roman script. Despite these disagreements, all these organizations demanded state recognition for the Santali language. The government of India recognized Ol Chiki in 1979 and listed the Santali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Language Family of the Constitution of India in 2003. After its inclusion, the Government of West Bengal established the “Paschim Bangla Santali Academy” to advance Santali literature and language. Other Santal living in Indian states, among others Orissa, Jharkhand, and Assam, also demonstrated their solidarity in promoting the Santali language (Mandi and Biswas 2017: 127-32). The Ol Chiki script was also added to the Unicode standard in 2008.

The acknowledgment of the Ol Chiki script in India and its inclusion in the Unicode standard stimulated the Santal of Bangladesh to pursue a distinct Santal identity by using Ol Chiki. However, the Ol Chiki script is not familiar in Bangladesh, being used only by the Santal living in India. Tudu ([Dulal S] 2013) remarks that in Bangladesh over time, both the Roman and the Bengali scripts have been used for Santali. The first educational system for the Santal, established by missionaries in Naongaon District in 1904, supported reading the Bible in Santali. In addition, the Santal of Bangladesh published some newspapers to promote the use of their language, such as *Abowak Kurumutu* and *Godet* (from Dinajpur District), and *Dharwak* (from Dhaka District). All these publications were written in the Roman script (Tudu [Dulal S] 2013), as is confirmed by Samar M. Soren, who commented that in the last ninety years Santali literature has been published in the Roman script.¹³¹ The linguistic survey of the Santali cluster in *Bangladesh: A Sociolinguistic Survey* (2010: 39) shows that 55% of Santal are in favor of the Roman alphabet being used as the Santali script. Hence, the Christian missionaries played an important role in promoting institutional education, collecting folk literature, and studying the language of the Santal, despite the fact that the use of the Roman script to promote use of the Santali language has always been criticized. In fact, the invention of Ol Chiki in India was a form of resistance to all types of colonial hegemony and became a weapon in pursuing the Santals’ distinct identity.

¹³¹ Samar M. Soren. 2013. “Ki hobe Saontali bornamal? (What will be Santali script?).” *Daily Prothom Alo*, 6 February 2013. <http://archive.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2013-02-06/news/327005>. (accessed 09.07.2017).

Thus, in 2017 the Santal prolonged this conflictual messiness by bringing in a third opinion, namely to adopt Ol Chiki in Bangladesh. Manik Soren,¹³² the information and research officer of the JAP, became the vanguard in the move to introduce Ol Chiki in Bangladesh. He communicated with the All India Adivasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association (All India ASECA), writing to it as follows on 14 January 2017:

I hope you may be concerned about the ongoing debate regarding the Santali script, which will be taken [to] Bangladesh. The decision is still pending because of the very hardline positions of the supporters of the Bangla script and Roman script... We have opportunities for Ol Chiki in Bangladesh. But we have [had] lack of support from you. Personally, I tried to contact you and was able to exchange a few emails, but I did not receive enough consultation and direction. I am still hoping that you will give a hand to spread the Ol Chiki in Bangladesh.¹³³

P.C. Hembram, the General Secretary of the ASECA, responded as follows to Manik Soren on 14 March 2017:

Linguists all over the world are of the same opinion that a language should adopt a single script. Otherwise, it will lead nowhere. And for this reason, only “Ol Chiki” has been accepted by the Government of India...pros, and cons of adopting “Ol Chiki” have to be analyzed and understood properly by the Santals of Bangladesh. It will be their collective wisdom and unanimous/majority decision, and we have nothing to add to that. If they elect “Ol Chiki” to be their writing medium, we from India will try to extend all kinds of initial support through official (government-level) channel.¹³⁴

¹³² Manik Soren himself is a traditional believer, a young Santal and a journalism graduate from the Rajshahi University. Rather than serving for the JAP or to introduce Ol Chiki in Bangladesh, he is involved in many activities to renew Santal traditions: for instance, he is one of the administrators of Santali Wikipedia, penning articles for indigenous rights and launching events to revitalize celebrated images of the Santali festivals. The initiative of Manik Soren in reviving the image of the *baha* festival is discussed in Ch. 8.

¹³³ All India ASECA. 2017. <http://www.allindiaaseca.org/BANGLADESH/MANIK-SOREN/manik-soren.html>. (accessed 04.05.2017).

¹³⁴ Ibid. (accessed 04.05.2017).

This e-mail communication between Manik Soren and the All India ASECA was published on the ASECA website and gave rise to new conflicts among the Santal living in Bangladesh. Although Manik Soren and Rabindranath Soren are both associated with the JAP, and the JAP has been advocating adoption of the Bengali script since the 1990s, Manik Soren's attempts to introduce Ol Chiki in Bangladesh have now created further conflict. I therefore asked Manik Soren how the claims to indigeneity by the Santal will be advanced by writing in Ol Chiki. He replied:

There is no debate over how long we have been following the Roman or Bengali script. At some stage we will have to decide what would be appropriate for our distinct identity. Thus, Santal, whether living in India or Bangladesh, should adopt a single script, and that would be Ol Chiki.

The debate over the merits of Bengali and Roman has been intensified by the proposal to adopt Ol Chiki. However, Rabindranath Soren influenced the situation by saying: "Pre-primary Santal children are already struggling to adopt the mainstream books in Bengali; they would benefit if the Bangla alphabet were to be introduced to them earlier. We can also consider a version of the books in Ol Chiki."¹³⁵ Nevertheless, Jogendranath Soren, president of the Morcha, feels strongly that the Roman script should be adopted: "Roman scripts are not Roman since they were accepted as Santali alphabets some 154 years ago."¹³⁶ Regardless of the controversies that broke out during my fieldwork, one student in class five in primary school, Alex Tudu of Burutola village, said: "I have no idea about Ol Chiki. I am quite familiar with Bengali sounds, and the Roman alphabet is relatively similar to English. Only some sounds are unfamiliar to me." From the nationalist viewpoint, language is significant in determining ethnic identity. However, the conflicts over the script have aggravated the religious differences and become a political tool by dividing the Santal into two interest groups. The question of which Santali script to use in

¹³⁵ "Santal children yet to get textbooks in mother tongue." *The Daily Star*, 08 January 2017. <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/santal-children-yet-get-textbooks-mother-tongue-1342030> . (accessed 11.05.2017).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* (accessed 11.05.2017).

school books has been fought over since 2012, and the third proposal to adopt Ol Chiki as the Santali script does not make the political decision any easier.

To obtain the views of the state on this matter, I talked to a state representative, Fazle Hossain Badsha, a national Member of Parliament, who has the power to influence government decisions. He said,

I am willing to resolve the debate, but the solution should come from the Santal and, given the current debate, I would suggest printing one book in both scripts. During the years of primary education, the teachers will follow the suitable script. The experiment will support us in finalizing the Santali script for school books as well. In fact, the language is more important than the question: What will be the written Santali script?

Thus, he was in favor of deferring a decision regarding whether Bengali or Roman should be the script used in Santali school books. This strategy has been adopted by the state to avoid the controversy. The nationalist structure of Bangladesh expressly requires “authenticity” and “autochthony” to be indigenous, and this is a significant position for anyone wishing to reject the Santals’ demands.

However, in Bangladesh the promotion of Ol Chiki was criticized by the promoter of the Roman script. According to Sunil Murmu, one of the organizers of the Morcha, who works in Godagari Upazila, “when traditional believers failed to promote the Bengali script, they proposed Ol Chiki to be adopted as a distinct Santali script.” The controversies have increased, indicating that indigenous activists are being essentialist in their desire to revive Santal identity. At the same time, essentialism is being promoted by the state and NGOs (Wade, 2010). The promotion of Ol Chiki requires essentialism if the Santals’ distinct ethnic identity is to be revived, but its strength is rather being dispersed. Choksi (2014a), in his PhD thesis, deals particularly with the multilingual and multiscriptal Santali scripts used by Santal living in India and demonstrates the nexus between “script, performance and politics.” He continues:

The continued use of multiple scripts and codes by Santals for political purposes suggests a multi-layered notion of autonomy, of which Ol-Chiki only forms one part. The use of Eastern Brahmi and Roman, either independently or in concert with Ol-Chiki, provides a more complicated account of autonomy that goes beyond the assertion of a single Santal identity or unified accounts of resistance or recognition. (Choksi 2014a: 5)

In the view of Choksi (2014a), a hostile environment would result from adopting a unified Santali script. Indeed, the decisions over which script to use in producing written documentation are made and kept by outsiders, although the development of a distinct script called Ol-Chiki offers the possibility to bring the Santal together with a fixed identity, while also endangering their authenticity. Furthermore, decisions over different scripts (except the Roman) reflect the adoption of scripts as a living essence when Santal have to be bilingual in order to sustain their everyday lives, otherwise the situation may be worsened by the power exerted over the minorities.

Consequently, the struggle for a distinct script is correlated with the construction of identity and indexes the patchwork of stories of social and political survival. Barth (1969) shows that the Pashto language is a crucial attribute of being Pathan, though the language is not the only element promoting a unified identity, as multiple groups may belong to the same linguistic category. Barth (1969) criticizes the concept of ethnic groups being suffused with self-contained sets of cultural attributes, but ethnic groups are interrelated to one another, and differences can be accounted for by referring to given situations. But the activism of the Santal in establishing a distinct Santal identity is contextual; it varies according to the contexts of Bangladesh and India. The Santals' geographical boundaries are maintained by political relationships rather than cultural differences. From the Bangladeshi perspective, the adoption of the Santali script for use in textbooks will be determined by the power relations between traditional and evangelized Santal and the state.

5.3. Discord among the Santal and the Breakdown of the National Platform

The reproduction of a distinct Santal identity is contested by dialectical relations among the Santal. The religious fission among the Santal is found from the village to the national levels, as

I have suggested in the previous section of this chapter. The contradictory juxtaposition also ruptured the organization of the indigenous peoples of the plains, the JAP, which has been defending their positions nationally.

Situngtola, one of the villages where I carried my fieldwork, is located near Kakonhat, where the organizational structure of the JAP was established in 1994. Another alliance for the indigenous peoples of the plains, the Morcha, was founded in the same area in 2012. Its founding members claimed that the JAP's efforts in advocating indigenous peoples' demands nationally had failed. To explore this allegation, I held informal discussions in the locality of Kakonhat and some formal discussions with local and national organizers. This revealed that the religious fission had acted to split the JAP, despite a hidden conflict of personalities between institutionally highly qualified Santal and others with comparatively low academic skills¹³⁷ but with greater political achievements. It was the conflict between these two groups that led to the break-up of the JAP. As a consequence, a local incident later forced the disputes into the light and accelerated the rupture. Suresh Mardi, a resident of Ramnagar village near Kakonhat, told me about the local incident that had brought the conflict out into the open:

5.3.1. Case Study Two: The Suicide of Serafina Mardi

In 2010, on the eve of Easter Sunday, Serafina Mardi, a 14-year-old girl, was gang-raped by seven Santal men. She was a student in class four in a nearby primary school and a resident of Amtali village in Godagari Upazila. The village is near Kakonhat and close to Situngtola. After the incident, her father, Cornelius Mardi, screamed in anger, took a cutlass in his hand, and moved around the villages to kill the rapists. Due to his reaction, the Manjhi Parishad of his village punished him by imposing a penalty of Tk. 200 (about 2 Euros). In the meantime, the news spread to adjacent areas. The Thana Pargana of Godagari Upazila¹³⁸ (Godagari Thana

¹³⁷ The former JAP president, Anil Marandi, graduated from a local high school, the current president, Rabindranath Soren, from college, although they have been dynamic and politically active in serving the indigenous peoples' demands for decades. Jogendranath Soren, President of the Morcha, graduated from university and is now a Professor of Physics in a college in Rajshahi District, and other members of the Morcha are also well qualified. When I was carrying out fieldwork, some JAP members and local NGO organizers informed me that in doing social work these well-qualified "educated" people found themselves exercising less political power and being given less priority. Thus, they attempted to establish another platform for the indigenous peoples of the plains in order to advance their ambitions for leadership.

¹³⁸ Thana Pargana of Godagari Upazila was formed in 1982 by a development project of Caritas Bangladesh aimed

Pargana) and the Manjhi Parishad of the village, in cooperation with Father Barnard Tudu of the Shurshunipara Mission (Amtali village falls under the jurisdiction of the Shurshunipara Mission), made an effort to resolve the matter through village arbitration. Father Barnard Tudu took custody of the girl, and the sisters of the mission took care of her. Father Barnard Tudu, along with the Godagari Thana Pargana members, resolved the issue, and a verdict was declared that the families of the seven rapists should jointly pay compensation of one hundred and twelve thousand taka (approximately 1200 Euros) to the victim's family, and also that the first rapist had to marry the girl. The judgement also decided that the father of the girl would be made withdraw the case he had filed against the rapists in court. It should also be mentioned that in the meantime only four of the rapists had been arrested, the rest having escaped. In accordance with the judgement, the victim's father withdrew the case and received the compensation money from the rapists. However, the first rapist refused to marry the girl. During this time, Serafina Mardi was suffering socially and even in her family, failing to receive proper counseling or care. In 2011, she set fire to herself in an attempt to commit suicide. In a serious condition, she was admitted to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, but after surviving a few days she died. The Serafina Mardi rape case then turned into a murder case with intent. Her father filed a murder charge, and the state's law agencies again became involved.

At this point the JAP intervened directly as well. Rabindranath Soren said: "Whether the rapists are Santal or Bengali, indeed a rapist is a rapist. We want a proper judgement of the rapists, according to the country's law." However, the Godagari Thana Pargana decided to resolve the problem within the community because the rapists were Santals, and the judgement was based on this assumption. It appeared that gang-rape was acceptable provided the village's verdict was followed, aided by money and muscle. But Serafina Madri's suicide called this judgment into question. Faced with this situation, the JAP organized a human chain at Godagari Upazila and a series of protests calling for justice. The Deputy Commissioner, the Divisional Commissioner, and the Superintendent of Police of Rajshahi called for negotiations with the Godagari Thana Pargana, but the latter were arrested for breaking the state's laws. In these

at revitalizing the traditional Santali system of governance. After the Serafina Mardi incident, the head of the Thana Pargana, Biswanath Tudu, was imprisoned for violating the country's law. The Thana Pargana refrained from refilling the position, and the institution became inactive. Later, an interim committee was formed headed by Babulal Murmu, one of the active organizers of the Morcha in the Godagari Upazila.

circumstances, the JAP supported the state and objected to the decision of the Godagari Thana Pargana. The Santal community in the Kakonhat area was divided, one side supporting the decision of the Godagari Thana Pargana, the other side supporting the JAP's position. In fact, the traditional believers supported the JAP, the Christian Santal the Godagari Thana Pargana.

The case is still pending, but the arrested rapists and the members of the Godagari Thana Pargana were all released from prison after an appeal. After this incident, the Godagari Thana Pargana became inactive. Later an interim committee was formed, but the negotiators for the rapists formed another national platform, leading to the emergence of the Morcha¹³⁹ in the Godagari Upazila. The Morcha stated that “the JAP works against the indigenous communities and displays its superiority.”

However, there is a different perspective on the emergence of the JAP. In the 1990s mass dispossessions of indigenous land increased the anger among the indigenous people living in Godagari Upazila and served as a background for the emergence of the JAP. At that time, the Jatiya Krishok Somity ([National Peasant's Association] JKS), a national peasant wing of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh (WPB), was increasing its cooperation with indigenous peoples in order to mobilize this anger in the form of protests. Professor Mesbah Kamal, also a member of the JKS, described the background to the protest. During an interview, he told me that the mass discontent of the indigenous peoples of the plains eventually led to the formation of the JAP in 1994. The indigenous people of Godagari Upazila had blockaded the District Commissioner's office in Rajshahi in the same year. Fazle Hossain Badsha, the National General Secretary of the WPB, who comes from Rajshahi, was involved in building a national platform for the indigenous peoples of the plains. The emergence of the JAP was supported by the WPB. In its initial stages, the JAP had incorporated different political parties in its organizational arrangements, but those affiliated with the right-wing political parties soon left the JAP. Not even the JAP was able to turn itself into a joint platform for the left-wing groups. At the same time, the WPB was never interested in establishing democratic practices within the JAP, but worked for the WPB as a

¹³⁹ The inhabitants of the Kakonhat area argue that the “Serafina Mardi Rape Case” encouraged the emergence of the Morcha. The Morcha, however, denies this and states that its eleven-point demand was significant in advancing the rights and local demands of the indigenous peoples of the plains in Bangladesh.

dependent platform. The institutional arrangements of the JAP have always been guided by the WPB. In this regard, Professor Mesbah Kamal said:

It is a political limitation of the political culture of Bangladesh. However, despite many limitations, the JAP has achieved significant importance in negotiating the demands of the indigenous people of the plains, and it has been recognized as the national platform for [them].

Indeed, the JAP has supported the rights of this group for over two decades. The major political parties in Bangladesh (BAL, BNP) have never developed a political wing or front for the indigenous people, nor expressed any solidarity with the JAP.

Recognition of the claims to an indigenous identity and the restoration of land rights are the JAP's core concerns. In addition, the JAP demands the establishment of a separate land commission for the indigenous peoples of the plains, the establishment of cultural academies in districts inhabited by indigenous people, primary school education in the mother tongue, a separate indigenous ministry at the national level, provision for restoring indigenous peoples' lands by the government, and so on. The Morcha has drawn up an eleven-point list of demands to uphold indigenous people's rights nationally which are essentially the same as the nine-point demands of the JAP. At present, the organizational activities of the Morcha only involve the Godagari Upazila in Rajshahi District, but the coalition has also presented its demands in different political and social platforms. In an interview, Jogendranath Soren said;

The JAP always takes a position against the indigenous peoples, just as they took the side of the state in the Serafina rape case, and they advocate adoption of the Bengali script for teaching Santali. In the same way, they supported the current ruling party when Benjamin Tudu competed to become head of the Rajshahi Division Ethnic Minority Cultural Academy (the Academy).

In fact, the Benjamin Tudu suspension case turned into a crucial dispute between the JAP and the Morcha, increasing the level of conflict between the two indigenous platforms and revealing the

split within the Santal which persists in the form of the division between the traditional believers and the followers of Christianity. The evidence about Benjamin Tudu's suspension allows rigorous reflections to be made when scrutinizing the controversies between the JAP and the Morcha. The case proceeded as follows:

5.3.2. Case Study Three: The Suspension of Benjamin Tudu

Benjamin Tudu, a research officer of the Academy, was accused of violating its rules and regulations and was subsequently suspended in 2012. He belongs to the Santal community. S.M. Shamim Akter, the Deputy Director of the Academy, whose ethnic identity is Bengali, has been serving as its head since its inception in 2003. It should be noted that the Deputy Director's position is the highest position in the Academy, serving as the head of the Academy. Benjamin Tudu was recruited as a research officer in the same year. Subsequently, in 2010, the Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institute Act was adopted and, in accordance with the Act, the head of the Academy had to be recruited from among the ethnic minorities of the areas adjoining the Academy [Article 11 (1)]. The other six "Small Ethnic Cultural Academies of Bangladesh" follow this stipulation. Benjamin Tudu belonged to the indigenous communities adjoining the Academy and fulfilled the criterion of having nine years of work experience, so he satisfied the conditions for becoming the next Deputy Director of the Academy. In contrast, S.M. Shamim Akter had built up an indigenous-friendly image and had a strategic relationship with the ruling party, the BAL, which led the fourteen-party alliance that included the WBP. Benjamin Tudu, by contrast, had been associated politically with the BNP, which helped him to obtain the job when the BNP was the ruling party of Bangladesh (2001-2006). The Morcha took the side of Benjamin Tudu and advocated appointing him as the Deputy Director of the Academy, while the JAP maintained its political alliance with the WBP. Thus, the staffing of posts in the Academy became polarized and politicized, and finally Benjamin Tudu was suspended.

Due to its lack of a strategic political alliance, the Morcha was not able to lobby for Benjamin Tudu. Although the Morcha has a strong position regarding the adoption of the Roman script for textbooks, it has a weak reputation when it comes to advocating the demands of the indigenous peoples of the plains. The Morcha emerged as a result of a local dispute, and the controversies are a core part of the positioning of its organizational activities. Conversely, the

JAP has already occupied the organizational space of the indigenous peoples of the plains, although its growth has been politicized by the political culture of Bangladesh.

Nonetheless, it was not only because of the emergence of the Morcha that the organizational activities of the JAP were questioned and in the course of time challenged. For instance, in 2003 the Bangladesh Communist Party (CPB) also established a platform for the indigenous peoples of the plains, called the Bangladesh Adivasi Union. Rebeca Soren, the sister of the indigenous leader, Alfred Soren,¹⁴⁰ became its leading representative. However, after a few years it faded away.

Indeed, in Bangladesh there are many complex issues linked with the subjugation of the Santals' past. As noted in Ch. 3, in the case of the Nachol revolt, the uprising of Santal farmers in 1949-1950 recalls their complicated past and prolongs Santal subordination. Upen Hembram of Kankonhat commented on the Nachol revolt during my fieldwork: "We have always been used by others to fight frontline battles, but we were not able to achieve our rights." Upen's opinion underlines the process of objectifying the Santal, which has occurred over a long period. As a matter of fact, after the Nachol revolt was defeated, there followed a period with little advocacy of the issues of the indigenous peoples of the plains in Bangladesh, which were then taken up, however, by the emergence of the JAP, although this seems to have become politicized because of Bangladesh's partisan politics.

The disputes between the JAP and the Morcha reflect positions of both rigidity and fluidity. They also show that the Santal involve themselves in reflexive relationships, endeavoring to produce their own identity by engaging in many controversies. As the emergence of the Morcha was not politically grounded, their organizational growth continues in the shadow

¹⁴⁰ Alfred Soren from Naogoan District was an indigenous leader in northern Bangladesh and a member of the JAP. He attempted to prevent the eviction of nineteen indigenous families living on state-owned land in Vimpur Sorderpara village, but the local landlords' musclemen attacked the village and killed him on 18 August 2000. Since then, the indigenous leaders and activists have been demanding proper judgment of Alfred Soren's murder case, but it is still pending trial. For details, see Jahangir Alam Akash. "Indigenous-Christian Leader Alfred Soren Murder and Justice." *Human Rights Today-Peace J&D*. 01 February. 2010. <https://jaakash.wordpress.com/2010/02/01/indigenous-christian-leader-alfred-soren-murder-and-justice/>. (accessed 18.05.2017).

of subjective clashes rather than advancing political aims. Furthermore, the idea of an essential or authentic identity has been pursued by demanding Bengali, Roman or Ol Chiki as the script of choice, indicating that identity is fluid and contextual. Although the existence of indigenous identities is denied by the state, by negotiating with the government over the script to be used in school books, the JAP and Morcha brought about a quasi-chaotic political situation in relation to Santal rights.

5.4. Rupturing and Retaining: Attempts to Revive Santal Identity

These local and national disputes, which produced these fissures among Santal, are explicit in that, to a greater or lesser extent, Santal unity is undermined by the religious division. The controversies over how to maintain Santal identity have created difficulties for both groups of believers (traditional and Christian). Subordination in social settings and majoritarian hegemonic behavior are linked to the repressive power structures that have been imposed on the Santal in living memory. The impact of globally articulated indigenous ideas has stimulated the Santal to renew the ancestral memories of their past. In the villages, they might not be aware of the rise of global indigenous movements, but they are cautiously intent on maintaining their Santalness.

However, the attempt to produce Santalness or an indigenous identity that is not independent of the vernacular involves imagined images. It is certainly influenced by the national and global emergence of indigeneity, while the attitude towards indigeneity stimulates Santal to become an “imagined community.” Benedict Anderson coined the phrase “imagined community” in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Anderson examines the emergence of nationalism with reference to the historical backdrop to the last three centuries. In his view nationalism is a cultural artifact, the nation being “imagined” by virtue of its territory, history, language, and human design. National consciousness is historically tied to western political developments in the eighteenth century, and the modern concepts of time and of print-capitalism create an image of use of the vernacular and a unified imagined community. These images have also worked to build nation states in post-colonial Asia and Africa (ibid.). The controversies among the Santal are ultimately over their identity. Thus, the etic approach also provokes them to be imagined as “old” and “traditional,”

with a destiny of their own, though leading to a polarization of controversial situations, which are not free from nationalistic notions of identity.

By acknowledging the danger of vernacular images, the renewal of Santal identity has always been a pivotal aim of the Santal. Thus, in paying attention to the dynamism of the claim to be “indigenous”, it is equally crucial to remember that being “traditional” grounded their demands in the complex set of journeys supporting that claim, in which they anticipate obtaining their rights, even though their ethnic identity is tied to interactions with “others” (cf. Barth, 1969). Thus, social contacts play a meaningful role in maintaining ethnic identity. The “continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders” (ibid.: 14) has a social meaning in maintaining boundaries. The Santal try to maintain differences and, at the same time, try to hide cultural differences. Their interactions with “others” are crucial for the Santal. However, the ignorance of Bengalis has also aggravated the complexities of their situation for the Santal. A sense of subordination has occupied their minds and led to a distance growing up among them, a distance embedded from outside to inside. The state and the preachers of Christianity avoided responding to these controversies, though they are certainly significant actors in creating them among the Santal. Conversely, the controversies among the Santal also have a remarkable reciprocal power in producing the energy to sharpen Santalness (discussed in more detail in Chs. 6-8). The attempts to renew the past and their roots circulate within the Santal by producing traditions. The discussions over the controversies reveal that they are creating alternative spaces in order to redefine their identity.

Therefore, as mentioned above, the discussion in this chapter has uncovered four ingrained facts. First, the controversies between traditional (*bideen*) and Christian (*esoie*) Santal have undermined their collective strength. Secondly, the controversial communal position is holding back their success – that is, the disputes over choosing a script for the Santali language are introducing a quasi-political atmosphere into movements supporting the rights of the indigenous peoples of the plains. Thirdly, the rupture of the JAP and the rise of the Morcha have institutionalized the fission between the two religious beliefs. Thus, the contested relations between traditional and Christian Santal also shed light on the national level, which ultimately polarized the Santals’ political goals. Finally, the controversies contextualize the fluidities of

these situations and urge a review of the pluralistic and fluid perspectives of identity because in resisting and living under social subjugation, both groups of believers find themselves in the same place.

5.5. Concluding Remarks

The ethnic relations of the Santal are significant in magnifying their claims to be indigenous. The discussion in this chapter reveals that the disputes between *bideen* (traditional) and *esoie* (Christian) have contributed to the religious fission and are hindering Santal's struggles to obtain their rights and assert their identity. Although from the essentialist point of view religion may be used to construct an identity, the historical dimensions of the process of converting the Santal increased their social exclusion, including their social subordination. From the perspective of Santal life, "...ethnic identities are involved with – resources, power, livelihood, autonomy and interdependent knowledge of oneself and others, a sense of the past and future" (Wade 2010: 153). Thus, controversies can provide a resource whereby Santal activists may find a patchwork of complex political networks, in which, however, they have been perpetually objectified. Consequently, the chapter makes explicit the controversies over choosing a script for the Santali language that points to an understanding of the structural relationship between the Santal and the state, as well as the factors involved in proselytization. The evidence and the analysis in this chapter of the rupturing of the platform supporting the indigenous peoples of the plains reveals the complex confrontation between traditional and Christian believers among the Santal, which becomes reduced to serving subjective ends, thus obstructing their wider political goals. Ultimately, the controversies described among the Santal show how they live discursively in different locations, for example, in villages, in places of local organizations, and on national platforms, while ever struggling to renew the notion of a Santal identity. Therefore, in investigating the organizational setting of the Santal, we find their identity being embodied by maintaining the alliance with the Manjhi Parishad. The discussion in the next chapter will provide evidence of this.

Chapter 6

Manjhi Parishad (Village Council): Confronting and Creating Santal Identity

Manjhi Parishad is the symbol of our oneness. Without the Parishad, we cannot govern our village life. Nowadays, it is divided into two groups, and the division is demolishing our 'atu sagai' (village unity).

—Sofia Tudu, an elderly woman from Burutola village

The change and continuity of the Manjhi Parishad were both voiced by Sofia Tudu, as a Manjhi Parishad traditionally governed each village. The religious fission and internal conflicts have led to the village council splitting and a second council being established, indicating a firm requirement, as the village life of the Santal is still governed by the Manjhi Parishad. The interference of evangelization was mainly blamed for dividing the traditional village council. The maintenance of village life is constituted and integrated by the governing role of the Manjhi Parishad. My fieldwork materials from the three villages' reveal the involvement and mutual avoidance of the three actors (state, churches, and NGOs) that invested in reformulating and restructuring the Manjhi Parishad. In analyzing the dynamic role of the *manjhis* (village headmen), my ethnographic findings recall the observations of Somers (1977), even though he worked among the Santal a few decades ago. He described Santal society as “encapsulated,” the authority of the *manjhi* being dichotomized as, in Bailey’s words, “partly independent of, and partly regulated by, a larger encapsulating structure” (Bailey 1969: 12, quoted in Somers 1977: 51). The evidence of my own ethnographic fieldwork, however, suggests encroachment rather than encapsulation, as the intermediaries (NGOs and churches) objectified the Manjhi Parishad for the sake of their prescribed development. In contrast, the governing power of the Santali village council is overlooked in enacting the Acts relating to local government in Bangladesh.¹⁴¹ In living with this paradox, the Santal attempt to retain their cultural traditions through the Manjhi Parishad. Indeed, the persistence of the Manjhi Parishad decodes their cultural strength and symbolizes their resistance to projected development. At present, it has divided and isolated

¹⁴¹ The rural and regional local government structure of Bangladesh has four tiers. As discussed in Ch. 4, Santal village life mainly communicates with the lowest level local-government tier called the Union Parishad and to some extent with the Upazila Parishad (sub-districts). A large number of local government Acts have been enacted in Bangladesh, but these have not even acknowledged, let alone incorporated the village council structure of the Santal.

them from the external but apparently independent Manjhi Parishad, with its limited authority to govern the social life of the Santal. In point of fact the maintenance of village unity (*atu sagai*) is ideologically paramount to the Santal, being determined by the perpetuation of a single Manjhi Parishad. This is the reason for Sofia Tudu's disappointment, especially when she says, "the division is not a good sign for our 'atu sagai'."

Therefore, in this chapter I discuss the distinct characteristics of the Manjhi Parishad, their social contacts with intermediaries, particularly with NGOs, and their integration with the transformation of and departure from their traditions. In fact, the churches' involvement, NGO development programs, and national denials have all led to this macro-meddling situation, which somehow regulates and influences the governing role of the Manjhi Parishad. This chapter demonstrates the comprehensive characteristics of the Manjhi Parishad by investigating the niches of dependence and independence, thus revealing the multifaceted interference of the intermediaries. It also addresses certain arguments such as how the affiliation with any Manjhi Parishad supports the maintenance of Santal identity, how the intermediaries forced the traditional village council to accept their agendas, and whether or how even a dichotomized Manjhi Parishad is still essential for the Santal. The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates the necessity of the Manjhi Parishad, as well as revealing the contemporary disputes and disagreements among the Santal themselves. By describing the traditional structure of governance, the chapter reveals the endemic nature of the Santalness that exists through this alliance with the Manjhi Parishad. In discussing the dynamic activities of the Manjhi Parishad, it is critical to remember that in this thesis the term "tradition" is used with reference to the collected memories of the Santal which they experienced as they changed (see Ch. 1). This chapter shows the application of traditions through the Manjhi Parishad to be most suitable way of responding to the question of how to exercise traditions among the Santal. This has turned into an instrument to sharpen the notion of Santalness, instead of attending to the characteristics of nationalistic notions of identity.

While most Manjhi Parishads are now divided, the continued existence of a single Manjhi Parishad in Situngtola village symbolized the consensus of the villagers, as reflected in Minoti Tudu's words when she said, "Currently most of the Santali villages are divided into two

religious groups, and accordingly the Manjhi Parishad is as well. However, our village is a unique village in this area because we are united by following one Manjhi Parishad.” The village community perceives its alliance with any Manjhi Parishad as an obvious way of maintaining their Santalness. Thus, when one group breaks the association with the existing Manjhi Parishad, they form another so as to maintain the life of the village. In this way, the village of Burutola added two more Manjhi Parishads owing to their internal communal conflicts. In Champatola, two Manjhi Parishads exist to govern the same village, one for traditional believers, the other for Christian Santal. Currently, most Santal villages are divided into two Manjhi Parishads, like Champatola. In order to investigate this paradoxical situation, I was careful in selecting villages for my fieldwork, as I explain in Ch. 1. Nonetheless, the current split in the Manjhi Parishad is the most discussed topic among the Santal, who agree that it undermines Santal unity. Their endeavor to renew Santal identity is evident in how they deal with village affairs in traditional ways.

The four collected case studies in this chapter depict the Santal as accommodating the changes to and transformation of their traditions as their own. The *kulhi durup* (village council meeting) and *manjhis* (headmen) were targeted by the Christian missionaries when they started preaching to the Santal in the nineteenth century (Carrin and Tambs-Lyche 2003). The encroachment of the churches has continued into the present. Subsequently, the NGOs also targeted the Manjhi Parishads in supporting donor-driven development goals. The various contacts with the village councils impacted on the Santals’ world-view and undermined their ethos. For example, the NGOs also reinforced the prohibition on drinking *handi*, suggested that the number of days of celebration of traditional festivals be minimized while also funding the celebrations of traditional festivals (*shorai, baha*). By virtue of NGO projects, the ritualized life of the Santal shifted from practice to performance, while these types of intervention popularized the global understanding of the claims to indigeneity among young Santal. These revitalization programs expanded the requirement to “be lost” and stressed the need “to be old” in order to claim an indigenous identity. The combined paradox of the development schemes of the two different groups of actors (churches and NGOs) go hand in hand. In fact, these interferences fed the nationalist view to create the sort of essentialism that assigns ethnic identity to predetermined boxes.

In spite of these interferences, the Santal are maintaining their village order through the Manjhi Parishads. In describing the experiences of Santal living in Bangladesh and India, Shariff (2013) remarks that their social strength lies in their preference for resolving their disputes at the village level by themselves and thus avoiding interference by the police or other state bodies. According to Shariff (ibid.), these traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms oppose hegemonic powers and become “a symbol of defiance” that protects their ethnic identity. In the same spirit, Nader (1990) discussed the concept of a “harmony ideology” by stating that “a bad compromise is better than a good fight” and that harmonious communal behavior can be used as a strategic way of confronting conflicts with the hegemonic power structure. She illustrates this idea by examining the Zapotec of Mexico, who also experienced colonial penetration and evangelization. Nevertheless, the Zapotec drew on their own sense of communal harmony to deal with disputes in ways that helped protect their cultural differences. Like the Zapotec the Santal have also experienced colonialism and evangelism, yet they continue to draw on their traditional practices in resolving disputes. This comparison supports the investigation of how communal harmony may become a weapon undermining hegemonic power. In the same vein, Scott’s (1985, 1990) concept of everyday forms of resistance explains their collecting evidence of their cultural strength. This evidence is significant in relating the power of an oppressed people to the hegemonic power structure, where the activities of the oppressed achieve the goal of resistance. However, in dealing with the dynamic power of the *manjhis*, the research conducted by Somers (1977: 10) revealed the dyadic aspect of the Santal social system. He says, “The Santal social system must be labelled ‘traditional’ but is it certainly in a state of flux; this state is typified by ‘events of harmony’ as well as ‘events of discord’” (ibid.).

The basic elements of the “harmony ideology” are reflected among the Santal in respect of their preference for continuing to assert their Santalness through the traditional village council by either dividing or combining their traditions when it comes to resolving conflicts. In both forms, the role of a Manjhi Parishad is to seek to maintain Santal identity. I also came across villagers with similar concerns as those expressed by Mohon Tudu, the *paranik* (deputy headman) of Situngtola village, who said, “As Santals we need the Manjhi Parishad to mediate our village affairs and to be a medium of maintaining our Santalness.” This simple but firm

statement is the best way to understand the Santals' ability to determine their own cultural identity. The discussion in this chapter will also ascertain the truthfulness of this statement.

6.1. Function and Structure of the Manjhi Parishad

Despite the multifaceted interferences it has undergone, the Manjhi Parishad is still a fully-fledged governing body with authority primarily in governing the village life of the Santal. Succession to the position of *manjhis* (headmen) is hereditary, as it is for most of the other officials. In describing the Santal village council, colonial rulers used various terms such as “polity” (Dalton 1872: 213), “communal organization” (Risley 1892: 234), “village government” (Hunter 1868: 216), and “village officials” (Archer 1984: 5). In describing the village council of Pangro, Troisi (2000) used the Santali term *more hor*, literally “five persons,” used colloquially to refer to the village council. In Bangladesh the term *more hor* is not used, the village council usually being called the Manjhi Parishad. The lowest level of the government structure in Bangladesh, the “Union Parishad,” has influenced the name of the Manjhi Parishad. “Parishad” is a Bengali word meaning “council” or “committee.” However, the council deals with both administrative and judicial issues in the village, in which it works as an autonomous body. Through the *kulhi durup*, the village council makes rules and regulations related to village affairs. Under normal circumstances, the village council meeting or *kulhi durup* takes place once a month, but in the case of an emergency it can call a meeting at any time. A member of each household has to be present at a *kulhi durup*, the date and time for which is fixed taking into account the date of the weekly market and the times people work in the paddy fields. The muddy square within the village or the courtyard of any village council official is chosen as the venue for the meeting, which is usually scheduled for the late evening and is adjourned before nightfall. All village affairs, i.e., births, deaths, marriages, funerals, ceremonial occasions, and the dates of celebrations, are discussed and fixed in the *kulhi durup*, and social behavior of all the members of the village community is regulated, whether complaints or compliments are involved.

In continuing the discussion, this chapter should be referred to Ch. 5, where I discuss the present-day divisions among the Santal between *esoie* (Christian) and *bideen* (traditional believer), which have also affected the divisions in the Manjhi Parishad. Thus, the Manjhi Parishad in Champatola has been divided into two units, for traditional and Christian Santal

respectively. In the village of Burutola, internal conflicts among the Santal have led to the addition of two Manjhi Parishads, though all the residents of the village have converted. Given the large size, the number of inhabitants, and the existence of a lot of farmland in the middle of the village, the village has been divided geographically into two parts, one part known as Big Burutola, the other as Small Burutola. The size and geographical location of the village justified the existence of two Manjhi Parishads, one for each part of the village. Thereafter, different group interests among the Santal generated two additional Manjhi Parishads. Currently, therefore, Burutola has four Manjhi Parishads. Thus, the divisions among the various Manjhi Parishads cannot be reduced to religious divisions alone. When a dissident group establishes another Manjhi Parishad, the requirement to affiliate with any Manjhi Parishad remains explicit. Therefore, the divisions in Burutola and Champatola affect the regulation of village affairs. Conversely, officials drawn from both groups of believers sit on the Manjhi Parishad of Situngtola, which has therefore become a symbol of “*atu-sagai*.”

Thus, I found that the Manjhi Parishads are functioning strongly in the villages where I conducted fieldwork. I observed that the Manjhi Parishads are structured in nearly the same way as found in the colonial documents, although their authority and autonomy are nowadays declining, and they are having to contend with the various changes. Usually, the Manjhi Parishad is composed of seven officials. According to the structure, the *manjhi haram* (village headman) is the chief of the Manjhi Parishad. He represents authority in the village and requires that his instructions be followed, which the villagers are trusted to do. In fact, the *manjhi haram* is “a genial disciplinarian, a communal custodian” of the village (Archer 1984: 4). The next official is the *paranik* or deputy headman, whose responsibilities are to minimize the disputes that occur in the village and to organize trials and arbitration if required. In practice, the *paranik* serves as the chief judicial authority in the village. If the *manjhi haram* is absent, he acts as the *manjhi haram* as well. The third official, the *jogmanjhi* or keeper of village morals, mainly regulates moral issues and organizes marriages in the village. Next to the *jogmanjhi* comes the *jogparanik*, who acts as assistant to the *jogmanjhi*. The two religious officials are the *nayeki* (principal priest of the village) and his assistant the *kudum nayeki*, both being important positions. The *nayeki* supervises all the festivals and regulates the mobility of the village’s internal deities. The *kudum nayeki* mainly controls the intrusion of external deities into the village, and once a year he

sacrifices blood to prevent evil deities from entering the village. The official *gudit* or messenger mainly conveys the Manjhi Parishad's messages and judgements to the village community.

As already noted, ideologically one Manjhi Parishad governs a single village, as it is an expression of Santal unity, but nowadays most villages have two Manjhi Parishads. Hence, the traditional believers' Manjhi Parishad in Champatola village has only three officials, namely the *manjhi haram*, *jogmanjhi*, and *gudit*. Johon Murmu, the *manjhi haram* for the traditional believers, said, "Only seven families are followers of the traditional belief system in the village. Thus, we don't need the full seven-member governing body. I serve the roles of both *manjhi* and *nayeki*." Conversely, a significant change has occurred in the positions of *nayeki* and *kudum nayeki*. These two positions were excluded from the Christian Manjhi Parishad, the position of chapel-master being included instead. In the vicinity of the village, the chapel-master is known as the *girja-master*. His primary responsibility is to organize the weekly prayer session. Alternatively, in the village of Situngtola, the traditional and Christian Santal have one Manjhi Parishad between them, and, given the harmony that prevails between both groups of believers, they have incorporated the position of chapel-master, as well as those of *nayeki* and *kudum nayeki*.

Manjhi Parishad officials are mainly male members of the village community. Hunter commented, "The village government is purely patriarchal" (1868: 216), although Archer (1984: 9) explained that in some cases a woman may be appointed as a *manjhi*. However, during my fieldwork, I did not find any village where women were serving as the *manjhi*. Some villagers even commented, "Women do not have the competence to serve in this position." However, in the village milieu, the *manjhi burhi* (the wife of the village headman) and the *neyeki burhi* (the wife of the village priest) are given special honors connected with those of their respective husbands. From the modern perspective of gender equality, some NGOs have tried to have positions assigned to women in the Manjhi Parishad. I came across two women's positions in the Manjhi Parishad, which were introduced to include issues concerning the women of the village in the *kulhi durup*. However, in the transition from one period to another, the Manjhi Parishad officials in Situngtola abandoned the women's positions. Mohon Tudu, *paranik* of the Manjhi

Parishad, said, “During the last five years, we did not find any value in the women’s positions.” In contrast, Linton Mardi, *jagparanik* of Champatola, said,

The NGOs suggested that we should include women as Manjhi Parishad officials, and the father of the respective church agreed. Thus, we recently appointed two women members and recommended that they organize the cultural activities during our ceremonial occasions and help the chapel-master organize the weekly prayers.

In Burutola village, though women members were included in two of the four Manjhi Parishads, group conflicts undermined the inclusion of the women members. Thus, although the positions were not abandoned, later they became dysfunctional.



Figure 11. Officials of the Situngtola Manjhi Parishad in a *kulhi durup* with *handi*. Photo by the author.

The Manjhi Parishads have more or less maintained the five-year cycle in relation to which the performance of their officials is evaluated. One member from each household participates in the evaluation meeting. Generally, the official is appointed to the same position he served in previously. Although Archer (1984: 6-9) mentions that in theory the tenure for all these officials is one year, traditionally they hold their positions for life unless they agree to give up the position, moral or economic corruption is revealed, or they suffer a physical disability. The official positions in the council are hereditary, the eldest son usually being selected as the successor to the position (ibid.). According to tradition, the evaluation meeting is organized in the month of Magh (January–February) during the Magh Festival or first fruits festival (ibid.). At present, however, the Magh festival has been dropped, so the evaluation meeting is usually held after the *sohrai* festival (harvest festival [January–February]), as I discovered during my fieldwork. In the village of Champatola the *manjhi haram* position is inherited, but in Situngtola that has been changed because of an abuse of authority that occurred while I was in the field: Ram Murmu was removed as *manjhi haram* for allegedly embezzling money¹⁴² from the Manjhi Parishad fund.

Manjhi Parishad officials consider it their responsibility to serve the village community. Thus, every official has as their profession the pursuit of their livelihood. In practice, officials receive respect and honor in the village environment. The *gudit* only receives a yearly honorarium, i.e., five kilograms of paddy from each household. During the *baha* festival (spring festival), the *nayeki* is honored by giving him one *gamcha* (local towel) and one *dhuti*¹⁴³ (a long loincloth). Conversely the chapel-master, a position introduced to replace the *nayeki*, receives nothing from the village community, he and his family being supported by the church instead

¹⁴² The Manjhi Parishad of Situngtola village received a special grant from the local Member of Parliament to build a temple (*manjhithan*), i.e., 40,000 taka (about 400 Euros). Instead of building the temple, the *manjhi haram* Ram Murmu embezzled the money. When succession to the next period of the Manjhi Parishad was discussed, the villagers objected to his re-selection. Instead, Antonio Hembram was selected to serve as the *manjhi haram*. During the evaluation meeting, the village community and the other officials on the Manjhi Parishad demanded that Ram Murmu should refund the money, which he was forced to do, otherwise the Manjhi Parishad would have taken disciplinary measures against him. In the final stage of my fieldwork, I observed Ram Murmu return the money and the Situngtola Manjhi Parishad using it to build a metal *manjhithan* (sacred place), usually a place selected within the village made of a mound of earth.

¹⁴³ The *dhuti* is a traditional men's garment, a loincloth wrapped around the hips and down to the feet. The dress is typically worn in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

through the provision of continuous benefits, such as education and medical facilities for the family and increasing the chances of his children finding work.

In providing services to the village community, each Manjhi Parishad usually has some assets, such as cooking pots, large dishes, plates, glasses, spoons, a large canopy, and traditional drums.¹⁴⁴ During any social event (marriages, funerals, name-giving ceremonies, etc.), these assets can be used by the villagers, as they are considered to be members of the village community, and the villagers return them after carefully using them. These assets were mainly accumulated from the donations of local people's representatives or from *dandoms* (fines); for example, Champatola's Manjhi Parishad acquired these assets from donations by the local people's representative, and in Situngtola by generating funds from *dandoms*. In fact, the income of the Manjhi Parishad usually comes from *dandoms* or fines that are imposed on offenders in resolving village disputes. Another source of funding comes from fees, which the villagers contribute during the observance of festivals or ceremonies. Those Manjhi Parishads that own traditional drums also generate some income by renting the drums out. Rather than acquiring assets, these funds are also spent during festivals and ceremonies.

The upper level of the Santal governance system is called the *pargana* or *parganait*. The head of the *pargana* resolves a dispute if the *manjhi harams* fail to do so. The structure of the *pargana* includes a number of villages, and the head of the *pargana* is also called a *pargana*. He also has an assistant called *des-manjhi* (O'Malley 1910: 106–107). Besides the *pargana*, the Santal have a higher court called the *Lo Bir* or Hunt Council, which assembles once a year for the Annual Hunt or *Disom Sendra*. The convener of the hunt is called the *dihri*, and serious disputes are decided in the *Lo Bir* (Troisi 2000: 66). These upper-level governance structures have disappeared from the Santal living in Bangladesh. The residents of the three villages could not remember when these upper-level traditional governance structures became dysfunctional. However, I will discuss the Caritas-Bangladesh project to revitalize the upper-level traditional governance systems of the Santal in the following section of this chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Currently, most Manjhi Parishads do not have traditional drums, as evangelical Protestants such as the Seventh-day Adventists prohibit the playing of traditional drums. While the Seventh-day Adventists converted a few Santal villages, in my fieldwork area the Santal are affiliated to the Catholic Church.

Although the current authority of the Manjhi Parishad is guided by the Christian churches, is subject to interference by development organizations, and is overlooked by the state, the governing capacity of the Manjhi Parishad can be best described in Troisi's (2000: 56) words as "...a well-defined political and administrative unit governed by a council of village elders which not only regulates life within the village but also orders the villagers' relations with the outside world." In post-colonial Pakistan and independent Bangladesh, the Acts related to local government have ignored the traditional governance structure of the Santal, even though the Bangladeshi government accepted indigenous peoples' traditional structures in the CHT.¹⁴⁵ The Union Parishad or the lowest level of local government in the country includes village communities in local-level development projects, but it has avoided doing so in the case of the Manjhi Parishads, in line with the state's practice of denying the notion of indigenous identity.

Alternatively, the colonial rulers deliberately exploited the leadership capacity of the *manjhis*, as noted already in Ch. 3. The authority of the *manjhis*, *parganaits*, and *des-manjhis* was not limited to dealing with village disputes but was also extended to maintaining law and order and acting as the village police (Archer 1984: 15–18). The Santal rebellion (1855–56) increased British interference with the Santal. Even though the establishment of the Santal Parganas marked out the Santal area of settlement as containing a large tax-paying population, the Santal *manjhis*' (headmen) authority was used to collect taxes. Despite this, government recognition extended the responsibilities of the village headmen to reporting any disorder in the village to the police (Somers 1977: 49–51). The Santhal Pargana (SP) Manual of 1911 gave the *parganaits* power as officers in charge of a police station or sub-inspectors of police in dealing with minor criminal matters (Santhal Parganas Manual 1911, 489, quoted in Sundar 2005: 4431). The extended role of the *manjhis* gave the position a new dimension: "from the traditional status and administrative role of headman emerged a dual and more complex role in the sphere of the village and the central government" (Somers 1977: 50). However, in negotiating the complexities, the Santal found themselves on the margins where the niches from which one can claim rights as a citizen of the country are minimized. Political denial and economic deprivation

¹⁴⁵ The indigenous people's traditional governance structure in the CHT was institutionalized by the CHT Regulation (Act of 1900), or the CHT manual that was enacted by British colonial rulers and accepted by the current Bangladeshi government. However, the objective of the manual does not go beyond the purpose of collecting taxes.

have pushed the Manjhi Parishads to deal with village disputes and affairs alone, while also tending to sharpen the notion of Santal identity in their handling of village affairs (Sundar 2005). In the next section, I illustrate the concealed power of the Manjhi Parishad by narrating four case studies.

6.2. The Manjhi Parishad's Ability to Deal with Social Offenses

Among the Santal, the Manjhi Parishad is employed in resolving disputes involving both moral matters and more mundane affairs. In maintaining social relations, the villagers interact with one another and accept the verdicts of the Manjhi Parishad. Thus, understanding Santal identity requires explaining the governing role played by the Manjhi Parishad. In this section, the discussion of the following four case studies demonstrates its organizational strength. The cases show inconsistencies in the behavior of some villagers that broke the communal harmony. Among the Santal, collective sentiments are related to the individual's actions, which themselves symbolize the collective values of Santal society. Maintaining traditional norms and values is crucial to the Santal. For violations of traditional Santal rules, the Manjhi Parishad has the power to enact an extreme form of punishment, namely social ostracism. The selected cases show how the aim in the lives of ordinary Santal is to maintain communal consensus, symbolizing their desire to perpetuate Santal identity, in spite of the many hegemonic pressures to assimilate.

6.2.1. Case Study Four: A Marriage Ceremony and Tearing up a Tradition

It was the conflict between being a Santal and becoming modern that led to Jotin Hasda being ostracized. Jotin is a thirty-two-year-old man and a resident of Burutola village. He inherited a good piece of fertile land (approximately 1.20 acres), unlike many other villagers, completed his high-school education, and is aware of the issue of indigenous rights. While organizing a feast for the villagers on the occasion of his marriage ceremony, which is called *gidi chimowra*¹⁴⁶ in Santali, or the gift-giving ceremony, he appealed to the Manjhi Parishad to allow it to be done in the modern fashion. In Jotin's case, doing it the modern way meant inviting and paying for

¹⁴⁶ *Gidi chimowra* could best be described in dominant cultural terms as a marriage reception. See Ch. 8 for a detailed account of it.

professional cooks and other necessary logistics from a commercial decorator service.¹⁴⁷ This was usual practice among mainstream Bengalis but unusual in the case of the Santal. However, the Manjhi Parishad rejected his request and told him to arrange the feast according to Santal tradition. Among the Santal, arranging a feast related to the marriage ceremony or any other ceremonial occasion usually involves community participation, as the village community participates in cooking, serving, and managing all the arrangements by volunteering their labor (ethnographic details are discussed in Ch. 8). The Manjhi Parishad also extends its support by providing all the logistics. Jotin refused to follow this traditional method and organized the feast in the “modern” way, as he desired. In response, the village community expressed their disagreement with his so-called modern manners and by rejecting his invitations abstained from going to the feast. As for the Manjhi Parishad of Burutola, it decided that Jotin had disrupted the harmony of the village. Thus, in the next *kulhi durup*, the Manjhi Parishad decreed that the villagers of Burutola should end all social interactions with Jotin, thereby ostracizing him.

“I don’t like all the traditions of the Santals. I wanted to do the invitations the modern way”, commented Jotin when I asked him about his social boycott. Conversely, Lukas Hembram, the *manjhi haram* of Burutola village, said, “Jotin Hasda’s behavior was an expression of mistrust in the community. To maintain the Santal way of life, we have to boycott him from the village’s affairs.” Jotin’s well-off status supports him in managing his material life, but he is alienated from the village because villagers avoid talking to him or going to his house. During most of my time in the field, when I was walking along the muddy paths in the villages, I was usually accompanied by one, two, or sometimes more villagers, but whenever I made a move to enter Jotin’s house, the villagers stopped walking and refused to accompany me. I also observed that the villagers expressed contempt for Jotin, in line with the social embargo that extends to Jotin’s everyday actions. Generally, when Santal norms and values are broken, the standard practice among the Santal is to impose a *dandom* or fine. The decision whether to impose a penalty of ostracism is determined on the basis of the seriousness of the offense. If it is considered a severe offense, ostracism is imposed.

¹⁴⁷ The commercial decoration service is like an event organizer, which is commonly used by Bengalis in organizing any ceremonial feast such as for wedding or funeral.

This case study demonstrates the authority the Manjhi Parishad has to enact Santal law. The penalty of ostracization for breaking Santal tradition symbolizes the significance of the *gidi chimowra*: in other words, community participation in arranging the feast expresses social solidarity and the belongingness of Santal identity. Among the Santal, individual actions are connected to the community. As Troisi remarks,

The idea of communal solidarity is expressed in collective feasting, drinking, singing, dancing, mutual visits and exchange of gifts. The whole village community, young and old, males and females, join in these manifestations of joy and exaltation. Each individual member is aware of his fellowship with his community. (Troisi 2000: 153)

Thus, when Jotin broke with this tradition, it was perceived as a serious offense, and the most severe decree was enacted, which is ostracism. Jotin's behavior involved an imported sense of "individualism," contrary to the *gidi chimowra* or feast for the marriage reception, which is a collective event for the Santal. Each individual is responsible for maintaining Santal collectivism.

6.2.2. Case Study Five: A Theft and Maintaining Morality

Carlos Mardi's political activism failed to excuse him for stealing the possessions of the Manjhi Parishad. Carlos is a fifty-eight-year-old man living in Champatola village who is treated as belonging to the "indigenous elite" of the village due to his involvement in the indigenous rights movements in his locality. By using his communication skills, he twice brought the "experimental plots" of the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute to his farmland, the farmers' participation in agricultural research being established through it. Hence, he has enough awareness of citizens' rights to be able to benefit from the SSNPs scheme for the sake of his family. He is strongly involved in development and political activities, despite which the villagers were very circumspect when it came to talking about Carlos. What happened to Jotin when I was walking along the path through the village also happened with Gabriel Mardi, another of the village residents. On the way, when I made a move to go to Carlos's house, Gabriel told me that he would not join me, even though Carlos was a relative. I asked him, "Why? He is your relative", and Gabriel replied, "He is ostracized, and the villagers do not go to

his house, including me.” Gabriel Mardi’s caution in obeying this decree of the Manjhi Parishad made me curious to know why Carlos had been ostracized, but Gabriel Mardi avoided talking about the issue, just as other members of the village had. Later, Linton Mardi, the village *jagparanik*, told me that Carlos Mardi had embezzled the Manjhi Parishad’s possessions, i.e., cooking pots, big dishes, plates, glasses, spoons, and placemats, which were mainly used to serve the villagers during ceremonies. In consideration of his activism on behalf of the rights of indigenous people, the Manjhi Parishad handed over these possessions and assumed that he would be a proper custodian of them, but Carlos Mardi stole them instead. He was repeatedly warned to return them, but avoided doing so every time.

As well as allegedly stealing these possessions, there were other matters that also angered the villagers against Carlos. Thus, members of his family also broke the harmony of the village, and he failed to observe his guardianship role. He has three daughters, one of whom is married to a Muslim man, while another daughter, Shefali, who is separated, is living in Carlos’s house, where Carlos, his wife, two sons, two daughters-in-law, grandsons and granddaughters also live. However, his daughter Shefali has been accused of being associated with several men, including one who was a Muslim and a regular visitor to Carlos’s house. The regular visits of a Muslim man to a Santal woman in a Santali village stimulated anger against Carlos’s family, and Carlos himself was condemned for his failure to guide the members of his family properly. To deal with this anti-social behavior, the Champatola Manjhi Parishad prohibited and prevented the Muslim man who had copulated with Shefali from entering the village. Despite this, the villagers are still angry because they claim that the activities of Carlos and his family have violated Santali norms, thus endangering the sense of Santalness. When I talked to Linton Mardi to inquire into the matter, he commented, “Yes, he is working to promote the rights of the indigenous people outside the village, but inside the village, he and his family have violated Santal values.” Thereafter, through different conversations, it emerged that the villagers did not consider Carlos poor enough to be able to benefit from state schemes for the disadvantaged, but indeed as capable of helping the economically destitute in the village instead, which he never did. There were therefore many reasons for the anger against him, and finally his theft of its possessions compelled the Manjhi Parishad to take the most extreme action against him, namely to ostracize him.

This case has been selected in order to demonstrate the power the Manjhi Parishad has to maintain the moral order among Santal. Its decisions also indicate the important role the Manjhi Parishad has in, for example, preventing the visits of the Muslim man, essentially meaning that the villagers as a whole controlled individual actions that broke social norms. In the same spirit, Carlos's political activism was not taken into account inside the village. In the villages, the Santal have their own types of awareness and act to maintain Santal identity, unlike Carlos, who drew support from outside the Santal community. Collective unity is enacted by the decrees of the Manjhi Parishad. In maintaining Santal identity, the Manjhi Parishad's decisions also express a strong sense of morality.

6.2.3. Case Study Six: A Case of Clan Endogamy

The Santal are still strict in maintaining their rule of clan exogamy when marrying; while Christian law does not require it, the Christian Santal observe it just as traditional Santal do. The whole of Burutola village was converted long ago, but they still strictly practice Santal marriage traditions. However, Ferdinand Murmu's family saw a reason to break with this tradition. Ferdinand is a sixty-five-year-old man living in Burutola village. He is the owner of the largest piece of land (eight acres) in the village, has academic degrees, has a self-regulated irrigation system, and was a government official in the agriculture department. He is the only person in the village who has electricity in his house, despite Burutola as a whole being outside the electricity coverage area. Nonetheless, Ferdinand is not only the most affluent person in Burutola village but also in all three villages where I carried out my fieldwork. Pronoy, his only son, broke the Santal marriage tradition by marrying endogamously, that is, into his own clan. The Santal traditionally practice patrilineal clan exogamy when marrying. For example, those who belong to the Kisku clan cannot marry another Kisku. In Burutola village, Pronoy Murmu broke this tradition by engaging in an endogamous relationship with a Santal girl called Protima Murmu. This occurred about ten years before my fieldwork, when Pronoy and Protima both fled the village, got married, and started living together in another village. They have two daughters who, at the time of my fieldwork, were seven and five years old respectively.

Among the Santal, marrying within the same clan is analogous to incest. In order to deal with this social breach a particular judicial procedure is used called *bitlaha*.¹⁴⁸ The *bitlaha* is similar to a hunt in that the offender is treated as the hunted and villagers become the hunters. The practice of *bitlaha* demonstrates that the Santal exert rigid social control in dealing with issues pertaining to clan endogamy and incest among kin, although it is preferred to charge a large fine or even to banish the offender from the community instead of enacting *bitlaha*. Troisi (2000) mentions that *bitlaha* was declining among the Santal, and in the village of Pangro where he worked, nobody remembered such events. During his fieldwork he witnessed four breaches of clan exogamy and one case of incest in Pangro village, and the village council simply imposed a fine when dealing with all these cases. I had a similar experience during my fieldwork in the Santal villages. Moreover, Samuel Mardi, *union pargana* (headman of a number of villages), told me about a moderate version of the social procedure for enforcing clan endogamy:

If any endogamous affair occurs, in this case the bride can be adopted as a daughter of one of the villagers who belongs to a different clan, and the bride's clan name would be changed accordingly. To ensure she returns to the community, the adopted father of the bride should arrange a *jom-jati* or feast for re-admission into the community. Thereafter, the Manjhi Parishad arranges a marriage for the faithful lovers.

However, Ferdinand was not willing to resolve the matter in this way and decided to arrange another marriage for his son instead which did involve clan exogamy. In contrast, in the village, nobody has shown any willingness to resolve this problem of social disorder by adopting Protima as a daughter because Protima's family lacked sufficient financial means. In this situation, Ferdinand was called in by the *kulhi durup* several times, but failed to attend it every time. Finally the Manjhi Parishad of Burutola banished him from the community, and he became an ostracized person in the village.

¹⁴⁸ Archer (1974: 90–103) describes cases and gives minute details of *bitlaha*. According to him, this judicial procedure is used by the Santal to deal with severe crimes. For the Santal, clan endogamy is analogous to crimes that are graver in nature, and *bitlaha* represents a strong reaction against breaching the rules of “tribal” endogamy and clan exogamy. Carrin-Bouez (1991) mentions that the British authorities forbade *bitlaha* because of the extreme violence of the procedure.

The ostracism destroyed Ferdinand's dignity, and he was filled with anger, expressed in his desire to break the Manjhi Parishad. Ferdinand established another Manjhi Parishad in the village along with some of his relatives, and he declared himself the village *manjhi haram*. As a consequence, after a few years, internal conflict among his relatives led to the Manjhi Parishad breaking apart again. The dissidents among Ferdinand's relatives established another Manjhi Parishad, and a fourth village council emerged in Burutola village. These events happened about ten years ago, but the legacy of the divided Manjhi Parishad endures. The villagers feel embarrassed in talking about either these events or the offence of clan endogamy, as was evident when they commented, "because of the incident our *atu-sagai* was broken. The divided status of the Manjhi Parishad expressed our lack of unity." Ferdinand was regarded as an arrogant person in the village, which he echoed when he said to me, "I am the most 'educated' person in the village, and I deserve the headmanship." However, most of the villagers in Burutola were not willing to accept him as *manjhi haram* but instead expressed resentment at his arrogant attitude. Sonamoni Tudu, one of the villagers of Burutola said,

Someone cannot claim the headmanship just because of his financial power or educational status. In our village, we have some rules and regulations. Regardless of their status, these apply to everyone. The Manjhi Parishad does not give anyone special treatment based on his or her financial power and academic record.

The Manjhi Parishad's decree and Sonamoni Tudu's views were both expressed by invoking the traditional principle of egalitarianism among all Santal. Despite the problem he had caused, Pronoy returned to his father's house because of a severe road accident that occurred during my fieldwork. When I went to Ferdinand's house, I saw Pronoy lying on the bed, his leg and hip bone fractured, and he was not able to move by himself. His two little daughters were playing in the courtyard. Ferdinand brought in a girl to nurse him from another clan who was supposed to marry Pronoy. Ferdinand declared that he accepted his son along with the latter's daughters, but not Pronoy's wife, Protima. Pronoy physical condition and financially hopeless position compelled him to compromise with his father, otherwise he would have had to give up his ownership of his father's large property.

As a consequence of Ferdinand's accepting Pronoy back, the villagers once again became agitated against him, but also felt that it would be better to resolve the issue by arranging *jom-jati*, given that ten years had already passed and that the couple had two daughters. The case was nonetheless evidence of the desire to maintain the exogamous clan organization as essential when it comes to entering into a marriage. Further to the previous comment by Samuel Mardi, it was suggested that a moderate version of the ritual be held enabling Pronoy to return to the community and to allow clan endogamy in this case. The different modes of clan management and the preference for arranging a *jom-jati* instead of *bitlaha* or banishment symbolizes the cultural strength of the community and the guardianship of the village council, which proved able to accommodate itself to the situation that had arisen. In this way, the suggestion that this case of clan endogamy be accepted demonstrates the Santal's adaptability in the face of changed situations. At the same time, it also demonstrates their resistance to assimilation by Christianity when the latter permits the possibility of clan endogamy when marrying. In respect of maintaining clan exogamy, the amendment by the village council nonetheless demonstrates the autonomy the Manjhi Parishad enjoys when the date of a marriage is also scheduled in conformity with the Church's procedures. However, the strictness with which the principle of clan endogamy in marrying is upheld shows the determination to maintain Santal identity and to carry on regardless of whether traditional or Christian Santal are involved. In fact, maintenance of the traditional exogamous clan organization expresses a strong sense of Santalness.

6.2.4. Case Study Seven: An Unwed Mother¹⁴⁹

The Santal are strict in maintaining not only clan exogamy but also tribal endogamy. Nonetheless, as we saw in Ferdinand's case, Situngtola's Manjhi Parishad also showed its ability to adapt by avoiding *bitlaha* and even ostracism in the case of Elena. Elena Soren is a twenty-two-year-old Santal woman living in Situngtola village. She is unmarried and lives with her

¹⁴⁹ In Bengali society, the idea of an unwed mother living in society is unimaginable. Sex before marriage is prohibited, and pregnancy outside marriage is considered a criminal offense in Bangladesh. Most cases of pregnancy are terminated by illegal abortion. As a citizen of Bangladesh, in the course of my lifetime I have never seen Bengali society accept an unwed mother. When I heard and witnessed the Santal accepting an unwed mother, with the Manjhi Parishad of Situngtola accepting her socially too and enacting an order to behave appropriately with Elena, I was struck by the flexibility of Santal society despite their having been interacting with such the more rigid Bengali cultural constructions for a long time. However, as Troisi (2000) and Archer (1984) mention, traditionally Santal show flexibility in rendering these incidents socially acceptable, so Elena's case is not exceptional.

parents. Her father is an agricultural laborer like many Santal, a job Elena also works at sometimes. She is also an unmarried mother, having become pregnant because of her romantic relationship with Johir, a Muslim man from the neighboring village. Soon afterwards, Manjhi Parishad officials talked with Johir's family and scheduled a date for a *kulhi durup* to deal with this infringement of the social order. Johir's older brothers came to Situngtola on the date fixed for the *kulhi durup*, but Johir fled. He was already married and had two children. Thus, the issue of his marrying Elena was replaced instead by that of the maintenance costs for the expected baby. Mohon Tudu, *paranik* of Situngtola village, narrated the incident and told me that the negotiations over the money led to Johir's family agreeing to bear the baby's maintenance costs. The amount decided for maintenance was Tk. 10,000 (approximately € 100), and for breaking the social order, the Manjhi Parishad charged a *dandom* or fine of Tk. 25,000 (approximately € 250).

According to Santal tradition, this type of incident is made socially acceptable by following the rule of *jawae kirinok bapla*, where a husband is purchased¹⁵⁰ for an unmarried mother. Finally, if there is no marriage, the clan name of a maternal grandparent is chosen for the child (Archer 1984: 381). This solution was also adopted in the case of Elena, and her son's clan name became that of Elena's mother's clan title, Murmu, Elena's clan name being Soren. Nevertheless, if a Santal has a sexual relationship with a non-Santal, the traditional rule of Santal endogamy is considered to have been infringed, and the whole community becomes polluted because of this offense by one individual. Among the Santal, therefore, "tribal exogamy" is also a severe offense, and the extreme penalty of *bitlaha* may be resorted to offender (Troisi 2000: 187–188). However, in Elena's case, a bath purified the situation.

In dealing with Elena's case, the Manjhi Parishad of Situngtola again demonstrated its adaptability in preferring purification instead of banishment from the community. Re-admission is effected by a *jom-jati* or feast for re-admission into the community. The money the Manjhi Parishad obtained from the *dandom*, i.e., Tk. 25,000, was spent in arranging the *jom-jati*. A ritual

¹⁵⁰ There are several forms marriage among the Santal (mentioned in Ch. 8), one of which is *kirinok* or *kirin jawae bapla*. This type of marriage is required when an unmarried girl becomes pregnant by a man who refuses to marry her or who belongs to the same clan as her. In such cases, a husband is purchased for the girl, the cost being recovered from the offender or whoever made the woman pregnant. Archer (1984) and Dey (2015) also mention this sort of traditional marriage practice among the Santal.

was held to enable return to the community, and Elena suggested a purificatory bath. After the bath, she fetched a pot of water, placed cow-dung on top of the pot and stepped into her house. While stepping, she paused three times and avowed, “What I did was inherently sinful, I will never do that, and nobody should do this.” The bath symbolized her washing away her sin, and the words she uttered confirmed her commitment to the community. While describing the judicial process to me, Mohon Tudu stressed the importance of the clan organization and said, “It was difficult to deal with such an incident because clan identity is essential for becoming a Santal, and it was crucial to decide the clan name of the infant when her father was Muslim.” However, as already noted, the village council managed to resolve this case of “tribal exogamy,” and Elena was accepted back into the village community. When I was in the village, I found that she was living with her parents and that her two-year-old baby boy was roaming about along the village paths, but Elena herself kept a careful distance when talking to an outsider.

This case demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of the Manjhi Parishad in acknowledging the constant contemporary changes. Along with these changes, its firm maintenance of the clan organization is reflected in how it decides clan names, imposes purification rituals, and holds rituals for re-admission into the community, all traditions that express the strong sense of Santal identity. At the same time, it also represents resistance to assimilation, even when most Santal have been converted or, in other words, have become associated with the prescribed modernization; their literacy rate is increasing, the numbers of mobile phone users are growing, and communication using the internet and social media is expanding. In becoming involved with these present-day issues, Santal are improving their communications outside the village. Moreover, the additional attempts by the churches to interfere are futile in preventing such practices, which belong to the traditional notion of Santalness. Indeed, the Manjhi Parishad is the forum for making concrete the issues related to Santali traditions, and this applies to both traditional and Christian Santal alike. While the continuity of Santal traditions is enforced by the Manjhi Parishad, it also becomes a target for intermediaries wanting to introduce development schemes. The next section discusses how the Manjhi Parishad acts in the context of “development projects.”

6.3. NGOs: Intervention versus Encroachment

As mentioned above, these four cases provide an explicit and independent picture of the village council. The role of the Manjhi Parishad is seemingly independent within the village, but it is in fact dependent on dealing with issues within as well as outside it. The state's denial and the encroachment of intermediaries involved the Manjhi Parishad in many development schemes, both wanted and unwanted. The state's denial creates spaces for NGOs to engage in support of Santals' human rights (see details in Ch. 4). In Bangladesh, a large number of NGOs¹⁵¹ are introducing many development programs among the Santal.

Nevertheless, these development interventions generally fail to link development, the state, and the Santal, thus creating rhetorical chaos rather than achieving the ultimate goal of Santal well-being. Nonetheless, a number of NGOs are working with the indigenous peoples of the plains in Bangladesh and running a number of different projects in order to develop the socio-economic lives of indigenous people. However, in this section, I discuss the projects of two organizations,¹⁵² Caritas-Bangladesh and Anogrosor Samaj Unnayan Sogonstha (Social Development Organization for Disadvantaged-People [ASUS])¹⁵³ that are particularly involved with the Santal in developing the Manjhi Parishad. Hence, ASUS is a local NGO, implementing donor-directed projects, while Caritas-Bangladesh is a well-known Catholic Church-supported global NGO.

¹⁵¹ According to the NGO Affairs Bureau of People's Republic of Bangladesh, there are 2636 NGOs working across the country (<http://ngoab.portal.gov.bd> [accessed 23.12.2018]). Furthermore, the Bangladesh National Portal provided micro-information to the effect that 41, 32, and 35 NGOs are working in Godagari, Birampur, and Phulbari Upazilas respectively. Situngtola, Burutola, and Champatola, where I conducted my fieldwork, were situated respectively in the mentioned Upazilas as well. The density of indigenous peoples is higher in these Upazilas. Bangladesh National Portal. <http://godagari.rajshahi.gov.bd/>, <http://birampur.dinajpur.gov.bd/>, and <http://fulbari.dinajpur.gov.bd/> (accessed 16.05.2018).

¹⁵² As mentioned in Ch. 4, the categories of NGOs in Bangladesh have arguably evolved over time. However, in this chapter, I have chosen to discuss Caritas-Bangladesh and ASUS projects, an international and a local NGO respectively, and both target particularly Manjhi Parishads in implementing their projects. The church-supported NGO Caritas-Bangladesh mainly emphasizes service and charitable activities, while the local NGO ASUS mostly works as an implementing agent on behalf of donors.

¹⁵³ ASUS is a local non-development organization, working in the Kakonhat area of Rajshahi District near Situngtola. The organization mainly works with the indigenous people of each respective area. Rajkumar Shaw is the executive director of the organization, another indigenous person from this area.

As most Christian Santal are Catholics, the activities of Caritas-Bangladesh are aligned with the Catholic Church. They work in Santal areas by combining their activities with proselytization and philanthropy (discussed in detail in Ch. 4). Thus, villagers informed me that the churches determine the legitimacy of the Manjhi Parishad by saying, “because of our internal conflict or religious fission, another group can establish a separate village council, but the approval of the church determines the legitimacy of the Manjhi Parishad.” To investigate the points of control over the Manjhi Parishad, I interviewed the fathers of the churches, as well as NGO professionals. The investigations included some rhetorical questions, for example, how do the churches undermine the sovereignty of the Manjhi Parishad? What plans to intensify proselytization have been combined with the development programs? What type of assimilation is being channeled through the Manjhi Parishad to develop the Santals’ lives? To obtain answers to these questions, I asked questions about the Manjhi Parishad’s authority. From this it emerged that the Manjhi Parishad can fix the date of the *kulhi durup* alone, but that the dates for *bapla* (marriage), *bhandan* (a feast after the funeral), *janam chatiyer* (infant name-giving ceremony), and *gonon* (fixing wedding date and bride-money) are fixed based on the suggestions of the respective church father. Nonetheless, these ceremonies include many minor traditional practices that are not controlled by the churches, and the Santals’ persistence in keeping up “trivial traditions” apparently becomes a meaningful way of pursuing the notion of Santalness over time. Conversely, the hidden supervision of the churches cannot be ignored, because both forms of encroachment – that is, the hidden commands of the churches and the project interventions of the NGOs – polarize the autonomy of the Manjhi Parishad.

The Caritas-Bangladesh project interventions aim to reform the Manjhi Parishad and to revitalize the traditional upper-level governance structure. Caritas-Bangladesh ran an Integrated Human Development Project (IHDP) in 1990–2010 in seven Upazilas (sub-districts) within the three districts.¹⁵⁴ The Caritas Bangladesh Annual Report 1990–91 states: “the aim of this project is to support the inclusive development of the people who are socio-economically backward and landless and by providing all opportunities to make them self-dependent and confident, freeing

¹⁵⁴ The IHDP-implemented Upazilas are the Tanore and Godagari Upazilas in Rajshahi District, the Nachol and Gomostapur Upazilas in Chapainawabgang District, and the Porsha, Shapahar, and Niyamot Upazilas in Naogaon District.

them from injustice and superstition” (Caritas Report 1991: 12). The village of Situngtola fell within the project area. The project reconstructed the upper-level governance structure, the *pargana* or *parganait*, which was reconstituted as a Union Pargana, and similarly the *Lo Bir* was reformed as Thana Pargana or Pargana Parishad.¹⁵⁵

Caritas-Bangladesh implemented another project in the Rajshahi and Dinajpur region, the Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP) from 2008–14. The Project aimed “to empower indigenous community people through strengthening social organization, retention, education, legal services, training and capital formation” (Caritas Report 2014a: 77). The project also targeted indigenous peoples’ village councils. Activities conducted under the project included the reorganization of the traditional social organization, arranging monthly meetings, developing entrepreneurship, supporting leadership skills, and the provision of financial support to release mortgaged land (Caritas Report 2014b: 65). At present, the ICDP has reduced the project area in the Rajshahi region and is currently working only in Naogaon District. As Burutola and Champatola came under the project area, I carried out fieldwork there as well. During my interview with Arok Toppo, the Caritas-Bangladesh Program Manager, he said, “The primary focus of the IHDP and ICDP projects was on reviving the Adivasis’ traditional village council and cultural activities, although at present the ICDP project emphasizes the economic activities and awareness programs as well.”

Initially, these projects stimulated the Santal who were living in the project area. The officials of the Manjhi Parishad and aware Santal acquired a larger platform than before to campaign for their rights because these projects included the constituency of the Union Parishads as the working area of the Union Pargana. In the same way, the Thana Pargana also included indigenous peoples living in the Unions under the respective Upazilas. Meanwhile, the projected traditional governance structure abstained from pledging collaboration with any government program, nor did the activities under these projects correspond to those of the Upazila Adivasi Development Committee. As I showed in Ch. 4, the Upazila Adivasi Development Committee has the responsibility for allocating Development Assistance for Special Areas (except CHT).

¹⁵⁵ The head of the Union Pargana was also known as the *union pargana*, the head of the Thana Pargana as the *disham pargana*.

Under the allocation, a small yearly budget exists for the development of the “ethnic groups” living in the plains, who receive grants from the Bangladesh government. The omission of this objective renders futile the sustainability of NGO-supported development and increases the distance between the state and indigenous peoples. The tendency to avoid the state reminds me of Fisher’s (1997: 445) words about NGOs’ “ability to politicize issues that were not formerly politicized or that were ironically depoliticized through the discourse of development or ‘democratic’ participation.” Indeed, depoliticized problems are futile in fulfilling the ultimate goal of development, even though Caritas-supported project (IHDP) worked for two decades to revitalize the upper-level traditional governance structure of the Santal. However, after they withdrew from the project, it ceased to be as it was. Their current situation was voiced by Kerobin Hembram, who had been appointed *desham pargana* in the Birampur Upazila, during an interview. He commented as follows:

Only the Manjhi Parishad is capable of governing the village affairs of the Santal. The Caritas-Bangladesh-supported projects were supportive in revitalizing the upper-level traditional governance structure. Meanwhile, since it withdrew from these projects, the Union and Thana Parganas are both alive but not as active as they were during the project implementation phase.

During my fieldwork, the IHDP ended its projects, and the ICDP reduced the project area. The reformulated and restructured Union and Thana Parganas are gradually becoming dysfunctional in both Gogagari and Birampur Upazilas. These projects bypassed the contemporary local government organization of the Bangladeshi government, introduced bilateral activities between Caritas and the Santal, and increased the exclusion of indigenous people, who had already been rejected by the Bangladesh state structure.

The ICDP-designed Union Pargana at Khanpur was pledged by a 12-member committee and included 28 Manjhi Parishads from the respective Unions. Currently, the activity of the Union Pargana is limited to a bi-monthly meeting and a yearly gathering with the Manjhi Parishad officials. To fund the bi-monthly meeting, Caritas-Bangladesh contributes Tk. 500 (approximately €5) to each meeting. The expenses of the yearly gathering are provided jointly by

the Manjhi Parishad officials and Caritas-Bangladesh. During the last gathering, Caritas-Bangladesh contributed Tk. 4500 (approximately €45), and each Manjhi Parishad official contributed 1.5 kg of rice. Three officials from each Manjhi Parishad were nominated to participate in the gathering. Samuel Mardi, the Khanpur *union pargana*, informed me about the details and commented, “The Pargana structure had disappeared from the Santals. About five years ago, the Caritas-Bangladesh and Father of Dhanjuri mission suggested its re-establishment. By following their suggestion, we established the Union Pargana.” He also expanded on this information by saying, “We invite only those Manjhi Parishads who are recognized by the church.” This information demonstrates the constant control of the churches over the Manjhi Parishads that were implemented by Caritas-Bangladesh. Thus, initiatives to revitalize the Santal’s traditional governance system seem to be intended to increase proselytization among them as well.

Like the Caritas Bangladesh projects, ASUS also implemented several projects to develop the Santal village councils, such as a project on “Adivasi Self-Rule for Community Development Project” from 2005–2007. The main objective of this project was to develop the capacity of the Manjhi Parishads. ASUS began another project in 2011 in conjunction with the “Adibashi (Indigenous People) Rights Project,” which was continuing during my fieldwork. It covered different issues to develop the socio-economic life of the Santal and aimed to revitalize Santal traditions. The traditional dance and music competitions and the celebration of the *sohrai* (harvest festival) and *baha* (spring festival) were included in the projects. Both projects were funded by the Manusher Jonno Foundation.¹⁵⁶ Rajkumar Shaw, executive director of ASUS, commented, “The revitalization activities under the projects have added a substantial contribution to the mobilizing of the people, but the divided status of the Manjhi Parishads interrupted the activities of the project.” ASUS implemented another large-scale project called the “Anograsor Gono Unnoyan Prokalpo” (Development Project for Disadvantaged People), funded by Oxfam-Bangladesh, the project period running from 2010 to 2014. This project aimed to establish collaboration between the indigenous village council and the Union Parishad. To achieve this, many lobby meetings were organized, and it was suggested that at least one

¹⁵⁶ A national non-governmental funding organization working to promote human rights and good governance in Bangladesh.

representative of the indigenous people be included in the Union Parishad Standing Committees.¹⁵⁷ The project was proposed in order to establish one Special Standing Committee to deal with indigenous peoples' issues with the Union. The three projects were all implemented in Godagari Upazila, which therefore included Situngtola in the area of project intervention.

According to some NGO professionals and social activists, "the traditional governance system of the Santal was highly patriarchal." The same opinion was reflected in Rajkumar Shaw's words when he said, "The 'Adivasi Self-Rule for Community Development Project' aimed to include women as Manjhi Parishad officials because it was primarily a male-dominated council." As I noted in a previous section, while in Champatola the women members were assigned some work, in Burutola the arrangement had ceased to function, and in Situngtola it had been abandoned. Regarding its abandonment, Mohon Tudu, *paranik* of Situngtola village, commented, "We included the female members based on the suggestion of the NGOs, but in the last five-year electoral period, we did not find any significant contribution from the addition of the women. Thus, we decided to abandon the positions." The abandonment casts light on the review of the Santals' social arrangements, in which Santal women,¹⁵⁸ like other social groups, are subordinated, their inherited property rights are ignored, and their freedom to use space in performing rituals is curtailed, just like their rights to become a member of the Manjhi Parishad. Nonetheless, Santals' women's discourses on everyday life, their ability to move within the

¹⁵⁷ According to the Union Parishad Act 2009, each Union Parishad has to form thirteen Standing Committees to deal with the development issues of the Union. The existing elected Union Parishad members lead the committees. Each consists of five to seven members, and the members of the committee include the respective Union Parishad residents so they can contribute to the Union's development programs.

¹⁵⁸ The customary involvement of Santal women already fulfills some of the criteria of "economic empowerment", as they have worked as agro-laborers for a long time. This involvement in work also extends their traditional area of mobility beyond courtyard, which is not common among the majority of Bengali Muslims. Moreover, their mobility in the village, in the local market place or in visiting their friends or relatives is relatively free from the hidden approval of man, who is indeed the head of the family. Conversely, among majoritarian Bengalis, the everyday mobility of women is controlled by the overt and covert control of men in the name of protection or social security. Domestic violence, especially wives being beaten by their husbands, is a widespread cultural practice among Bengalis. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics conducted an assessment entitled the Violence against Women (VAW) Survey 2011, which showed that 87% of married women are abused by their husbands (Bangladesh VAW survey 2013: 29). In the course of my fieldwork, I did not find any case where a Santal man was brutally beating his wife. The observation incited me to ask the Santali women, "Does your husband beat you?" Some women replied, "No," while some replied, "It has happened sometimes, but it is not as merciless as the manner in which the Bengali men engage in it. It is also mild, seldom, and a very private episode; there's no chance of you noticing it." These cultural differences and practices extend the requirement to acknowledge the niches of the Santal's egalitarian practices in introducing the modern concept of gender equality.

village environment, and decision-making in respect of issues of kinship, marriage, sex, work, and age intensify their positions in the house and society, where they have the freedom to choose a partner, divorce, drink *handi* (rice beer) after marriage, and so on. Without understanding the patterns of social arrangements and gender discrimination, the top-down concept of “women’s empowerment” overlaps with the niches of the customary practices of egalitarianism. In this context, in respect of having women as members of the Manjhi Parishad, officials showed their intentions either by abandoning the positions or by allowing them to become an ornament just to satisfy so-called development goals.

The Final Evaluation Report (ASUS Report 2007: n. pag) states that the Manjhi Parishad has become “inactive,” and that the pilot project of ASUS made it “active”. It also states that traditional festivals such *baha* and *sohrai* “were not celebrated,” and that the project contributed to reviving their celebration them. The statement in the “Final Evaluation Report” is contradicted by my ethnographic data because, in the course of my fifteen months of fieldwork among the Santal, I observed the dynamic presence of the Manjhi Parishad in dealing with village affairs, while the division within the Manjhi Parishad polarized the unity of the Santal, as described in the above section. From an anthropological point of view, the “Final Evaluation Report” constitutes a discursive manipulation of the existing facts in order to fulfill the project’s top-down goals. When the Manjhi Parishad functions strongly within the villages, these projects tend to reinforce the dysfunctionality of the Manjhi Parishad. This quasi-cultural distance between the NGOs and the community creates a vacuum in understanding the Santals’ struggles for rights and identity, when the ultimate goal of obtaining political access ceases at micro-events.

Indeed, any discussion of the complexities of Santal lives must pay attention to the involvement of a large number of actors, including those who interfere with the Santal through their many programs. NGOs, missionaries, the state, right-based movements, and the Santal have wide-ranging formal and informal interconnections with each other. These multifaceted relationships are undermining the Santals’ way of life in various ways. Thus, the seemingly independent Santal village council is being undermined by different actors. Initially, the project’s interventions generated tremendous enthusiasm among both the Santal and the local activists. To examine the interference of the intermediaries, the Foucauldian idea of governmentality can be

drawn on, as it identifies a wide range of control mechanisms to make people governable beyond the state's policies, as in the Santal case. In analyzing NGO interventions among the Santal, a Foucauldian analysis will also include the concept of power, where the power of the poor resists the disciplinary power involved in producing knowledge and discourse. Thus, the Manjhi Parishad in Situngtola abandoned women's positions that had been prescribed by the NGOs and the churches. In viewing the optimistic aims of the NGOs' project interventions, which were designed to improve the capacity of the Manjhi Parishads or to revitalize the traditional governance system, the NGOs provided a flow of ideas and funds that extended their associations beyond the village.

6.4. The Maintenance of Santal Identity

The discussion in this chapter provides evidence of the distinctiveness of the Santals' social and judicial system, in which their cultural practices and village affairs function through the Manjhi Parishad. Evidently, the Manjhi Parishad is divided in accepting and rejecting change, despite governing the village life of the Santal. The persistence of the Manjhi Parishad symbolizes the role of Santal identity in maintaining harmony within the village. In reviewing the role of the Manjhi Parishad, I did not intend to place it under the label of "tradition" but instead aimed to draw attention to the content of the changes. In this way, the empirical facts in this chapter have documented the interference of intermediaries and the Santals' responses to it. These multifaceted situations support Barth's idea (1969) of ethnic identity being enacted through a process of alternation in admitting the division and endorsing the constant changes so that the Manjhi Parishad becomes a medium for retaining and reforming Santal identity.

The selected cases in this chapter demonstrate the transformative character of the Manjhi Parishad. In dealing with the issue of clan endogamy, breach of which is traditionally a severe offense, the Manjhi Parishad showed flexibility in accepting it and suggesting that Ferdinand obtained re-admission into the community by arranging a *jom-jati*. In fact, in handling the case of this breach with tradition, the Manjhi Parishad proposed another tradition to legitimate it. This is also reflected in Elena's case, where "tribal exogamy" was ruptured, another severe offense. In the cases of both Ferdinand and Elena, there was a unique combination of tradition and transformation, and the process of issuing decrees undermined the guardianship of the

intermediaries. It is evident that the Santal are conscious of the importance of maintaining their traditional practices.

Collective resistance to becoming “modern” is also reflected in Jotin Hasda’s case, when the community rejected his invitation and imposed ostracism, which is mainly used in serious cases, emphasizing the importance of firmly maintaining Santalness. The strong sense of Santal morality is reflected in how the Carlos’s case was dealt with. The power of the Manjhi Parishad was shown when it disregarded Carlos’s political power and ostracized him for stealing its possessions. In working with the Santal, Somers (1977: 58–59) noted traces of egalitarianism in their everyday discourses, in their sense of belongingness as *hor hopon* or “sons of mankind” [sons of humanity], in maintaining their clan organization, and in exercising the authority of the village council. The practice of egalitarianism is still evident in the *kulhi durup*, where each individual is free to give his or her opinions and to participate in the discussions and decision-making processes. The belongingness signaled by this egalitarianism was enhanced when the Manjhi Parishad refused to compromise with political power and wealth by ostracizing Carlos. This case demonstrates the spirit of egalitarianism and the principle of the strong maintenance of boundaries in order to protect Santal identity. By alternately rejecting and accepting contemporary changes, Santal are able to formulate and reformulate their relations both within and outside the village. At the same time, in dealing with village affairs, the Manjhi Parishad aims to minimize the controversies between traditional and Christian Santal in order to enhance their collective claim as indigenous.

In investigating the interventions of the NGOs, one of the most frequently asked questions that arose was “Can NGOs do good without doing wrong?” In responding to this question, Fisher (1997) emphasizes the inclusion between the individual, society, and the state, whereas NGOs have the ability to work in pockets of inequality, and macro-governmental rationalities need to take micro-programs into account when addressing the people’s demands (Fisher 1997). However, the type of NGO project, particularly Caritas-Bangladesh-supported projects, I have discussed above, remind us of Foucault’s ideas about governing and forming governable communities, the projects being principally intended precisely to do the latter.

In sum, the discussion in this chapter reveals three basic factors regarding the Manjhi Parishad. The first is that the Santal have been dominated for centuries in many different ways, in spite of which the constant continuity of the Manjhi Parishad expresses the firm maintenance of boundaries, the communal power to undermine the multifaceted hegemonic pressures, and the capacity to accommodate changes. Even the divided status of the Manjhi Parishad bears the same cultural requirements. To maintain the spirit of Santal identity, the Manjhi Parishad becomes the key to representing Santalness. The second factor is the silent sidestepping by the state in acknowledging the traditional governance structure in national local government institutions. The state's denial forced the Santal to accommodate the assimilative pressures of the NGOs. The third observation is the declining role of the state in creating spaces for NGO interventions. Obviously, the NGOs undertake a wide-range of activities among indigenous peoples, of which I can only include a sample of projects here, especially those that targeted the Manjhi Parishad. Meanwhile, NGOs' discursive and ephemeral activities failed to take into account the relationship between the state and indigenous people when a proper reformulation of the traditional governance structure became tied up with the local government structure in the country. The main concern is with the ASUS-implemented projects: the Caritas-implemented projects seem to follow the hidden goal of proselytization.

6.5. Concluding Remarks

In discussing the authority of the Manjhi Parishad in the initial stages of this chapter, I have explained that, although its power has declined in the course of time, it still remains important in maintaining Santal identity. In dealing with disputes within the village as of today, the Santal strongly resist the encroachment of the intermediaries in their affairs, although the intrusion of the intermediaries is much stronger when they have a distant relationship with the state. Besides, the Santal must endure the state's denial of them and the neglect of the majority of Bengalis as well. In investigating the role of the Manjhi Parishad, this chapter has also shown that the Santal are continually confronted with multifaceted encroachments, must endure the silent sidestepping of the state, and paradoxically adopt and confront change, while also reformulating their notion of Santalness. In fact, when the Santal are being oppressed in multiple ways, i.e., socially, culturally, politically and economically, the encroachments of development agencies and other NGOs are more or less accepted. The involvement of NGOs creates a translocal space within the

village in which the Santal can interact with globalized ideas of human rights and accustom themselves to indigenous rights, etc. As a traditional institution, the Manjhi Parishad becomes a medium for transmitting all sorts of ideas. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the Santal are creating forms of everyday resistance by performing ritual practices that are also a means to intensify the idea of Santal identity.

Chapter 7

Subtlety of Resistance Using Ritualized Practices: The Passage from Social Subjugation to Neoliberal Development

They (the Santal) are an illiterate and backward people. They do not have enough ability to explain their lives. As neighbors, we (Bengalis) know them well because we have been living in the same area for a long time. They do not have enough knowledge to improve their lives, and they still have many primitive practices in their everyday lives. In fact, they learned from us how to eat, how to cook, how to dress, how to maintain life. What you are looking at today is an upgraded version of the Adivasi, which they have learned from us. Though till now, their life contains many backward practices.

—Regarding the Santal, told by Bengali neighbors in Burutola village

This view of the Santal was expressed while I was carrying out a focus-group discussion with the Santal under a tree, when three Bengali men from the neighboring village came up to us and joined in. They were curious to know what I was discussing with the Santal. Their overbearing behavior ruined the atmosphere of the group discussion because they interrupted when the Santal were talking about their peasant way of life. The three Bengali men preferred to talk about the Santal. I soon discovered that they had robbed me of the responses to my questions by intervening in the discussion and telling me about the Santal, including the opinion of them cited above. The Santal present stopped talking and listened to their opinions but did not respond, instead gradually and silently leaving in order to keep the peace. The Santal are conscious of their status as a minority in relation to the majority Bengalis and of the latter's overpowering behavior.

However, the authoritative expressions of the Bengalis were not limited to correcting the Santal but extended to inquiring about me. Their first attempt was to question me: "Are you Muslim?" The next question was, "Do you perform the *namaz*?¹⁵⁹ Are you fasting?"¹⁶⁰ After

¹⁵⁹ *Namaz* is an obligatory religious duty on Muslims, a spiritual act performed five times a day at prescribed times.

¹⁶⁰ That was the time of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. Muslims restrict their eating during the month from sunrise to sunset.

asking about my religion, they started to ask questions to collect personal data about me, such as “Are you married? Where is your husband? Does your husband allow you to roam around villages in this way?” Soon afterwards their inquiry turned into preaching to me that “as a Muslim woman, I should observe *pardah*”¹⁶¹ and “Why observing *pardah* is necessary for me.” In addition, their authoritative behavior was not limited to asking me questions and my responding, but secretly extended to investigating my research assistant, as he informed me later. Neither responding to these questions nor refraining from replying to them was easy because I wanted to avoid any conflict so as to be able to complete my fieldwork peacefully. Thus, my social acceptance was not only an issue in the Santal villages but also in the locality more generally. Simultaneously, the three men’s treatment of me turned into male chauvinism and a covert intention to follow social prejudices. This aspect of male domination over women invokes the dimension of subordination in gendered contexts and contextualizes the social subjugation of minorities, with the Santal experiencing the ethnocentrism of the Bengalis. This perspective invites us to diagnose the multilayered overbearing behavior of the majority Bengalis in relation to the Santals, wherein the Santal are continually treated as “backward,” “inferior,” and “impure.”

Against this backdrop, the continuity of traditional practices – for instance, Santal salutations and welcome rituals – itself constitutes symbolic defiance of Bengali belittling tactics. Therefore, this chapter discusses Santal’s particular spontaneous ways of greeting, showing how integrated their communal power is in determining their identity and following the path of resistance. The ethnographic details in this chapter also show that these ritual practices are not only limited and persist as covert defiance, they are also linked to the strength to resist the neo-liberal development project in Santal villages. This chapter thus describes the spirit of resistance in moving from the vicinity of the village to the global sphere when resisting neo-liberal development projects. In doing so, a complex matrix of power exercised through village

¹⁶¹ *Pardah* refers here to additional women’s clothing covering the head and body and sometimes the face too. This is a social practice among Muslims, a form of seclusion and segregation of women’s physical appearance that is justified by Muslim religious norms. The particular aim of covering a woman’s body from other men is to secure her body for only one man—her husband. Usually in Bangladesh, in respect of outside mobility, *pardah* is observed by wearing a *burka* or *hijab*.

verdicts is exercised, making resistance, communal power, and traditional practices become the central concerns of this chapter.

In diagnosing social subjugation, I am concerned with the banalities of everyday life, including the social distance between Santals and Bengalis, which has endured remarkably. This distance is maintained in different social interactions based on the contradictions of “pure” vs. “impure” and “inferior” vs. “superior.” Therefore, the Santal are careful in taking care of their pigs, because no pig should enter a “pure” Bengali village by crossing its boundary with an “impure” Santal village. In the same way, when Bengali neighbors come into Santali villages, they prefer to take only uncooked food to maintain their “purity.” During weddings and festivals, Bengali neighbors take a great interest in watching the gorgeous Santal displays. In most cases they are not invited as guests but come as visitors. The restrictions regarding “purity” oblige the Santal to invite the neighboring Bengalis. The Santal are nonetheless cautious in maintaining a particular social distance because Bengalis usually do not take any meal cooked and served in the kitchens used by the Santal. In Santal villages one often comes across one or two tiny grocery shops and tea stalls, but no Bengali ever comes to buy anything there. Thus, strong social boundaries are retained and maintained on both sides. The maintenance of these boundaries reinforces Santalness, irrespective whether of Christian Santal or followers of the traditional beliefs, as all are considered “inferior” and “impure” by the Bengalis.

While doing fieldwork I came across these circumstances so often that I need to discuss situations in which the Santal resist hegemonic pressures in order to maintain their Santalness. For example, when I initially entered the Santal villages, I was greeted with the word *johar*, a Santal form of welcome. Soon afterwards I also began uttering and performing *johar* as an attempt to align myself with the village community. I found performing *johar* was more effective than asking “*chet lekha menema*” (how are you?). A couple of weeks later, I found the Santal extensively practicing *dobok* and *janga-abuk* to welcome guests into the community. These practices extend beyond the religious division between *bideen* and *esoie*, which I discussed in Ch. 5. However, on the one hand, the traditional and Christian Santal are united in performing rituals without a revitalizing agenda. On the other hand, conventional development dogma has pressed them to abandon the traditional drink of welcome, which is called *handi*.

Handi (rice beer) is a traditional Santal drink, but it was banned by the evangelists, has been restricted by development agencies (NGOs), and is also prohibited by the Bengali majority, all of whom state that drinking *handi* is dangerous for the Santal. However, the Santal resist all these restrictions because drinking and serving *handi* are rooted in their lifestyle, and the drink is an essential constituent of all rituals and ceremonies. As a traditional drink, the Santal produce it within the household. I experienced the close affinity and vivid presence of *handi* when I wished to make myself an “insider” in the Santal villages. Thus, I involved myself in minor forms of housework, ate with them, danced with them, and played the traditional Santali drums, but after drinking *handi* during *bhandan* (a feast after the funeral), I realized that getting close to the Santal was the most important thing I should do. I found that what broke down the distance between the villagers and myself was not only a behavioral process, but also the act of “drinking *handi*,” which pointed to the power of culture: “drinking *handi*” is not restricted to their social activities but is also a symbol of resistance to all hegemonic cultural acts exercised over them.

In discussing cultural hegemony, Gramsci (2006) emphasizes the relationship between culture, power, and capitalism. His concept of cultural hegemony suggests rethinking majoritarian interpretations and manipulations, in which a “ruling class” or, in the case of the Santal, the majority Bengalis insist on imposing their own world view. Bengalis’ hegemonic behavior based on ethnocentrism is oppression to the Santal. The response to it is to provide a space within which identity-based Santal practices can thrive and in which every individual, as a member of the Santal community, is conscious of practicing all forms of traditional rituals of welcome. The individual power to think and react to hegemony is correlated with the production of resistance. With regard to the tendency to examine everyday resistance, Abu-Lughod’s arguments (1990) provide directions for negotiating within space, as she showed by describing her experiences living with Bedouin women in Egypt. She observed the secret and silent forms of behavior and discourses in women’s everyday lives, for example, secret visits to friends, relatives, or healers, secretly smoking and hiding from men, singing songs objecting to men’s control over marriage arrangements, publishing sexually irreverent women’s discourses about men genitals, etc. She shows that these forms of resistance indicate a range of prohibitions and restrictions and are an exercise in power relations between women and men. Abu-Lughod (ibid.) seeks resistance in the telling of women’s stories or in behavior that is part of the banalities of

everyday life, thus pointing the way to rethinking the idea of everyday resistance in deference to context and culturally specific interactions. Thus, the multiple prohibitions on drinking *handi* or belittling Santals' culturally specific practices leads one to reinterpret the traditional salutations and welcome rituals as a response to the hegemonic social setting.

Therefore, the ethnographic explorations in the following sections will demonstrate the Santals' experiences in undermining the Bengalis' cultural hegemony, including how traditional salutations and welcome rituals are turned into resistance. The subtlety of resistance in respect of how to pursue enactment of the traditional form of village verdicts that resist neoliberal development projects, including the particularity of traditions and the context and culturally specific applications of these practices, are explained with reference to the evidence.

7.1. The Subtlety of Resistance in Performing Traditional Salutations

In doing fieldwork among Santal, I needed to be cautious in understanding their struggle to maintain their Santalness. Their allegedly “backward” practices are ingrained in the Santals' everyday lives, apparently trivial practices that indeed support their claim to recognition as indigenous. In the light of conscious and unconscious practice, these acts are probably questionable, but they certainly reinforce understanding of the Santals' underlying power, thus inviting one to frame these salutation-welcome rituals as forms of everyday resistance. Hence, by practicing these sorts of traditional customs, they challenge domination and survive under the repressive structure of the power they are subjected to. Thus, consciousness of Santal identity is important because, when I asked villagers why they practice the traditional forms of salutation, they said it was because majoritarian neglect and motives connected with evangelization press them to leave their “backward” practices behind. They replied, “We are divided now because of our religious conversion, but we try to minimize our divisions by practicing our traditions when we are all Santal.”

By performing traditional salutation and welcome rituals, the Santal are consciously opposing cultural hegemony and stressing their ethnic identity. Carrin comments, “The formulation of Santal ethnicity is rooted in a consciousness of a distinctive past. It is on this basis that Santals act in different social and political contexts” (Carrin 2000: 1, quoted in Hadders,

2005: 10). From that point of view, the perpetuation of *johar*, *dobok*, and *janga-abuk* does not express an intention to resist. However, these practices still nurture the distinctiveness of ethnic identity, irrespective of whether a Santal is a traditional believer or a believer in Christianity. When these customs are practiced in order to retain Santalness, they definitely belong to the spirit of resistance.

The performance of traditional salutations varies between everyday life and ceremonial occasions. For example, in daily communications, Santal use the words *johar* and *bido-johar* to welcome or greet each other. *Dobok* is an extended part of the greeting, which is determined by the relationship between two individuals or by a family relationship. *Janga-abuk* is also a form of greeting, but it is the highest expression of honor and is performed at different events. The first form of salutation is *johar*, a gesture of greeting and simultaneously a form of “hello.” It is a habitual form of behavior, which is practiced formally and informally in everyday life. The performance of *johar* consists in pressing the hands together, with the fingers pointing upwards and without the palms touching. It is similar to the Hindu greeting *Namaskar* or *Namaste*, but to perform *Namaste* the hands are pressed together and the palms touch. Hence, when a Santal meets another Santal, they say *johar*, and when it is time to bid farewell, they say *bido johar*. The word *bido* means “bye.” In practice, most of the time on both occasions, meeting and leaving, they say *johar*. Sometimes, without the gesture, they only say *johar*. The meaning of *johar* is a reference to communal solidarity among the Santal:

‘Johar’ expresses a wish of happiness, victory with person as ‘victory be with you’. Santhals greet each other by uttering ‘Johar’ when they meet. The phrase also signifies the secret of community solidarity. The word is derived from ‘Ja’ or ‘Joy’ and ‘har’. ‘Jo’ or ‘Joy’ means fruit or success or victory, and ‘har’ means to collect or share etc. (Hembram 1988: 91)



Figure 12. Performance of *johar* and *dobok*. Taken from Huren Murmu's Facebook timeline, with permission.

In figure 12, the woman and boy who are standing make the gesture of performing *johar*, and below part of the act of *janga-abuk* is shown. There is also a unique form of *johar* performed at weddings called *balaiya johar* or "salutation among in-laws." To welcome one another, the relatives of both families (groom and bride) stand in two lines, face one another, and perform *balaiya johar* by pressing the hands together, each saluting the other. This signifies that a social relationship has been extended between two families. The following figure 13 shows the act of

balaiya johar: when the relatives of the groom's party arrive at Situngtola village, the bride's party welcomes them.



Figure 13. Performance of *balaiya johar*. Photo by Huren Murmu.

In observing these practices, I noticed that the Santal were aware that they were teaching their children *johar* and *dobok*, an awareness that demonstrates the belongingness of Santal identity. The Santal wish to retain their identity because by doing so they convey their sense of belongingness to *hor hopon* or the sons of humanity (Somers 1977). This spirit is conveyed throughout the localities and extends beyond the village boundaries, to the market place, tea-

stalls, and other public places. In my field area, the Santal generally say *johar* when one Santal meets another. They are conscious of being “backward” and “inferior,” as well as having a culturally and ethnically minority status. On the one hand, in local public places, by saying *johar* they differentiate themselves from others. On the other hand, they extend the range of their defiance from the Santal village to other public places.

The persistence of these customs encourages the Santal to nourish the power to exercise such “backward” practices in public places. As a consequence, the utterance of *johar* is also extended to friendly indigenous majorities. Hence, when a Bengali meets a Santal either in a public place or individually, he or she will also say *johar*, an indication that he or she is expressing solidarity with the Santals’ struggle to retain their identity. Consequently, uttering *johar* is also politicized by local political leaders, as I found while working in Santal villages. The local people’s representatives and local political leaders even say *johar* in official communications with the Santal. This appears to increase their acceptance among Santal voters by making use of the Santal way of greeting to increase votes while also creating another discourse of objectification.

The second form of greeting is *dobok*, which is limited to the Santal and is a formal expression of salutation. The performance of *dobok* differs according to gender and age.¹⁶² For example, if a younger male is assigned a junior status, in performing *dobok* he generally places his open left hand under his right elbow and correlates his action with his right forearm extended to the older person with his right fist closed and keeping the head bowed. The younger female usually bows her head to the level of her waist and places her hands in the same way, but the correlation of the hands is from right to left. Simultaneously, a reciprocal gesture is returned by the older person. In this sequence, the responses differ according to gender. By receiving *dobok*, the elder male acknowledges the respectful gesture, while, in admitting the senior status of his counterpart, the younger man extends his right forearm with the body bent, with a half-closed fist, and with his palm pointing slightly downward. The elder female also acknowledges this respectful gesture by extending both arms to her junior, but her hands are open with upward-

¹⁶² The maintenance of senior and junior statuses in performing *dobok*, and the respect and cultural significance it expresses, have described by Somers (1977: 59-62).

facing palms, and her body is slightly bent forward with a gradual motion of the hands and fingers. Somers also observes this practice among Santal (Somers 1977: 59-62). The following figure 14 shows explicitly how to perform *dobok*.



Figure 14. Performance of *dobok*. This photo was taken by Nirjhor Shahriyar while making a documentary on the Santal. In it, Samar Soren is performing *dokok* to express respect to a village elder. Photo courtesy of Nirjhor Shahriyar.

In every ceremony, whether with guests or relatives, Santal perform *dobok*. The gesture of *dobok* connotes a special form of respect, and the representation and correlation of *dobok* between older and younger persons is a reciprocal relationship of respect; for the younger person, it conveys honor to the elder for his experience as an elder. This form of ritualized practice is deeply rooted in the ethnic belongingness of the Santal and is practiced by the Santal in communal communications. They are concerned to educate their children in Santal etiquette. On this point, Sumita Baskey from Champatola village said, “I guide my children to show proper respect for their elders, and for that they should learn how to perform *dobok* and *janga-abuk*.” This indicates that it is more important to be a Santal or *hor* than to elevate one’s status as

Bengalis interested in becoming “forward.” The practice of salutations represents an exercise of power by Santal and constitutes covert resistance to the so-called advanced ways of living of the majority.

The third form of salutation is *janga-abuk*, an extended form of showing respect which constitutes an expression of great honor. Remarkably, this highly ritualized practice indicates the continuation of the social order in the Santal manner, and by performing it Santal strategically root the notion of Santal identity in their everyday communications. This extended form of salutation is associated with a pot of water and the relationship between two individuals or families. The word *janga* means “feet,” and *abuk* means “to wash.” For example, when a brother comes to meet his sister in her in-law’s house, the sister welcomes her brother by performing *janga-abuk*. During my fieldwork, I observed that when Suren Murmu came to meet his sister in her in-laws’ house, his sister, Dulali Hasda, performed *janga-abuk* to welcome him. The performance of *janga-abuk* cannot be simplified by relations of kinship or clan membership, as the relationship extends the demonstration, communication, and association of politeness between individuals and families. Suren Murmu does not have any relationship of kinship with Dulali Hasda, but he has good relations with her in-laws, and her husband is one of his good friends. Apart from that, Dulali Hasda and Suren Murmu’s villages of origin are the same. Hence, Dulali Hasda perceives Suren Murmu as her brother. In addition, age determines what type of relationship will be established between any two individuals. Suren Murmu is about four years older than Dulali Hasda, putting them in a brother-sister relationship; if Suren Murmu were any older, he would be her uncle. This way of establishing kin ties between two individuals and families involves mutual consent and the cultural characteristics of society. The Santal practice this fixing of kin relations in their day-to-day lives. The relationship determines the performance of *janga-abuk*, and it includes kin, clan, and fixed relations. Thus, the performance of *janga-abuk* is a part of everyday Santal practice.

The performance of *janga-abuk* extends to Santal ceremonies and festivals. For example, *janga-abuk* is a significant rite during a wedding, at *baha* and *sohrai* (spring and harvest festivals), and at other ceremonies. It is performed extensively at Santal weddings, which involve a number of ceremonial occasions; all the events connected with a wedding, such as *gonon*

(fixing wedding date and bride-money) and *jam-nio* (feast), have continued serial salutations by means of *johar*, *dobok*, *balaiya johar* and *janga-abuk* (for more details see Ch. 8). The *gonon* is a meeting at which the wedding schedule and the brideprice are fixed, as the groom's family will have to give a brideprice to the bride's family. Traditionally, the brideprice is three *maunds* of paddy and Tk. 12 (approximately €0.12).¹⁶³ Usually, the date is set about one month before the wedding, and to complete the rituals, members of the groom's family, some officials from the Manjhi Parishad, and other relatives come to the bride's family. The welcome reception begins by uttering *johar* and performing *dobok-janga-abuk*. The young girls from among the bride's relatives help to complete the *janga-abuk*.



Figure 15. Performance of *janga-abuk*. During a wedding, when the bride arrives at the groom's house, her mother-in-law welcomes her by performing *janga-abuk*. Photo by the author.

More importantly, during the wedding the bride and groom are greeted several times by *janga-abuk*, as figure 15 makes evident. Nowadays, Santal wedding rites continue for three days

¹⁶³ As noted before, the *maund* is a traditional unit of weight, three *maund* being equivalent to 111.96 kg of paddy, while €0.12 is given as a brideprice to the bride's family. Whether solvent or poor, all Santal pay a similar amount in brideprice.

and include a series of salutations, i.e., *johar*, *balaiya johar*, *dobok* and *janga-abuk*. For instance, the wedding starts on the due date decided at *gonon*. The inauguration ceremony or *jam-nio* begins by welcoming the guests. The successive events of the wedding, namely *sasang sunum* (turmeric and mustard oil ceremony on body and face), *gur khila* (feeding molasses), *gidi chimowra* (gift-giving ceremony), the departure of the groom's supporters from the groom's village, their arrival at the bride's village, the farewell to the bride in the bride's village, and the welcome of the bride in the groom's village – all these wedding rites include performances of *balaiya johar*, *dobok*, and *janga-abuk*. Right after the closing wedding rituals, after *gidi chimowra* at the groom's village, a comical episode of *janga-abuk* is usually performed (Ch. 8 discusses the minute details of the wedding rituals). In performing these wedding rites, the members of the village, both community and kin, are all involved in performing *balaiya johar*, *dobok*, and *janga-abuk*.

The performance of *janga-abuk* is an integral part of traditional festivals and, as an essential ritual, it is performed by the villagers of Situngtola during *baha* and *sohrai*. The following figure 16 displays the *nayeki*'s role in conferring a blessing and receiving honor from one of the village community members. In doing so, the *nayeki* (priest) plays a significant role during the festival; after performing worship at the *manjhithan*, *jaherthan*, and *got-tandi*,¹⁶⁴ the Manjhi Parishad official reaches the *nayeki*'s house. The *nayeki burhi* (wife of *Nayeki*) welcomes them by performing *dobok* and *janga-abuk*, and in celebrating the *baha* festival the *nayeki*'s reception is marked by performing *dobok* and *janga-abuk* (discussed in detail in Ch. 8). In Santal villages, the persistence of these highly ritualized salutations is related not only to modes of behavior but also to displaying the continuity of historical records, the character of the society, and the process of deploying the power of the community. The power they manifest when choosing a public event¹⁶⁵ to show their traditional salutations conveys the meanings they invoke in determining to make changes in their own way. Simultaneously, the staged performance of

¹⁶⁴ *Got-tandi* is an empty rice-field near the village. Generally, it is used as a meeting place for villagers, and the male members of the village community also assemble there to perform rituals related to ceremonial occasions.

¹⁶⁵ A group of young Santal set up Manowa a decade ago, that is, a Kakonhat-based indigenous cultural organization. Throughout the year the organization organizes different cultural events. The primary aim of Manowa is to revitalize the indigenous traditions of the indigenous peoples of the plains. The organization staged *janga-abuk* in front of public. The emergence of Manowa and some of its initiatives are discussed in Ch. 8.

traditional obeisance is a form of resistance and maps out a path from “hidden transcripts” to “public transcripts.”



Figure 16. Performance of *janga-abuk* during *baha* (spring festival). The *nayeki* (priest) is welcomed in every house by performing *janga-abu*. Photo by the author.

Thus, in the big annual event put on by the Manowa Cultural Organization (Manowa), the *janga-abuk* was demonstrated to the public, being staged at the Kakonhat Municipality Auditorium in 2014. The Mayor of Kakonhat Municipality, the chief guest of the program, was welcomed on to the stage by a performance of *janga-abuk* during the three-day long cultural program, which was organized by Manowa. The local elites were also invited as special guests of the program and welcomed on to the stage in the same manner. Therefore, the performance of

janga-abuk on the stage attracted huge public attention, and the welcome session was a curiosity for the audience. Manowa views the *janga-abuk* as a significant part of Santal culture, by performing which it aimed to show and share Santal cultural heritage, Manowa's annual big event being a good platform on which to demonstrate it.

In fact, the performance of *janga-abuk* is a highly ritualized tradition which makes explicit the Santals' cultural strength by demonstrating their traditional practices at a public place and by belittling those the majoritarian Bengalis label as "backward." Thus, their audacity and subtlety in performing these rituals reveals a sort of cultural resistance to social subjugation. The initiative to demonstrate this integral ritual practice also manifests the Santals' intention to determine change on their own and to oppose the cultural hegemony exerted over them by dominant groups. This indicates that the *janga-abuk* is also a symbol of the idea of Santal identity. According to the Santal, "We are Santal whether we have changed our religion or not, but we are conscious of keeping our identity as Santal." These traditional salutations express a strong sense of ethnic identity.

From Comaroff's (1985) point of view, rituals are not only acts of self-representation, they also mark apartheid-era social relations and boundaries. Comaroff studied Tshidi life in South Africa, where political resistance was banned by law. The syncretistic reproduction of rituals was exported by the Zionist Christian Church in Tshidi life and became a symbol of resistance to the South African apartheid system. Of course, in Santal life particular changes occurred, and intermediaries (NGOs and Churches) entered the stage attempting to reduce the oppression of the Santal, but the symbolic meaning of the ritualized salutations is distinctive, one that the Santal attempt to use in both ways. First, they disregard the missionaries' attempts to assimilate them, and secondly they resist the majoritarian hegemony. Therefore, the traditional salutations reveal defiance of domination and subordination. The practices related to Santali salutations are prolonged by serving *handi* (rice beer). From the dominant cultural point of view, the term *handi* could be translated as "welcome drink" or "fermented beverage."

7.2. When *handi* Opposes Domination

Serving *handi* is an essential aspect of the welcome ritual at any traditional Santal event. Thus, on all ceremonial occasions, such as *gonon* (fixing wedding date and bride-money), *bapla* (wedding), *gidi chimowra* (gift-giving ceremony), or *jam-nio* (feast of wedding ceremonies), the welcome reception essentially begins by serving *handi* and *murhi* (puffed rice). During *gonon*, after the *dobok* and *janga-abuk*, the bride's family welcomes the groom's party by serving *handi* and *murhi*. Then the reception continues in the same way during *jam-nio* and *gidi chimowra*. After serving *handi*, the hosts accompany the guests by drinking *handi* as well. These events are enjoyable, with chatting and waves of laughter, and the rhythms of the *tamak* and *tungdak* create a cheerful atmosphere in the village.

Similarly, the celebrations at the *baha* and *sohrai* festivals would not be complete without *handi*, which is a significant constituent in offering worship, making libations, and conducting ceremonies. During worship at the *manjhithan* (sacred place), *jaherthan* (sacred grove), and *got-tandi* (empty field, a meeting place of villagers), *handi* is an essential constituent of all rituals and celebrations, as we learn from the following account:

The festivals of the Santals would appear lifeless if no reference is made to the practice of drinking rice-beer on these occasions. 'Give me rice-beer (*handi*) or give me death' may be the summary of a Santal's instinctive craving for rice-beer which can be rightly called their 'national' intoxicating drink. So important is the drinking of rice-beer that nothing of a public character can be ratified without the drinking of *handi*... It is compulsory to offer *handi* libations to the major spirits, the ancestors and other spirits during worships. Santal tradition stresses the divine origin of *handi*. (Troisi 2000: 125)

In particular, and as already mentioned in Ch. 2, the Santal myths of origin tell that Santal learned to brew *handi* from Marang Buru (Great Mountain, or one of the high gods). The use of *handi* is rooted in Santal myth and cosmology and is firmly established as an integral part of their lives. The arrival of evangelism led to the drinking of *handi* among Santal being prohibited, despite which I observed the sacred use of *handi* in all types of worship. Irrespective of whether the importance of *handi* in making libations to the deities no longer applies to the Christian Santal, both groups of believers, traditional and Christian, continue to use *handi* as an essential

aspect of taking auspices on all types of ceremonial occasion. Josef Tudu, a Christian Santal and one of the officials on Situngtola's Manjhi Parishad, acknowledged this by saying, "Although we have changed our religious identity, we cannot leave *handi*; it is rooted in our traditions and has determined our way of life as Santal."

In Bengali discourse *handi* is referred as *haria*, while the Oraon, another indigenous people of the plains of north-west Bangladesh who use the same drink, also call it *haria*. The Santal are careful to call it *handi* and by doing so signify their cultural distinctiveness. However, there is political objectification underlying the drinking of *handi* because the local elites and the local political leaders try to make them drunk and to enslave them by exploiting their habit of drinking *handi*, for example, getting them to sign documents while drunk to transfer land away. This is one of the reasons for the indigenous peoples of the plains being dispossessed of their land.

Ordinary development agencies have also capitalized on this process of politicized objectification by sidestepping the structural causes of poverty and citing the Santals' "traditional drinking habit" as one reason why they are poor. These intermediaries condemn it as "alcoholism." Thus, the aim of abolishing Santal drinking traditions has been added to development programs: for example, Caritas Dinajpur of Bangladesh has launched a project to eliminate the *handi* habit involving eleven indigenous village women of Dinajpur District working against "alcoholic addiction."¹⁶⁶ In addition, the local Catholic Church also enforces strong restrictions on drinking *handi*. The Seventh-day Adventists absolutely prohibit the drinking of *handi*, as well as the playing of traditional musical instruments such as the *tamak* and *tungdak*.

Another reason has been found to ban *handi* by Compassion International, a United States-based, church-supported NGO which began working in Bangladesh in 2003. With respect to *handi* it states: "The Santal tribe is also known for making *chuani*, a homemade alcohol.

¹⁶⁶ "Dinajpur, Caritas battles alcoholism among tribal." *AsiaNews.it*, 05 November 2015. <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Dinajpur,-Caritas-battles-alcoholism-among-tribal-34205.html>. (accessed 14.08.2017).

Because of this, alcoholism is prevalent in this region, often leading to violence and unemployment.”¹⁶⁷ *Chuani* is another traditional fermented drink, which is widely used by indigenous peoples in the CHT. Due to a lack of knowledge about the Santal, the development agent mentioned *chuani* instead of *handi*. However, the evangelical notion of development was also echoed by Jogendranath Soren, President of Morcha, during an interview when he said, “Religious conversion does not ruin Santals’ traditions. What ruins it? That is alcoholism, the *handi* habit of the Santal.”

Moreover, Bangladesh is a country with a predominantly Muslim majority, among whom alcohol consumption is strongly prohibited. Thus, the Santals’ *handi* habit makes them “impure,” just as the habit of eating pork makes them untouchable to Muslims. Likewise, majoritarian norms are rooted in the scholarly work of Bengalis. For example, Sharif’s (2014: 18) study states that “alcoholic addiction” is one of the major challenges in schooling Santali children, and he makes reference to “home-made alcohol preparation and drinking regularly in an addiction that creates an adverse environment in the family and in discharging parental responsibility. It hampers the education of children in many Santal families.” And Hasan (2006: 72) remarks that “the conscious Santals avoid drinking *hariya* [rice beer]; instead they drink tea.” Tea is widely used and is a socially accepted drink among the majority Bengali Muslims in Bangladesh. Instead of analyzing differences in cultural behavior, these scholars are influenced by practices of cultural hegemony and tend to adopt donor-driven development discourses. Hasan’s (2006) statement exemplifies this tendency to establish a hegemony in scholarly observation:

A considerable change is observed in the serving of *hariya* (rice beer). Earlier, *hariya* abuse was rampant in ceremonies and festivals of the Santals. With increasing awareness and health concerns, a large part of *hariya* ritual is being replaced with tea and *muri* (puffed rice) serving. Such a change has economic implications too. Financial insolvency, as well as increased motivation to savings and prudence, bars them from unworthy spending in liquor. (ibid.: 135-136)

¹⁶⁷ “Bangladesh, Northwestern Region.” *Compassion International*. 2015. <https://www.compassion.com/bangladesh/santal.htm>. (accessed 25.12.2017).

The notion of “financial insolvency” needs to be investigated in the context of how the village economy is pursued in Santal villages, because until now the Santal have mainly preferred to accept their daily wages in paddy rather than money, given that most Santal are associated with agricultural activities (discussed in detail in Ch. 4). The circulation of money in Santal villages is generally due to the reciprocity performed by the Santal, not only amounts of currency. *Handi* is produced in Santal villages, its ingredients depending on indigenous knowledge, as Santal believe that they have health benefits and do not lead to “health concerns.” This stresses the objections to imposing change on the Santal without knowing about their world view.

The Santal belief that the ingredients of *handi* have health benefits extends to the plant species used in making *handi*, which are said to prevent many ailments such as malaria, blood pressure, liver-related diseases, and so on. During the course my fieldwork, I came across Sumitra Tudu, a Santal women living in Burutola village, in her courtyard using the sun to dry something the size of the common plum, but white in color and round, which was unknown to me (see figure 17). As I was curious to know what it was and for what purpose it was used, she said, “It’s called *bakhar* or *ranu*, one of the essential ingredients of *handi*, and without *ranu*, *handi* it cannot be made.” She also informed me that “previously *bakhar* or *ranu* was prepared from more than 20 herbal plants, but nowadays, due to reductions in plant species, it is limited to 8-12 species.” Afterward, I also spoke to other Santal women and found that the preparation of *ranu* is a matter of hidden knowledge among them, knowledge they transferred from generation to generation. Santal women prepare it once a year and preserve it all through the year to make *handi*. Sometimes, they also buy it, but its preparation and the trade in it are limited to the Santal. Knowledge of how to prepare *handi* is mainly the preserve of women, who are not willing to share the names of the herbal species they use because they believe that this will reduce the affects of the spices.

Indeed, drinking *handi* is deeply rooted in Santal culture and contains traditional wisdom. To persist in drinking *handi* is not only an act of defiance, it also maintains the esoteric knowledge of *handi* preparation. Despite the many prohibitions, continuing to drink *handi* is another proof of the notion of cultural resistance. The desire to keep knowledge of *handi*

preparation secret represents symbolic defiance of all types of domination, while continuing to drink *handi* creates a discourse with which to resist changes laid down by hegemonic actors.



Figure 17. Pots of *handi* (rice beer) and *bakhar* or *ranu* (one of the essential ingredients of *handi*). The left-hand photo shows Manjhi Parishad officials sitting in the field (*got-tandi*) with pots of *handi* on the first day of *shorai* (harvest festival). In the right-hand photo a Santali woman holds *ranu* in her hands. Photos by the author.

It is notable that the Government of Bangladesh acknowledges traditional alcohol-drinking habits under the Narcotics Control Act (1990), even though alcohol consumption is prohibited by law in Bangladesh. However, producing and drinking alcohol are allowed to the indigenous peoples living in the country, as well as to sweepers, tea-garden laborers, cobblers, fisher people, and cremation ground cleaners.¹⁶⁸ In this regard, Roy (2009:16) says, “Seemingly a mundane matter, this is an important recognition of the cultural rights of indigenous peoples.” In practice, sometimes the advantage turns into a disadvantage because the indigenous villages are targeted as a source of alcohol production. The prohibition of alcohol among Muslims (particularly among men) actually encourages them to consume it, and they come to Santali villages to buy *handi*. This objectification of Santal villages as a source of *handi* also creates another space in which to abuse Santal women, as stated by Alex Murmu, who lives in Burutola village:

¹⁶⁸ “Law and our rights.” *The Daily Star*, 27 May 2010. <http://www.thedailystar.net/law/2010/03/04/advocate.htm>. (accessed 18.12.2017).

Santal women are another attraction, hence the frequency of the back and forth of Bengali men in Santal villages. Because of this they also have room to flatter the young Santal women and girls. And in most cases, the women are sexually abused.

However, unemployment and seasonal unemployment force the Santal to produce alcohol for sale. Nonetheless, by continuing to drink and serve *handi* on all types of ceremonial occasions, the Santal have a silent but powerful response to all the prohibitions imposed on them by hegemonic powers since the nineteenth century, when the missions began to stop the drinking of *handi*. From then until today, *handi* contends with many restrictions, but the bare presence of *handi* makes it evident that it is irreplaceable in Santals' lives.

7.3. Village Verdict versus Resistance to Neoliberal Development

The image of the Phulbari movement that emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century counts as one of the most frequently circulated people's protests against neoliberal development in Bangladesh. As I wrote in Ch. 3, the open character of the movement and the openness of the indigenous people were made visible in public protests. In this section, I explain the background that provoked the Santal to root their spirit of resistance in ritual practices, showing how the verdict of the village becomes a weapon with which to resist neoliberal development projects. Furthermore, by acting on village verdicts, we see how the Santal became caught between the continuity of changing power relations and the communal strength to undermine aggressive power.

Before proceeding to an account of the Santal's covert resistance to the neoliberal project, it is important to recall that after the people's protest on 26 August 2006, implementation of the Phulbari Open-Pit Coal Mine project was halted. The people's agitation against the Project lasted from 2005 to 2006. The intensity of the protest forced the Bangladesh Government to sign a six-point agreement¹⁶⁹ with the protesters, spearheaded by the National Committee to Protect Oil,

¹⁶⁹ The six-point agreement was signed on 30 August 2006. As a quick response, the Government of Bangladesh halted the Phulbari Open-Pit Mining Project. The other demands mentioned in the agreement still have not been fulfilled. The demands are: (1) Ban Asia Energy activities in Bangladesh and enact permanent prohibition by order against open-pit mining anywhere in the country. (2) Compensation for the protesters killed by the police on 26 August 2006. (3) Compensation for those injured and other persons affected by the events of 26 August 2006. (4) Conduct a proper inquiry and impose proper punishment on those responsible for the killings of 26 August 2006. (5)

Gas, Mineral Resources, Port, and Power (National Committee). If the project had been implemented, the Santal would have been evicted for living in a coal-mining area.

Despite the dialectical relationship between the Santal and Bengalis, in protesting against an agent of neoliberalism (Asia Energy) they stood together because, if the Phulbari Open-Pit Coal Mine Project had been implemented, both would have been evicted. In this respect, the subordination of the Santal has been documented in the previous chapters of this thesis, but it is notable that the Santal and Bengalis were prepared to act in concert when they were both threatened with eviction from their homes and farmland. This common interest formed a powerful background to their asserting their collective nature in the Phulbari Movement. The alignment of two or more different interest groups in reaching the same goal is not unique to the Phulbari Movement, as Wright (2016) has acknowledged. In analyzing the network of the anti-globalization movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s, she states, “More universalist political goals can be shared by various people in a resistance movement... These issues were particularly visible in writing about indigenous activism and struggles for land rights and self-determination, which were the very means of resistance” (Wright 2016: 10).

The Santals’ overt participation in the Phulbari movement was circulated in the media and mentioned in academia, but their covert acts of resistance were overlooked. In the popular concept of resistance, internal ethnographic events usually go unnoticed. Thus, when, by passing a decree of ostracism, the Santal curbed the mobility of traitors in their villages, Scott’s concept of “hidden transcripts” can again be invoked to investigate the circumstances behind the village verdict. From the perspective of cultural resistance, the Santals’ covert resistance became overt to me when I was prevented from entering the Phulbari Coal Mine Project area’s villages, where I had selected Burutola and Champatola as my fieldwork area. To gain admittance to the area, I initially went to the National Committee office in Neemtala Circle.¹⁷⁰ During office hours at the National Committee office I met Saiful Islam Jewel, Convener of Phulbari Upazila, National

Withdraw false cases filed against the protesters and punish the “agent” for Asia Energy. (6) Build a monument to the deceased following the events of 26 August 2006 (Alam 2015: 108-109, 130-131).

¹⁷⁰ Neemtala circle is situated in Phulbari Bazaar, a significant area where most of the public protests against the Phulbari Coal Mining Project began and the mass protest on 26 August 2006 occurred.

Committee, and satisfied him that I was not against the people living in the Phulbari Coal Mine Project area, after which I was allowed to proceed to the villages. In proving this, my academic research affiliation and my personal contact with Professor Anu Mohammad,¹⁷¹ the member-secretary of the National Committee, enabled me to carry out fieldwork in the villages of the Phulbari Coal Mine Project area. Afterward, I had to confront another instance of social reluctance because any outsiders present were presumed to be opposed to the movement. Thus, in the first stage, I held back in the villages when the villagers were reluctant to talk to me. As a citizen of the country this was a completely new experience for me, because in my life up to that time I had always been able to move around any part of the country without any prior consent from anywhere or anyone.

As already mentioned in Ch. 1, it took time to build trust with the community in the Phulbari Coal Mine area. The communities within the Coal Mine Project area have imposed strong restrictions on allowing any outsider to enter, and the consent of the National Committee is required to carry out any research work. Also, the villagers' restrictions and the National Committee's consent are correlated with each other. The level of agreement between the villagers and the National Committee demonstrates the vitality of the resistance in which the achievements of the Phulbari movement are rooted. In fact, as of today, the villagers in Burutola and Champatola live in constant fear of being evicted from their homes at any time. They assume that certain internal arrangements are being made between the government and the corporate body responsible for the coal mine project, of which they themselves are unaware, so they deliberately monitor the presence of strangers. Thus, for any outsiders to enter the villages in the Phulbari Coal Mine area and conduct fieldwork there is difficult. In discussing the people's protests in the Phulbari Movement, this form of resistance on the part of the community tends to go unnoticed and to disappear because of the attention given to the large-scale forms of popular demonstration. By mentioning communal restrictions on entering the Project area, these

¹⁷¹ Professor Anu Mohammad, the member-secretary of the National Committee, who teaches economics in Jahangirnagar University. He is a prominent leader of the Phulbari Movement, and on behalf of the protesters he signed the Phulbari Agreement with the government of Bangladesh in 2006. As a spokesperson of the Phulbari Movement, he speaks for the Movement both nationally and globally. As an influential academic and activist, his concerns are powerful in protesting against the use of extortion in relation to natural resources.

unnoticed forms of resistance, where communal power, ritual practices and resistance go hand in hand, are revealed.

From this point of view, by discussing the following cases of three traitors, I trace the cultural aspects of the involvement of the Santal in participating in the Phulbari Movement. Right from the beginning of the movement, their participation has been visible in many public spheres, such as rallies, processions and public demonstrations, where the Santal are noticeable with their traditional bows and arrows, drums, and dresses. Conversely, in analyzing their invisible participation, I draw attention to the collective resistance of the Santal in the form of enacting decrees through the Manjhi Parishad, decrees that show how their traditional practices can act to undermine neoliberal development protects in Santal villages.

7.3.1. Three Cases of Traitors among the Santal and Ritual Practice to Resist Them

These three examples of village verdicts exemplify the idea of covert resistance, including the decrees issued by the Manjhi Parishads, when three traitors were socially boycotted within the village. As a result, the spirit of resistance is not only demonstrated in the public sphere but grafted on to ritual practices. In examining these social boycotts, I uncovered three testimonies of traitors from my field area, the first being Binoy Tudu, a forty-five-year-old landless agricultural laborer living in Champatola village, who no longer has social interaction with the other members of the village community. In the village, he and his family have only negligible communications with the other villagers because he worked secretly for Asia Energy as a spy, giving them information from 2005-2006. His sudden acquisition of electronic goods and squandering of money made the villagers curious to know the source of his money. They kept track his activities and found that he was working for Asia Energy. The village community considered this a violation of the social order and a betrayal of communal belonging. Soon afterwards the Manjhi Parishad of Champatola called an emergency *kulhi durup* (village council meeting) and imposed ostracism on him, which Santal usually enact in the most offensive cases, in line with the seriousness of this punishment, as I explained in Ch. 6.

The enactment of this most serious decree demonstrates the seriousness with which communal treachery is treated and the importance of preventing spying in the village. The decree

of the Manjhi Parishad emphasizes uncovering the subtle aspects of the enactment to identify the fabric of resistance, which is directed at undermining neoliberal development, as well as being the glue that holds everyday resistance together. Although the discussion of everyday forms of resistance may reveal a lack of political consciousness, the enactment of ostracism in order to penalize traitors involves a high degree of political intention, in which the village was turned into a corridor of power to resist capitalist penetration.

However, Binoy Tudu was not the only traitor who had a sentence of ostracism passed on him, as two other persons in Burutola village committed the same offense and were penalized in the same way. These two traitors were called Sunil Murmu and Laxmiram Tudu. Both of them secretly sent information about everyday events in the village and like Binoy benefited financially from their involvement with Asia Energy. The village community of Burutola tracked their activities and imposed the same sentence of ostracism on them. After being ostracized, all three found it difficult to go on living under the social embargo placed upon them and fled from their villages. Afterward, when the Phulbari Movement succeeded in halting the Phulbari Coal Mine Project, they expressed shame and apologized for their misdeeds. The Manjhi Parishad of Burutola absolved Laxmiram Tudu, but Sunil Murmu was not freed from the social boycott. When I was carrying out fieldwork in Burutola, I discovered that Sunil could not enter the village, even though he is a medium-scale farmer, well-off financially and has a home in the village. Instead he had to live in his father-in-law's house with his wife and only daughter, but by maintaining a safe distance, he leased out his farmland to get some benefit from it. At this time, his home was occupied by a member of the village community, and the Manjhi Parishad of Burutola refused to lift the ban on Sunil as an ostracized person.

Conversely, in lifting the ban on Laxmiram Tudu, the Manjhi Parishad of Burutola showed generosity by accepting his apology. In doing so, Laxmiram confessed in front of the community and undertook not to harm the community by any of his activities. Laxmiram Tudu is older and completely landless, having to work as a wage-laborer for his living. Thus, by extending this kindness, his destitute status contributed to his ostracism being lifted. In extending their generosity to Laxmiram, the villagers of Burutola collectively said:

We not only took action against the Asia Energy agents, we also prohibited all activities by them in our village. As well as attacking the Asia Energy office at Phulbari Bazaar, we also attacked all the traitors' houses in the locality and burnt their houses too. For a period, the traitors were not allowed in the vicinity of the village. Nonetheless, some of them returned because their poor status led to the imposition of ostracism being withdrawn. Laxmiram is one of them.

Binoy's financial status was similar to Laxmiram's. Thus, in withdrawing the sentence of ostracism, the Manjhi Parishad of Champatola also demonstrated its generosity, but in accepting Binoy's apology an extreme form of punishment was enacted, in which he (Binoy) had to spit and lick up his spittle again with his tongue in front of the villagers while vowing that "in future, I will never violate communal unity." Binoy did this in order to have his ostracism lifted. Socially, the sentence of spitting and licking spittle up into mouth with the tongue is the highest form of humiliation, one that affects human dignity, as well as marking treachery to the community as an extreme offense. Finally, the sentences of ostracism were withdrawn from Laxmiram and Binoy, but their social status is still low today.

The Phulbari Movement ended over a decade ago. Several phases passed during the period of the movement, and open-pit mining under the Phulbari project is still suspended. These silent roles in preventing neoliberal development show the importance of "hidden transcripts," that is, of "offstage" events and the Santals' ability to combine "everyday acts" with "ritual practices." Thus, the idea of everyday resistance shows how the verdict of the village became a powerful weapon of an oppressed people. Furthermore, the restriction on any outsider entering the village reveals the subtle character of the resistance, the community being intimately aware of any internal activity and responding to it by resisting the entry of outsiders.

7.4. The Subtleties of Resistance, Ritual Practices and the Verdict of the Village

In describing my observations of Santali traditional salutations and welcome rituals, I argued that the advantage of traditional practices is that they have the power to ignore the prescribed changes. Initially, the salutations and welcome rituals might appear trivial, but careful observation indicates a dynamic power being exercised by the Santal, which is grafted on to the

subtle notion of resistance in ritual practices and denotes a shift from “hidden transcript to public transcript” (Scott, 1990: xii). Despite Gutmann’s claim (1993) that forms of everyday resistance are not aimed at structural change, in the fullness of time the initially banal ignorance of the restrictions on ending the drinking of *handi* became a historical milestone and documented the underlying power of the Santal through which they dismiss centuries of domination by others.

The Santal are continually going through phases of transformation while endeavoring to decide on their own changes. In resisting neoliberal development projects, they showed their courage by participating in public protests and demonstrated their spirit of resistance by passing village verdicts to counter traitors and Asia Energy’s agents. In doing so, they drew on the power of Santal laws, in which communal betrayal is considered the greatest offense, for which the extreme decree of a sentence of ostracism is imposed. The maintenance of social order appears to be a response to market-oriented development, iconic relationships being revealed between ritual practice and resistance movements.

In the early 2000s a similar indigenous resistance movement occurred in the Niyamagiri Mountains in the Indian state of Odisha, an area rich in bauxite. The indigenous people of the region, the Kondh and Dongria, protested against neoliberal extraction and development supported by the Government of India and Vedanta, a multinational company (Pandey 2017). Evidently, like the Santal the Kondh and Dongria successfully halted its implementation. As in the case of the Santal, in pursuit of economic growth indigenous people like the Kondh and Dongria are targeted for eviction in many parts of the world, as well as mobilizing resistance movements against neoliberal actors and states. Similar theoretical progress is also observed in the Zapatista Movement¹⁷² in Mexico, the Zapatistas’ struggles becoming an example inspiring

¹⁷² The Zapatista movement is a general term for the indigenous uprising against economic globalization and demands for democratization and land reform in Chiapas, Mexico, organized by EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation). It emerged in 1994 and evolved until 2003. As a consequence of the movement’s emergence, the Mexican government stressed the need to improve the political rights of indigenous peoples, although infringements of human rights and social inequality still occur. In arguing for the achievements of the movement, Inclán (2018) says, “...its national and international salience has made it a model for indigenous and antiglobalization struggles ...more recently the Zapatista banner has become emblematic of anarcho-libertarian movements around the world” (Inclán 2018: 1). For details, see María Inclán. 2018. *The Zapatista Movement and Mexico’s Democratic Transition: Mobilization, Success, and Survival*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

indigenous peoples of the world to create similar spaces for negotiation between themselves and the state.

The creeping encroachment on the Santal is nothing new: they have experienced it for ages. The records of resistance movements not only reveal Santal heroism but focus on the shifts in hegemonic power, thus distinguishing the context of Santal rebellion that is yet to become significant in Bangladesh, and with the Santal fighting for rights that are yet to be achieved. During the 161st anniversary celebration of the Santal rebellion, Tripura (2016) expressed a similar view, many indigenous activists in the country agreeing with it. This is also found in Bengali literature, as the following paragraphs will explore in more detail.

Thus, in reviewing the ties of resistance, I regard the subtleties of Santal resistance as not only a matter of making the journey from covert to overt resistance, or from ritual practice to resisting neoliberal development, but also of occupying a space in Bengali literature. One example is *Aranyer Adhikar* (The Rights of the Forest [Devi 1977]), a novel containing a biography of Birsa Munda,¹⁷³ one of the indigenous freedom fighters in British India. The uprising of Birsa Munda features in the novel, Birsa Munda being an emblem of resistance who inspires today's Santal to find the power to resist oppression. *Kalindi*¹⁷⁴ (Bandyopadhyay 1940) is a novel documenting the quasi-feudal relationship between *zamindars* and Santal, including their covert political ideas. Subsequently, the novel was staged as a drama and played a role in making public the oppression the Santal suffer and their ability to resist. The novel *Katatara Projapoti* (Butterfly in Barbed Wire [Hossain 1989]) is focused on the Tebhaga Movement (1946-47) but anchors the streams of resistance in the successors to indigenous peoples' rights activists. Recently the drama *Rarang*¹⁷⁵ completed fourteen years on the stage. Its staging began

¹⁷³ Birsa Munda (1875-1900) was an indigenous freedom fighter from Jharkhand and a folk hero of the Indian independent movement.

¹⁷⁴ *Kalindi* is a river flowing in North 24 Parganas district in the Indian state of West Bengal.

¹⁷⁵ *Rarang* is a Santali word referring to sound. The drama *Rarang* was written and directed by Mamunur Rashid and staged by Aranyak Natyadal, a renowned Bangladeshi theatre troupe. The number of times of its staging is itself a triumph, a performance record in Bangladeshi theatre. See "The Final Show of 'Rarang' at BSA." *Daily Star*, 20 July 2018. <https://www.thedailystar.net/arts-entertainment/theatre/the-final-show-rarang-bsa-1607959>. (accessed 02.12.2018).

in 2004, between when and July 2018 it was staged 180 times. The drama featured the biography of Alfred Soren, who fought against oppression and land dispossession. To depict the ingrained character of the strength of the Santal, it also recapitulates the historical trajectory of the Santal *Hul* of 1955-56.

The deployment of tribal resistance has been narrated exclusively by Mahasweta Devi.¹⁷⁶ She wrote a significant number of novels, among them the fictional *Chotti Munda ebong Tar Tir* (Chotti Munda and his arrow), which was most frequently circulated. Published in 1980, the novel is written in Bengali and is a significant work of Mahasweta Devi's. The novel was studied and also staged to raise a thousand hands as followers of Sidhu-Kanu and Birsa Munda's rebellion. It is considered her seminal work, one that expresses the historical continuity of the repression of indigenous peoples. The protagonist in the novel, Chotti Munda, belongs to the Munda community, the Santal and Munda both being peoples of eastern India. In fact, the novel documents colonial and pre-colonial history and portrays the continuity of colonial images in the decolonized independent state. *Chotti Munda ebong Tar Tir* has become a "weapon of the weak" for its critique of dominant power relations. Although my focus is on everyday resistance, which goes beyond popular political movements, it has a political character. In spreading and popularizing the spirit of resistance, this literature has been significant in depicting how the lives of the Santal are objectified by repressive power, while at the same time being significant in stimulating the Santal of today to stand up to all forms of oppression.

Therefore, by discussing everyday ritual practices and their connection with popular protests, the apparently disguised banal behavior of everyday life and ordinary village verdicts reveals the rebellious character of the Santal, including their resistance to repressive power structures and the mobility of neoliberal development agents in the villages. The discussion in this chapter has shown the particularity of the Santals' nature, in which they continuously use their underlying power to oppose all forms of oppression. Thus, the evidence of this chapter

¹⁷⁶ Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) was a Bengali novelist and social activist. She raised her voice by writing against discrimination against the indigenous people of India. She spent a significant amount of time with the indigenous people of West Bengal, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh and linked her writings to the colonial legacy of discrimination, which still remains. Her most notable works, *Chotti Munda O Tar Teer* and *Aranyer Adhikar*, were penned to draw attention to colonial oppression and the power of resistance of indigenous people.

induces me to make four points about resistance. The first is that the sense of belongingness of traditional modes of salutation goes beyond the religious divisions. However, the social area of interaction is gradually changing, and the Santal are gradually interacting in many social locations, such as in public places, with both intermediaries and majoritarians. In this context, the use by Santal of traditional salutations reveals the growing power of resistance within the community.

The second observation is that, in the context of stimulating the retention of Santalness among young Santal, the performance of *janga-abuk* at the Kakonhat Municipality Auditorium demonstrated defiance against oppression and domination. This consciousness has led young Santal to restrict the existence of Monawa (see more details in Ch. 8), an indigenous people's cultural organization. The durability of Monawa is itself a symbolic form of resistance against outsiders, intermediaries who seek to impose changes, spreading the message that the Santal have the strength to decide changes in their own way.

The third point is that the restrictions on drinking *handi* have a long historical background. The prohibition on drinking *handi* has been transferred from missionaries to development agents, from majoritarian propaganda to scholarly arguments, and has intensified the tendency of NGOs to gloss over the structural causes of poverty and refer to predetermined development dogmas in stopping the drinking of *handi*. However, the underlying power of the Santal has induced them to continue this ritual habit. This is a response to the hegemonic prescription, which is evidence of the strength of cultural resistance. According to my own observations, this is the strongest form of resistance, as it is derived from the community in its defiance of the many hegemonic powers. This resistance was not limited to drinking *handi* but also extended to producing it, in which respect the Santal conceal knowledge of the preparation of *bakhar* or *ranu*, one of the essential ingredients of *handi*, knowledge that women hide but also to transfer to the next generation. This act of concealment displays the independent power of the community to determine its own way of life. Therefore, in discussing the ritualized salutations and welcome rituals – the key subjects of this chapter – “resistance” and “ritual practices” certainly demonstrate the strong social mechanisms of the Santal, in which they nurture their spirit of resistance.

The fourth and final point relates to the exercise of the traditional social order and its connection with defending Santal villages from neoliberal development projects. This traditional social order is invoked to enact the village verdict and thus embodies a revolutionary outcome, helping us understand the meaningful connection between the exercise of the traditional social order and resistance movements against a multinational company (Asia Energy) and the state. This link provides a context in which to conceptualize the relevance of scrutinizing the idea of everyday resistance and the impact of oppression.

In scrutinizing the idea of resistance, I follow Scott's (1985, 1990) theoretical analysis of everyday forms of resistance, although his ideas have been criticized by Dirks (1994: 486), who alleges that he "ignores the possibilities that ritual could constitute an important site of resistance." To me, the ritual practices I have examined in this chapter are subtle evidence of the consciousness and power to encounter the hegemonic power structure, conducing to a suitable atmosphere for making effective use of ritual practices and village verdicts. Thus, Scott's conceptual understanding is significant in evaluating the meaning of the trivial matters of everyday life, rather than finding examples from his work. In this variable situation, the ritual practices of the Santal embody a strong sense of resistance. Decolonization and the emergence of the peripheral nation state of Bangladesh have revealed the existence of a majoritarian hegemony over minorities and of missionary enterprises that have affected the cultural texture of the Santal. In contrast, the practice of traditional salutations and welcome rituals signifies a process of power among the Santal that defies the monopolistic guardianship of the churches and the cultural hegemony of the Bengalis. In addition, village verdicts are also metaphors of the message of resistance.

7.5. Concluding Remarks

In respect of the testimonies described above, this chapter has shown that the spirit of resistance among the Santal has been continued from past to present, as well as from publicized protest movement to ritual practices and vice versa. This chapter has presented evidence making explicit the idea of a "hidden transcript" and has shown how it becomes manifest in traditional salutations and welcome rituals. These practices continue as a part of the Santals' everyday lives.

However, majoritarian domination, development dogmatism, and proselytization encourage the dropping of these practices. My argument in this chapter is that the practice of these ritualized salutations and attachment to *handi* as a traditional drink demonstrate the communal belongingness of the Santal social structure, which creates subtleties of cultural resistance and leads us to revisit the power of oppressed people. By arguing that the traditional forms of salutation are forms of resistance, the chapter has also made evident the power of the traditional social order, with village verdicts becoming a weapon with which to resist the mobility of neoliberal agents in Santal villages. In scrutinizing the subtleties of ritualized salutations and welcome rites as part of the traditional social order, my aim is not to romanticize these practices but instead to understand the deeply rooted nature of Santal social structure, including how Santal enhance their power and interact with the power of “others”. The subtlety of ritual practices in the context of rights and resistance will be made more explicit in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Traditional Festivals and Wedding Rites: Bringing Together Rituals and Rights

Christmas is similar to “shorai” (harvest festival), and Easter is “baha” (spring festival).
—Villagers of Situngtola

This phrase was repeatedly used by both Christian Santal and traditional believers during my fieldwork in Situngtola and other villages. This discourse provides a picture of evangelized assimilation, and represents the complexities that arise in being Santal, becoming indigenous Santal, and converting to be a Christian Santal. As mentioned in Ch. 5, there are divisions among the Santal in which they struggle to accept and reject each other's religious identities but paradoxically agree in both belonging to Santalness. However, colonial oppression, proselytization, and state denial have overwhelmed them into transforming their religious beliefs and ritualized practices. As a result, the shifting images of *shorai* and *baha* do not present a comprehensive story of indigenous identity but instead invite one to investigate the historiography of transformation. To understand these time-laden complexes, Clifford (2013) discusses indigenous people's endurance and resistance, seen when they transfer the stereotypical image of themselves from “pathetic victim” to “visible actor in local, national and global arenas” (ibid.: 13). Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s, indigenous people engaged in processes of renewal in order to revive their roots. In fact, the dynamics of global indigenous politics add diversity to the claim to indigeneity, Clifford (ibid.) pointing to a reconceptualization of indigenous peoples' cultural identities by exploring “the indigenous histories of survival, struggle and renewal.” His concept widely challenges the assumed idea that the “indigenous people are disappearing.” He invokes a critical apprehension of the multidirectional process from the colonial assimilation of the nineteenth century to the complex influence of globalization in the early twentieth century, during which, through complex economic, political, and cultural networks, many indigenous groups have endured instead of disappearing. Against this backdrop, the transformative image of *shorai* and *baha* forms relationships between practice, performance, and persistence, as well as offering a critical perspective on contemporary changes.

By tracing these transformations in this chapter, I describe two traditional festivals, *sohrai* and *baha*, as well as the wedding rituals. The relating of *sohrai* to Christmas and *baha* to Easter prompts an examination of the factors involved in imposing assimilation. The wedding rituals intensify Santals' social relations and their sense of Santalness. In the same spirit, the projects of ritual renewal in the form of the call for the *baha* festival and competition in the *dasai-danta* dance connect Santal to the pluralistic global politics of indigeneity. These attempts at the renewal of traditions demonstrate their mobilizing capacity and dignify the Santals' worth as a whole.

The discussion continues by describing the three-day long ceremonies that constitute a wedding. Although the Santal are divided along religious lines, they have solidified their identity in performing wedding rituals. My empirical materials demonstrate that, in practicing and performing these ceremonies and traditional festivals, they strengthen their claims to being indigenous. In this regard, the question arises of how persistence and performance challenge hegemonic power and how the "invention of tradition" can inform the notion of essentialism by determining what is tradition and how traditions are established. Another concern is how these events accumulate power and mobilize the Santal to deal with hegemonic power politics and to nurture the idea of cultural resistance. In response to these arguments, I attempt to examine how memories of the past are shaping the present and leading indigenous movements to reclaim their rights in the future. It is in this spirit that I provide ethnographic details of the traditional festivals and wedding rites, which the Santal perform emotionally but through which they rationally accumulate the power to persist and resist.

The ritual practices of the Santal are essentially linked to their religious beliefs and peasant way of life. In investigating the forms of Santal religious beliefs, Troisi (2000) noted the relationship between religious beliefs, agriculture, and the annual cycle of ritualized practices. His seminal work, *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals*, established the Santal religion empirically as an indispensable part of their social structure and as a means of social solidarity, as expressed in their beliefs and ritual practices (ibid.: 70). He worked in the Damin-e-koh area of the Santal Parganas in Bihar, India, where the transformation of Santal religious beliefs mirrored two major religious traditions: Hinduism and Christianity

(Troisi 2000). The continuity in seeking the ingrained characters of Santal rituals has been observed by Schulte-Droesch (2016) in *Making Place through Ritual*, where she identified a similar characteristic among the Santal. In her opinion, “Santal rituals means to study social structure, relationships between people and their deities, politics and identity” (ibid.: 347). She also conducted her fieldwork in East Singhbhum District in the state of Jharkhand, India.

In Bangladesh, where I conducted my fieldwork, the Santal mainly interact with biased Bengali Muslims and the genocidal form of ethnic Bengali nationalism. Furthermore, the penetration of evangelization has extensively occupied the spaces that suffice for living a human life, which has subsequently been bypassed by the state. Thus, the ethnic and religious superiority and neglect of the Bengali Muslim majority, state denial, and the encroachment of evangelization constitute a complicated aspect that dominates the transformation of Santal identity. In these circumstances, the diffusion of evangelism pushes Santal to align their religious traditions with Christian values, where Pilchuh Burhi (first woman) becomes Eve and Pilchuh Haram (first man) becomes Adam. The analogy extends to the dissolution of many traditional practices, such as those involving *orak*, *abge*, and *hapram bongas* (sub-clan, household, and ancestor spirits), but observing *bhandan* and *janan chatiar* are still indispensable today for both groups of believers.

Like traditional beliefs, Santal are gradually being separated from peasant life, but their life-cycle remains intimately connected to the agriculture calendar and seasonal rites. In both forms of separation many ceremonies and annual festivals have disappeared,¹⁷⁷ but the persistence of *sohrai* and *baha* and of wedding rituals demonstrates the Santals’ defiance of assimilation being imposed on them. Thus, whether agricultural laborers or marginalized farmers, whether Christians or traditional believers, Santal fix their wedding dates once a year, i.e., after celebrating *sohrai*. They rationalize retaining these rites and festivals by saying, “We want to follow our ancestral past.” Although the Christian Santal have been formally separated

¹⁷⁷ Mukherjee (1962: 233-274) and Troisi (2000: 115-154) describe a number of annual festivals and ritual practices, such as *erok sim*, the ceremony of the sowing paddy seeds; *hariar sim*, the sprouting of the paddy seeds; *jom sim*, offering a goat or sheep to the sun god; *iri-gundi nawani*, offering first fruits of the millet; *gamah purnima*, observing the full moon; *karam*, praying for the welfare of the village; *janthar*, offering first fruits of winter rice crops; *magh sim*, the cutting of the thatching grass; and the *pata* festival, swinging by a hook. At present, the Santals living in Bangladesh nominally observe only *erok*, and mostly abstained from celebrating the other festivals.

from their traditional beliefs, informally they are still tied to observing the *sohrai* and *baha* festivals. By retaining these beliefs and ritual practices, they have adopted the complexities of twenty-first century identity politics.

However, the Christian Santal emphasize the difference between beliefs and ritual practices, saying “culture and religion are not the same.” Troisi (2000: 240) opposes this by stating, “Santal religion is essentially social.” My own empirical data also illustrate the intimacy between today’s ritual practices and the earlier forms of religion. The nature of religious beliefs is reflected in ritual practices and provides the clue to understanding the culture identified in Geertz’s (1993) iconic discussion in his “Religion as a Cultural System.” His analysis has sparked investigation of the “cultural dimension of religious analysis” and proposed a broader lens through which to study religion, where humans “communicate, perpetuate and develop their attitudes towards life” (1993: 73). Using an example from Balinese practice, Geertz demonstrated how religious beliefs function through rituals. In analyzing the relationship between belief and knowledge, he emphasized that belief precedes knowledge, while Foucault has established that discourse produces knowledge and generates power. Conversely, Asad (1983) argued against Geertz’s concept, saying it is “European” and biased towards “Christianity”, and suggesting a focus on the relationship between power and religion, rather than religion and culture. However, Geertz’s concept has still proved seminal in studying a religion that provokes an investigation of socio-cultural processes. In discussing ritual practice, Geertz’s (1957) example of the *slametan*, or communal feast in Javanese religion, promotes an understanding of social relationships created by performing rituals. The analogy is also applicable to the Santal in arranging communal feasts, for example, a feast for any social event (wedding, funeral, etc.) or in organizing *jom jati*, the feast for readmission into the community (detailed in Ch. 6). Therefore, in scrutinizing the Santals’ struggles for rights and dignity, Geertz’s concept (1993, 1957) provides the backdrop to investigating how ritual practices interact in social events and everyday life and how they manufacture a contemporary sense of indigenous identity.

In this paradoxical situation, the rise of global indigenous movements in the decades since the 1980s has been supplemented by demands for their rights. A number of NGOs have

become a medium in pursuing it, prompting the Santal to embed themselves internationally. Thus, local ritual renewal projects, the call for a *baha* festival in Barokona village, and the *dasai-danta* dance competition in Kakonhat connect the Santals' notion of indigeneity with the global dimension. In these circumstances, the observance of *sohrai* and *baha* also become weapons in which Santal establish their identity. In the following sections, the ethnographic details of ritual practices and wedding rites embody the process of negotiation between traditional beliefs and today's transformed practices, which head the struggle to move from ritual practices to indigenous rights.

8.1. Celebrating Festivals

Traditionally, the Santal celebrated a significant number of festivals throughout the year. The annual cycle of Santal festivals has been documented by many writers: for example, Hunter (1868) and Mukherjea (1962) mentioned ten festivals, Troisi (2000) seven, and Ali (1998) ten, including Durga, Kali, and Laxmi Puja,¹⁷⁸ as well as Christmas. I have found that the Santal commonly celebrate *sohrai* and *baha*, and minimally *loban* (new harvesting festival) and *ero* (first fruits festival). Additionally, they go to watch Kali Puja and sometimes participate in Chorok Puja (Hindu festivals), but they never hold these Hindu festivals in their own villages. However, while *loban* and *erok* are celebrated by households or individuals, *sohrai* and *baha* are observed collectively. Even so, these celebrations have a dynamic of change and create quasi-cultural controversies, from being Santal to dropping Christian Santal status when a large number of Santal converted to Christianity. Moreover, the attempt to assimilate *sohrai* to Christmas and *baha* to Easter demonstrates the cultural demand that the festivals must be observed. As I have mentioned, the Christian Santal are enterprising in separating religion from culture in order to maintain their Christian faith, and traditional believers among the Santal are striving to remain connected to their culture in order to protect their Santalness. Despite this disjuncture, both are united in wanting to retain their Santal identity. To this end, the traditional believers organize the *sohrai* and *baha* festivals, while the Christian believers make sure of their own presence in order to sustain social solidarity, even though their role in participating and

¹⁷⁸ Durga, Kali, Chorok and Laxmi puja are Hindu festivals which are particularly popular among Bengali-speaking Hindus.

observing has been reduced because “Santal ritual is in religious experience and vice versa” (Troisi 2000: 116).

Evangelization not only assimilates traditional festivals, it has also fashioned the calendar. As a result, the date of *sohrai* comes after Christmas, i.e., after December 25th, though it was traditionally celebrated in the month of Pous (December-January) after the harvest. Similarly, *baha* has been scheduled after Easter in April, but was previously held in the month of Phalgun (February-March). The Situngtola village community explained the reason for this change by saying, “We alter the dates to minimize division and continue our togetherness.” Thus, the Manjhi Parishad of the village schedules a suitable date after Christmas on which to celebrate it. The traditional believers pay a fee for the celebrations, while the Christian Santal avoid this. Nonetheless, through drumming, dancing, drinking, singing, hunting, and the after-hunting midnight barbecue, Christian Santal position themselves differently within the frame of indigenous claim-making, although they only abstain from worshipping at the *manjhithan*, *jaherthan* and *got-tandi*. Conversely, Burutola villagers have ceased celebrating *sohrai*, as nearly the entire village has been converted. In the village of Champatola, seven households are still followers of traditional belief systems,¹⁷⁹ although the presence of comparatively high numbers of traditional believers in Situngtola guided me in situating myself there to observe the *sohrai* and *baha* festivals.

The *sohrai* or harvest festival is the largest annual festival; it lasts for four days in Situngtola, although villagers informed me that “earlier it was celebrated for seven days.” Troisi (2000) reported that it was observed for six days, Mukherjea (1962) for one week, and Archer (1974) for from three to five days. This merry festival, as it is celebrated in Situngtola, began with *umm*, which refers to the cleaning of houses, courtyards, cattle, and individuals. To inaugurate *sohrai*, the Manjhi Parishad officials and some members of the village community assembled at the *manjhithan* (*sacred place*) for worship. The *nayeki* (principal priest of the village) conducted this worship, which is called *badna puja* and which represents the village’s protection from all bad internal deities. During offerings to the deities, only officials who are

¹⁷⁹ The composition of religious beliefs is discussed in Ch. 4, while Table 1 presents numerical data on traditional and Christian Santal.

traditional believers are present at the *manjhithan*, although the Manjhi Parishad of Situngtola consists of members of both groups of believers. The worship included some sacrificial offerings of rice, sugar, lollipops, a banana, *sindoor* (vermilion), mustard oil, and two marking nuts¹⁸⁰ representing respectively the male and female members of the village. Following this, *handi* (rice beer) libations were made to the *bongas* (spirits). Soon after the worship, the sacrificial offerings were mixed and distributed to the villagers who had been present during the worship. These were blessed, and they ate them believing it will bring prosperity in the future.

Thereafter, the Manjhi Parishad officials moved on to the *got-tandi* (an empty field and a meeting place near the village), where the remaining Christian Manjhi Parishad officials and some Christian Santal from the village community were already waiting with four large pots of *handi*. Another round of worship, called *got puja*, was performed at the *got-tandi*. There are two significant reasons for *badna puja* and *got puja*: the first worship represents the village's protection from bad internal deities, while the second aims to block the entry of evil external deities. The *got puja* was carried out by the *nayeki*, while to perform *bul mayam*¹⁸¹ the *kudum nayeki* (principal priest's assistant), along with some of the Manjhi Parishad officials, moved a little away from the *got-tandi*. In performing *bul mayam*, the *kudum nayeki* made his most significant contribution of the year, sacrificing a few drops of blood from his penis by pricking it with a thorn, and thus signifying that the village has been protected from evil external deities for the next year. Because of this special yearly contribution, the *kudum nayeki* receives a special honor from the village community. The following figure 18 shows an image of *got-tandi*, where the Manjhi Parishad officials are talking while drinking *handi*.

¹⁸⁰ The marking nut (*Semecarpus Anacardium*) is called *soso* in Santali. The plant has medicinal value, and was used as traditional medicine in the Indian subcontinent. The name "marking nut" was introduced by Europeans because it was used by washermen to mark cloth before washing it.

¹⁸¹ *Bul mayam* refers to blood sacrifice. The *kudum nayeki* and, in some cases, the *ojha* (traditional healer) offer blood from their bodies to the deities, also mentioned by Culshaw (1949) and Troisi (2000). A photograph provided by Troisi (2000: 120) shows the *kudum nayeki* performing *bul mayam*. I attempted to observe the ceremony, but the Manjhi Parishad of the Situngtola asked me not to because of my female identity. I obeyed this request.



Figure 18. Villagers and Manjhi Parishad officials at the *got-tandi*, where they were drinking *handi* while conversing on the eve of *umm*, or the first day of *sohrai*. Photo by the author.

Soon after completing both pieces of worship, the present members of the village community positioned themselves in a circle at the *got-tandi* and begin chatting while drinking *handi*. They discussed everything from trivial to essential matters in the village with joy and laughter. Their conversations included the funding¹⁸² details of the celebration, and the *paranik* (deputy headman) submitted a financial report, in which he described the receipts and expenditure connected with the *sohrai* festival. At the end, they held a raffle, writing all attendees' names on pieces of paper. The person whose name was selected in the lottery will responsible for donating a large pot of *handi* for the next year's *sohrai*. Although they continued the practice of one community member contributing *handi*, the practice was different in the past, as they informed me:

¹⁸² The funding for the *sohrai* mainly comes from villagers' contributions, which are given only by the traditional believers; 24 households are still followers of the traditional beliefs in Situngtola village. During my fieldwork, the total fund was Tk. 890 (approximately € 8.90), and the expenses were Tk. 595 (approximately € 5.95). The remaining money was transferred to the Manjhi Parishad's fund.

Previously, some of the items from sacrificial offerings at the worship were sprinkled on a paddy field, and those whose cattle first ate the offering would be the next to donate *handi*. Now, the cattle are tied with ropes on the grassy field, so we introduced the raffle system instead.

After the long chatting and drinking session, they began walking towards the village while drumming. First, they reached the *nayeki*'s house, where the *nayeki burhi* (wife of the principal priest) welcomed them by performing *dobok* and *janga-abuk* (traditional salutations) respectively. The welcome session continued with another serving of *handi* with *murhi* (puffed rice), while drumming added joy to the festive environment. Some female members of the village community showed their excitement by singing and dancing. Thereafter, they began walking to the houses of those Manjhi Parishad officials who follow the traditional beliefs, although all the officials collectively visited each house. Afterwards, at night, the first day of the *sohrai* ended.

The second day of *sohrai* is called *dakay*. In Santali *dakka* means rice. Literally, *dakay* means "food day," colloquially a reference to a feast among the family and kinsfolk. The day is intended to invite kinsfolk, particularly in-laws, to one's home. The villagers are kept busy welcoming guests to their home and extending hospitality by serving food. The third day is called *khuntai* and is dedicated to offerings of *pithao* or local cakes to the cattle. The word *khuntai* comes from *khunti*, a word for the fastening of cattle in front of the house. *Pithao* is a fried cake made of rice flour and sugar or molasses. The offering is symbolized by hanging a piece of cake on the necks of the cattle. This signifies the important role of cattle in the Santals' agrarian way of life and represents a thanksgiving to the domestic animals. While the Santal were once peasants, many people today are agricultural laborers, the continuity of such peasantry behavior indicating their cultural affinity to an agrarian way of life. The village community of Situngtola said, "By performing the rituals, we follow our ancestors and retain our traditions." *Dakay* and *khuntai* are both individually arranged by each household.

The fourth and last day of *sohrai* again becomes a collective celebration. In Situngtola, the day was dedicated to hunting, which is called *sakrat*. The young members of the village community participated in the hunting competition, which was organized by the Manjhi Parishad. The villagers said, “*Sakrat* is the day for hunting”, but at present it is an invented archery competition to select the best archer. Thus, the current celebration of *sakrat* is a modernized competition reviving the hunting tradition. The following figure 19 shows the invented form of the observation of *sakrat*, where young Santal in Situngtola participated in recalling their ancestral past in a field. Thus, in the afternoon, to observe *sakrat*, the villagers assembled near the empty field of the village and the young men attended with bows and arrows. The *jogmanjhi* (moral guardian of village) was the organizer of the competition, and he placed the stem of a banana tree in the middle of the field. At the top of the stem he placed three pieces of *pithao*, which had been prepared the previous day for the *khuntai* celebration. Before the competition, the *jogmanjhi* performed worship with the aim of maintaining harmony within the village. The drumming continued during the worship, and by singing and dancing, some female members of the village were affected by the spirit of togetherness.



Figure 19. Invented archery competition: young Santal in a field, observing *sakrat* or day for hunting. Photo by the author.

This joyful environment created a truly festive atmosphere. Here the archery competition ended, and, drumming, dancing, and singing, the villagers paraded on the *kulhis* (village roads) and stopped at the *nayeki*'s house. Simultaneously, a group of young Santal from the village who had gone hunting¹⁸³ early that morning in the nearby bushes returned with a fox and civet cat (see figure 20). On this festive evening, the *nayeki burhi* (wife of the *nayeki*) welcomed them by performing the *dobok* and *janga-abuk*, and the welcome session continued with *handi* and *murhi*, chatting and laughing. Finally, the night was dedicated to a barbecue of the hunted animals, only the male members enjoying the grilled meat. After drumming, drinking, and general enjoyment, the celebration of the *sohrai* ended at midnight in Situngtola.



Figure 20. Returning to the village after hunting on the final day of *sohrai*. Photo by Huren Murmu.

¹⁸³ In practice, there is no hunting in the Santal living area in Bangladesh, because the country has the least forest area in Asia (11.2%), according to the Asian Development Bank Report 2016 (“Bangladesh among Asian Countries with less forest area.” *Daily Star*, 07 November 2016. <https://www.thedailystar.net/environment/bangladesh-among-asian-countries-less-forest-area-1310851>, accessed 20.06.2018). Moreover, the forest areas are located in the southeast and southwest of the country, while the Santal live in the north-west or the Barind Tract of Bangladesh, an arid region due to the massive clearing of the natural forest. Today, the Santal, who were once a forest-living people, organize hunting events as they recall their memories of their hunting life. Thus, the villagers of Situngtola went to nearby bushes to hunt.

The celebration of *sohrai* in Situngtola village signifies a devotion to continuing past practices and to maintaining a Santal identity. As a consequence, both groups of believers attempted to protect their Santalness, as stated by the village headman of Situngtola, who is a Christian Santal: “We belong to the same society, despite the fact that we are divided into two religious groups. By participating in the traditional ceremonies, we want to continue our unity.” This statement indicates that there is a communal requirement to celebrate *sohrai*. Religious conversion necessarily meets some material needs, although by renewing rituals, Christians maintain their Santalness. Therefore, both groups of believers are consciously creating a space in which to maintain their Santal identity.

The second largest festival of the Santal is *baha*, or the spring festival. The Santal year starts with the new moon in the springtime, in the month of Phalgun (February-March), when the Manjhi Parishad concerned usually decides the date of the *baha* celebration. This date therefore varies from village to village. Traditionally, it is observed after the full moon in the month of Phalgun, when the *sarjom*, or Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*), and the *mahua*, or butter tree (*Madhuca longifolia*) flowers begin to bloom. Meanwhile, the Sal and *mahua* are both disappearing from the Santal living area of Bangladesh; the Situngtola village community now celebrates the *baha* festival with *neem* (*Azadirachta Indica*) flowers, rather than Sal and *mahua*.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, like the *sohrai* festival, the timing of the *baha* celebration has been aligned with the liturgical calendar. The observance of *baha* is linked to Easter Sunday, i.e., occurs in April instead of February-March. It is also called “Paska Porob”¹⁸⁴ by the villagers. Previously it was observed for two days, but today the celebration has been reduced to one day. In attending the *baha* festival in Situngtola, however, I observed that early on Easter Day Christian Santal assembled in front of the chapel to listen to Bible verses. The traditional believers waited at the *jaherthan* (sacred grove) for the Christian Santal, who were to join them. After listening to the Gospel messages, the converted officials of the Manjhi Parishad and some of the Christian Santal from the village community walked towards the *jaherthan*.

¹⁸⁴ The Santal of Bangladesh colloquially use *Paska Porob* instead of Easter, which refers to a festival remembering the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Porob* is a Santali word meaning festival.



Figure 21. *Baha* festival versus Easter Sunday. On the left image, the chapel master of the Situngtola is reciting a Bible verse on the eve of *baha*. On the right, along with some traditional believers, *nayeki* is assembling the items of the sacrificial offerings to begin *baha* festival. Photos by the author.

When both groups of believers had gathered at the *jaherthan*, the *nayeki* began the worship. The items of sacrificial offering remained unchanged as they had been in the *sohrai* festival and were similarly distributed among the people at the *jaherthan*. Soon afterwards, jackfruit leaves, another sacrificial offering, were pleated into handmade cups to serve *handi*. As a thanksgiving to Marang Buru (Great Mountain, or one of the high gods), they also drank the *handi* as a sacred substance. Then the time came to bestow an honorarium on the *nayeki* for his deliberating role throughout the year. As mentioned in Ch. 6, this took the form of giving him one *dhuti* (a long loincloth) and one *gamcha* (a local towel). He wrapped the *dhuti* and *gamcha* around his lower body and began walking to each house in the village to bestow his blessings by distributing the *neem* flowers. During this time, the *godit* (messenger) accompanied him by drumming, and he (the *nayeki*) carried a large number of *neem* flowers in a winnowing fan and a pot filled with water. To distribute the blessings, he went to each house, walking along the muddy paths through the village.

Typically, at each house, a woman welcomes *nayeki* by performing *dobok* and *janga-abuk*, and the *nayeki* delivers blessings by sprinkling water from the pot and presents her with a few *neem* flowers. The woman accepts the flowers and conveys her respect by wearing them in

her hair bun. Then, depending on the relationship between the *nayeki* and the woman, they participate in humorous dialogues. If the woman is senior in age, they maintain a distance from one another while mutually joking. The relationship is either determined by kinship or based on mutual consent, whether they are kin or not. In this way, usually the *nayeki* went from house to house, but only to the traditional believers' houses. Meanwhile, the *baha* festival in Situngtola became cheerful when the villagers started anointing each other with pink and red powder. Thus, every household kept some powder to celebrate *baha*, and they rubbed it on each other regardless of the religious division. In this regard, one of the Christian Santal in Situngtola stated, "Previously, we used earth clay to rub on each other. At present, we prefer to use powder, and by anointing colors, we harmonize our Santalness, although we abstain from worship." Conversely, the traditional believers recalled their merry past, saying:

At present, the celebration of the *baha* festival is minimized in the number of days and gleeful space. Previously, the *baha* festival was merry with dances and music, with fun and flowers. The women danced on the *kulhis*, and the men accompanied this with drumming. They continued moving in the village by drumming and dancing. These traditions are reminiscences. The previous festivities of the *baha* are now alive in our memories.



Figure 22. The *nayeki* pours water to bestow blessings, which is a significant moment of *baha* festival. Photo by the author.

In fact, the oral epic of the *baha* festival that young Santals heard from their elders has inspired them to arrange a cultural event in the evening of the *baha* as well. Thus, the young Santal of Situngtola prepared a stage in the middle of the village and organized cultural events to perform Santal dances and music. Those Situngtola residents who were once actors in the *baha* became an audience for these cultural events. The young members of the village community who had graduated from the local college stated, “We are aware of our cultural annihilation, and by inventing traditions, we are trying to enrich our present, and that does not contradict the Christian faith.” This struggle between tradition and the Christian faith certainly enters into identity politics, where tradition becomes a weapon flagging Santal identity, also being a medium connecting them to national politics and global indigenous movements. By accepting tradition but rejecting traditional beliefs, the Santal struggle to accommodate them in the contemporary world system, as the transformed image of the *baha* festival makes evident.

8.2. Staging Identity

The struggle to becoming indigenous Santal was also evident in organizing the *baha* festival in Barokona village in Dinajpur district. Although I completed fieldwork in 2015, this iconic effort prompts me to include in the discussion the invention of the *baha* festival in Barokona village in 2017 and 2018. I contacted Manik Soren, who is the initiator of the festival and is always using social networking sites to publicize it. By hosting videos on popular websites, he spread its message to a global audience, making it a medium for politicizing indigenous peoples’ rights. The JAP patronized the celebration, and the Baha Festival Celebration Committee organized it. It is led by Manik Soren, mentioned earlier, who is reinvigorating many Santal traditions. The invented *baha* festival was an attempt at renewal the aim of which was to share the collective sense of Santalness, confront the controversies that critically surround the issue of religious fission, and situate them in the process of becoming indigenous Santals. The venture was initially successful when the Minister of Primary and Mass Education, Mostafizur Rahman, came to Barokona village to inaugurate the *baha* festival in 2018. Financial support was contributed by NGOs. Furthermore, the *manjhis* of the localities enriched the sense of a collectivity by contributing their labor. The invented *baha* festival negotiates with the religious division and the experiences of the transformations grafted on to tradition and identity.

মারওবুৰু হিরলী 'এলো মিলি প্রকৃতির সাথে' জাহের আয়ো সোহাই

বাহা উৎসব ২০১৭

২৩-২৪ মার্চ ২০১৭
বারকোনা মাঠ, পার্বতীপুর, দিনাজপুর

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জনপ্রিয় সাঁওতালি ও বাউন সঙ্গীতশিল্পী রথিন কিঙ্কু ও তার দলের পরিবেশনা

দ্বিতীয় দিন (শুক্রবার)
সকাল ৯টা: বাহা সৌরদি
বিকাল ৩টা: আলোচনা, আদিবাসী সাংস্কৃতিক প্রতিযোগিতা ও পুরস্কার বিতরণ
জনপ্রিয় সাঁওতালি ও বাউন সঙ্গীতশিল্পী রথিন কিঙ্কু ও তার দলের পরিবেশনা



আপনারা সকলে আমন্ত্রিত
আয়োজনে: বাহা উৎসব উদযাপন কমিটি ও আদিবাসী সাংস্কৃতিক পরিষদ
সহযোগিতায়: বারকোনা মাজ্জি পরিষদ, এন.এন.এম.সি, গ্রাম বিকাশ কেন্দ্র, সেড,
মাগরিক উদ্যোগ, কাপেং ফাউন্ডেশন এবং জাতীয় আদিবাসী পরিষদ
যোগাযোগ: ০১৭১৫ ৫১৯৩৬০, ০১৭৩০ ০৭২৮২১, ০১৭১৮ ৬৪৩৫১৯

Figure 23. Poster announcing the *baha* festival, circulated as part of the campaign for the *baha* festival of 2017. It was also widely used on social media. In addition, a video clip was produced¹ and circulated through YouTube and Facebook. Photo courtesy of Manik Soren.

The projected *baha* festival deliberately counters the current divisions between Santal Christians and traditional believers by intensifying the harmony between them. By inviting Sebastian Tudu, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Dinajpur, the event uses the same missionizing strategy as choosing the *manjhis* to preach Santal in Christianity (discussed in Ch. 2). Manik Soren gave voice to the spirit in which the *baha* festival is organized:

Dancing and music are an inherent part of the Santals' behavior. The long crusade of evangelization to stop drinking, dancing, drumming, and singing has been futile in this respect. I want to capitalize on this behavior on the part of the Santal. Thus, in inventing the *baha* festival, we (the Baha Festival Celebration Committee) organize a cultural event where everyone can participate. It nurtures the Santals' ceremonial solemnity, and in

dancing, drumming, and singing, they find themselves in the same situation. In contrast, we invite the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Dinajpur as a guest of the festival because we aim to stimulate the Christian Santals' sense of solidarity when most Santal have been converted.

In fact, by inviting the Bishop of the area, Manik Soren was pursuing an anti-evangelization strategy. In deliberating over his public speech, Bishop Sebastian Tudu acknowledged the merry background of the Santals' past, their uprising against British colonization, and their contribution to the Bangladesh liberation war. The indigenous people's demand for constitutional recognition was also voiced in his speech. An upload of the recorded speech on YouTube¹⁸⁵ became an instrument for campaigning for Santals' rights. In this spirit, the ritual renewal project for the *baha* festival became a weapon for campaigning and claiming indigenous rights. Conversely, it can be argued that, "while traditional rituals are usually addressed to some spirit or deity, the newer rituals are addressed primarily to the audience" (Barkataki-Ruscheweyh 2013: 243), but it certainly contextualizes the conscious choice of the Santal, and by addressing the audience, they display their increasing power against repression.

The invention of tradition was also projected by Manowa in the Kakonhat Municipality Auditorium through the *dasai-danta* dance competition of 2014. In fact, the establishment of Manowa embraced a spirit of renewing tradition. Its brochure stated that it is an "alternative voice of cultural awareness" (Manowa 2014). The word "Manowa" comes from the Santali language and denotes "human." The organization is based at Kankonhat Bazaar and was founded in 2005. By organizing small or large events throughout the year, Manowa endeavors to revitalize Santal traditions. Cornelius Hasda, the founder of Manowa and himself a young Santal from Kakonhat, stated, "By performing traditional rituals and staging dramas, we are endeavoring to revitalize the annihilated glorious past of the Santals." To learn about Manowa, I frequently visited their office near Situngtola, and during rehearsals I situated myself in the corner of the room. Additionally, I conducted an in-depth interview with Cornelius Hasda.

¹⁸⁵ "Bishop's Speech-Baha Festival 2018, Bangladesh." 11 April 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1ro2hvAR6U> (accessed 11.06.2018).

During the course of my fieldwork, Manowa organized the largest program of the year, the *dasai-danta* dance competition. This included many other events, such as songs, dances, discussion sessions, and short films. This lasted for four days. Manowa not only strengthens the renewal of traditions, it also nourishes the idea of everyday resistance. Hence, Manowa members are young Santal, as well as members of other indigenous groups living in Kokonhat. Most of them are students, and some are agricultural laborers. The organization's lack of funds means that members must contribute themselves. Thus, during rehearsal, they bring rice and other food items, including pieces of firewood, for cooking and eating. In this way, they can continue to practice, being scheduled to perform during the four-day-long program. This practice has existed since the inception of the organization, although Manowa did not receive any foreign-donor support. It survives primarily by performing dramas and cultural shows in different programs. In addition, it receives donations from local politicians.¹⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Manowa received grants from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in three consecutive years, 2010 to 2012, valued at Tk. 15,000, Tk. 20,000, and Tk. 25,000 (approximately € 150, € 200, and € 250), respectively. Furthermore, the District Commissioner of Rajshahi occasionally provides some financial support. Organizational contact with the Rajshahi Divisional Ethnic Cultural Academy (the Academy) supports its survival because Manowa frequently receives invitations to perform in the Academy's programs. For this, it receives honorariums, i.e., Tk. 5000-6000 (approximately € 50-60), for each drama or cultural show, but the amount is nominal because most of the money is spent on travel. Manowa members must engage in other work to find their living expenses. On this point, Cornelius Hasda stated, "We accept the invitation as a strategy to survive. In fact, the commitment of the members is the main capital that supports our survival."

Manowa's efforts accumulate cultural power by mobilizing young Santal, and the program of renewing traditions is articulated with local politicians, local government bodies, and the media. Incorporating the idea of indigeneity, in 2014 Manowa organized four-day-long

¹⁸⁶ The indigenous people are known as a vote bank of the BAL, the current ruling government party of Bangladesh. When a significant number of indigenous people are living in Godagari Upazila, Manowa occasionally receives some donations from the Mayor of the Kakonhat Municipality, the Chairman of Godagari Upazila, the Member of Parliament for the Kakonhat constituency, and the Convener of the Parliamentary Caucus of Indigenous People. Thus, these donations are secretly intended to secure the vote bank of the respective area.

cultural programs, but the *dasai-danta* dance competition was highly publicized and was projected as revitalizing traditions. For purposes of broader publicity, a poster was hung up in the localities and uploaded on to social networking sites. A strategic partnership has been formed with the print and electronic media to ensure the circulation of Manowa's programs in their news portals and their screening on television channels. The *dasai-danta* dance competition has consequently become an issue of discussion in the locality, encouraging people to watch the competition, as well as the other cultural programs.

**ঐতিহ্যবাহী দাঁসায় ও ডান্টা প্রতিযোগীতা এবং
নাট্য উৎসব-২০১৪**
স্থান : কাঁকনহাট পৌরসভা যিজনায়তন

17-21 October-2014
kakonhat.auditorium

Sanamkuthen Aleyak Saprau
Njel Sangi Renak Neota

Taheyena

॥ অনুষ্ঠান সূচী ॥

১৭/১০/২০১৪ইং (ভক্তবাসর)
সকাল : ৯.০০ টায় উদ্বোধন
সকাল : ৯.৩০ মি: হতে প্রতিযোগীতা
দুপুর : ২.৩০ মি: অতিথি, দারাম/অর্ডাখনা
বিকাল : ৩.০০ টায় আলোচনা সভা
বিশেষ সম্মাননা ও পুরস্কার প্রদান
বিকাল : ৪.৩০ মি: সাজাঙ্গী চলচিত্র প্রদর্শনী
বিকাল : ৫.৩০ মি: মঞ্চ নাটক "ডিটোম"
১৮/১০/২০১৪ইং (শনিবার)
বিকাল : ৩.০০ টায়
ঐতিহ্যবাহী সাজাঙ্গী সাংস্কৃতি ও রথিন কিস্কুর
পরিবেশনায় সাংস্কৃতি অনুষ্ঠান
১৯/১০/২০১৪ইং (রবিবার)
বিকাল : ৩.০০ টায়
ঐতিহ্যবাহী উরাও সাংস্কৃতি ও রথিন কিস্কুর
পরিবেশনায় সাংস্কৃতি অনুষ্ঠান
বিকাল : ৫.৩০ মিঃ মঞ্চ নাটক "মছয়া"
২০/১০/২০১৪ইং (সোমবার)
বিকাল : ৩.০০ টায়
ঐতিহ্যবাহী মাল পাহাড়ী সাংস্কৃতি ও রথিন কিস্কুর
পরিবেশনায় সাংস্কৃতি অনুষ্ঠান
২১/১০/২০১৪ইং (মঙ্গলবার)
দুপুর : ২.০০ টায়
সাজাঙ্গী চলচিত্র প্রদর্শনী
বিকাল : ৩.০০ টায় আলোচনা সভা
বিকাল : ৫.৩০ মিনিট, মঞ্চ নাটক (কলির বাপ)

দাঁসায় ও ডান্টা প্রতিযোগীতায় অংশগ্রহণে ইচ্ছুক দলকে
আগামী ১০/১০/২০১৪ইং তারিখ এর মধ্যে নিম্নে
আয়োজকদের ঠিকানায় ২০০/- (দুইশত) টাকা এন্ট্রি ফি
সহ যোগাযোগ করে প্রতিযোগীতার নিয়মাবলী সংগ্রহ
করতে হবে।

উভয় পুরস্কার :-
চ্যাম্পিয়ন : গুরু শিষ্যদের সম্মাননা স্মারকসহ ট্রফি ও
নগদ ২,০০০/- (দুই হাজার টাকা)।
রানার্সআপ : গুরু শিষ্যদের সম্মাননা স্মারকসহ ট্রফি ও
নগদ ১,৫০০/- (এক হাজার পাঁচশত) টাকা।

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আয়োজনেঃ "মানুওয়া" (সাংস্কৃতিক সচেতনতায় একটি বিকল্প ধ্বনি)
সুন্দরপুর, কলেজ রোড (গ্রামীণ ব্যাংকের পাশে), কাঁকনহাট, গোদাগাড়ী, রাজশাহী।
যোগাযোগঃ ০১৭৫৮-৭৮৪০৯২, ০১৭৪৬-১৬৪৯১৪, ০১৮৪৬-৬৭৮৫০৪

Figure 24. Poster announcing Manowa's four-day-long cultural program. It was circulated in the region to advertise the four-day-long programs that were held from October 17th to October 20th, 2014. Photo courtesy of Manowa.

The cultural programs were performed at the Kakonhat municipality auditorium, and a field adjacent to the playhouse was used for the *dasai-danta* dance competition. A group of Santali artists were also invited from Santal living in India, their reception being a source of joy when they were greeted by the rhythms of the *tamak*, *tungdak*, *tirio* (flute made of bamboo), and *raharh*¹⁸⁷ at Kakonhat train station. The Manowa members dressed up and decorated themselves in an archaic style and welcomed the Santal artists from India by dancing, drumming, and singing. The welcome reception changed into a colorful parade when they traveled from the Kakonhat train station to the auditorium along with crowd. The area of Kankonhat Bazaar buzzed festively, and the adjoining field was flooded with spectators. Neighboring Bengalis also displayed immense interest in watching the programs. A significant number of vendors and street food-sellers attended to sell their products. The Kakonhat locality thus became a cultural fair.

The four-day-long program was inaugurated by the Mayor of the Kakonhat Municipality, who was also one of the financial contributors to the program. The local elites were invited as guests, and in their speeches, most of them emphasized that “the indigenous traditional heritage nowadays has been annihilated, and it must be revived.” Meaning “to revitalize tradition”, *janga-abuk* (a form of traditional salutation) was performed on the stage to welcome the guests. The primary attraction of the program, the *dasai-danta* dance competition, in which 22 dance groups participated, was performed in the field adjoining the auditorium. Manowa’s leaflet had already been circulated among the audience, describing the folktale of the *dasai-danta* dance. According to the Manowa Leaflet (2014), the background to the *dasai* dance is as follows:

Once upon a time, the adorable daughter of a Santal king called Kisku Raja was kidnapped. To search for his daughter, he went to look at each house in the village, thinking that someone from the village had hidden his daughter. However, as a king, he could not show mistrust of the village community by searching each house. As a result, he came up with the idea for a dance that seemed to explore something, and this particular dance is called *dasai*. Ideally, it is performed in the courtyard, and it has several forms, i.e., *loboy*, *shikour*, *buyeang*, and *bunga*. The *guroch haram*, or *guru*, was

¹⁸⁷ The *raharh* is a large version of the traditional Santali drum, used to make more powerful rhythms. Today, it is set to disappear from the Santals’ vicinity, but during weddings, the village community rents the *raharh* from local band groups or neighboring villages who have it.

the treasurer of this unique form of dance and passed the expertise down from generation to generation. In the past, in every village there was a *guroch haram* who was also a traditional healer, but currently, traditional treatment is rejected as a sign of backwardness. Thus, the *dasai* dance has been abolished, as has the position of *guroch haram*.

By publishing this story, the notion of Santalness is circulated, while by performing the dance, local people are exposed to the notion of indigeneity. Manowa believes that, by staging the dance, it is reviving the traditional heritage of the Santal. In this sense, the ritual meaning of the *danta* dance is described in the Manowa leaflet (2014) as follows:

The *danta* dance is a heartbreaking spiritual dance that was performed during *bhandan* (a feast after the funeral). After the feast, this dance was performed at midnight. For the performance, the dance group that was invited to play the *danta* dance collected the life story of the deceased person beforehand. Through the dance, they displayed the biography of that person. That is why the dance is recognized as a spiritually heartbreaking farewell ritual.



Figure 25. Group performance of the *danta* dance near the Kokonhat auditorium. Photo by the author.

Currently, the ritual practice of the *danta* dance has disappeared from the Santals' lives, but both groups of believers (traditional and Christian) observe *bhandan* in the name of a deceased person, an event at which animal sacrifices are made to ancestral spirits while wishing for the eternal peace of the departed soul. Although Christian Santal do not sacrifice animals, they believe that the deceased person's soul will not have peace if they do not perform *bhandan*. It is usually held within two to three months of the death; in some cases, it can be done after one year. Other rituals are also performed after the death, such as smearing oil and turmeric on the dead body, regardless of the practice of either group of believers (Christian and traditional). To perform *bhandan*, Christian Santal invite the priest of the respective church, while traditional believers conduct the ceremony under the leadership of the *nayeki*. The Christian Santal set the date of the *bhandan* by consulting the respective church, but both groups of believers believe that, after death, Santal cross a river to eternal life.

However, the *dasai-danta* dance competition brought back striking memories of the Santal past because during the dances the competition area was filled with spectators. After the competition, the champion and runners-up receive a trophy, honorary memorabilia, and prize money. Later, the crowd went on to watch the drama called *ditom*, which refers to the sharp claws of the scorpion, symbolizing the spirit of the Santal Rebellion (1855-56). The writer and director of the drama, Cornelius Hasda, stated, "By using the word *ditom* I want to show the Santals' determination that they showed in the Santal Rebellion, and by recalling past heroism, I intend to inspire young Santal to stand up against injustice." His goal was to some extent successful, because during the performance the playhouse was flooded with spectators, and there was no space to sit or even stand. The auditorium can accommodate about 400 spectators, but the presence of over 1,000 spectators meant they had to sit or stand in the spaces between the seats. Manowa claims that by doing things this way, they are not only revitalizing lapsed traditions, but also awakening young Santal to them. In fact, the four-day-long cultural programs attempted to stage handed down memories in order to inspire the Santal of Kakonhat to restore their past practices.

The current trend to invent traditions is certainly connected with the past. By looking at ritual practices, I draw attention to these accounts as weapons through which the notion of

resistance thrives. The controversies over being Santal, being Christian Santal, and becoming indigenous Santal are employed as juxtapositions in dealing with the Santal religion and rituals. The staging of traditions in a complicated way includes the politics of national denial and the encroachment of evangelization. From that point of view, the traditional dance competition challenges the repressive power structure, attempts to revitalize traditions, and aims to construct the identity of present-day Santal. Manowa's survival agenda sharpens the notion of everyday resistance when its members contribute to survival by providing everyday meals during rehearsals. Thus, the emergence and existence of Manowa's rewoven traditions and, in the same sense, the trend to perform ritual practices demonstrate the underlying power of the community, evident in the resistance to hegemonic power and the Santal's strategy of negotiating with national and local forces. In the next section, I examine the ethnographic details of the wedding rituals which still take place among the Santal today.

8.3. Persisting Practices

The traces of the past are articulated in present-day narratives; as Situngtola villagers stated, "We want to conduct marriage ceremonies in the same way that our ancestors used to." The collective and colorful ceremonies connected with Santal marriage erase the differences between the *bideen* (traditional believers) and *esoie* (Christian Santal) at a wedding, when they come together to gather the pieces of the past and sharpen their sense of Santalness. To examine the dynamics of wedding rites, I observed both the Christian and the traditional Santals' three-day wedding programs. Indeed, the Santals' marriage customs convey their cultural strength in volunteering their labor and devoting their belongingness to the tradition of egalitarianism, as is evident in maintaining the village economy for the communal feast, which prompts them to retain their rituals. The division between the two groups of believers disappears during the wedding rites, when both groups practice similar rituals to convey the sense of Santal identity.

The continuity of the clan organization determines the marriage relationship, in which the Santal figure their identity. Still today, they are strict in maintaining tribal endogamy and clan exogamy, as mentioned in Ch. 6. However, the relationship between two individuals as man and woman in the village or between villages is established through marriage, being also a way to assemble people from various villages, thus stressing their unity. Thus, through marriage, the

people of Situngtola not only increase their social networks but also intensify the notion of Santalness. Marriage is called *bapla* in Santali,¹⁸⁸ and can take place in the same village or between two villages, subject to tribal endogamy and clan exogamy being observed. They usually follow patrilocal residence, in which case the newly married couple lives in the groom's father's house. In the regular form of marriage, this may be arranged by a marriage broker, but the bride and groom also have the freedom to choose a partner. As well as the regular marriage, there are among Santal several other forms of marriage, Archer (1984) noting 14 types of marriage.¹⁸⁹ Remarriage for a divorced woman or widow and widower or a divorced man is accepted, called in Santali *sanga bapla*. Although there are several forms of marriage among the Santal, they mostly practice and celebrate two forms of marriage: *kirin bahu bapla*, in which a man gives his son a wife by paying *gonon* or brideprice; and *dol bapla*, or a dressy wedding where the villages of both bride and groom celebrate it by drumming, dancing, drinking, and singing. In Situngtola, where I observed Santal wedding rites, the wedding combined both forms.

Santal marriage ceremonies feature three indispensable core customs. The first is that the marriage system not only connects two individuals, but increases the unity between the two villages, as the wedding rituals are concerned with the community rather than the two individuals. The second activity, *gidi chimowra*,¹⁹⁰ or the gift-giving ceremony, reveals a communal consensus where gifts and blessings are brought together by performing particular rituals. The third, called *maan*, or delivering gift items with good wishes, includes ritual acts that incorporate archaic behavior but also reveal the spirit of moral economy. Overall, all of the rites related to the marriage ceremony resist external penetration of their villages. Hence, Santal tradition supports a wage-laborer or agricultural laborer in arranging a feast for the village community, individual contributions creating communal resources. This altruism is not limited to contributing resources, but is also found in the practice of volunteering oneself to take part in

¹⁸⁸ For detailed descriptions of *bapla* or Santali marriage, see Troisi (2000: 166-189), Mukherjea (1962: 195-220) and Culshaw (1949: 139-149).

¹⁸⁹ The Santali marriage and divorce system and maintenance of marriage laws are discussed by Archer (1984: 227-359) at great length.

¹⁹⁰ According to Troisi (2000), *Gidi Cumaura* [*gidi chimowra*] is observed as a "second waving ceremony", but I found that it is a gift-giving ceremony that includes some specific ritual practices and accumulates communal resources. In dominant cultural terms, it can be considered a "marriage reception."

organizing the ceremonial occasions during a marriage. In the twenty-first century, neoliberalism views all forms of exchange and consumerism in everyday life as focused on purchasing everything from the market. However, in the age of the market economy, the archaic sorts of reciprocal practice among the Santal recall Mauss's (1925) views on reciprocal exchange, which analyzed social arrangements and human relationships. Mauss examined reciprocal gift-giving practices in Melanesia, Polynesia, and Native North American societies, and discovered some similarities, as well as some differences, in which the "gift" was a means of social integration creating a consensus through collective and individual exchange practices. Although Mauss's observations were made nearly a century ago, and currency as a mode of exchange now dominates all types of reciprocity, still today in Santali villages, such archaic gift-giving practices prompt investigation of the spaces of collective strength that they use to sharpen social solidarity and resist market penetration.

Marriage, or *bapla*, is a sacred event among the Santal. During the wedding, the members of the village community are concerned to maintain their harmony as Santal. In fact, the social lives of the Santal are joined together through the ceremonial events connected with marriage, the significance of this among Santal best being described in the following words:

Marriage is as much a union of two villages and two families as it is of two persons. It is not a mere arrangement entered into by two individuals or even two families. Both village communities are vitally involved in the wedding celebrations. This is not only emphasized during the parting speeches, but more strongly by the role of the village officials and the village community itself. (Troisi 2000: 185)

This is supported by Archer's (1984: 230) statement that "the ceremony not only unites the boy and girl but fuses the two villages in a ritual act." The ability of the celebration to link past and present is evident in recalling ancestors' memories, as voiced by the villagers of Situngtola: "In the past, they (ancestors) celebrated the ceremonial events of the marriage for seven days; presently, we observe them for three days." On the one hand, religious fission and occupational shifts have forced them to reduce the number of days of celebration. On the other hand, the churches, like the NGOs, suggest curtailing the days of celebration because, during the

wedding period, villagers abstain from going to work. The intermediaries become concerned that their economic vulnerability will increase because Santal livelihoods depend on daily wages. In response to this pressure, they reject daily wages and prefer to volunteer their labor to organize the events related to the wedding rites, in which they intensify their cultural strength in maintaining and performing rituals. The pageantry related to marriage begins at least 15 days prior, when the communities of the two villages of the bride and groom involve themselves in preparatory work for the wedding. Thus, the prescription “to minimize the days of the wedding rituals” is ignored, though the day of the wedding is fixed with the consent of the Father of the respective church.

In fact, the festivities related to the wedding rites begin with the *gonon* (fixing wedding date and bride-money), which usually happens one month prior to the wedding. Traditionally, the marriage ceremonies occur after the *sohrai*, or harvest festival, each year. Thus, the time after *sohrai* can be considered the wedding season. Therefore, the wedding period still exists in its archaic glory, but dates have been compromised by the Church’s authority. After celebrating *shorai*, the village council decides how many marriages will occur in the current year. Thereafter, this becomes an issue of discussion among the village community, and the enthusiasm flows from the villagers’ behavior into the village atmosphere. The villagers stressed the need for my presence by saying, “You must be there at this time in our village when you are documenting our way of life. It is a good chance for you to observe our cultural heritage”. This emphasizes the significance of the wedding period for them.

It is important to note that, after *gonon*, the Christian Santal who follow Catholic values should receive eight-day-long “pre-marriage residential training” from the respective church. The Santal who have been not formally educated usually have no objection to participating in the training, but those who have been formally educated strongly oppose participation. With regard to this, Ramai Mardi, a Catholic Santal who received this training and graduated from the local college, commented, “The Church treats us like idiots. I strongly oppose this type of training – we know very well how to manage our marital life.” To manage moral life, the *jogmanjhi* (moral guardian and one of the assistants of the village headman) is responsible for dealing with ethical issues and ceremonial events connected with the marriage. In performing wedding rituals, he

leads the performance of all of the rites at specific times and places. Almost all the wedding rituals of both groups of believers are performed similarly, although the Christian Santal have eliminated two major rituals, *sindoor daan*¹⁹¹ and *da-bapla* (water wedding). In discussing the wedding rites, the Christian Santal emphasize the similarities between the rituals rather than differences. Conversely, the traditional believers accentuate the existence of the rituals, which they still firmly practice today. Indeed, both forms of wedding emphasize an understanding of the convivial continuity of ritualized practices related to marriage, and by accepting, rejecting, and accommodating them, they aim to retain Santal identity and create a new web to place themselves in the frame of indigenous identity.

About a week prior, the villagers engage vigorously in preparatory work for the wedding. To arrange all the materials related to the wedding, they perform a series of tasks, such as the very important activity of preparing *handi* (rice beer), the most significant component. All rituals and receptions become truly functional by serving and offering *handi*, as I showed in Ch. 7. It takes three to four days to make *handi*, and the female members of the village community volunteer to prepare it. For one wedding, 15 to 20 pots of *handi* are required, and each pot contains 5 to 10 liters of *handi*, but the amount can vary according to village size. For one pot of *handi*, three to four kilograms of rice are required, which the families of the bride and groom contribute; sometimes, kin and neighbors also provide it as a gift. The complementary item *murhi*, or puffed rice, is served with *handi* and is also made by women, or sometimes is bought from the local market.

The second task is to paint the bride and groom's house. For this, the house is first coated with earth clay. Then, over the clay, different colors and designs are drawn to give it a charming appearance. Usually, the female members of the family and other relatives are entitled to do this. The following figure 26 provides a view of a decorated house. The third task is to organize all logistics related to the feast, i.e., to assemble cooking utensils, assign tasks to the main and assistant cooks, organize a team to serve the food, organize seating and arrange seating materials,

¹⁹¹ The *sindoor-daan* is the most monumental ritual among the Santals, and it affirms that the marriage relationship is established between man and woman. *Sindoor* is a traditional vermilion that is applied to the parting line of a married woman's hair, and as a dot on the forehead as well. It is also a sign of marriage in Hinduism and it is essential to wear it. The Santals practice this as well.

create a volunteer team and assign each their responsibilities, and select *titri kuri*¹⁹² (wedding assistants). These activities are completed by the Manjhi Parishad. The fourth task is to buy additional items for the feast, such as spices, oil, and firewood, the bride's dress, and the groom's turban. The male members of the family and some senior male members from the community perform this task. The fifth task, a fascinating one, is to prepare the *mandwa*,¹⁹³ or the marriage shed. This is similar to a temporary stage, prepared with leaves, bushes, and tree branches, which is placed in the middle of the courtyard. Most of the wedding rites are performed under the *mandwa*. Young male members of the village usually do this work.



Figure 26. Decorated houses during a wedding. Photos by the author.

These free-spirited community contributions nurture communal solidarity and intensify the sense of belonging to the Santal identity. The main course in the feast, the rice, is contributed by each household, two to three kilograms each, and the complementary item, meat of chicken and pigs, is provided by the relatives. Moreover, the families of the groom and bride contribute this from their own husbandry. To collect resources related to the wedding ceremonies, the

¹⁹² The *titri kuri* is an adolescent girl who has not reached puberty. During marriage ceremonies, three *titri kuris* are selected from the village community to assist in completing some rituals of the wedding.

¹⁹³ Previously, the *mandwa* was made of the branches of the Sal or *mahua* trees, because the Santal believe the benevolent *bongas* (spirits) dwell in these trees and the couple will have a happy married life. As these trees have disappeared from the Santals' living area of Bangladesh, the branches and leaves are usually collected from mango trees, which are available in the vicinity of the Santal villages.

villagers exploit their underlying shared power and communal craft, through which the financing of the wedding is kept outside the dominant sphere of the economy. By contributing their moral, emotional, and empirical wealth, even the poorest members of the community are able to arrange a splendid three-day-long wedding celebration. Thus, by refusing daily wages, the Santal create their own type of indigenous money.

By organizing all the tasks, therefore, in Situngtola the three-day wedding rituals were inaugurated by performing *da-bapla*, literally “water marriage,” but colloquially, “village worship.” In the usual practice, the bride’s and groom’s communities observe it separately in their respective villages. As I observed when performing *da-bapla*, the three *titri-kuri* had the materials of worship and, together with them, the villagers reached the place set aside for *da-bapla*, which is an empty field near the village. The groom’s or bride’s parents joined in the parade. Singing and dancing continue in parallel with the traditional drums. The *jogmanhi* dug the earth assigned for the *da-bapla* and planted three arrows around it, threading the arrows together (see figure 27). This symbolizes the fact that the friendship is rooted. Soon afterwards, he poured water and dedicated a few drops of *handi* to Marang Buru. He placed a one *taka* coin and some rice in the dug earth and welcomed benevolent spirits by marking the earth by *sindoor*. After the worship, a small cup water was fetched for the groom and bride to be used for holy water during a bath. The worship ensured that the village was now protected from evil deities. After the worship, the female members of the village started dancing and singing by turning around at the place of the *da-bapla*, and the male members contributed with drumming, although the Christian Santals do not observe *da-bapla*.



Figure 27. Earth dug for the *da-bapla*. Photo by Huren Murmu.

The same day at noon, a number of village communities and family members from the bride's side arrived at the groom's village to attend the *jom-nio* or *oraa-dor-nel*, meaning respectively "feast" and "to observe the groom's house." In brief, the program is known as *jam-nio*. By performing *balaiya-johar*, *dobok*, and *janga-abuk* (traditional salutations discussed in Ch. 7), the guests from the bride's side were welcomed at the groom's house, and this welcome was underlined by serving *handi* and *murhi*. The greetings continued by sprinklings of flower petals, smearing *sindoor* and mustard oil over each other, and drinking *handi*. The event turned into one of the most magical times in the village. Meanwhile, male and female members kept separate during the sparkling moments of sprinkling and smearing, but the accompanying drumming added some merriment. Then began the feasting, together with humorous chatting and conversing. After it ended, the bride's guests said goodbye to the groom's villagers and returned to their own village.

However, the villagers of the groom's party returned to the courtyard of the groom's house to observe the ceremony of *sasang sunum*, or smearing turmeric on the body and face. The

titri kuris, or wedding assistants, participated in the ceremony by performing a number of rituals, such as rubbing turmeric on the faces, feet, and hands, smearing mustard oil on the hair, and combing the groom, his relatives, and honorable members of the village community. While performing these rituals, the drumming continued. In the final stage, the groom received *sasang sunum* from the *titri kuris*, and then the mother of groom performed another round of *sasang sunum* for the groom, which ended at midnight. Soon afterwards, the villagers again occupied the courtyard, the women started dancing, the men continued drumming, and the rest of the villagers present watched while drinking *handi*. Both the bride's and groom's parties observed the *sasang sunum* ceremony similarly.

The next morning, the villagers got busy dressing and decorating the groom to go to the bride's village. The purity of the bride and groom was ensured with a bath, and during that time, they washed the mustard oil and turmeric off from the previous night's *sasang sunum*. After the bath, their palms were briefly decorated with henna. During the wedding, a Christian Santal groom wears a *panjabi*¹⁹⁴ and pyjamas with a turban, the turban being made of white corkwood and decorated with glitter; they put a cross on top of the turban, which is generally purchased from the local market. In contrast, a groom who is a traditional believer wears a white or off-white jerkin or a sleeve-length shirt and white *dhuti*, and he prepares the turban himself by folding together a long white piece of cloth, which is done traditionally. Conversely, the bride among the traditional believers wears a yellow *saree*¹⁹⁵ with a red border, while a Christian bride wears a red brocade *saree* similar to a Bengali bride. This is worn during the wedding, and turbans like those of Hindu Bengalis are also worn. The following figure 28 provide a comparison between both believers' brides and grooms.

¹⁹⁴ A knee-long jerkin type with sleeves, usually either white or off-white in color, used during the wedding.

¹⁹⁵ The *saree* is a female garment widely worn on the Indian subcontinent. It is about five meters in length, is wrapped around the waist, and one side is draped over the shoulder. The midriff is covered with a blouse.



Figure 28. Both believers' couples soon after the marriage. On the left is a traditional believer Santal couple, and on the right a Christian Santal couple. Photos by the author.

After dressing up, the groom reached the front of the chapel of the village, where the villagers had already assembled to perform *gur khila* (feeding molasses). In the case of a traditional believers' wedding, they go to the *manjhithan* (sacred place), but both groups of believers perform similar rituals to complete the ceremony of *gur khila*. During *gur khila*, the mother of the groom, by performing *janga-abuk*, bestowed blessings on her son, then fed him molasses, and the female relatives of the groom then individually performed the same rituals. During this time, the groom was accompanied by the *lungta kura*¹⁹⁶ (supporters of the groom), who also received molasses. After performing these rites, the groom gave token money to his mother and aunts. This particular ritual signifies that the son has returned the value of breastfeeding and babysitting to his mother and aunts respectively. During this time the drumming continued, which the villagers watched with enthusiasm.

Next, the *gur khila*, the groom's party, traveled to the bride's village on three *bhotbhoti*.¹⁹⁷ Approximately 100 people accompanied the groom, and it took about 45 minutes to

¹⁹⁶ During the wedding, a young man is assigned to accompany the groom; he is called *lungta kura*. In most cases, he is a cousin or a bosom friend.

¹⁹⁷ *Bhotbhoti* are locally made, unauthorized three-wheelers, prohibited by the government to prevent road accidents. Although it is widely used in rural areas, its cheap fares make it a popular local form of transport in the rural north-west of Bangladesh. It is also known as *nasiman-kariman*.

reach the vicinity of the bride's village. Afterward, they walked about two kilometers on the thin mud over the ridges of the crop fields to arrive at the bride's village. Once there, the groom's party waited at the field near the bride's house. The *manjhi haram* (village headman) came to welcome them; the welcome session is called *pera daram*, or "reception for relatives". The Santal say, "*kulhi muchtore pera daram*", which means "relatives are welcome in the village." In performing *pera daram*, the *manjhi haram* of bride's village usually uses a pot of water covered with banana leaves on the top and bottom and, by holding it up, he welcomes the groom's party. By taking it and holding it, the *manjhi haram* of the groom's village accepted the invitation (see figure 29). This method of welcoming symbolizes the fact that a relationship of kinship has been established within both villages. During that time the drumming continued, and soon afterwards, by dancing and singing, the groom's party arrived in front of the bride's house.



Figure 29. The *manjhi harams* of both villages (bride's and groom's) performing *pera daram* (reception of relatives). Photo by the author.

Afterwards, a second round of warm welcomes began by performing *johar*, *dobok*, and *janga-abuk*, ending with a serving of *handi* and *murhi*. Near the yard of the bride's house, a

seating place was arranged by spreading out mats on the earth, and canopies were hung up to protect people from the sun. Meanwhile, drumming, singing, and dancing continued, and the most important event of the wedding began shortly afterwards. In the case a Christian Santal marriage, the Father of the respective church comes to deliver the marriage vows, and the bride and groom exchange rings.

Conversely, if it is a traditional believers' wedding, *sindoor-daan* becomes the most important part of the marriage. By smearing vermilion on the forehead and hair parting of the bride, the marriage is completed. To perform this specific ritual, the bride is placed in a large bamboo basket, which four men lift up. Similarly, two strong men carry the groom over their shoulders, facing the bride. The groom uncovers the bride's face and smears *sindoor* five times using a mango twig. During this time, the villagers scream jubilantly, the drumming reaches its loudest volume, and these festivities continue until the groom lifts the bride from the basket. The groom holds her in his lap, then they stand alongside each other. Soon afterwards, the aunts of the bride welcome the newly married couple by performing *dobok*.

In observing the wedding rituals, I noticed that the newly married couple was welcomed home by performing *janga-abuk* and feeding them molasses. A piece of burning coal was placed on the earth, which the bride and groom broke together to enter their home. This bars the evil spirits loitering in the locality and ensures a successful marriage life. Both groups of believers perform the ritual the same way. The feast meanwhile continued for the groom's party, along with the community of the bride's village. The drumming continued to amuse those at the celebration, spreading throughout the event.

After entering the house, the couple took a place under the *mandwa*. The *gidi chimowra*, or gift-giving ceremony, began by performing *dobok*, after which the bride's mother held a winnowing fan with meadow grasses and a few pieces of paddy. She waved the winnowing fan three times around the heads of the bride and groom. She quickly scattered some paddy and put a few bits of meadow grass on the ears of the couple. Soon afterwards, mainly the female relatives of the bride performed, one by one, the same ritual by presenting *maan*, or gifts. This ceremony signifies bestowing gifts and blessings for a prosperous and peaceful married life. Presents of a

pig, chickens, and aluminum and brass kitchenware count as precious gifts, which mainly come from relatives and those who have a kin-like relationship with the bride and groom. In fact, the *gidi chimowra* and *maan* rituals are correlated with each other. However, the rice, which is the chef's contribution from the village community, was not included in this episode. After completing *gidi chimowra*, the gift-giving ceremony, the *manjhi haram* of the bride's village handed over the gifts to the *manjhi haram* of the groom's village, where the groom's father and other officials of the Manjhi Parishad trusted that the gift items are handed over suitably. Afterwards, the groom's party returned to their village along with the bride. The bride was accompanied by a *gayati kuri*¹⁹⁸ for a few days, who was responsible for supporting her in everyday work.

When the groom's party returned at night, the groom's mother received the bride and groom by performing *dobok* and *janga-abuk*, and drumming continued to add mirth to the welcoming of the bride. After welcoming the bride, the villagers once again participated in dancing, drumming, and singing, and the drinking and chatting continued until midnight. At this time, some members of the village community began arranging the necessary tasks for the next day's feast, which would be held at the groom's village. As soon as the morning came, the relatives, the officials of the Manjhi Parishad, and some members of the community from the bride's village came to the groom's village. They were taken to a yard in the groom's village, at which time some members of the groom's village joined them. Thereafter, another episode began of drumming, dancing, and singing in which the prominent participation of young Santal was observed, and it continued until the feast.

Most usually, the second phase, *gidi chimowra*, or the gift-giving ceremony, started at noon. The *maan*, or gifts, were presented to the couple, and the same rituals from the previous day in the courtyard of the bride's house were observed. To conduct the *gidi chimowra*, the couple sit on a chair, with the *lungti kura* and *gayati kuri* close by. One by one, relatives and some of the villagers who have close intimacy with the groom's family performed similar rituals to those observed at the bride house. Once this was finished, another phase of humor began,

¹⁹⁸ The *gayati kuri* is either chosen from one of her bosom friends or is a cousin, and should be a girl.

implying the growing intimacy between bride and groom. They shared a *neem* branch to brush their teeth, and the bride gave the necessary items (a towel and soap) to the groom so he could take a bath. The groom accepted them and left to take a bath in the nearest pond. The village community watched this and made fun of it. Soon afterwards, to honor the officials of the Manjhi Parishad and some of the honorable senior members of the village community, the bride performed *janga-abuk* for them. In fact, this episode demonstrated patriarchal gender distinctions and idealizes the caretaker role of the bride or woman.

Soon afterwards, there was the comical episode of *janga-abuk*, where the sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law¹⁹⁹ of the bride came to receive *janga-abuk*. To create humor, a few of them put a clay and spiral rope on their feet, which must be washed off and removed by the bride. There was more humor when the bride held one leg tightly and demanded a gift. At this time, the younger kin of the bride tried to pull out their feet, and the villagers laughed. Finally, the bride received token money as a gift and released the leg. Nearby, young Santal carried on drumming and dancing. This ended in the evening, formally ending the three-day-long wedding rituals.

The ceremonies related to marriage continue for three days, although one week before and after, the festivities continue in sharing labor, exchanging resources, and organizing trivial and essential matters regarding the wedding rites. In drumming, dancing, singing, drinking, and feasting, each individual is conscious of maintaining the consensus of the village, in which the villagers stress their communal belongingness as Santal.

8.4. Ethnographic Events and Activism

In fact, the Santals' relationship with these ritual practices is pivotal, indicating their attachment to the ancestors' memories that are passed on orally and that shape their everyday practices. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates a sort of consistency between observing and performing these traditional festivals and wedding rites. On the one hand, in their ceremonies, they are establishing their own type of identity; on the other hand, the twenty-first century attempts at

¹⁹⁹ The relationship of brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law is not only associated with the kinship of the groom's family members, it is also embedded in the village community members who have mutually established a relation of kinship with the groom's family. Thus, the number of brothers- and sisters-in-law is quite large among those who participate in the comic episode of the *janga-abuk*.

renewing their indigenous identity lead them to campaign for their traditions and to perform rituals (Clifford 2013). As a result, young Santal endeavor to reorganize their discursive identity, saying, “Though we are divided by religion, we are culturally united.” Although I refer to fluidity in analyzing Santal identity, there is a danger in making “indigenous claims” in order to prove authenticity if it almost asserts the notion of essentialism and the hegemonic notion of nationalism.

Thus, in discussing the rituals, I consciously included the changes in which the evidence of inequalities and the juxtaposition of hegemonic powers stress belonging to ancestors’ memories, while the moving elements encourage them to form everyday resistance or resist hegemonic assimilation. The transformations in observing the *sohrai*, *baha*, *bapla*, and *gidi chimowra* significantly include highly ritualized practices and historical continuities and discontinuities, and the contemporary notion of indigeneity adds glue to sharpening today’s struggle for rights. This rich struggle, in its complex way, provides the dynamic for surviving and translating the indigenous claim to fulfill the needs of material life.

In this manner, by performing rituals, these become weapons with which to campaign and claim rights. In Bangladesh, the performance of identity includes the political context in which the Santal have been demanding constitutional recognition as an indigenous people since the 1990s. To foster their rights, local-level calls to stage the *baha* festival and the *dasai-danta* dance competition include the global discourse of indigeneity that Clifford (2013) acknowledged in his idea of indigenous insurgency: that is, by performing traditions, they place themselves in the twenty-first century’s translocal spaces, as noted at the beginning of this chapter. In this sense, the observances of *sohrai* and *baha* reveal some differences between the traditional and Christian Santal, but despite the rituals’ specific events, they add strength to the struggle to become indigenous Santal. The actuality of these juxtapositions should be accounted for in analyzing the connection between rituals and rights.

In sum, the discussion of this chapter makes three contributions. First, it illustrates the Santals’ sense of belonging to their ritualized practices. Second, it provides an overview of the rituals they still practice today in an effort to assert their identity. Among these, the *sohrai* and

baha festivals have become iconic in allowing them to retain their identity. Furthermore, aggressive evangelization has eliminated many ritual practices, even though the substantial practices of the wedding rituals demonstrate their great significance. Third, to discover the forms of the invention, the call for the *baha* festival and *dasai-danta* dance competition reveal evidence of transformation, in which the representation of Santal identity consciously projects a reinforcement of the Santals' political claim to their indigenous identity. By staging traditions, they become part of global indigenous movements.

8.5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented in particular a discussion of the Santals' relationship with their ritualized practices. In analyzing the spaces between rituals and religion, the evidence in this chapter displays the cultural characteristics of the Santal that accommodate both groups of believers (traditional and Christian) in continuing their relationship as Santal and compromising the religious divide. The rituals performed during the festivals (*sohrai* and *baha*) and marriage ceremonies (*bapla*) contain meanings and motivate both groups of believers to intensify their social solidarity. Although they are divided in religion, neither group is separated from the notion of Santal identity. Though observing or abstaining from traditional festivals, they retain their Santalness in the wedding rites. The ethnographic details are most notable during wedding rituals, in which they ideally minimize the religious divisions and, through traditional salutations, feasting, drinking, dancing, and drumming, strategically place themselves in the process of becoming indigenous. While observing wedding rituals, *gidi chimowra* (the gift-giving ceremony) in particular displays an intimate relationship between tradition and economy, in which the moving factors in Santal egalitarianism provide a space for anyone in the community to arrange a communal feast, regardless of economic status. This sort of egalitarian practice includes parallel resistance to market-driven activities in the village. The histrionic dimension developed by performing these traditional practices and inventing the *baha* festival and *dasai-danta* dance competition play a crucial role in allowing the Santal to accommodate themselves to the complexities of the postmodern world. These efforts at renewal, which insert them into the contemporary idea of the "indigenous," provides them with the strength to rationalize the traces of transformation and combine rituals and rights in order to determine the path of human rights.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Hor khon in esoie akana, entkan hor hopon khondo bangin begar akana.

(Although I have converted to Christianity, I have never lost my affiliation with “hor hopon” [sons of humanity]).

—Uttered by Johan Tudu, an inhabitant of Situngtola

The above comment invites an examination of how the controversial context between the Christian faith and traditional beliefs incites the Santals to contract their identity based on ancestral values. During my time in Situngtola, my involvement in the villagers’ everyday lives extended to their bantering with each other. Either when chatting or interviewing, I was purposefully interested in knowing how important a consensus was to them despite proselytization having divided them into two groups. Thus, when I asked them how evangelization has hindered their unity, many of them replied like Johan Tudu. Indeed, his statement indicates an ingrained attachment to Santalness, a strong sentiment of ethnic belongingness. To the Santal, they are not only *hor* (human being) but also *hor hopon* (sons of humanity). The sense of ethnic binding with the notion of *hor hopon* inevitably encourages the Santals’ connection with semantic memories. Therefore, “They [Santals] regard themselves as special people. Their name for themselves, *hor hopon* carries the implicit meaning of ‘the true men,’ the only really human society” (Somers 1977: 57). Explaining this emotional attachment using *hor hopon*, Somers remarks that the phrase is closely connected to the concept of *hor disom* (Santal country), but “the Santal’s *disom* implies a less definitive boundary than modern political and administrative areas; it carries greater emotional implications of ethnic identity...where ethnic groups have had great struggles to gain or preserve their *lebensraum* ([living space] *ibid.*: 57).” Thus, in the remote villages, today’s Santals’ thoughts revive ancestral memories; they attempt to minimize division within themselves by sharpening the idea of *hor hopon*. In fact, the idea of *hor hopon* refers “to Santal identity and opposes the category to *diku* – outsiders and foreigners” (Carrin 2002: 139). This term is a synonym of “a Santal”, to whom their self-identity is *hor*, and their worth as humans is meaningful as a *hor hopon*. The outsiders’ nomenclatures for the Santals, used to dominate and govern their lives, have been demonstrated

in the major part of this thesis. Another side to power, that which is produced through discourse, encourages a reexamination of Barth's (1969) ideas on the cognitive awareness of ethnic identity, which can clarify the multiple, fluid, and constant change among the Santals. In this sense, today's Santals prudently observe their division, and to diminish the controversies, they use past values to construct the present and conform to changes. These traces of belonging to Santalness are presented throughout this thesis. Thus, Johan Tudu's comment stresses the crossroads of representation routed through ancestral values, where the Santals contextualize the present, acquire the power to oppose assimilative pressures, and sharpen their ideas to perpetuate their distinct identity.

The notion of *hor hopon* is perpetuated on printed T-shirts containing the words *hor hopon* (see figure 30). In Situngtola, during the *baha* festival, I saw a few Santal wearing T-shirts with "*hor hopon*" printed on the back. Initially, I thought it might be part of a development project for the Santal to "revitalize." Usually, this kind of T-shirt is made to market products or to promote a festival or conference and is freely distributed to increase consumer awareness. However, my assumption was wrong. The Santal informed me that they bought the T-shirts from a shop located at Laxmipur bazaar in Rajshahi City. The T-shirt promoter, Noren Marandi, owns the shop and is himself a Santal and a resident of Situngtola. Intrigued, I investigated and found not only the T-shirt but also the shop's name was *hor hopon*. This shop was the only one in Rajshahi City owned by a Santal or indigenous person. I asked the owner (Noren Marandi) why he printed such T-shirts and called his shop *hor hopon*. He replied,

We are comfortable to name ourselves *hor hopon*. It does not only refer to Santal, but also to 'human being' which is the notion of Santal identity. The idea applies to all: Christian or traditional believer Santals. It is a universal idea for us.

Regarding the name of the shop, he also added that, "Santals are not in the business field. To inspire Santals for entrepreneurship and to campaign for my shop, I chose the shop name *hor hopon*." This name and the decision to enter the business field strongly exemplifies their consciousness of ethnic identity and the motivation to continue the Santal identity.



Figure 30. One of the villagers of Situngtola wearing the printed T-shirt *hor hopon* at the *jatherthan*. Photo by the author.

The *hor hopon* shop mainly sold western garments, which Bangladesh usually produces for export. Opened in 2010, the shop closed in 2018. Noren Marandi explains the reason for the closure:

On the one hand, my rental agreement with the landowner was over, and on the other hand, my business partner (who was also a Santal) had betrayed me. In such a situation, I did not have enough money to renew my rental agreement. But I am planning to open the shop again at Kakonhat, which will be near my village. The shop name will remain the same: *hor hopon*. Furthermore, by considering the demands of the locality, I will keep traditional garments, such as *saree*, *lungi*,²⁰⁰ *dhuti*, which Santals use in their daily life. In addition, I plan to keep *panchi* and *parhan*,²⁰¹ and bows and arrows, although nowadays the Santals do not use these things, but when campaigning or participating in a

²⁰⁰ A traditional male garment in Bangladesh, as well as in various countries of south Asia. This garment is similar to a skirt, wrapped around the waist, and ankle-length.

²⁰¹ The traditional pieces of clothing of Santali women, in which the upper garment is called *parhan* and lower *panchi*. Santal women in Bangladesh nowadays do not wear this traditional attire.

procession, they may need these items, for example, on June 30th, the observance of Santal Rebellion Day.

The Santal initiative to print and promote such T-shirts implies a new expression of survival, in which the division between Christian and traditional believer Santals is mended in *hor hopon*. Therefore, the three instances (i.e., Johan Tudu's words, the villagers willingness to wearing the *hor hopon* T-shirt, and Noren Marandi's *hor hopon* business venture) reveal the crossroads of Santal identity and their realistic efforts to continue it. Thus, these ethnographic events scrutinize the historical consciousness and its connection to the considerable changes and distinct past. The moral intensity and initiative to make changes, such as printed T-shirts, draw credible attention to the Santals' response to changes and their reinvention of traditional values.

Therefore, in this chapter, I not only summarize the details presented earlier, I also draw attention to the moral questions and ethical engagement of this research. Heintz (2009: 1-3) acknowledges the complexity of ethical engagement in executing anthropological enquiries. Thus, the social context is not "abstract and an object of study": along with empirical difficulties in the process of research, it is instead a matter of "grasping the ways in which moralities are created, transmitted, or interpreted, and negotiated" (ibid. 3). Heintz views morality as a meeting point with other cultures, although there is a danger of correctness. To varying degrees, the idea of morality and the context of culturally situated ethics in which anthropologists are concerned deal with the issues. However, in pursuing interactions with the Santal, I acknowledge the moral stances involved in academic research. Therefore, this ethnographic study deals with political stakes and possibilities. Indeed, this thesis has demonstrated the complexity of transformations, the context of ritual practices, and the connection between performance, persistence, and initiatives to reinvent traditions, despite these ethnographic details containing paradoxes and juxtapositions within the periodic and everyday events discussed within it. These shreds of evidence account for the complexity of issues, but they also contextualize the necessities of survival from a pragmatic viewpoint where the Santals negotiate with the nationalistic state, nurture their spirit of resistance against aggressive assimilation, and correspond with global indigenous activism through the strength of their own identity. Thus, this thesis concludes the analysis by making three core points. First, the chapter examines the niches of negotiation

regarding the state's denial. Second, it clarifies the Santal's idea about their identity, which includes complex periods of change. Third, this ethnographic exploration reveals the variety and diverse meaning of Santal resistance and its connectivity between ritual practices and rights. The discussions on these points are elaborated in the following sections.

9.1. The State's Denial and Spaces for Negotiation

The state's denial of the Santals' indigenous status diminished their cultural rights; moreover, they experienced massive land dispossession and cyclical disorganization in receiving services. The disruption in distributing scarce resources interrupts entitlements as well. Furthermore, the nationalistic emergence of Bangladesh retained a legacy of colonial oppression, constitutional disapproval, and rejection of the UNDRIP, an obvious consistency of denial. The denial also persisted in social locations, allowing the majoritarian Bengalis to treat the Santal as "inferior" and "impure." National denial and social subjugation have supplemented each other, causing multiple predicaments for the Santal, as demonstrated in this thesis.

The ethnographic exploration of this thesis indicates that the Santals' collective and individual suffering in obtaining the necessities of life and their predicaments in obtaining the minimum resources for a human life has diminished their rights. Indeed, the institutional disorganization has curtailed the Santals' rights as citizens as well. The impacts of denial and multifaceted disorganization have created spaces for evangelized developmentalism, as I have argued in this research. Thus, the present ethnographic materials demonstrate that the churches have crossed the conventional paths of charity by forming many welfare committees, providing irrigation services, introducing indigenous-friendly microcredit programs, and launching health insurance schemes. By investigating these areas, this thesis has provided evidence that interactions gradually decreased between the Santals and the state but extensively increased between Santals and evangelized development programs and their respective churches. Meanwhile, the past experiences of living under colonial control and the Santal's present survival under the hegemonic nationalist state stressed them in receiving these services. The Santals' distressful socio-economic life reveals the importance of survival, which they compromised by their traditional beliefs.

Although the Santal are able to survive, receiving these services invites many challenges that polarize their identity, with Christian and traditional believer Santal involved in opposing each other's identity and ceasing their communication with the church. Living with these consequences, they attempt to materialize their problems in life to encourage negotiations. Repeatedly, the issue of their rights has been brought before the state bodies, and either through acceptance or denial, they acquire spaces for negotiation. For example, the National Education Policy, launched to teach Santal children in their mother tongue, is the result of long decades of demand. Although the Santal are divided on adopting Santali script, they won national attention, and the issue of a distinct script for the Santal become a matter of national discussion. In the same vein, the adoption of the Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institute Act 2010 energized them: at least as a "small ethnic minority" they obtained some provisions. This partial acceptance became pivotal for emerging negotiations when the Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institute Act 2010 mentioned 27 "small ethnic groups" existing in the country. However, the indigenous people opposed the numbers of "small ethnic groups" that were mentioned in the Act. Thus, indigenous protests boosted the areas for negotiation, and the indigenous people's arguments were reviewed by the state, which are now under consideration with a proposal to include 50 "small ethnic groups" in the country (FTPP 2017: 7). Therefore, the aspect of national denial invites us to witness another aspect of denial, within which, ironically, the spaces of negotiation can emerge.

The field of anthropology accounts for the dynamics of negotiation. Here Gulliver (1963) deals with the dispute-settlement system in the Arusha society of northern Tanganyika. His recorded cases demonstrate the indigenous legal system. When engaged in resolving disputes, Arusha society generally handles such situations by negotiation instead of the colonizers' system of adjudication. Gulliver acknowledges many complexities but sees possibilities in mutual settlement instead of "a single static structure" (ibid.: 5). By reviewing the international distribution of power, Nader (2018) acknowledges the contextual challenges in negotiations between two parties, examined by Gulliver; however, Nader adds world changes from the 1960s to the contemporary period when third-party or other actors can valorize the processes of negotiation. Her discussion emphasizes the international area of negotiations along with the complexities of the "civilized" world and power relations between dominant nation states and

peripheral nation states; thus, the UN is an actor that takes part in boosting the processes of negotiation. In contextualizing the Santal struggle for rights and identity, the UN certainly provides some international instruments, which have become weapons for the indigenous peoples of the world, as well as for the Santals. Using these instruments, “arbitration, mediation and negotiation” can be generated between the state and the Santal.

Evidently, the Santal are more prudent in using traditional judicial procedures to ban the mobility of neoliberal development agents in their villages. To do this, they teach a peaceful and prudent method of resistance, challenging people to rethink the power of indigenous or “primitive” systems of dispute resolution. However, the Manjhi Parishads use their authority to connect considerable changes to traditional laws in dealing with village disputes. Indeed, the Santal’s cultural strength is executed through judicial proceedings to adopt changes and accept differences. In fact, the critical and complex socio-political aspect of Santal lives stress “rethinking resistance,” in which “resistance can be reconceptualised as the negotiation rather than negation of social power” (Chandra 2015: 563).

The state and the Santal’s relationship with it have been explored in this thesis, but the ethnographic details also demonstrate the cognitive aspect of the Santal’s prudence in critiquing a static structure and the state’s denial of their status. In this respect, the Santal’s revival of their identity and their activism in claiming their rights could mean searching for the dyadic meaning of denial, from which the Santal’s struggles become visible at the national level. Hence, we can revisit the power relations between the state and Santal to discover the rational meaning of resistance. The subtleties of resistance provide shrewd meaning for their discourses for negotiation, from which they can potentially obtain rights. In such circumstances, the Santals’ strength and issues of survival could be streamlined. To identify the normative prospects, James Clifford (2013) has inspired me to speculate on the cultural transitions and transnational impacts of decolonization and globalization that polarize indigenous people’s lives. Although his geographical focuses were Island Pacific countries, he described the cognitive and pragmatic meanings of indigenous people’s survival and renewal. From that point of view, the Santals’ struggle could have political possibilities or, in Clifford words, “They [indigenous people] reach

back selectively to deeply rooted, adaptive traditions: creating new pathways in a complex postmodernity. Cultural endurance is a process of becoming” (ibid.: 7).

Therefore, the most recent acknowledgment by the state (i.e., the establishment of the memorial dedicated to the great Santal heroes in the Santal-inhabited part of the country) contains considerable meaning. The acknowledgement has implicitly led to the Santals reconstructing their strategy of struggle to acquire spaces for negotiation within the nationalistic state. The affirmation of the Santal’s struggle was acknowledged in the state representative’s speech:

Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is not possible if some sections of the people, including the ethnic minority communities, lag behind...Santal community played significant roles in different movements like the Santal Revolution during the British colonial rule, Tevaga Movement as well as the 1971 Liberation War. But we could not do much for their advancement...it is sorrow that the demands of the ethnic communities including the Santals have not been fully realized. I will talk with the prime minister about forming of [a] separate land commission for the ethnic minorities on plain lands.²⁰²

In fact, the Santal’s participation in different dominations and the state’s denials of them were both acknowledged by Dr. Gowher Rizvi, international affairs adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, after unveiling a monument to the Santal Rebellion and Tebhaga Movement in Kaharol Upazila in Dinajpur district on September 22, 2018.²⁰³ The memorial consists of a sculpture of the great Santali heroes Sidhu-Kanu and ceramic portraits of four prominent Tebhaga Movement leaders.²⁰⁴ After the memorial’s establishment, the area, formerly known as

²⁰² “Momentum of Santal Movement.” *Daily Star*, 23 September, 2018. <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/monument-santal-movements-1637188>. (accessed 18.02.2019).

²⁰³ See ibid. and “Government Working for Santal Community’s Development.” *The Daily Independent*, 23 September 2018. <http://www.theindependentbd.com/printversion/details/167369>. (accessed 18.02.2019).

²⁰⁴ The four leaders were Ila Mitra, Gurudas Talukdar, Hajee Mohammad Danesh and Khoka Ray, who all mobilized marginalized farmers and sharecroppers at the grassroots level during Tebhaga Movement. Santal participations in the Santal Rebellion (1855-56) and Tebhaga Movement (1946-47) were discussed in Ch. 3.

Kantaji Square, was then renamed Tebhaga Square, a name acknowledging the Santal's participation in the Tebhaga Movement (1946-47). The monument was established at the traffic island at the entrance road toward the Kantaji Temple.²⁰⁵ The monument's location at such an important public place is a meaningful recognition of the Santal's contribution to anti-colonial movements and against all forms of oppression. This location also suggests state recognition for the Santals' own struggle. Indeed, the monument depicts the outcome of the activism of the plains indigenous peoples and draws attention to their specific rights as a "small ethnic minority". Figure 31 provides a visualization of the monument.



Figure 31. The Tebhaga Monument in Kaharol in Dinajpur district. Source: *Daily Karlarkantho Report on Memorial Sculpture Inauguration*. 22 September 2018.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Kantaji or Kantajew temple is a late medieval Hindu temple located in Kaharol Upazila in Dinajpur district. This temple is an excellent example of terracotta architecture in Bangladesh. Despite its religious significance, the temple is a huge tourist attraction due to its exemplary architectural design.

²⁰⁶ The report on the Tebhaga Monument inauguration and the photograph can be accessed through this link: http://www.kalerkantho.com/online/country-news/2018/09/22/682903?fbclid=IwAR0QYMM8P2024dXNR6SAflKLJ48r5XGO9pXWLPu6Y7vbQE6Jb0OIKJru_nlk. (accessed 20.02.2019).

This state acknowledgment implies identity with the Santals' own struggles, and that acts against repression are meaningful in finding political possibilities. Despite the constitutional denial of the "indigenous" recognition and different bureaucratic descriptions of indigenous peoples, this acceptance leaves room for negotiation. In relation to the state's denial and institutional disorganization, this thesis discusses the Santal's survival and describes the diverse forms of resistance and indigenous activism from which negotiations can be constructed.

9.2. Controversies, Constant Changes, and the Continuity of Santalness

The movements for recognition as "indigenous" include the danger of essentialism; however, in the Santals' case, the controversies pertaining to the *bideen* (traditional believer) and *esoie* (Christian Santals) include complex and contested facts leading to division within the Santals. In fact, the religious division among the Santals now occupies their area of struggle, but it contributes to the meaning of everyday resistance, which has been examined throughout this thesis. To varying degrees, this thesis has described the positive aspects of Christian missionaries' interference in respect of formal schooling and philanthropic activities among the Santal, while also explicitly revealing the negatives of evangelization in imposing the doctrine of Christian faith and dominating the Santals' everyday lives. Evangelization certainly divided the Santals into two groups and, consequently, it has created many disputes, which move from the village to the national level and vice versa.

This thesis explicitly reveals the discursive arguments of both believers and their juxtaposition in asserting indigenous status. Despite the Santals' divisions, my ethnographic exploration has shown how these debates bind the Santal together through semantic memories and the notion of Santalness. Therefore, this thesis shows that the endemic nature of Santalness, embodied by the retention of the Manjhi Parishads, is either divided or united. By investigating controversial situations and the complexities and intelligibility of the predicaments of proselytization, prospects under transformation, and possibilities in practicing or inventing traditions have been broadly presented here. By analyzing the composition of the changed situation, this thesis has also addressed the role of intermediaries, particularly NGOs. While I acknowledge their participation in development programs, their shift from philanthropy to quasi-commercial ventures and generalizations while intervening in development projects among Santals was widely argued. Thus, the cultural differences among the Santals were explicitly

bypassed. However, the paradoxes of the controversies and juxtaposition of intermediaries encourage the creation of alternative spaces to intensify the notion of Santal identity.

However, the disputes among the Santal led to them breaking up their consensus from *atu sagai* (village oneness) to adopting a common script for the Santali language or breaking the platform of indigenous plains peoples. Conversely, the same context tended toward consensus, thereby intensifying the notion of *hor hopon* in everyday life or launching the Santali edition of Wikipedia in the global sphere, and thus bringing them together in a shared place to perpetuate their Santalness. As a consequence, the most recent inauguration of the Santali Wikipedia garnered global acceptance whereby Santal alliance occurred in the three countries of Santal presence (i.e., Bangladesh, India, and Nepal). The initiative for a Santali edition of Wikipedia began in 2012 and it was launched in 2018. The Ol Chiki script was chosen as the alphabet for Wikipedia.²⁰⁷ Indeed, this enterprise opens a shared platform.

By creating their own virtual space in Wikipedia, the Santal cross state boundaries and use cultural connectivity and memories of share histories to bring together all Santal. However, the Santal world moves beyond the nationalistic construction of the state because “for the Santal, the world is a vast ‘sacred’ arena in which men, spirit and impersonal powers are constantly interlinked” (Troisi 2000: 112). Their idea of *disom*, or country, has emotional implications, instead of those of a modern territorial and nationalist state (Somers 1977, Troisi 2000). In advancing their agenda for rights, this virtual space is useful in creating a common cultural space to share experiences. This effort might yield a pan-Santali area in which unity across places may be developed.

In contextualizing the application of the Wikipedia page in the Bangladesh perspective, the ethnographical details presented here provide evidence of the multifaceted disruption to the Santal due to religious division. Thus, one of the most controversial issues is disagreement in adopting a distinct Santali script for the Santal of Bangladesh. In this matter, the traditional believers mostly supported the Bengali script while the Christian Santals were in favor of the

²⁰⁷ Santali Wikipedia (sat.wikipedia.org). 11 December 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santali_Wikipedia. (accessed 21.02.2018).

Roman script. Later, a third proposal to adopt Ol Chiki polarized the divisive situation among the Santal but also provided a way to stand together. In this circumstance, the endorsement of Ol Chiki for the Santali edition of Wikipedia and the alliance of the three countries' Santals provides a political meaning of togetherness. Likewise, this endorsement invites the Santal of Bangladesh to resolve the disagreement, although the application of a unified Santali script is disputed when Santal are in the shadow of region-specific scripts. However, promoting a political consensus could mean considering the possibility in negotiations.

9.3. Ritual Practices, Subtleties of Resistance, and Crossroads of Rights

To varying degrees, in the villages, the Santal resisted imposed assimilation, as the ethnographic details in this thesis have demonstrated. Their subjugation in social settings, the penetration of evangelization, and the denial of the state agitated the Santals. Thus, their hidden anger was nurtured through behavioral acts and ritual practices, subtleties in response to the various forms of repression that were analyzed through the lens of Scott's (1985, 1990) idea of everyday resistance. The particular background of the increasing number of Christian Santal is a fact, although they are confronting and accommodating the dilemma of both beliefs, i.e., Christian and traditional beliefs. Hence, the diverse meaning of the manifold situations that have been presented in this thesis. Hence, the Santal's power solidifies the Santal identity articulated by the phrase *hor hopon*. Meanwhile, the discussions in this thesis demonstrate that the Santal are neither pious Christians nor worshippers; instead, they synthesize both beliefs, proselytization appearing as a harbor when they are deprived of basic services and are striving in their everyday lives for the necessities of life.

In Chs. 6 to 8, I presented the various ritual practices, wedding rites, ceremonial occasions and festivals, and dyadic but dynamic roles of the Manjhi Parishad. These practices clearly contain juxtapositions. First, a juxtaposition discloses the ingrained character of Santal culture and their common purpose to continue it. Second, the continuity of these practices overlap with the spirit of resistance, and the Santal nurture their power to resist all forms of repression. However, conventional development agents widely portray Santal as "disadvantaged" people in comparison to the majoritarian Bengalis, and the developmentalism or interventions of intermediaries are generated from this imported concept of development. As this thesis argues,

NGOs and development agents fail to understand the Santal's peasant way of life and the futility of running microcredit programs in Santal villages. Their misconstrual of Santal culture provoked them to ban the Santal habit of drinking *handi*, and their vacuity was observed when they attempted to reduce the days involved in wedding celebrations.

In sum, the Santal are surviving multifaceted events, struggling to establish their rights, and constructing an identity in which their traditional way of life or ritual practices create spaces for resistance. In James Scott's viewpoint, those are the weapons of the weak, including the Santal. Documenting the spirit of resistance has occupied a significant portion of this thesis, drawing evidence from ritual practices and behavioral acts that have been intensified by inventing or revitalizing traditions. These acts contain three meanings. First, they are pursued as part of Santals' lifestyle. Second, they have discovered power in reviving their roots. Third, they revealed the Santal's power to build bridges between tradition and their present-day way of life.

Furthermore, in contemporary times, not only are goods exchanged but also ideas. Therefore, in the late twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the emergence of global indigenism provides an articulation of political consciousness in inventing traditions and framing cultural distinctiveness in forms of self-determination. In viewing indigenous people's processes of renewal, James Clifford finds strength in the performance of traditions. Similarly, this thesis has examined the craft of Santal traditions and ritual practices in staging or revitalizing them.

Therefore, the ethnographic exploration in this thesis demonstrates that Santal culture has established a connection between *sohrai* (harvest festival) and Christmas or *baha* (spring festival) and Easter, as well as mobilizing Santal's ability to stage the *baha* festival in Barokona village and stage a competition in the *dasai-danta* dance. However, in dealing with the complexity and paradoxes involved, Santal consolidated their consensus by performing wedding rites. Furthermore, in organizing ceremonies related to weddings, the Santal not only exhibited their collectiveness, they were also invited to rethink the moral economy in order to understand how individual diligence created communal wealth, from which the poorest member of the community was able to do the same as the richest member of the village. The subtle characters of

gidi chimowra (gift-giving ceremony) are significant in resisting the penetration of the market. In addition, the Santal's cultural strength was well-established by their rejecting restrictions on drinking *handi* (rice beer). By continuing to drink *handi*, they resisted the long crusade of intermediaries who pressured them to stop doing so. The maintenance of their identity and the revival of traditions shifted from the village to neoliberal development projects, as we found in the case of the coal-mining in the area of the Santal villages. In fact, the multifaceted strength of Santal resistance provides an understanding of their individual and collective power, as demonstrated throughout this thesis. Indeed, the traces of Santal cultural strength, social power, and subtlety of resistance are linked.

In fact, both new and changed practices among the Santal demonstrate the passage of time and the distinction between past and present. The ethnographic evidence of this thesis demonstrates the Santal's efforts to bind together modern life and traditions; thus, they use technology to document traditions (see figure 32). The Santal may not be well aware of the effects of their practical connection between their life today and their traditions, "but, in pragmatic terms, they act as rational agents with sufficient intention and purpose" (Chandra 2015: 565). In the same vein, the Santal's attempts to merge tradition with the newest technology throws the argument back to the development actors, whose worldview is limited by imported development doctrines and who cannot understand the dynamism of the Santals, assuming instead that they are "vulnerable" or "disadvantaged." I suggest that this world view represents limited cognitive awareness, in which the intermediaries are restricted by bigoted westward ideas of development and are unable to understand the diversity of human cultures.



Figure 32. During the wedding rites, the old woman has smeared her face with *sindoor* and is singing a Santali song. Standing beside her, a young Santali woman is holding up her cell phone to record the song. Photo by the author.

Within the framework of development, the microcredit programs of the Credit Union are designed to accommodate the Santal's peasant lifestyle and thus meet their requirements, despite concealing their true intentions. However, the enterprise of incorporating indigenous people's experiences into development programs encourages mainstream microcredit providers, even the NGOs, to review their broken records. Conversely, the state, as a central provider of socio-cultural and political rights, has a profound impact on Santal lives through the choice of denial or acceptance. Both denial and acceptance, however, can intensify the indigenous "resurgence" and promote Santal rights. To uncover the political possibilities, the ethnographic details of this thesis indicate that there is a democratic space under the current empirical contexts of the state. To institutionalize a democratic space for the Santal or the minorities in the country, the values

of Santal egalitarianism²⁰⁸ could mean a review of the current democratic practices in Bangladesh.

While anthropologists try to comprehend constant change and culture and are concerned with manifold power relations, they also examine alternatives in which subordinate groups can articulate the meaning of their struggles in order to acquire tangible benefits. James Clifford's sensitization to indigenous struggles is appropriate in relation to the Santals' perspective on life, in which they use their traditions and rituals to construct their identity and claim their rights. Their histories of exploitation and their current living experiences of denial and domination have pressed them to apply different forms of resistance. The Santals' socio-economic conditions are pitiable, but their capacity for mobilization is sustained by their traditional beliefs, which ground their strength in practicing and inventing traditions. Thus, the dynamics of individual and collective resistance, either by performing a ritual or participating in a local event, exploit their historical consciousness in unifying the Santal. The Santal's underlying power to speculate on their lives by using their traditions and ritual practices, as well as their awareness of global indigenous movements and their involvement in local indigenous activism, has increased their socio-political room for maneuver, ultimately allowing them to improve their living conditions.

²⁰⁸ The Santal practice of egalitarianism, as explained in Ch. 6, is traced in the sense of *hor hopon*, the right to speak in *kulhi durup*, uniformity in executing village verdicts, and rationality in enacting special pardons. For details, see Somers (1977).

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Appendix 1. Glossary of Local Terms

Bengali Terms

Adivasi: indigenous people.

bazaar: market place.

bhotbhoti: unauthorized local three-wheelers.

bigha: traditional measurement of land; one *bigha* = 0.33 acre.

bihari: Muslim migrants in Bangladesh, migrating because of Partition between India and Pakistan, and communal riots between Hindus and Muslims.

dhuti: long loincloth, traditional men's garment.

diyara or *chapiya*: internal group of migrants who migrated because of erosion along the Padma-Mahananda river.

gamcha: local towel.

kameez and *orna*: traditional women clothing in Bangladesh and Indian subcontinent.

mahajan: revenue collector or moneylender.

maund: traditional unit of weight in parts of South Asia; one *maund* = 37.32 kg.

ojha: traditional healer.

panjabi: knee-long jerkin type with sleeves worn by men.

rickshaw: traditional three-wheeled vehicle pulled by humans.

saree: female garment.

ser: traditional unit of weight in parts of South Asia; each *ser* = 0.933 kilograms.

sindoor: vermilion.

sindoor-daan: ritual establishing marriage relationship between woman and man.

tahsildar: revenue collector.

upajati: sub-nation, used as a synonym of "tribe."

van-gari: local three-wheeled passenger cart without a hood, generally pulled by one man.

zamindar: landlord.

Santali Terms

atu sagai: village oneness.

baha: spring festival.

bakhar or *ranu*: ingredient of *handi*.

balaiya johar: salutation to in-laws.

bapla: marriage.

bhandan: a feast after the funeral

bideen: traditional Santal believer.

bitlaha: traditional judicial procedure for the most severe offenses.

bonga: spirit.

da-babla: water wedding.

dakay: food day, second day of *sohrai*.

dandom: fines or penalty.

dasai-danta: traditional forms of Santali dance.

desham pargana: Santal coordinator at Upazila level.

des-manjhi: assistant to *pargana* or *parganait*.

diku: Hindu or outsider.

dobok: extended form of greeting or salutation.

esoie: Christian Santal.

gayati kuri: bride's assistant.

gidi chimowra : gift-giving ceremony.

gonon: fixing wedding date and bride-price.

got-tandi: empty field, a meeting place near a village.

gudit: messenger and one of the officials of the village council.

gur khila: feeding molasses.

guroch haram: guru or master.

handi: rice beer.

hor: human being.

hor hopon: sons of humanity (literally: a son of man, a Santal)

hul: resistance, uprising.

jaherthan: sacred grove.

janam chatiar: purification or name-giving ceremony for infants.

janga-abuk: extended form of highly ritualized greeting.

janthar: first fruits festival.

jeen kata: group-based, contractual agricultural wage-work.

jogmanjhi: moral guardian and one of the officials of the village council.

jogparanik: assistant to the *jogmanjhi*.

johar: greeting.

jom-jati: feast for re-admission into the community.

kudum nayeki: assistant of principal priest and one of the officials of the village council.

kulhi: village road.

kulhi durup: village council meeting.

khuntai: third day of sohrai.

lungi: traditional male garment in Bangladesh.

lungta kura: groom's assistant.

maan: gift.

mandwa: marriage booth.

manjhi burhi: wife of village headman.

manjhi haram or *manjhi*: village headman.

Manjhi Parishad: village council.

manjhithan: sacred place.

Marang Buru: Great Mountain or one of the high gods.

murhi: puffed rice.

Muslewo: Muslims.

nayeki burhi: wife of principal priest.

nayeki: principal priest.

panchi and *parhan*: traditional pieces of clothing of Santali women.

paranik: deputy headman.

pargana or *parganait*: head of a group of villages.

pera daram: reception of relatives.

Pilchuh Burhi: first woman.

Pilchuh Haram: first man.

pithao: local cake.

porob: festival.

raharh: large traditional drum.

sakrat: last day of *sohrai*, designated for hunting.

sasang sunum: ceremony smearing turmeric and mustard oil on body and face.

sohrai: harvest festival.

soso: marking nut.

Thakur: supreme deity or high God.

tamak: traditional drum.

Thana Pargana: upper-level traditional governance structure, consisting of several union *parishads*; headman of *thana Pargana*.

titri-kuri: wedding assistant.

tungdak: traditional drum.

umm: inauguration or the first day of *sohrai*.

Union Pargana: upper-level traditional government structure consisting of several villages; headman of a number of villages.

Appendix 2. Zusammenfassung

Eine Frage der Identität: Staatsverweigerung, örtliche Kontroversen und alltäglicher Widerstand unter den Santal in Bangladesch

Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, Transformationen innerhalb der Santal in Bangladesch aufzuzeigen. Um diese Transformationen genauer zu betrachten, wird die hegemoniale Machtausübung über die Santal sowie ihr Kampf eine eigene Identität aufzubauen umfassend untersucht. Die Forschung wurde an verschiedenen Orten durchgeführt und bediente sich qualitativer Untersuchungsmethoden. Sie basiert auf Daten, die in insgesamt 15 Monaten ethnografischer Arbeit bei den Santal, einer der indigenen Gruppen der Ebenen im Nordwesten von Bangladesch, in den Jahren 2014 und 2015 erhoben worden sind. Um die Veränderungen innerhalb der Santal unter verschiedenen Gesichtspunkten betrachten zu können, untersucht diese Arbeit den Einfluss äußerer Faktoren, einschließlich der epochalen Ereignisse der Kolonisation und Dekolonisation und der damit einhergehenden Auswirkungen der Evangelisierung beziehungsweise Missionierung. Das spätere Entstehen des nationalistischen Staates Bangladesch beinhaltete ein Vermächtnis politischer Vormachtsstellungen, wodurch die Santal weiterhin dominiert werden konnten. Alle diese periodischen Ereignisse und die Beteiligung der Akteure führten zu einer Polarisierung hinsichtlich der Identität und der Rechte der Santal. Um diesen hegemonialen Machtstrukturen entgegenzutreten, demonstrieren die Santal ihre eigentliche Macht sowohl in periodischen als auch alltäglichen Ereignissen. Daher sind die zentralen Themen dieser Forschung die Identität der Santal und ihre Kämpfe, um diese Identität aufzubauen durch die Linse ihrer Rechte. Durch die Darstellung ihrer Kämpfe enthüllt diese Arbeit die subtile Bedeutung von „alltäglichem Widerstand“, den die Santal im Kontext von rituellen Praktiken, Verhaltensweisen und Traditionen ausüben und dadurch seine rationale Bedeutung nicht nur durch Ausübung, sondern auch durch Erfindung verbreiten. Vor diesem Hintergrund werden bei der ethnographischen Untersuchung in dieser Arbeit mit einer Reihe von Schlüsselbegriffen und Themen gearbeitet. In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird zunächst analysiert, wie die Santal im Alltag Macht erzeugen und Formen des alltäglichen Widerstands ausüben. Zweitens zeigt diese Arbeit die Komplexität und Gegenüberstellung zwischen „Santal sein“ und „indigene Santal werden“ beziehungsweise die Spannungen zwischen christlichen und traditionellen Gläubigen unter den

Santal. Drittens spekuliert diese Dissertation über die Komplexität, durch die Kontroversen bezüglich der Identität der Santal entstehen und die damit ihren Kampf um die Anerkennung ihrer Rechte polarisieren. Viertens erklärt diese Arbeit die nationalistische Konstruktion des Staates, der die indigene Identität leugnet und durcheinanderbringt, begrenzte Dienste anbietet, wodurch sich der Bereich der Marginalisierung ausdehnt. In gleicher Weise wird in der vorliegenden Arbeit aufgeführt, dass diese Prozesse die Evangelisierer ermutigen, die evangelisierte Entwicklungspolitik zu intensivieren. Fünftens untersucht die Arbeit, wie die Santal all die hegemoniale Machtausübung untergraben, die über sie ausgeübt wird. Schließlich wird in der vorliegenden Dissertation erklärt, wie die Santal ihre Traditionen und rituellen Praktiken durch Ausübung und Erfindung mit politischen und rationalen Bedeutungen belegen und uns dazu einladen, die Macht der Subalternen zu überdenken.

Appendix 3. Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich an Eides Statt, dass ich die vorliegende Dissertationsschrift selbständig verfasst, keine anderen als die von mir angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel verwendet und die den benutzten Werken wörtlich oder inhaltlich entnommenen Stellen kenntlich gemacht habe.

Farhat Jahan

Halle (Saale), February 2020

Erklärung über vorherige Promotionsversuche

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich keine vergeblichen Promotionsversuche unternommen habe und dass die Dissertation in der gegenwärtigen bzw. in einer anderen Fassung nicht bereits einer anderen Fakultät vorgelegt wurde.

Farhat Jahan

Halle (Saale), February 2020

Appendix 4. Lists of Publication related to this research project

1. **Indigenous Identity Disputes in Democratic Bangladesh.** Published in *Southern Papers Series*. Working papers no. 26, Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 2015.
2. **Phulbari: Where Grassroots Gathered against Global Capital.** Published in *Bank-Watch*. Vol. XII, No. 1, NGO Forum on ADB, Philippines, December 2014.

Appendix 5. Curriculum Vitae

Farhat Jahan is from Bangladesh. She completed her first master in Political Science and second master in Philosophy with the multi-disciplinary approach. Before enrolling at the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, she had worked with an international development organization for about ten years. She had gained long working experiences in development issues related to rights and justice. She spends her time in work and study to observe marginalized people's status of human rights in the countryside. Moreover, she has penned these experiences, those frequently published in national daily newspapers and in journals. In addition, she has published two books in her native language. These experiences stirred her interest in the Santal, and therefore, she continued it by working with the Santal. Thus, in the context of her PhD research, she conducted fifteen months of fieldwork with the Santal of Bangladesh. She intends to pursue this interest further by working with marginalized communities interactions with the culture-specific perceptions of rights and justice.