



## Adaptive Strategies of Santal Families in Educating Their Children: A Study on Primary Education in the Context of Basbari Village of Rajshahi

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### ABSTRACT

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*In spite of being a multicultural and multilingual country, what continuous trend seen over country is that ethnic communities of Bangladesh are excluded from primary education due to poverty, ignorance, lack of social consciousness, lack of learning opportunity in ethnic language, intolerance for indigenous culture, negligence of teachers and students towards indigenous children and discrimination, which may threaten Bangladesh's achieving SGDs and may result in less graduate/human capital, less literacy rate, decreased job opportunity in ethnic societies as well as Bangladesh. This contradictory socio-cultural environment leads Santal families to occupy new adaptive strategies. Literatures found lacks discussion on this especial issue, which made the sufferings of the Santal families in ensuring education undiscovered. The current research aims to know how Santal children overcome the problems faced in Schools and understand the strategies Santal children take in getting education. This research argues that the Santal families are teaching their children Bangla language, hiding their cultural identity, stopping cultural practices, focusing on their religious identity and taking opportunities given by different Churches, NGOs and government agencies as means of coping strategies in educating their children, which is helping them in participating in education but falling in threats of losing cultural diversity in future.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of mankind's most basic requirements, as well as the most powerful weapon for achieving socioeconomic mobility and a critical tool for establishing a just and equal society. Education improves efficiency all while improving overall quality of life. Since education plays a major role in alleviating poverty, a well-educated populace is critical for economic and social progress (Sarker, Wu & Hossin, 2019). Education has favorable effects on health, nutrition, and social cohesion in addition to economic benefits. Lower child poverty, child and maternal malnutrition, and women empowerment are all benefits of a more educated citizenry. If improvements are made in the educational sector, Bangladesh's

growing population can be turned into a beneficial resource (General Economics Division, 2015). However, the fact that many children around the world are deprived of an education is distressing. About five million children are out of school as a result of not enrolling or leaving out early, owing to poverty and a lack of educational resources (General Economics Division, 2015; PEDP-3, 2010).

Indigenous peoples are likely to have reduced access to education in most countries (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2003). Indigenous Peoples' educational marginalization occurs in a context of high poverty and hunger, insecurity, identity crisis, language threats, lands grabbing, and livelihood threats, resulting in high dropout rates and a decreased number of Indigenous Peoples participating in secondary and higher education (World Bank Group, 2016; Sarker & Davey, 2009; UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2003), which also implies to Bangladesh.

Santals are one of Bangladesh's largest indigenous populations, relying primarily on agriculture, hunting, gathering, and fishing for their livelihood. They inhabit primarily in Bangladesh's Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions. Many Santal children are being kept out of primary school due to poverty, poor physical conditions of educational institutions, biased social practices, ignorance, lack of social consciousness, and discrimination (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2016; Mohajan, 2014; Mujeri, 2010; Sharmin, 2010; Sarker, Wu & Hossin, 2019; Shohel, 2014; Selim, 2017), which is preventing them from becoming skilled manpower (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2016; Mohajan, 2014; Mujeri, 2010). Despite the harsh social, economic, and political climate, Santals participate in education because they recognize its value.

Basbari is village, which is located in Puthia Upozila of Rajshahi district. There are Santals as well as Bengali people in this village. The socio-cultural, political, religious and economic environment of this village is almost the same as other villages of Bangladesh. Santals' experience of socio-cultural, political, religious and economic environment is also indifferent with the rest in many cases. The participation and experience of Santals in/with education has been discussed in this article.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This research aims to discover overall scenario of Santals participation in education. In spite of this, the specific objectives of this research are:

- i. To know how Santal children overcome the problems faced in Schools.
- ii. To understand the strategies Santal children occupy in getting education.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to the World Bank Group (2016), indigenous peoples' educational marginalization occurs in a context of high poverty and hunger, decreased security, lack of understanding and respect among non-indigenous students/teachers about Indigenous cultures, knowledge and traditional ways of knowing, traditions, and histories, limited access to education due to remote areas and unsafe/inaccessible distance from school, failure to provide learning supports, curricula, and resources, and failure to provide learning supports, curricula, and resources. Similarly, according to Selim (2017), the main reasons for indigenous children's exclusion from education are a lack of schools within reasonable walking distance, a lack of dormitory, the seasonal nature of their parents' occupation, economic crisis, a lack of ethnic language text books, and the prevalence of replacement

teachers. Begum et al. (2018), on the other hand, argue that the inclusion of children in education through government and NGO initiatives is uncertain due to poverty, gender inequality, ethnicity, remoteness, language barriers, issues for children with disabilities, and the negative impact of climate, such as monsoonal flooding, landslides, and other natural calamities that regularly strike Bangladesh. Sarker, Wu & Hossin (2019) assert that poor physical condition, lack of quality education, economic hardship, biased social practice, geographical isolation, parental education and family factor, relationship and insecurity, rapid population growth, lack of access to education, migration, and early marriage are all factors that contribute to the rise in dropouts in Bangladesh. In the same way, Shohel (2014) finds that poverty, child lobbies, a lack of NGO initiatives, social attitudes about teenage relationships, extra costs in children's private tuition, parent's migration for employment outside of Bangladesh, and early marriage are all factors that affect child education in Bangladesh. According to Hossain & Zeitlyn (2010), the poverty rate determines access to schooling. Children are silently excluded due to health issues, lack of educational supplies, and living in locations without decent schools as a result of poverty.

It is clear from the literature relevant to this study that they did not discuss in this regard.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

This study was conducted in a qualitative way. Because of the relevance of the research topic, Basbari village in Puthia Upozila, Rajshahi district, was chosen as the research area for this study. While selecting the respondent for primary data collection, a random sample method was employed, and we also assessed their knowledge, convenience, and willingness to engage in the interview session to target a specific respondent. We have gathered secondary sources or literatures, both worldwide and local, that are relevant to our study aims and categorized them into bigger categories. We considered secondary sources to be books and periodicals that were determined to be related to the topic at hand. As a secondary qualitative data gathering method, the document review method was applied. We talked to a variety of people for primary data, such as Santal wage laborers, primary pupils, parents, and people who relied on hunting, gathering, and fishing. To gather primary data, an unstructured interview and observation method were utilized. In this study, a family was used as a unit of analysis. This study employed the inductive analytical method.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Despite the fact that educational access in Bangladesh is insufficient, it is encouraging that the country has made significant progress in increasing literacy rates for both boys and girls, decreasing school dropout rates, and meeting the MGD target in 2015 (Rio+20: National Report on Sustainable Development, 2012). The promotion rate of students from SSC, HSC, and other examinations to the next higher academic class has been high in recent years (Khan, Rana & Haque, 2014). Despite this, many Bangladeshi children lack access to fundamental educational opportunities due to poverty, ignorance, a lack of social awareness, and discrimination (PEDP-3, 2010; Mohajan, 2014; Zulfiqar, Hossain, Shahinujjaman & Hossain, 2018; Akter & Halim, 2016). It is easy to see indigenous children being excluded from education and mainstream society. Their absence from mainstream society is linked to the poor importance given to indigenous children's education. Because previous studies have focused on the country as a whole, or on the mainstream population solely, nothing is known about their educational standing (Sarker & Davey, 2009).

Many of the Santals in Basbari village are impoverished, with little or no land to produce. They work as daily wage laborers on the lands of other Bengalis. Parents also bring their children aged 10 and up to work with them. Their economic condition is briefly alleviated as a result of this, but the education of Santal children is also halted. Basically, it is not hyperbole to say that the majority of indigenous children in northwestern Bangladesh are barred from receiving a primary education and will almost certainly never receive or complete one due to poverty, child labor, and caring for siblings (Sarker & Davey, 2009; Ahmed, 2018). Indigenous children are disadvantaged in participating in education for a variety of reasons, including poverty and child labor. Because of poverty, poor physical condition, biased social practice, ignorance, lack of social consciousness, and discrimination, the majority of Bangladeshi children from both non-indigenous and indigenous communities are denied access to education and other basic rights (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2016; Mohajan, 2014; Mujeri, 2010; Sharmin, 2010; Sarker, Wu & Hossin, 2019; Shohel, 2014; Selim, 2017). However, in some circumstances, the reasons for excluding only Santal and other ethnic children from elementary school are different. Indigenous students face discrimination when it comes to learning in their mother tongue because they are a minority group. Their culture, tradition, and history are also given the least amount of attention in the classroom (UNDP, 2010).

Santal children of Basbari speak less and do not ask teachers anything they do not understand in schools and classrooms in case their inability to speak Bangla fluently is exposed. The Bengali students, for the most part, laugh at the Santal children's Bangla pronunciation and grammatical errors. It has been known to serve as a source of entertainment for both teachers and pupils in classrooms and schools. As a result, Santal students engage in less dialogue with non-santal students and engage in more conversation within themselves. They are occasionally humiliated only for speaking Santali on school grounds because it is not understood by the Bengali community. The Santal children of Basbari sometimes go hunting during their vacations because it is a part of their culture. However, this becomes a burden when any of their classmates or schoolmates sees it, as it becomes a topic of discussion in class and at school. Traditional Santali foods such as pork, rat, rabbit, turtle, conch, scorpion, and cockle meat have become symbols of disdain for Santals and other indigenous children. Essentially, Bengali teachers and students perceive Santali language, dietary habits, hunting-gathering-agriculture-based economy, tradition, and culture as inferior to Bengali culture. Santal pupils also face discrimination during the tiffin period as a result of their educational environment, as they are unable to eat at school due to their fear of non-indigenous children seeing what they are eating. If they do not eat at school due to the issue described previously, they face discrimination when dining at neighboring food shops and tea stalls since proprietors do not treat them as pupils from the Bengali community.

They are served food, tea, and water in pots that are not the same as those used by the Bengali community. The Santal children do not attend school on a regular basis for the reasons stated above, which results in irregular study and low academic understanding, ensuring their adversity when teachers ask them questions about the texts. When they are unable to speak about the lesson and the Santal children are absent from class again, the children see mental and, in some cases, bodily torment. Santal children are more likely to drop out of school as a result of the presence of a social and cultural context in the classroom. Discrimination against indigenous pupils in schools and in the community is nothing new. Sarker & Davey (2009) discovered that Bangladesh's ethnic minority communities face social, political, and economic isolation, which extends to the school environment. Indigenous people live in small hamlets and dispersed distant villages where there are no

schools or educational institutions. In general, schools use Bengali or English, whereas indigenous people are accustomed to speaking their own ethnic languages and sitting separately from children from the dominant Bengali community, which is a form of discrimination and rejection by non-indigenous people when dining in restaurants located near school buildings and outside. It eventually leads to poor attendance and dropout.

Despite the contradictory socioeconomic environment, Santal parents in Basbari are encouraging their children to attend school, as are numerous NGO's, churches, and government institutions.

In general, Santal children attend churches-run and NGOs-run primary and pre-primary schools rather than government primary schools (Sharmeen, Hasan & Mahmud, 2021), as is the case with the Santal children of Basbari. In Bangladesh, pre-primary activities are divided into numerous programs administered by various NGOs, and a large number of top pre-primary schools are run by NGOs (USAID, 2022; Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, 2013; Mujeri, 2010). Both the Bangladeshi government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working hard to provide high-quality elementary education in a variety of areas, including inclusive education (Begum et al., 2018). Many educational institutions are also located throughout Bangladesh, including the Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha, the Church of Bangladesh, and the Catholic Church (Roy, Huq & Rob, 2020). Santal parents in Basbari send their children to schools run by various churches and non-governmental organizations. In general, parents' experiences with school life, including prejudice and mental torture by Bengali pupils, prompt them to send their children to private schools governed by NGOs and churches so that they do not face the same predicament. Teachers from indigenous populations are occasionally hired by these schools. The conversion of the Santals and many other indigenous communities to Christianity is well known (Bari, 2018).

As a result, teachers from same ethnicity and religion encourage them to participate in class. These teachers occasionally employ Santali language in class to help pupils understand the material. Churches and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) occasionally send aid to indigenous children, such as exercise books, clothes, pens, and other educational tools, so that they can continue their education. It is undeniable that a shortage of essential school supplies such as pens, pencils, books, bags, and geometry contribute significantly to silent exclusion. The vast majority of the poor are silently excluded because they cannot afford to purchase educational materials or take their children to school (Hossain & Zeitlyn, 2010). Churches and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide financial assistance to enable them finish their studies. Parents, on the other hand, become agitated when they are unable to enroll their children in missionaries' schools in order for them to achieve strong academic performance and cultural acceptance. Those who are unable to send their children to towns to attend missionaries' schools must enroll their children in local government or non-government schools. In this scenario, parents consult academically educated individuals before deciding where to enroll their children, and they base their decisions on the school's reputation of honoring indigenous peoples and indigenous students who have graduated from that institution. They concentrate on the Christian identity since it is regarded as more respectable than the indigenous term. Children are also observed not wearing traditional ethnic clothing. Santal children learn Bangla language in primary schools. However, some families begin teaching their children Bangla at an early age and use it in their daily conversations.

Private tutoring, which is intimately related with schools and whose absence results in the silent exclusion of the poor, is a contemporary issue in Bangladesh (Hossain & Zeitlyn, 2010). Poor families cannot afford the time or money for private tutors to assist their children be successful in school (Ahmed, 2018). As a result, wherever Santal children admit, their parents endure financial hardship because they are required to take their children to tutors and set aside funds for this. Those who are poorer than the rest of the Santals, on the other hand, find opportunities in the local region. In this circumstance, families typically relocate their children to another hamlet where other churches and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide assistance. When a well-educated Santal visit their home, they ask them to do sums or teach English. They do not need to give them money in this case. They frequently acquire old guide books from students who have already passed the exams. In general, they can readily obtain this book because it can be found without the exchange of money or at a low cost. However, when NCTB changes the texts and curriculum, it causes complications. The immediate primary graduation students also contributed their old school clothes.

## **CONCLUSION**

In a situation where country population are being academically educated gradually, Santal people are excluded from education due to high poverty and hunger, decreased security, lack of understanding and respect among non-indigenous students/teachers about Indigenous cultures, knowledge and traditional ways of knowing, traditions, and histories, limited access to education due to remote areas and unsafe/inaccessible distance from school, failure to provide learning supports, curricula, and education materials that reflect Indigenous culture and traditional teaching methods, inaccessibility or non-existence of school-provided education in ethnic mother tongue and loss of identity, language, territories and livelihoods (World Bank Group, 2016; UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2003; Selim, 2017; Begum et al., 2018; Sarker, Wu & Hossin, 2019), which sometimes lead them to occupy many adaptive strategies including going to NGO or Church-operated schools instead of government schools, receiving opportunities and educational aids given by NGOs and Churches, using kinship relation, practicing Bangla instead of Santali language, leaving traditional dress, hiding ethnic identity, taking advice from the educated and free tuition. These adaptive ways for acquiring education may be effective, but they impair their cultural identity and diversity, resulting in cultural homogeneity in the country.

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