

**LIVING ON THE EDGE: THE PREDICAMENT OF A
RURAL INDIGENOUS SANTAL COMMUNITY IN
BANGLADESH**

By

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Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education,
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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the material and non-material conditions of rural indigenous communities in Bangladesh. This research examines the complex confluence of power, politics, economics, and identities in rural Bangladesh; it explores the web of local, national, and global mechanisms that (re)create and maintain oppressive systems and structures.

Adopting an anti-colonial discursive framework and a case study approach, this research incorporates data from semi-structured and informal, in-depth individual interviews, focus-group interviews, an observational journal, and a review of relevant literature to study a remote Santal village in the Rajshahi division of Bangladesh. This study focuses on the voices of the local people, their experiences and narratives, and analyzes the data within the wider contexts of history, politics, and culture. The anti-colonial discursive framework that guides this study acknowledges the material and intellectual agency of local people and the value of their knowledge and lived experiences; it contributes to understanding local history and culture and the saliency of local resistance to oppressive practices.

The research findings reveal that colonial structures of oppression are perpetuated by the devaluation of indigenous peoples' mother tongue, education, culture, and religion and by distancing them from the land that has belonged to them for centuries. The

findings present a shift from the ritual-based, cultural matrix of the rural indigenous community and its tradition-oriented socio-political and education systems. Exclusionary policies and practices of the nation state and Christian aggression have fragmented the Santal community, devalued their collectivist mode of living, and alienated them from their traditional ways of life. The process of land alienation has perpetuated the colonial legacy of *terra nullius* and displaced the indigenous Santal community's sense of belonging and its inherent connection to Mother Earth, the *bongas*¹, and the spirits of their ancestors.

This dissertation suggests that there is urgent need for activism to resist colonial structures of oppression that continue to this day. This study contributes to literature on anti-colonial struggles across the globe and offers a framework for understanding other colonial and indigenous contexts.

¹ The *bongas/bongus* are spirit(s) or gods of the indigenous Santals.

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Abbreviations

NGO(s)	Non government Organization(s)
SHED	Society for Environment and Human Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
ILO	International Labor Organization
D.C	Deputy Commissioner (The Head of the District Administration)
TNO/UNO	Thana/Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (Local Thana) Executive officer)
C. O.	Circle officer (Revenue)
AITPN	Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network
Md.	Mohammed
CT Act	Criminal Tribes Act
IWGIA	The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

This dissertation is dedicated to marginalized and minority communities engaged in resistance across the globe.

Chapter One: Introduction

[T]he first step in fighting injustice is to make it visible.
(Mahatma Gandhi in Shiv Chopra, 2009, p.1)

Preamble

This thesis explores the ways in which mechanisms and conditions inherent in modern day colonialism negatively impact the lives of a tradition-bound indigenous Santal community in rural Bangladesh. This community—once isolated and thriving, in its own way—is on the brink of extinction. The ritual-based cultural matrix and economy of the community as well as its tradition-dominated, socio-political structure have been declining more rapidly than ever before. This decline is due to imposed and inherited colonial, assimilationist, racist and exclusionary policies and practices that have been adopted by the (Islamic) nation state, as well as the influences of modernity and Christian evangelism in Bangladesh. This research, based on the perspectives of community members, the research participants, explores the political, cultural, and religious domains responsible for this precarious condition.

Despite the official end of colonization and the emergence of nation states, indigenous communities, across the globe, have continued to experience threats to their material, cultural, and spiritual existence. Similar scenario continues to exist in Bangladesh. The ancestors of the rural indigenous Santals had once set the tone for resistance in their rebellion against the British colonial regime. However, the Santals currently negotiate ongoing cultural and spiritual decline, internal divisions, language loss, economic deficits, and political disenfranchisement.

This thesis explores both the material and non-material colonial conditions, (re)created by the nation state Bangladesh that affect this rural indigenous community. It challenges covert and overt sites of domination and oppression.

The Rural Santal Community

As you walk along the winding, dusty rural paths in the northern districts of Bangladesh, amidst the serenity of the harvest season, you may be drawn to the sight of men and women, in worn-out but distinctive clothes, working side by side in the golden paddy fields. It is not uncommon to see them toiling from sunrise to sunset. As William Wordsworth (1803) had been inspired to write the poem, *Solitary Reaper* (Wordsworth, 1803), these impoverished, hard-working men and women may stimulate your curiosity and empathy. Who are they? What are their lives really like? How are they positioned within wider society? And, how do they experience and negotiate being different from the people around them?

The Santals, or *Hor Hopan*, sons of Man (Das & Basu, 1982) are one of the earliest ethnic groups in Bangladesh. They are the largest indigenous community in the northwestern belt and are claimed to be *adivasis*. Ethnically, the Santals belong to the *Kolarian* race and linguistically, according to Max Muller, the *Munda* family of languages belonging to *Austriac* group (Hembrom, 1996). Historically, they are the bearers of a “great tradition” (Mahapatra, 1986), which is, however, unrecognized in mainstream discourse. The Santals are the living successors of the Santal freedom fighters— among them two martyred brothers, *Sindhu* and *Kanai*—who waged an organized rebellion, called the *Santal Insurrection*, in 1855 against the British colonial power and its agents.

The Santal freedom fighters also provided inspiration and impetus for the first anti-colonial resistance, popularly known as the *Sepoy Mutiny*, in 1857 (Roy & Tarapada, 1999). They later laid the foundation for the emergence of an independent subcontinent and nation states in 1947, which officially terminated colonial control and occupation. This study focuses on the rural people of this rich past, whose present is challenging and future uncertain. The uncertain future of the Santal is evident in the decline of their language, dispossession of their land, devaluation of their religion, culture, and tradition, and in the lack of economic security that has led them to poverty, hunger, and disease.

Situated about 40 kilometers from the northern divisional City of Rajshahi, the site of this study was once mainly populated by the Santals. They had, according to local perceptions, uncontested ownership of their lands, water, and forest; the language of both private and public life; and their own version of a local government that resolved intra-community crises. The Santals celebrated their way of life, culture, and religion with little intrusion from outsiders. They had their own economic system in which they shared their resources with one another and knew neither profit making, nor stockpiling to attain individualized financial monopoly at the cost of others.

This contained vibrant community enjoyed a sense of collectivity, and had a common goal of material and spiritual wellbeing. The Santals further claim that they had a sense of belonging to the soil, nature, and the *Bongas*, and the spirits of their ancestors. They were actively engaged in an intimate bond with nature, people, and their immediate environment. Much of their economic life centered on hunting, growing crops, and collecting fruit. Drawing sustenance from the land also entailed special responsibilities, including sharing their resources with others.

The Santals viewed the environment in natural terms alone. The land was endowed with cultural attributes and rituals that enriched and nourished their natural environment. They adhered to a holistic understanding of interconnectedness among men, nature, and spirit. Thus, these adivasi people viewed themselves as part of the natural world, rather than separate from it. However, with colonial rule, land, water, and nature came under state control and severe government limitations, penalties, and dispossession ensued.

Through the imposition of a Western model of education, government administration, and politics a gradual enforcement of government policy and control began. This process eroded the indigenous texture of the Santal community's rhythm of social life, their spirituality, and legal system. Although, this process of marginalization and oppression began in ancient times, perhaps in the time of the *Vedas*, it increased during the periods of foreign rule, such as the Muslim, English, and Pakistani regimes. Prior to contact with these rulers, the Santals did not consider themselves outsiders, nor coerced or oppressed by political-geographical barriers. They had pride in themselves as Santals and exalted in their tradition, language, religion, culture, and way of life.

The colonial legacy: Land dispossession. The *laissez faire* policies of British administration, especially in the first half of the 19th century, allowed indigenous communities to maintain their village community life and peasant economy (Somer, 1977). Later, with the consolidation of colonial rule, a stronger capitalist economy, and Western cultural invasion, in the guise of a "civilizing" mission, the rural communities began to transform. The emergence of capitalism forced many indigenous communities to

sever ties with the land, in order to survive in the new socio-economic order. This trend continued until the end of the British and the Pakistani rules in the sub-continent, including in the area of Rajshahi, Bangladesh, where my research is located.

Today, the Santal villagers are landless day-labourers who wage labour on the farms they have been evicted from. Being landless, this group is not only materially and physically alienated, but also spiritually estranged, as the land and their environment no longer sustain their sense of spiritual wellbeing. The current landlessness of the Santal villagers is colonial in nature and has a colonial history, which began with the concept of private property, established with the British *Permanent Settlement* in 1793 and the *Zamindari*² system. The British conferred control over vast territories, including adivasi territories, to designated feudal lords for the purpose of revenue collection. This process nullified the inherent rights and privileges of indigenous peoples, along with the connection they had once enjoyed with their land.

The emergence of the nation state Bangladesh brought the Santal community under direct rule and established a new incarnation of colonial rule (Ayres, 1998). Despite many forms of intrusion, the special rights and privileges the adivasi enjoyed under colonial British rule were completely abolished. In the new nation state, land reforms, rooted in a Euro-centric, colonial-imperial legal system, made indigenous communities, such as the rural Santals, vulnerable to landlessness. Embedded in a colonialist and imperialist mechanism of material domination, the property rights established by the Bangladesh government are fraught with political discrimination, domination, and deprivation. Discriminatory property rights, such as the *Enemy Property act* of 1965, or *Vested Property act* (see: Trivedi, 2007, Bhowmick, 2008) guarantee

² Feudal Land ownership.

property ownership only to the dominant Bengali Muslims, not to minority and marginalized groups, such as the Hindus and indigenous peoples in the rural areas who inherited their lands from the Hindu Zamindars.

Furthermore, customary adivasi laws did not traditionally require the type of documentation required by statutory law. Personal family ownership and communal land ownership had been entrusted to the local chiefs and village leaders. With the emergence of the nation state these institutions have been rendered outmoded and ineffective. In the name of national interest, the land laws represent a colonial desire to exploit the land, its resources, and people. These laws pave the way for administrative officials and the powerful landed elite to exploit illiterate and naive Santals.

Deluze and Guattari's (1972; 1983) concept of "territorialization" can be employed to explain the land dispossession of indigenous peoples, as part of a colonial mechanism in the neo-colonial context of Bangladesh. According to Deluze and Guattari:

- 1.) Colonialism's physical and material misappropriation of the lands it occupies is executed in order to implant the majority alien culture. Thus, cultural colonization is not simply a discursive operation, but the occupation of cultural space in all senses of the term.
- 2.) The land and the state manifest conquest, containment, and control of civilization over primitism.
- 3.) Colonialism introduces a new notion of land as private property. This notion generates conflict among the societies involved which do not perceive land as a form of private property; it leads to the appropriation and enclosure of land (Young, 1995) possessed by indigenous peoples, such as the Santals.

This study critically examines the impact of the colonial appropriation of land for various purposes, from cultural subjugation to privatization, in these rural communities, in particular and indigenous peoples, in general (See: Chapter Five).

Education and language. Education and language policies have had negative impact on the tradition-bound, indigenous Santal community in this study, through what Razack (1998) calls, “epistemic violence”. According to the research participants, education is the most important precondition to promoting qualitative change in their lives. However, the current education system has caused more harm than good. It is this education—which is in Frierean terms a form of “domestication” (Freire, 1998) and lacking in life-centeredness—that has caused internal fractures within the community and distanced them from their roots, traditional beliefs, values, and history.

Education policy. The system of education in Bangladesh is an instrument of the wider society, where power politics’ hidden agenda aims to produce “low level productive citizens” (Cummins, 1996, p. 9). The colonial nature of education has failed to foster the Santals’ self-respect and prevent the loss of their land, leading them to bond-service, debt, and other oppressions. It further impedes Santals’ efforts to maintain their indigenous culture, history, and religion and to find their distinctive place in the social political, economic, and cultural life of the nation state Bangladesh. In the Santals’ traditional institutions, indigenous children were taught livelihood and defense skills, the norms and modes of society, as well as their oral history and culture. Education was inseparable from the life of the community. It was in tune with mainstream Santali day-

to-day life. Learning was relevant because it served the community's need for survival, safety from enemy attacks, and harmony with each other and with nature. Most of all, education mirrored and affirmed the distinct cultural identity and spirituality of the Santal community.

The Santals' traditional system of education no longer exists. In its place, the current education system propagates alien cultures and histories at the cost of the indigenous community. This education system is being implemented by three competing agencies: state-run primary and secondary schools that promote exclusionary radical Islamist ultranationalism; various church-sponsored schools that perform Christianization, under the guise of a "civilizing" mission; and NGO-supported schools that are designed to incorporate Western forms of education for achieving social, economic, and political status, within the parameters of the nation state and the global development agenda.

These three competing forces- the state, the churches, and the NGOs- aim to fracture the indigenous community through imposed colonial models of education and development that disregard spirituality, displace local economies, and destroy their familial, social, and natural environments; and they do so in the name of normalizing and disciplining (Foucault, cited in Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) or "civilizing" the "other". The nexus among the three ideologies also complement each other to form a discriminatory education policy—the state-sponsored radical Islamization, which negates cultural values and beliefs of the minority and indigenous peoples; the church-sponsored education policy of civilizing mission; and the influence of Western education that leads to the "violent destruction of nature, local knowledge, culture, and memories" (Berry, 1990,

cited in Baura 2004, p. 97). As a result, like many other minority groups, the cultural values, language, educational needs, and basic rights of the adivasi Santal community are at stake.

Undeniably, school is a political and cultural site (Mohanty, 1974). It has been employed as a colonizer's tool to "oppress, repress, or disenfranchise" (Brandt, 1986 as cited in Graveline, 1998, p. 11) the Santals. Education in this context, however, is not only formal; various forms of media, government policy and practices, and other forms of "domestication" are present. In this study I investigate the lived experiences of the impact of formal and informal education on the Santal rural community.

Language policy. Inherent in the policy of education is the policy of language, which is an issue of contention in most colonial contexts as well. Fanon (1963) argues that language becomes an index of both cultural difference and power imbalance. The Constitution of Bangladesh has legitimized Bengali, the majority language of the nation, as the only official language. The Constitution states: "The state language of the republic is Bengali" (The Constitution of Bangladesh, 2006, part one, article 3, p. 6). Bengali is promoted at all cost and education is solely provided through Bengali. The Constitution of Bangladesh reveals a radical nationalistic discourse of linguistic homogenization, and implies that there is no room for indigenous languages or cultures in Bangladesh. The ideology of one nation, one language, and one culture fails to appreciate and validate the indigenous languages, literature, and rich cultural heritage associated with indigenous people's distinctiveness as well as their identities at the core.

The rural Santal community in this study is struggling to maintain their home language, Santali. A Santal child is born in a home environment where Santali is the language of the heart and soul. However, as soon as a Santal child is exposed to the world beyond the threshold, the child begins to realize the difference between private life and public life. Instead of Santali, which provides spiritual, social, and cultural sustenance, Bengali becomes the language of the child's public life. By imposing Bengali and denying Santali at school, Bengali becomes a colonial language and a carrier of his/her culture (See: Thiongo, 1986). This linguistic hegemony is implemented through the "exercise of colonial power in relation to the violent hierarchy between written and aural cultures" (Bhaba, 1992, p. 73). It is thus through linguistic hegemony, in place of linguistic integration, that a covert indoctrination of ruling ideologies occurs (Dei, 2000).

Schools that impose majority values through linguistic hegemony become sites of alienation for adivasi Santal children, who find no connection between what they learn at school and what they acquire through their lived experiences. As a result of the dissonance, or "bicultural ambivalence" (Cummins, as cited in Dei, 1995), they experience, uncertainty and low self-esteem individually and collectively, and eventually many Santal children drop out of school.

Education and language policies in Bangladesh have led the Santals to dispersion and individualization. The tribal depth of this rural community is being lost and fragmented. The voices of the research participants with regards to these policies are documented in Chapter Four.

Religion: The civilizing mission. Religion is at the core of indigenous Santal's tribal depth, which is tied to traditional mythology and rituals. First *Sankritization* and later *Islamization* brought assimilative pressures (Somers, 1977) to the rural Santal communities, with variable degrees of subordination. Despite the overlap between many Hindu and Santal religious practices—e.g., many Hindu gods and goddesses have tribal roots, although this claim may offend many religious Hindus today—social and religious elements in Santal culture were affected by *Sankritization*. Santals were regarded as an untouchable caste, rather than an ethnic group. Many exclusionary practices can be traced to the Hindu scriptures, including the religious epics, such as *The Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* (Dutt, 1899). In Hindu *Vedic* literature there are references to *Kolla*, *Villa*, *Kirata*, and *Nishada*, who were excluded and considered untouchable. As Bijoy (2003, p. 3) states:

In the ancient scriptures, considered to be sacred by the upper castes, various terms are used depicting Adivasis as almost non-humans. The epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Puranas, Samhitas and other 'sacred books' refer to Adivasis as *Rakshasa* (demons), *Vanara* (monkeys), *Jambuvan* (boar men), *Naga* (serpents), *Bhusundi Kaka* (crow), *Garuda* (King of Eagles), etc. In medieval India, those who surrendered or were subjugated were termed as *Dasa* (slave), and those who refused to accept the bondage of slavery were termed as *Dasyu* (a hostile robber).

Under such hostile circumstances, spiritual and social elements of Santal religion were still not under threat of extinction. In contrast, Christianization has undermined the values and beliefs of Santal culture and religion. Christianization—which began as an aid to colonization, under the guise of a civilizing mission during the British colonial era—continues to be powerfully active in this rural community, with large resources and a

development agenda. Somers (1977) observed this phenomenon of religious assimilation over 30 years ago. He outlines, “contact with the Christian religious tradition of Europe and America, where it has won converts, has undermined Santal culture by denying important traditional mythology and rituals” (p. 2). This phenomenon continues with increased intensity today. Furthermore, the state mutely supports Christianization, as it divides indigenous communities in order to weaken their capacity to resist the State’s authority. Infighting within the communities reduces their ability to withstand external pressures, such as Christianization and state control. In addition, the state shares only a small part of what it receives for the indigenous communities from international agencies. These agencies are actually the bearers of neo-colonization, not only in economic terms but in cultural terms as well. The phenomenon of cultural and religious assimilation that devalues the Santals’ religious and spiritual identity, how it is covertly and overtly achieved, and how the nexus of the state and the West accomplish this act, is documented through the voices of the research participants in the Chapter Six.

Why Colonialism? Historical and Social Perspectives

This work, set in colonial Bangladesh, explores the lives of the Santals as they experience colonialism day in and day out. I have employed the term “colonial” because, I argue, Bangladesh has not yet reached a state of post-colonialism, as indigenous people continue to struggle for change in colonially inherited, multi-faceted exclusions, violence, racial discrimination, and marginalization. They actually embody the unfinished business of decolonization (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). This colonialism not only manifests in territorial control; it imposes socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic structures on the

indigenous population. Recolonization, colonialism, imperialism, internal colonization, and neo-colonialism are interchangeably employed in this study despite their different denotative meanings. Colonialism is versatile and complex in nature. In Ashis Nandi's (1998) terms it is a "shared culture, which may not always begin with the establishment of alien rule in a society and end with the departure of the alien rulers from the colony" (p. 2). Indeed, colonialism is a process that disenfranchises minority peoples and creates a binary division of "us versus them". This process continues to affect and impact indigenous communities, such as the Santals, all over the world.

Colonialism in Bangladesh is a system of direct political, economic, and cultural intervention and hegemony. It is not imposed by a powerful nation over another nation, rather, by a more powerful group over a weaker community within the nation. Due to policies and practices imposed by the nation state Bangladesh, the present situation of indigenous people has deteriorated in comparison with their conditions under alien colonial rule. In the modern nation state of Bangladesh indigenous peoples are deprived of their rights, privileges, and practices in terms of belongingness, representation, and institutions.

The examination of the lived experiences of marginalized communities, such as the Santals, uncovers the negative colonial legacy in Bangladesh. As the understanding of the colonization must be based on the colonized and "with the idea of epistemological power of the colonized subjects" (Dei, 2006, p. 3), this study explores the voices of those who experience the ways in which colonialism survives in the nation state despite its decolonized status. It is a testimony to the failure of welfare states, such as Bangladesh, to improve the impoverished material and spiritual lives of indigenous peoples.

Historically, poverty, deprivation, and decadence are not a natural state for the hard toiling and nature loving indigenous peoples. For centuries, these conditions have been produced and reproduced by those in power, and are currently reproduced by the nation states' colonial and neocolonial practices and policies.

Like many surviving indigenous peoples around the globe, the history of the Santal is an epic of resistance, survival, endurance, and determination. These indigenous people have lived in this part of the subcontinent for centuries; however, within only a few decades, following the formation of the nation States of India and Pakistan in 1947, and finally Bangladesh in 1971, their existence has come under threat. Many indigenous peoples, such as the Santal, were affected by the disintegration of the subcontinent in 1947. The emergence of the nation states divided many indigenous communities through political boundaries. This has threatened their belonging to the *Jol*, *Jamin*, and *Jangal* (water, land, and nature).

Domination and Marginalization

The struggle of the Santal, rural indigenous community is a microcosm of the indigenous experience of oppression, rooted in colonialism. Intolerance and discrimination have denied Santal traditions, culture, language, history, land, and religion. The imposition of the majority, Bengali (pro-Islamic) culture, language, education, and legal, monetary, and political authorities has led to their material and spiritual vulnerability to internal colonization (Culvert, 2001). For centuries, indigenous peoples in the subcontinent have been discriminated against, stigmatized, marginalized, pathologized, criminalized, and romanticized. They have been portrayed as “wild,

promiscuous, propertyless, and lawless” or as “the noble savage who lived with natural law but without government, husbandry, and much else” (Battiste, 2000, p. 68 as cited in Alwyn, 2004, p. 3). The process of vilifying the “other” continues to be prevalent today. Mainstream people refer to adivasis as *jangli*, a derogatory term meaning, ‘those who are like wild animals’, i.e., barbaric, uncivilized, or sub-humans.

In the sub-continental context, for indigenous peoples, in general, and the Santals, in particular, colonization “which is not only alien rule but imposed domination and control” (Dei, 2000c, p. 42) did not begin with European colonization and or imperialism; it began centuries ago, during the Hindu and the Muslim rules. British rule had also adopted the policies of earlier domination and marginalization by the local mainstream populations. The notion of “notified tribes” or “criminal tribes” leveled against many adivasis, who resisted colonial expansion, goes back to the early years of colonial rule. Whoever resisted the British colonial expansion was branded as a potential criminal. By 1871 the Colonial British Raj had prepared an official list of Criminal Tribes (CT), and by 1921, the CT Act affected most adivasis across undivided India (Devi, 1998). Although well after the partition in 1947, the CT Act was replaced by the “*Denotified Tribes*” act, the stigma and dehumanizing schemes underlying the CT act are prevalent in all three major nation states.

Undivided colonized India, of which Bangladesh was a part until 1947, mimicked the colonizers and developed colonial conditions for the adivasis, following the departure of the colonial masters. According to Guha (1998), racial anthropometry, a “science” that fused ideas of race with caste and tribe, which was pursued by colonial administrators, such as H. H. Risley, was enthusiastically adopted by upper-caste Indians. The notion of

shared Indo-Aryan origins was used by Indian elites to claim their status among Europeans, while emphasizing their difference from lower caste and tribal “aborigines”.

The construction of the adivasis. The adivasis are, officially, no longer considered criminal tribes, however, in the application of state law and in people’s consciousness, they continue to be marginalized and treated with reservation. The construction of adivasis can be found in Orientalist discourse (Said, 1978), in the portrayal of the east as the Orient, based on the binary of “us” versus “them”. Similarly, in the subcontinent, the adivasis are called “Tribal”. They are at the lowest level of the social hierarchy, in the caste ridden sub-continental society. A colonial encounter necessitates a (re)creation of the colonized and a deliberate amputation of the past. Similarly, in the Bangladeshi context, policies, practices, and laws embody the colonial past and have reinvented indigenous and other minority groups as colonized. In the name of propagating ultra Islamic Bengali Nationalism, the Constitution of Bangladesh (2006) legitimizes, “The principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism” (article 81, part II, p.10); furthermore, “Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions” (1A) and “The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic.” (2A, part I). Finally article 23 of part II authorizes that:

The State shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the people, and so to foster and improve the national language, literature and the arts that all sections of the people are afforded the opportunity to contribute towards and to participate in the enrichment of the national culture” (The Constitution of Bangladesh, 2006, p. 16).

Thus, the constitution does not recognize the internal divisions and distinctive identities of minority groups, but aims to assimilate them into the majority national identity denying basic rights and privileges. In the process, the “Other”, such as the Santal, are rendered barbarian or are excluded. Against the backdrop of such ongoing oppression and intervention by the state, along with local and international agencies, the Santals continue to struggle for survival. The Santals in Bangladesh negotiate with and contest policies and practices that are inconsistent with their traditional way of life. Although, they were the first to rebel against British colonizers (as mentioned earlier) and were agricultural pioneers in ancient India, the Santals are now deprived and discriminated against in all sectors. The legacy of imperial and colonial practices is perpetuated through the ongoing systemic negation, fragmentation, and devaluation of the Santals. These issues are not unique to the Santal experience. The conditions that the Santals have been negotiating and contesting are common features of colonial encounters shared by indigenous peoples around the world.

Nationalism

This research project explores the ongoing impact of nationalist politics, homogenisation, and “uncontested internal fractures and divisions” (Loomba, 1998) on the present-day Indigenous Santal community in the Bangladeshi context. Like other indigenous peoples in Bangladesh and elsewhere, the Santals are negotiating multiple challenges rooted in colonialism that reinforce exclusive notions of belonging, difference, and superiority (Princeipe, 2004). This research initiates transformation by casting a critical gaze at sites of the production and perpetuation of oppression, subordination, and

injustice, including schools, the legal system, government administration, employment, and political, cultural, and religious institutions. This work is primarily an enquiry into the structures of the colonial legacy of the nation state that support and perpetuate mutated forms of colonialism experienced by its subjects, namely the Santals.

Politics of power and domination are explicit in the nation states' dealings with indigenous issues (Weber, 1996). The States exercise power in three major ways: 1.) through overt forms of coercion and torture; 2.) through limiting public dialogue and debate, so that the interests of the oppressed are not accommodated; and 3.) by attempting to manipulate the thoughts of subjugated peoples, so that they are estranged from their actual necessities (Luke, as cited in Weber, 1996). In the Bangladeshi context, all three methods are employed to disempower the Santals and exercise hegemony and the supremacy of the majority. This study sheds light on the ways in which the Santals are being dispersed and individualized, their tribal depth is being lost and fragmented, and their dehumanization and exclusion enacted in the discourse of the nation state.

Throughout history, minorities and indigenous peoples have been victims of injustice, oppression, racism, assimilation and discrimination. This occurred in the colonial eras and continues to today, following the emergence of nation states and the official process of decolonization. The creation of nation-states, in many contexts, has led to a more acute form of colonization and oppression for the indigenous peoples. They are being subjugated and marginalized by governments, dominant populations, and social classes (Tauli-Corpuz, 1999). Many of the discriminatory and racist aspects of laws, development approaches and programs, religion, and educational systems, especially those that are colonial in character, have not been reformed. As Loomba (1998) argues

“When nationalist thought becomes enshrined as the official dogma of the postcolonial State, exclusions are enacted through legal and educational systems and often they simply duplicate the exclusions of colonialism” (p.198).

Thus, the nationalism that has replaced colonialism is itself a version of colonialism in the suppression and appropriation of local identities for a national identity (Dirlik, 1997). This study uncovers oppressive practices of “the containment of the ‘Other’ as a making of the dominant self” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 342), in the Bangladeshi context. In addition, this study provides fresh perspectives on the post-versus anti-colonial debate; it contributes to the development and legitimization of indigenous paradigms; and emphasizes the recent surge of the broader fourth-world indigenous movement across the globe, in which third world indigenous experiences and voices have been limited.

In the Bangladeshi context, the ongoing colonialist phenomenon refers to contemporary neo-colonialist relationships between the historically colonized Santals and the Islamist nation state Bangladesh. In this study, I analyze the Santal experience at the micro-level and focus on insider perspectives, often overlooked in conventional sociological and ethnic studies.

Bangladeshi Nationalism, the Nation State Bangladesh and the Issue of Recolonization

The thrust, mechanism, and the imagination underlying the formation of the Bangladeshi nation state has generated controversial, radical politico-religious and language based Bangladeshi nationalism. This nationalism evolved from a wider, non-communal, universal, and broad-based, geo-political sentiment in Bengali nationalism.

During the united anti-colonial movement against the British, which categorically overlooked Indian society's diverse "uncontested internal fractures and divisions" (Loomba, 1998), a visible ethno-nationalistic consciousness was non-existent in this region.

Bengali language-based Bengali nationalism began to surface with the emergence of the Islamic nation state of Pakistan from undivided India. The province of Bengal was divided into West Bengal as part of India and East Bengal as part of Pakistan. East Bengal was renamed East Pakistan in 1947, thus denying its geographical integrity. Pakistanis began to inflict colonial oppression on the Bengali speaking population, the indigenous peoples, and other minorities. In all spheres of national life, exclusionary racial and oppressive policies and practices of 'Saidian Orientalism' were implemented to suppress Bengali-speaking people. This oppression, which, albeit, was colonial in nature, manifested in the imposition of the Urdu language, the devaluation of Bengali culture, and economic marginalization, among other acts. This phenomenon fostered the formation of Bengali nationalism, as Allan Lawson suggests, "nationalism is a reaction of peoples who feel culturally at a disadvantage" (as cited in Quayum, 2005, p.169).

Culture, language, material, and spiritual (non-religious) issues played pivotal roles in the formation of Bengali nationalism. Following the emergence of the Islamic nation state of Pakistan, the first anti-colonial movement, led by the Bengali Intelligentsia, initiated an unprecedented protest in Dhaka, challenging the imposition of Urdu as the state language of Pakistan upon Bengali speakers. They rejected the first Pakistani Governor General Mohamed Ali Jinnah's declaration that "Urdu, and only Urdu shall be the state language of Pakistan" (Singh, ed., 2003, p. 241). The covert

intention of this declaration replicates the Macaulay's English Education policy of colonized India. Macaulay's policy aimed to "white out" the Indians, colonize their minds, and create class and division through the imposition of British literature and the English language in education (Vishwanathan, 1989).

Similarly, Pakistani rulers attempted to inflict cultural oppression through linguistic hegemony. The Punjabi-Urdu Pakistani rulers attempted to eradicate pro-liberal Bengali-language-and-culture-based Bengali nationalism and inculcate non-liberal radical Islamic Pakistani nationalism. The resistance against linguistic hegemony and the demand for language rights turned into a full-blown language movement in 1952, in which many Bengali speakers sacrificed their lives for their mother tongue³. Bengali became the official language of the Bengali speakers. In this language movement, the participation of all peoples, including the minorities, was spontaneous. This movement soon turned into an anti-colonial struggle leading to the liberation war in 1971.

After independence, which cost the lives of three million people (Jahan, 1996), Bengali nationalism lost its pro-liberal leanings and anti-colonial frame of reference. In the process of its establishment, the new nation state began to discriminate against various adavasi and minority ethno-linguist groups. Despite their material, cultural, and spiritual marginalization in the newly independent country, the adivasis did not lose hope for better treatment from the state and its leadership. The adivasis, who supported the liberation war, had expected the nationalist leaders to address their situation. Unfortunately, the new constitution offered no provisions or recognition for indigenous

³ On February 21, 1952 there was a bloody language movement against a Pakistani Colonial plot to impose Urdu as the only official language of Pakistan. This movement is believed to have culminated in the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. February 21st has been declared International Mother Language Day by UNESCO.

peoples and other minorities. The age-old problems of the Santals and other Indigenous peoples were ignored. Rather, more brutal forms of exclusion and deprivation that undermined the social, cultural, political, and economic functions of these groups became the norm of the new nation state Bangladesh.

No doubt Bengali Nationalism, as a political movement, inspired a yearning for freedom from colonial domination in the collective consciousness of colonized Bengali peoples. However, this romantic nationalism soon became essentialist, coercive, oppressive, and exclusionary. Bengali nationalism, as non-liberal nationalism (Herr, 2006), began to impose a common Bengali/ Bangladeshi national identity and Bengali language, culture, and values on all citizens. Coercive and violent measures were taken to suppress minorities, challenging their rights and privileges to exist in Bangladesh. Integrationist and assimilative policies, underpinned by discriminatory attitudes, became the norm of the Bengali nation state. As their language rights, land ownership rights, and were threatened, the hopes and aspirations of adivasis, such as the Santals, were shattered.

Emergence of Bangladesh and How Santals are Positioned in It

Large scale, pre-meditated ethnic cleansing through dislocation and, in some places, militarization began, situating adivasis' age-old belonging on the edge. The first blow came with the Constitution of the new nation state in 1972. The Constitution states that “the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bengali/ Bangladesh”, and it is “the solemn expression of the will of the people, the supreme law of the Republic” (p. 8). This statement denies the existence and accommodation of numerous ethnic groups who have

lived on this soil for centuries. According to this constitutional mandate the existence and identity of the Santals, like other adivasis, are subsumed under the term Bengali. Despite the formal protest of the honourable Manobendra Narayan Larma, a member of parliament, who resigned from the parliament (Drong, 2004), the government went ahead with its nationalist agenda.

In 1975, the founding leader of the nation, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, implored the indigenous communities to reject their ethnic identities, become Bengalis, and join the mainstream Bengali culture (Tauli-Corpuz, 1999). This appeal was proposed and contested in the Parliament, as well, and manifests the colonial and imperial mindset that views their ways are inherently superior to those of the adivasis. The promises for which the indigenous peoples supported and participated in the nationalist movement soon withered. Their existence in the national agenda was completely overlooked.

Bengali Nationalism, which after 1975 became radical Islamist Bangladeshi Nationalism, brought religion to the forefront. Nationalist politics constitutionally undermined minority and indigenous peoples who have faiths other than that of the majority Muslims. The constitution amendment declares, “The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic.” (p. 6). The fifth and eighth amendments to the Constitution further curtailed the rights of the indigenous and minority people. These amendments gave rise, under the patronage of the government and pan-Islamic forces, to a radical nationalism with Islamist overtones (Mohsin, 1997).

The adivasis now experienced tremendous pressure to sacrifice their traditions, languages, and cultures and sense of group identity in order to prove their allegiance to

the new nation. This pressure is reminiscent of the ways in which the colonizers used a racist ideology to perpetuate and justify their authority and hegemony over indigenous peoples (Tauli-Corpuz, 1999) during the early years of colonization. The official history of Bangladesh, funded, produced, and sanctioned by the state, provides fabricated accounts of the past and promotes their version through education. Students belonging to both mainstream and indigenous groups accept this history uncritically and thus accept the legitimacy of state authority. The nation state Bangladesh is thus merely an extension of colonial and imperialist rule. Although born out of a language movement and a bloody war against the colonialist imposition of an alien language, the nation state is now imposing similar linguistic, cultural, and economic hegemony over its indigenous peoples. This act of physical and cognitive imperialism is constitutionally legitimized.

To this day, there is no constitutional amendment regarding the recognition or patronization of indigenous languages and their cultural heritage, nor are there government initiatives to address the adivasi issues of economic and land ownership. The emergence of the nation state has not reversed the trend of indigenous marginalization, nor the oppressive conditions of colonial rule. As indigenous people elsewhere, rural Santals in Bangladesh continue to experience oppression following the demise of colonial rule. Furthermore, this oppression has increased in the nation state.

The marginalization of the Santals, and other indigenous peoples in the Bangladeshi context, is more complex than an economic phenomenon; it is not only “internal colonization” (Calvert, 2001) by the elite in the newly independent country. Power and knowledge production, representation, belonging, and existence are involved as well. The situation of the rural Santals demonstrates the fluidity of colonial rule and its

mutation in different contexts and subject politics. It further sheds light the ways in which nationalism and imperialism sustain each other as part of the ongoing colonial project. The idea of nation and nationalism has a Western root that always undermines, devalues, oppresses and dehumanizes tradition bound indigenous communities.

Nation States and Their Colonial Roots

The emergence of nations as empires replaced feudalism, following the surge of capitalism. The industrial revolution and European Enlightenment initiated a global paradigm shift, creating a sense of European superiority and imperial capacity to control and rule others who were considered, in their terms, the barbaric, prehistoric peoples. The Enlightenment became a major contributor to the construction of a systemic and institutionalized racism that shaped notions of difference and “race” (Better, 2002, Foley, 2000, cited in Hippolyte, 2008). These notions gave birth to colonization in the modern world. With a view to accumulating wealth and expanding territorial control, European nations began to push the boundaries of their empires. Therefore, the notions of nation and empire became synonymous, as those nations brought the rest of the world under their control and domestication.

The concept of nation states in fact emerged from the dynamics of domination and domestication. The newly emerged nation states are an extension of the colonial empires in terms of the exertion of domination and control. In fact, in these contexts, “nationalism begets a sentiment of intolerance and ‘Othering’... it is a potent site for power discourse, and there is a recurrent hierarchy and hegemony within its structure. (Quayum, 2005, p. 14). Similarly, the everyday lives of Santals have become increasingly

“colonized” by an oppressive ethos of nationalism that is fundamentally at odds with their indigenous core values. The new nation state Bangladesh is nothing but a shadow of its colonial legacy. As James Scott states:

Modern statecraft is largely a project of internal colonization, often glossed, as it is in imperial rhetoric, as a ‘civilizing mission.’ The builders of the modern nation-state do not merely describe, observe, and map; they strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation (as cited in Sandlos, 2003, p. 410).

The noble laureate poet, Tagore criticized nationalism, the nucleus of the nation state, in his poem *The Sunset of the Century* (1899) written during the time of the nationalist movement against British colonial rule in India. This poem depicts the oppressive and destructive nature of nationalism that breeds radicalism and intolerance. The poem clearly predicted the hegemony of nationalism that exists in present day Bangladesh (as cited in Quayum, 2005, p.1):

The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red clouds of the
West and the whirlwind of hatred.
The naked passion of the self-love of Nations, in its drunken delirium
Of greed, is dancing to the clash of steel and howling verses of vengeance.
The hungry self of the Nation shall burst in a violence of fury from its shameless feeding.
For it has made the world its food.
And licking it, crunching it and swallowing it in big morsels.

Marginalized Santals and the Politics of Nation State

To be an adivasi in Bangladesh is to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with a legacy of age old colonial experience and forced isolation from the greater political structure of the state. Like other indigenous groups, the Santals have been struggling to find a place and voice in this Muslim nation state. Since its emergence, the country has

been plagued by assassinations, corruption at all levels, political and communal turmoil, the rise and fall of power-hungry military juntas, poverty, moral decadence, and lack of accountability and transparency. The concentration of state power has led to corruption within the system, and leaders deny responsibility for corruption and decisions that are not in the best interest of all people.

The political environment in Bangladesh is divided into four major factions: nationalist, Islamist, secular, and communist; each group attempts to appease the majority Muslims for votes or moral support. Indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, find it difficult to be a part of such political maneuvering, which is fraught with black money, local mafia, the petro-dollar, and corruption. Due to political hegemony, economic oppression, exclusion, and cultural imperialism, the Santal and other indigenous peoples doubt the reality of Bangladesh as a nation. The emergence of the nation state Bangladesh was expected to offer social justice and equity to the indigenous people. In reality, the powerful surge of Bengali nationalism that toppled Pakistani colonialism has caused deterioration in their conditions.

The nation state has achieved nothing but institutionalized terror, fear, lawlessness, and dispossession for the indigenous peoples. Democracy has never become institutionalized in Bangladesh. Failed leadership and abuse of power, extreme corruption, and violence from political and religious fanatics have become hallmarks of the judicial, administrative, and political structure of the nation. Instability has plagued this country throughout its existence. The power of the military Juntas, intolerance toward minorities, the absence of social justice, and the complicity of the political parties and civil society serve to exclude numerous ethnic minority groups. The extreme

“Bengali Muslim nationalism” does not endorse, accept, or tolerate anything but “Bengali Muslim nationalism” (AITPN, 1999, p. 3).

Research Focus and Goals

Most research on indigenous peoples in the sub-continent, especially on the Santals, is anthropological. These studies focus on the documentation of exotic lifestyles and the categorization of these minoritized peoples. Rooted in “romantic discourse” (Banerjee, 2000, p. 8) such research represents indigenous peoples in racial terms, with racist symbols and metaphors. There is a scarcity of literature that portrays the dehumanization and marginalization caused by the states through mutated forms of colonization and in which indigenous lived experiences and voices are recognized. In the mainstream discourse there is a denial of the ongoing brutality the indigenous peoples experience. This study fills this gap and intends to stimulate other researchers to conduct research in this area in Bangladesh.

The main purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical and research framework for use in the research of other colonized and indigenous minority contexts. As Smith (1999) explains “rewriting and righing our position in history [is about] a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying” (p. 28). Similarly, by focusing on anticolonial challenges, I actively engage in a transformative praxis that resists the oppressive policies and practices of dominant assimilationist, Islamic-*Bengali* nationalists, nurtured by the Eurocentric colonial legacy and age-old *Sanskritization and Islamization*.

This study is “a shift in the sense of rejecting universal, simplified definitions of social phenomenon which would normally infuse a decontextualized and essentialized reality” (Dei, 2002, p. 6). The research focuses on the “complexity of lived experience” instead of “searching for broad generalizations.” I further emphasize, “local specific and historically informed analyses grounded in spatial and cultural context” (Dei, 2002, p. 6), in which the voices of the research participants are recognized and valued.

Research Objectives

The history of Santals is a microcosm of the national and international indigenous experience of oppression resulting from colonialism and imperialism. Imperialism, in its colonial and neo-colonial phases (Thiongo, 1986, 1989), and its legacy and many mutated forms, continues to control the economy, politics, and culture across nations. In addition, the Eurocentric colonial worldview has given birth to many local forms of colonialism across the globe. World Indigenous communities have experienced the most negative impacts of these forms of colonization and/or its legacies. The devastation caused to indigenous communities is ongoing and immense. As Thiongo (1986, 1989) explains:

For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer (p.16).

Also, Ashis Nandi articulates the devastation colonialism that has inflicted upon traditional cultures in *Intimate Enemy* (1997). He states: “Modern colonialism won its

great victories not so much through its military and technological prowess as through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order” (p. ix).

Indigenous communities are, in fact, the bearers of such traditional order. With the official demise of territorial, colonial control, the nation states continue to inflict material and spiritual subjugation which is subtle and taken for granted as Ashis Nandi says: “at least six generations of the Third World have learnt to view as a prerequisite for their liberation. This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all” (1997, p. xi). As such, the “West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds” (Nandy, 1997, p. xi). Thus, this study focuses on a colonialism that has survived the demise of empires.

Colonialism is so prevalent that “even those who battle the first colonialism often guiltily embrace the second. The West has not merely produced modern colonialism; it informs most interpretations of colonialism” (Nandy, 1997, p. xii). It has thus given theoretical and practical tools to the local colonizers or emerging nations to maintain the oppressive situation to their advantage. In this study, a broader perception of colonialism is explored in order to understand the lived experiences of the Santals in the rural Bangladesh. Colonialism in the broader sense “is not foreign or alien rule but it is rather as imposed, dominating, and discriminatory” (Dei, 2000c, p. 42). This study reveals the ways in which the emergence of the nation state perpetuates and sustains colonialism and relations of domination and subordination between indigenous peoples and the dominant society.

In this study, I examine how policies of education and language; issues of religion, nationalism, modernity, and development, and land, culture, and tradition are contested sites that serve as colonial tools. The exclusion and oppression of adivasis in Bangladesh is, in addition, indicative of their unprivileged position in the international tribal rights movement as well as in the state. In order to understand the forces responsible for the adivasis' exclusion and oppression, there is need to examine their socio-political position as well as their day-to-day life contexts. As much as it is evident in other indigenous contexts, racist ideologies and the ongoing effects of colonialism have created an existentialistic predicament for the Santals in Bangladesh. The research participants in this study provide new understandings of these issues, without relying on essentialist or anti-essentialist foundations.

The purpose of this study is to examine the aftermath of the dominant nationalistic, socio-cultural, and political context of Bangladesh on the lives of indigenous Santal villager. The objectives are:

- 1.) To document the lived experiences of indigenous Santal villagers as the subjects of an oppressive situation.
- 2.) To understand how the West and a nation state as a legacy of colonialism continue to act on the ritual-based, traditional, and cultural matrix of Santal villagers.
- 3.) To reveal how Indigenous Santals are being removed from their religion, land, tradition, and language through development and the nationalistic agenda.
- 4.) To promote activism for the struggling Santals so as to assist them in finding a place, voice, and agency in the dominant society on their own terms.

Research questions. 1. How do indigenous Santals in a rural setting negotiate, compete, and contest colonial conditions in the nation state Bangladesh?

2. How are the lives of the indigenous Santals affected by the perpetuation of the colonial legacy through, language, land, religion, and Bangladeshi nationalism? (What are the sites of oppression that they contest as Santals and how do these sites impact their lives?)

3. Are the indigenous Santals of rural Bangladesh approaching extinction or reconstruction through the imposed-consciousness of homogenisation, Christianization, modernization, and Bangladeshi nationalism?

Research hypothesis. 1. The ritual-based, cultural matrix of the rural indigenous peoples, as well as their tradition-oriented, socio-political, and cultural structures have been disappearing due to the onslaughts of the nation state's policy of domination and marginalization.

2. Indigenous peoples are materially, territorially, and spiritually affected by evangelization and the nation state's policies of education, language, modernity, development, and land that replicate colonial conditions.

The Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Theory and the Contemporary

Indigenous Santals

Post-colonial theories are popular among Western academics (Dei, 2002) and Third World intelligentsia, whose view of the world is shaped by 'the film of familiarity' of Western colonialism and imperialism expressed nicely in S. T Coleridge's (1907,

1997) famous line which says, “..the film of familiarity and selfish solitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, the hearts that neither feel nor understand”(p. 3). Genuinely, postcoloniality is problematic in addressing the unrelenting battle of indigenous groups (Banerjee, 2000) around the world in general and among Bangladeshi, indigenous rural Santals, in particular. In Bangladeshi context, and elsewhere, the term ‘post’ in postcolonialism is unacceptable, considering the oppressive conditions of political domination, exclusion, and marginalization that rural Santals experience as a group on a regular basis.

Dei and Ashgarzede (2001) point to the irony of the post-colonial view of colonialism, as it “is somehow frozen in time and in ice...[a]s if European colonialism is the only colonial order (p. 307). In contrast are statements, such as: the “era of colonial domination ended with the emergence of newly independent nations in Asia, Africa, and South America” (Banerjee, 2000, p. 5); or “the assumption that colonialism as a historical reality has somehow ended” (Mani, 1989 as cited in Banerjee 2000, p. 5). Whereas indigenous communities, in many contexts, experience colonial conditions that are worse than those of alien colonial rule. In Bangladeshi context, the discourse of post-colonialism has produced and reproduced politics of domination (Pugliese, 1995). These colonial politics are inherited and at the same time act as a ‘cover-up’ (Dei, 2000) or ‘race to innocence’ (Fellows & Razack, 1998) to justify the damage caused to communities, such as the rural Santals.

“Post colonial theory dehistoricizes and homogenizes human identities as totally/completely fragmented, multiple and transient” (Dei, 2000). It is rooted in postmodernism that relies on a fragmented stance, rejects collective histories, and

disregards larger political-economic and cultural questions and contestations, This fragmentary theoretical stance is detrimental to the struggles of collectivistic, tradition-bound Santals whose lived experience relies on bonding the past (history, tradition) and the present (survival, resistance); people and nature; the *bongas* (spirits) and the land; and themselves with their ancestors. In addition, post-colonialism “negates the repressive presence of collective oppressions, colonial exploitations, and group marginality as well as shared histories and collective resistance of marginalized groups (Zezeza, as cited in Dei, 2002). Therefore, the predicaments of the Santals’ collective colonial experience and their struggles are “unspeakable and invisible” in postcolonial theorization.

Furthermore, Post-colonial theory turns a blind eye on the peoples of the Fourth World and is mainly preoccupied with textual analysis and the production of literary and historical texts that intersect with colonialism. Post-colonialism relies on the literary texts of the first world. It is divorced from the real world and is situated in the ivory tower. As such, postcolonialism is “obsessed with questions of binarism, essentialism, and identity; while it ignores the myriad forms of material oppression and downplays the importance of sites from which social action can be initiated” (Figueira, Dirlik, 1999 as cited in Shahjahan, 2005, p. 222).

Post colonial theorization further fails to recognize alternative ways of knowing and denies the agency of the colonized subjects, who not only resist colonialism but are endowed with “the will to change and hope” (Shahjahan 2005, p. 229). Loomba states that the discourse of post-colonialism does “not allow us to conceptualize agency, or to define subjects who are the makers of their own history” (as cited in Simmons 2006, p. 285). Indeed, “post-colonialism, while able to critique the discursive boundaries of

sanctioned legitimacy, relegates the subject to an objectified location where she is unable to speak, act, or resist” (Simmons, 2006, p. 285). As Loomba argues, postcolonialism is “an inflexible theory of subaltern silence, even if offered in a cautionary spirit, can be detrimental to research on colonial cultures by closing off options even before they have been explored” (as cited in Simmons, 2006, p. 285).

Employing a post-colonial framework to research on the indigenous Santals, who are physically and culturally on the verge of extinction, is antithetical as the “mega intellectualizing of the personal in postcolonialism has resulted in displacement of indigeneity, denigration of community, and the polarization of the material and spiritual world” (Spencer, 2006, p. 115). In light of the gaps in postcolonial theorization, an alternative, more holistic perspective is warranted. An anti-colonial discursive framework “recognizes the importance of locally produced knowledges emanating from cultural histories and daily human experiences and social interactions” (Dei, 2002, p. 7). This is, therefore, a viable approach for this research project.

The Anti-colonial Discursive Framework

In this thesis, I employ an anti-colonial discursive framework, as a “theoretical tool for practical purposes” (Dei, 1999) to explicate issues of power, domination, racism, and injustice in the lives of indigenous, rural Santal people in present day Bangladesh. The anti-colonial discursive framework addresses and explores issues that traditional Western model tends to undermine or question. It casts a critical gaze, presenting an alternative model embodied in indigenous knowledges. This approach contributes to the recognition and actualization of the material and intellectual agency of local people, their

experiences, resistance, and history. The anti-colonial discursive framework “offer(s) both theoretical and practical responses (Dei, 2000b, p. 24) to the colonial condition that the rural Santals negotiate and resist everyday.

The anti-colonial discursive framework effectively disrupts the layered dimensions of racist and hegemonic relationships between the nation state and marginalized communities, such as the rural Santals in Bangladesh. In this context Dei (2002) offers invaluable insights as he argues, “the focus is shifted to the complexity of lived experience. Rather than searching for broad generalizations, we must look for local, specific and historically informed analyses grounded in spatial and cultural context” (p. 6). In addition, the anti-colonial framework delves into the “history from above”, which configures as well as disfigures colonial relations between the indigenous peoples and the dominant Bangladeshis, who are in the privileged position through the emergence of the nation state in 1971.

Thus, the framework employed in this study interrogates the configuration of power embedded in ideas, cultures, and histories of knowledge production associated with marginalization and dehumanization. The anti-colonial approach recognizes the production of locally produced knowledge emanating from cultural history, social interactions, and daily experiences (Dei, 1999). Accordingly, the voices of the research participants, namely the Santals, and the challenges of their lived experiences are a major source of data in the process of knowledge production in this study. This theoretical and conceptual framework challenges the knowledge, policies, and practices that have disenfranchised this indigenous community and positioned them as “uncivilized”.

The policies and practices of the nation state overtly and covertly represent a mutated form of colonialism that is manifested in exclusionary and hostile education and language policies; the denigration of indigenous culture, tradition, religion, and their understanding of the self and the external world; pre-meditated dispossession of ancestral land and property; denial of adavasi agency, and undermining their resistance. The anti-colonial framework in this study contests these issues, not only making them visible but also offering a means for their resolution.

An anti-colonial approach allows me to argue for the recognition of the “localized knowledge” of the Santal elders and their folk culture and to go beyond western epistemology. Localized knowledge is a link to the past and local wisdom; its recognition challenges the hegemony of the local invaders and transnational neo-colonial forces of the West, the Islamist, and Christian aggression endorsed by supremacist ideology. The narratives of the Santals’ lives and resistance, their initial contact with the “modern” world, as well as their current predicament reflect a Western colonial machination of distorted history, handed down by a racial and social hierarchical order, compounded by *Sanskritization and Islamization*.

Historically, the indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, have been objectified, vilified, and demonized. They have been portrayed with little effort to recognize their capacity as subjects and creators of their own history. Unrecognized and alienated from the collective past, this history of marginalization is absent from the national psyche, in which the Santals and other minorities are viewed as outsiders and unwanted. Thus, colonialism is not only territorial control; it is the majority’s creation and recreation of denial of the socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic structures of the indigenous

population. In Bangladeshi context, it is a system of brutal political, economic, and cultural intervention and hegemony over a weaker community struggling on the margins.

The anti-colonial discursive framework “emphasizes the [epistemic] saliency of colonialism and imperialism and their continuing aftermaths on marginalized communities, for example in the form of reproduction of imperial relations, economic poverty” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2000, p. 300), and the distortion of the history of indigenous devastation. It thus enables me to explore the societal/institutional structure and the structure of state machinery in producing and reproducing endemic inequalities that affect the construction and reconstruction of the Santal rural community’s sense of self, their position in society, and their resistance through maintaining their traditions, culture, and spirituality. As a researcher I view the marginalized Santals as subjects of their own experiences and histories. The anti-colonial discursive framework enables me to “question, interrogate, and challenge the foundation of institutionalized power and privilege and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations” (Dei 2000, p. 300) that shapes the colonial experience of the indigenous Santals. The rural setting of this community is no longer encapsulated; they are dispersed and identity fractured. Consciousness of anti-colonialism promotes de-colonization and “can help the colonized” Santal “to cease from defining (himself) through the categories of colonizers” (Memmi, 1969, p. 152), and free themselves from neo-colonial domination (see Spencer, 2006). Anti-colonial consciousness is a powerful healing process and it can help the Santals overcome the categorization and naming that the mimicry of colonialism has imposed on this community.

By examining anticolonial challenges, I actively engage in a transformative praxis (Friere, 2000) at many levels, resisting the dominant, assimilationist, Islamic-Bengali nationalist agenda that is rooted in the Eurocentric colonial legacy and subconscious Sanskritization. The indigenous Santals cannot depend on external forces to reclaim their privileges and position in the cultural and political landscape in Bangladesh. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) offers a suggestion for indigenous decolonization:

We can claim voice and actively engage in processes of decolonization through the way that we see ourselves, and the way that we live our lives, by reviving our Indigenous languages, by practicing our ceremonies and by creating expressions of culture through literature, art, theatre, research song, dance language. By doing so, we can claim agency and recover from the fragmentation of the colonial process (p. 28).

Education and language policies and engaging in rituals are crucial for the anti-colonial project. The educational legacy that legitimizes the accumulated knowledge of conquest and colonization (Willinsky, 1998) continues to impose its authority on marginal communities around the globe. This is achieved “through linguistic racism and the symbolic capital of language that serves to discriminate and disadvantage the colonized” (Dei, 2006, p.16). As such, an examination of the education and language policies imposed on marginalized communities, such as the Santals, will expose the colonial legacy.

In Bangladesh indigenous languages have been subjected to the oppressive and destructive effects of colonization and the assimilation policies of the nation state. As language is the primary site of colonialism, language recovery should be the first step of the decolonization process. The anti-colonial discursive framework addresses mother tongue revitalization, and in this context the language recovery of indigenous Santals,

known as Santali, which is life blood of Santali culture, indigenous knowledge, history, and tradition. With the loss of Santali the whole community will be demolished both spiritually and culturally. In order to avoid the disappearance of this community, an anti-colonial undertaking is of paramount importance. As anti-colonial practice challenges the exclusion of indigenous languages in most parts of the world, it is also part of the anti-colonial engagement in this project.

Education policy is the most effective tool in colonial contexts, and it is through education that colonialism and imperialism have become a never-ending phenomenon. As Fanon states, “By a perverted logic, Colonialism turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (as cited in Wane, 2006, p. 93). The perversion, distortion, disfiguration, and destruction of indigenous peoples are achieved through colonial education policies that produce racialized knowledge, knowledge that the colonizers manipulate to their advantage. The legacy of colonial education policies that privilege the dominant group and disenfranchises the indigenous and minority peoples is an ongoing project, with little change, in most countries even after decolonization. The situation in Bangladesh is no exception.

Engaging in anti-colonialism through an examination of imposed education policies on the indigenous Santals of rural Bangladesh challenges “the hidden narratives which surround discourses of nation building and nationhood” (Dei, 2006, p. 15) in the name of homogenization. In addition, anti-colonial practices in education at the micro level can empower the colonized Santals and raise their consciousness through “identifying and countering all forms of colonial domination as manifested in everyday practice, including individual and collective social practices, as well as global

interactions” (Dei, 2006, p. 5). An anti-colonial project in education will pave the way for the epistemological empowerment of the colonized subjects (Dei, 2006), and will help the Santals reclaim their agency and capacity for resistance. This is possible through restructuring education and language policies and by affirming local indigenous knowledge that has supported the continued existence of this ancient indigenous community to this day.

Rituals are inherent parts of an indigenous community as well. They are the links to the past and help sustain the traditions and culture of the indigenous communities. Rituals and ceremonies bring communities together and give them a sense of collectivism that supports resistance against external forces preoccupied with the cultural and spiritual dispersal of the community. For many Santals, rituals are a part of their religious activities. Religious codes of conducts are embedded in their rituals. Therefore, ritual sites are primary targets for the powerful invaders who represent the civilizing mission. By denigrating rituals, religious colonizers create confusion and division within the community, contributing to their task of conversion. Religious conversion separates indigenous peoples from their past and their history is thus lost. Engaging in anti-colonial practice in this regard is to restore the rituals and recreate them in the hearts and minds of the colonized; this will reconcile the spiritually and materially polarized worlds of the Santals. As Wane (2006) argues, “Rituals of any kinds enable us to clear our minds, and shift from the clutter of our everyday life” (p. 102). Restoring rituals, which are a part of the indigenous Santals’s ties to the community, indigeneity, and religion, would be a process of decolonization in the real sense.

Summary. This chapter presented the parameters and importance of the study. It introduced the site, background, and objectives of the thesis. Drawing on historical evidence and perspectives, the chapter situates and examines the Santals' position in the nation state Bangladesh and critically analyzes the sites that manifest mutated forms of colonialism. The chapter outlines the issues explored in this study and elaborates on the theoretical framework employed. It further contests, clarifies, and takes a stance with regards to gaps in post-colonial thought as well as highlights the advantages of anti-colonial projects outlined in this thesis.

The Thesis

This thesis is organized in the following manner. The introductory chapter introduces the topic, site, and context of the study. It presents the research objectives and research questions, the theoretical framework, namely the anticolonial discursive framework, and clarifies post- versus anti-colonial perspectives; the location of the Santals in the nation state is examined providing a general introduction to this study. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature and is comprised of literature on indigenous peoples from both Bangladesh and India. This chapter explores and informs my understanding of the research area and locates my work in existing literature. Chapter Three discusses the research methodology employed in this study. Chapter Four (Neo-colonialist Language and Education Policies in the Bangladeshi Context), Chapter Five (Cases of Land Grabbing: A Narrative of Colonial Experience) and Chapter Six (Invisible Agenda: Civilizing Mission or Missionizing Civilization) document the research findings based on the lived experiences and voices of the research participants. Chapter Seven

(Insights from a Disappearing Rural Indigenous Community in Bangladesh) presents invaluable insights that the rural Santals offer in dealing with the damaging influences of modernity on the planet. Finally, Chapter Eight provides an overview of the research findings, critical reflections and implications of this study, its benefits and limitations, and recommendations for policy and praxis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I review and analyze existing literature on the Santals, who are at the centre of this thesis. I explore the positioning of the Santals, and other indigenous peoples, in this scholarship. The contexts, objectives, and representations of these studies inform my thesis and reveal the gaps in research it seeks to fill. The literature reviewed provides insights into the experiences of the Santals in the rural Bangladeshi context. I consulted a number of resources, including scholarly books, journal articles, newspaper reports, and curricular text books from schools that document the Santals' lives and struggles in the sub-continental context, as well as texts that outline events and situations, emerging from the "first contact" of this ethnic group with the Christian missionary workers. Due to the scarcity of relevant literature on the Bangladeshi context, I include research on various indigenous peoples from the neighboring country, India, where a plethora of studies have been conducted on a large scale.

The Santals and Divided Nationalistic Politics in the Subcontinent

Statistically, the Santals are one of the largest and highly researched indigenous groups in the sub-continent. The Santals in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal once belonged to an integrated, ethnic social order; however, following the emergence of the nation states of Pakistan and India (1947) and later Bangladesh (1971) they became fragmented. Nonetheless, the Santals in these three countries share a common historical, spatial, spiritual, and traditional bond and belonging. Therefore, while this thesis mainly focuses

on the Santals in rural Bangladesh, the issues pertaining to them are relevant to the Santals who live elsewhere in the subcontinent.

The Santals, all across south Asia, underwent a common plight of colonization, of *Bhramanical* supremacy, prior to the invasions and recolonization generated from the surge of nationalism of the nation states. Therefore, it is relevant to consult literature from the Indian context, especially West Bengal and the State of Bihar, where the concentration of the Santals is high.

The Santals in colonial anthropological research. The majority of the research about indigenous peoples, especially the Santals, attempted to continue to fulfill the colonial project; it documented exotic life styles and provided social, anthropological categorization and naming. This anthropological research was initiated by the colonial masters, early missionary workers, and Western-educated, upper class Indians, who view adivasis as part of the lower rung of Indian society. Indigenous peoples are treated as objects rather than subjects in these works. Both in texts and national discourse the Santals are perceived as anachronistic inhabitants of spaces outside modernity, and need to be assimilated, integrated, and civilized.

Within this hostile epistemic landscape, a number of researchers, including indigenous researchers and a few enlightened missionary workers with genuine interest and concern, delved into the lives, traditions, and cultures of Indigenous peoples. In the process, two major streams of research evolved, in understanding the lives of the Santals and other indigenous peoples in the sub-continental context. One stream is guided by the policies of isolation, assimilation, and integration adopted by the nation states; whereas

the second stream adopts a liberatory approach that exposes the dehumanizing practices and policies of mainstream society under the authority of the nation states.

The Santals and the civilizing mission under the British colonial rule. Paul Olaf Bodding, a Norwegian known as “a missionary with a difference” (Chaudhuri, 1986), is believed to be the one who rescued “the hidden treasure buried among the Santals in Bihar and Bengal.” Through his celebrated research, *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals* (Latest edition 2001) and *Studies in Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore* (Second reprint 2001); Bodding salvaged the fading treasure of Santal tradition, orature (oral literature), indigenous knowledge, and knowledge about medicinal plants. Bodding dedicated his life to understanding the Santals from an insider’s perspective. As a typical missionary worker he came to India with a mission to enlighten the heathens by converting them to Christianity and thus repair the “Creator’s unintended mistake”, in His creation of barbarians. Contrary to his vocation, however, Bodding spent most of his life working to understand the life, language, and localized knowledge and culture of the Santals.

Bodding’s *Traditions and Institutions of Santals* (2001) embodies the vibrant and thriving pulse of Santal society. This seminal work provides knowledge on the construction of the Santal’s individual and communal social, spiritual, and cultural identities and how they are passed down, celebrated, and reinforced. *Traditions and Institutions of Santals* presents a bird’s eye view of anthropological phenomena and a true testimony of a society and institutions that strictly followed a complete code of life, as is evident only in truly civilized societies. Based on Bodding’s writings it became clear

to me that beyond the boundaries of modernity and the imposed-consciousness of colonialism, the Santals were a living example of a truly egalitarian, civilized society.

Bodding's work documents many aspects of the lives of the Santal people, who lived far from the touch of so-called civilization; however he discovered only a fraction of indigenous Santals' erudition and wisdom. In view of the existing situation of his time, Bodding's work informs and enhances my understanding regarding Santals in the rural Bangladeshi context, in which they are similarly but more severely neglected by the majority people. Bodding's work is in a sharp contrast to the current situation in Bangladesh, where combined forces of Christianity, modernity, and radical nationalism pose enormous threats to the existence of Santals.

Although Bodding's purpose was not primarily or explicitly anti-colonial in nature, his writing challenged wider aspects of colonialism. He not only went against the grain of his compatriots and colleagues, who promoted colonialism, but also confronted the wrath of the upper caste, *Bhraminical* supremacy that undermined the adivasis as well as the oral traditions of the indigenous peoples in the subcontinent. Bodding successfully documented the unrecognized and unappreciated oral tradition of the Santals. His deep-seated respect and admiration for the Santal community is apparent in his remark:

If their [Santals'] traditions are to be believed, their ancestors—or at all events some of them—were at one time of a much higher civilization than the Santals of today and themselves administered a country of their own (In the preface of Santal Dictionary, 1929-1936 p. ii).

Bodding's *Studies in Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore* (2001) embodies his dedication to the study of the socio-religious fabric of the Santals and his keen observation and interest in the unique belief system through which the Santals approach

human ailments. Despite some controversial interpretations, which at times seem to undermine the unique world view and experiential knowledge of this community, the book presents the reality of the Santals' life, death, and diseases as influenced by their beliefs in the *Bongas*. It affirms the knowledge, traditions, and culture of this indigenous community, which is unrecognized in the Bangladeshi context. By rescuing and resuscitating the indigenous medicine from decline, *Studies in Santal Medicine* challenges the privileged notion of mainstream healing. In this sense, Bodding's work plays a liberatory role in relation to the power relations and dynamics of appropriating holistic indigenous pharmacopoeia, a site being appropriated and ravaged by colonialism and neocolonialism. Patenting is one of such colonial schemes.

In Bangladeshi context the appropriation of medical science plays a significant role in devaluing the indigenous notions of life, death, and diseases. Control over access to modern healthcare has placed indigenous peoples in a precarious situation in which they can either lose or retain their religion, tradition and culture. By representing modern medical science as an inherent part of modernity and Christianity, a neo-colonialist approach is adopted to distance adivasis from their traditional worldview and trust in their indigenous healing system. The modern medical science is identified as enlightenment as opposed to the traditional healing system, which is taken for granted as the practices of the heathens.

Another outsider who touched the lives of adivasis during the British colonial era is W. G. Archer, who intimately knew the Santals through his close association with them. Despite being a part of the colonial administration, to be precise, "a colonizer who refuses" (Memmi, 1991, p. 19), he painstakingly delineated not only the anthropological

aspects of Santal life, but also the social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of the Santals. In *The Hill of Flutes: Life and Poetry in Tribal India: A Portrait of the Santali*, Archer (2007) documents a collection of Santal poetry, legends, stories, and aesthetics of dances, rituals, and festivals. He respectfully and compassionately illustrates and discusses the traditions and customs of Santals and legitimizes the voice of the Santals through Santal poetry. Archer's deep interest in the cultural world of the Santals and generous appreciation of the artistic and creative genius and beliefs of the Santal people is apparent in his writing. His recognition and appreciation for Santal oral literature signifies his respect for the accumulated knowledge of this indigenous group, who are by Western standard barbarians.

The comprehensive information documented in *The Hill of Flutes* (Archer, 2007) is significant for this study as it promotes the recognition of the Santal, their language, culture, education, traditions, system of local government, and belonging in the Bangladeshi context. Archer does not only romanticize the Santals' literary genius, rituals, and customs; but also emphasizes the validity, authenticity, richness, and contribution to modern society of this pre-historic community. *The Hill of Flutes* records the sublimity and serenity of this tradition-bound community in the context of the Santal Pargana District of Bihar, India, which, I believe, is remarkably similar to the site of this research in Bangladesh.

Archer's (2007) book provides a descriptive account of the Santals and their poetry, and explains their world views, tribal code of conduct, the education of their youth through riddles, proverbs and games, and the rules which govern pre-martial romance, with a detailed analysis of their attitudes toward love and sex. Within the

context of historicity, the book is a testimony of a “Great tradition” every Santal, including the participants in this study, pines for despite being positioned on the verge of extinction.

Trosi’s *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals* (2000) is a full-length, systemic study of Santal religion, based on empirical data collected in a rural setting and analysis of the existing literature on the subject. This work examines the crucial role of Santal religion in the lives of the Santals and its contribution to and impact upon the maintenance and survival of Santal society. Troisi documents the interaction of religion and religious rituals and ceremonies with other institutions of the Santal social structure and their role in balancing the mundane and spiritual identities of the Santals. This work highlights the important role of religion in the rural Bangladeshi context, where Santal society is fractured within because of Christian aggression and oppression from the Islamic radicalism. As religion, according to Troisi, is the mother milk of the Santal societal structure, in this study I explore the experience of the research participants in relation to religion and how, in their opinions, it impacts other institutions of the Santal society in the Bangladeshi context.

Tribal Heritage: A Study of the Santals (Culshaw, 2004) is one of the earliest works written by Western Christian missionaries, who devoted their lives to spreading the message and influence of Christianity among the marginalized communities during the imperial domination. *Tribal Heritage* is replete with authentic sources Culshaw (2004) gathered during the five years he spent in the Santal villages in the rural Bengal. Regarded as an authentic handbook on the Santal, this book provides a brief historical overview of the origin of the Santals, their interactions with the local Hindus, their

dealing with the Moslems, and their journey into current century. Culshaw further describes how the Santals were discovered and their presence reported in the early years of the American Free-Will Baptist Mission's Journals. This is how we learn of the first contact of the Santals and how it occurred.

The discovery of the seemingly unknown people and the act of bringing this community towards the civilizing mission appears as a successful conquest from the perspective of the missionary outsiders. However, the resulting chasm within the community is too deep for missionaries, such as Culshaw, to recognize. According to Culshaw "many of the early converts were first drawn to the Church in order to gain some freedom from oppression" (2004, p. 172). This statement demonstrates the capitalist and Western view of human development that guided evangelism, along with the spread of colonization. As a researcher with an anti-colonial agenda, I am particularly drawn to the bitter truth of the civilizing mission from the indigenous perspective as it appears in the *Tribal Heritage*. Two chapters in this book outline the process of conversion among the Santal and the consequences the Santal society endured as a result of this conversion.

It is important to note that despite Culshaw's (2004) missionary agenda, he was keen to understand how Santal society became divided within, leading to intra-community turmoil, both materially and spiritually. Although the imposition of Christianity upon the Santal community existed in those days, Culshaw did not recognize or regret the colonizing of the hearts and minds of the Santals. The conversion process that began during Culshaw's time, and long before that, continues to this day and its consequences are negotiated and resisted by the indigenous rural Santals in the

Bangladeshi context. In view of these challenges, the issue of Christian aggression and its nexus with the nationalist forces is important to this study.

The Santals under a new administration in the nation state India. Unlike most of the missionaries who wrote about the Santals with a view to mapping Santal society to their advantage, George Somers (1977) conducted an academic case study of the Santals in Santal Pargana in the province of Bihar in India, recognizing the external pressures of assimilation and domination upon the encapsulated indigenous Santal village communities. Somers' *The Dynamics of Santal Traditions in a Peasant Society* (1977) reflects the voice of Santals in peasant society and recognizes their resistance to the assimilative pressures of the nation state, modernity, and society at large. Somer chose the Santal headman (*Manjhi Haram*), the most respected position and crucial institution in Santal village life, as the focal point of his study. Manjhi Haram is the guardian angel in the mundane and spiritual worlds of the Santals that sustains and enacts the Santal tradition of their ancestors. The enactment of the role of the headman in the village during legal, spiritual, social, and other crises affirms the dynamics of the tradition bound society despite external interference. The *Manjhi Haram* is a powerful institution, the "Charter of Santal Identity" (p. 8), around which the social, political, spiritual, and mundane orders revolve.

Somer (1977) demonstrates the impact of capitalist economy, Western invasion in the guise of the civilizing mission, and nationalistic policies of practices on peasant economy and community life. The assimilative pressures of Sanskritization, Islamization, or Christianization that Somer identified can be interpreted as recolonization or neo-

colonization in the Bangladeshi context, where the rural Santals are on the brink of extinction. Somer's study inspired me to examine the survival of indigenous peoples despite the pressures they experience in this part of the subcontinent. This study sheds further light on the issues Somer explored. It determines how the subcontinent has positioned itself in relation to the rural indigenous communities. Somer's study of the Indian context is situated in the past, when the pressures of modernity and the policies and practices of the nation states began to increase. Years later, with a new set of assimilative and integrative pressures, how the indigenous Santals continue to survive in the Bangladeshi context is worth investigating.

Sitakant Mahapatra's (1986) in-depth study, *Modernization and Ritual Identity and Change in Santal Society*, delineates the plight of the indigenous Santals in the sub-continental context. Mohapatra demonstrates how the tradition bound, ritual based Santals negotiate degradation and poverty and redefine themselves in the new and emerging milieu of modernization, sponsored by the state. With empathy and respect Mohapatra recognizes the glorious past of the Santals and attempts to document the emptiness the Santals feel as they try to find a balance between "two sets of symbols, between technology and ritual, between politics and culture"(p. 2).

Engaging history, mythology, psychology, economy, culture, religion, spirituality, tradition, identity, and the social and daily lives of the Santals, Mohapatra (1986) unravels the complexity that has led to the precarious situation of the Santals in the sub-continental context and identifies the transition and ambivalence the Santals experience. In order to move beyond the issue of ambivalence and identity towards activism,

however, I resort to anticolonial practices that challenge and cast critical gaze the Santals' experiences in the face of cultural, material, and spiritual invasion and extinction.

Bhuddheswar Tudu's *Atha Santal Katha* (in Bengali, 2004) is an authentic text that explores the problems, issues, and solutions of the Santal of West Bengal, India. Tudu, an indigenous Santal himself, witnesses and personally experiences the inner crisis of the community. He documents how the past is being removed and the present distorted, thus destroying the future of the Santal community. Although written in the context of West Bengal, India, *Atha Santal Katha* (Tudu, 2004) explicitly reflects the situation of the rural Santals in Bangladesh. According to Tudu: "the responsibility of the British toward the wellbeing of the adivasis fell apart as soon as they could manage to convert them into Christianity; they never tried to help them grow humanly" (p. 9). The anguish resulting from Christian aggression is shared by the Santals in the rural Bangladeshi context as well.

Tudu (2004) reveals the covert policies and practices of the state and its mechanisms, embedded in the education, administration, and socio-economic system, that devalue and destroy the Santals' culture, tradition, and religion. Through *Atha Santal Katha* he attempts to enlighten and raise awareness among mainstream people of the challenges the Santal face, in order to reform their attitudes towards the indigenous Santals, in particular, and indigenous peoples, in general. Tudu's work informs and influences my research on the lives of the Santals in the Bangladeshi context.

Bangla Samayikpatre Adibashikatha (Ghosh, 2005, in Bengali) is a collection of articles on cultural anthropology and tribal studies, published in Bengali periodicals during the pre-Independence era. This collection is an extraordinary resource on the lives,

struggles, and survival of the adivasis in the subcontinent. Unlike the functionaries of colonial administration, missionaries, and imperial anthropologists, who wrote about adivasis for administrative purposes and to safeguard colonial objectives, in the 19th century, a number of Calcutta-centered, Bengali intellectuals initiated an enlightened tradition of writing essays and research articles that empathize with the indigenous peoples. These writings turned into a broader establishment in the 20th century and embarked on a tradition in which adivasis were treated equitably and honorably.

Side by side, other stream of Bengali writers produced controversial and superficial articles, lacking in understanding and compassion regarding adivasis. In their writings adivasis were portrayed as uncivilized, barbarians, hideous, and ruthless, similar to the way the British regarded the Indians as heathen, pagan, fallen, and uncultured. On the other hand, the group of cultural anthropologists from Calcutta diligently and compassionately wrote about the influence on civilized society of the languages, cultures, traditions, and, above all, the localized knowledge of the indigenous peoples. *Bangla Samayikpatre Adibashikatha* (Gosh, 2005) is an anthology of their work, and is intended to raise awareness among mainstream Bengali-speaking people, administration, and policy makers, who view adivasis as backward and uncivilized.

The articles in *Bangla Samayikpatre Adibashikatha* (Gosh, 2005) document invaluable historical information about the origins of present day Bangladesh, where adivasi are now considered alien and denied the constitutional right to be called indigenous peoples (Palit, 1932, 1942; Sen, 1933).⁴ The articles challenge the prejudiced and racist views of intellectuals who undermine the existence of the adivasi and deny

⁴ E.g., *Banglar Itihashe Koekti Gorar Katha (A Prologue to the History of Bengal)* (Sen, 1933), *Banglar Adim Jati O Shabhyata (Primitive Tribes of Bengal and Civilization and Ancient Bengali)*, and *Jati-Marang Buru Manab (The Ancient Bengali Nation—Marang Buru Man)* (Palit, 1932, 1942).

their roots in Bangladesh. These articles substantiate the rootedness of the indigenous Santals in the Bangladeshi context. In addition, the articles touch on various aspects of the rich heritage of the Santals in Bengal and adjoining areas (Chandra Roy, 1911; B. Chatterjee, 1922; P. Chatterjee, 1925; B. Gupta, 1925; S. Gupta, 1927; N. Roy, 1927; Sanyal, 1888; Lal Sarker, 1946; Vija Das, 1924).⁵ They document various social, economic, and spiritual crises that arose due to the negligence of the majority Hindus and the colonial regimes. Some of the articles identify the influence of the missionaries and their acts of conversion that took advantage of the vulnerability of the poverty stricken Santals. Despite being dated, these articles are important sources of information on the lives and location of the Santals in the social history and civilization of the subcontinent. They legitimize the existence of indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of the land and make a case for further research in this area. This thesis is a part of their legacy.

In *The Santals: Anthropological-Theological Reflections on Santali & Biblical Creation Tradition*, Hembrom (1996) explores the common ground between the ancestral faith of the Santals and the Judeo-Christian worldview as manifested in their narratives of creation. Although, Hembrom claims to foster a dialogical relationship between the religions and build an understanding of the role and goal of humanity in today's world, the content of book suggests otherwise. In delineating an analogy between Christianity and the Santals' notion of creation, and the Bongas and the supreme creator, Hembrom

⁵ See: *Santal Jatir Biboron (The Narrative of the Santals)* (Sanyal, 1888), *Santalgoner Biboron (An account of the Santals)* (Chandra Roy, 1911), *Santal Jiban (The Life of Santal)* (B. Gupta, 1925), *Santalder Gram (The Village of the Santals)* (P. Chatterjee, 1925), *Dina purer Santal (The Santals of Dinajpur)* (N. Roy, 1927), *Santal Puran (The Mythology of the Santals)* (B. Chatterjee, 1922), *Santali Gan (The Santal Songs)* (Lal Sarker, 1946), *Santalder PujaPadhyati (The Rituals in Santal Religion)* (Vija Das, 1924), and *Santali Bhashaey Sanskrit o Pradehsik Bhasher Prohhab (The Influences of Sanskrit and Provincial Languages on Santali)* (S. Gupta, 1927)

implicitly justifies the Santals' turning to Christianity for spiritual and material nourishments.

Hembrom's (1996) attempt to establish the credibility of the religion and traditions of the Santals in light of Western theology is problematic, as Western religion has historically devalued and undermined indigenous religion, language, culture, and tradition across all continents. Although Hembrom recognizes the beauty of the freedom of the Santals "from the enslavement of any scriptural indoctrination" (1996, p. 244), he does not respect nor find meaning in the "rituals" they inherited from their ancestors nor does he rule out the notion of assimilation. His implicit endorsement of the assimilation or integration of indigenous Santals into Christianity, endorses the colonialist and assimilationist policies of the nation state.

While across the globe there is a movement for indigenous cultural revitalization, assimilation continues to be detrimental to the development of these communities. Hembrom's attitude represents a generic worldview that overtly and covertly destroys indigeneity in the name of development and the civilizing mission. On another note, this book offers invaluable information, with meticulous details, about the history, tradition, and influence of the Hindus and Muslims on the Santals in the sub-continental context. Most interesting and in-depth is Hembrom's analysis of the *Bongas*. *The Santals* (Hembrom, 1996) clarifies many aspects of the Santals' antiquity and their contributions to the development of human civilization in the subcontinent.

Educating Tribals: An Ashram School Approach (Ananda, 2000) is based on an empirical study of the education system of two indigenous communities, known as *Chenchu* and *Sugalis* in Andhra Pradesh, India. Ananda's study incorporates both

qualitative and quantitative data in order to examine the concept of the “Ashram school system”, first introduced by Thakkar Bapa and Indulal Yagnik, two Gandhians who were inspired by Mahatma Gandhi to work among the tribal communities. The objectives of the Ashram School focus on inculcating values of service to the community in the learners and building connections between learning, families, as well as the community. Ashram Schools aimed at providing learners with opportunities for personal development, with a high sense of responsibility for the community (Ananda, 2000, p. ix), reducing drop out rates, and ensuring harmonious learner development.

Boarding schools in the North American context brought enormous devastation to indigenous peoples, including, physical and spiritual subjugation, torture, distancing children from their roots, and destroying their culture, language, religion, and tradition. The Ashram school system, in contrast, emphasizes the importance of the community, language, and culture of the learners in their harmonious development, within the purview of environmental and individual interaction (Ananda, 2000). Instead of separating children from the community and their culture, Ashram school system integrates them for spiritual and material nourishment.

Drawing on secondary data from a large number of studies on the Ashram school system and its pedagogical implications across India, Ananda (2000) recommends various strategies in terms of curriculum, teaching, and infrastructural modifications, emphasizing the authentic education of indigenous communities based on their needs. This study offers valuable insights for this study in the Bangladeshi context, where the school dropout rate among the Santal community is high and where the state sponsored education functions in the best interest of the majority people alone. The Ashram School

approach is a viable alternative for rural communities, who negotiate enormous social, political, cultural, material, and spiritual challenges through the Western model of education that is designed according to a policy of “one size fits all”. Education that brings the community and the individual together and develops connections between the community and the environment is important for the survival and growth of the indigenous communities.

Subash Chandra Panda’s (1998) research, *An Empirical Study of Education of Tribals*, was designed to explore in-depth the barriers to providing quality education to the tribal people of the state of Orissa, India. The study identified low literacy rates among the tribal community despite their large demographic presence in the location of the study. Panda identified a number of issues as key factors in the failure of education in the tribal communities, including poverty, socio-economic issues, language (mother tongue), the background of teachers and guardians, gender discrimination, the dominance of majority groups, curriculum relevance, cultural issues, parental motivation, resources and their misuse due to corruption, and government policies and practices.

Panda (1998) makes 40 recommendations for the qualitative improvement of tribal education across Orissa. Recommendation seven, for example, states that the “Government should make suitable arrangements for all concerned authorities to ensure that the backward classes are not denied their due share to the advantages earmarked for their upliftment” (Panda, 1998, p. 192). Recommendation 21 states that, “Education for tribal students should be vocational and technical oriented where tribal students may capitalize upon their inborn skills, and knowledge. Full encouragement may be given to tribal folk songs, games, music, dance and archery etc.” (p. 193). Implementing even

some of Panda's (1998) major recommendations in these communities could eliminate the marginalization they experience due to a lack of functional literacy that is embedded in their way of life. Tribal communities require balance in their lives, which have been damaged by neo-colonization, orchestrated by the nation state. A study pertaining to qualitative change in education in the Bangladeshi context is warranted.

Antiquity of Indian Tribes (Tiwari, 1998) offers readers the opportunity to think critically about the colonial epistemology of the colonial officials and missionaries, who created the term "tribal" during the 18th century. The term 'tribal' separates indigenous peoples from Indian society and create divisions within its caste-ridden hierarchy. *Antiquity of Indian Tribes* sheds light on the "preconceived social parameters" "the British administrators used...to prove the forest dwelling communities as separate people from the Hindus" (Tiwari, 1998, p. 2). This coercive act of social construction continued for two hundred years and became a part of the popular belief system.

Along with the colonialists, the caste-Hindus, under influence of the *Bhraminical* supremacy, continue to take the concept of tribal for granted and use it to impose domination over the lower caste communities. The current conditions of the adivasis in the nation state, as well as their identities, are the inherited legacy of colonial construction. Tiwari (1998), based on references from the ancient texts, demonstrates that, except for their lifestyle, there were no major cultural, traditional, or spiritual differences between the mainstream and the indigenous forest dwellers. Many issues are taken out of context and twisted for the purpose of their continued subjugation by setting one group against the other. The colonial policy of "divide and rule" is prevalent in rural settings. Tiwari's work presents the ways in which colonialism created social divisions in

the subcontinent and how these divisions are used as a powerful tool in the marginalization of the rural communities, by depriving indigenous people of their legitimate position in national history and politics.

A number of works document the Santal Insurrection and movement. These include: *The Santal Insurrection of 1855-57* (Datta, 1940, 2001), *Santal Bidroher Etikatha* (Tudu, 2004), *Santal Kahini (Banabir Gatha)* (Dutta, 1998), *Santal Bidraher Rojanamcha* (1995), and a collection of articles published in a special edition of *PachimBanga (The West Bengal)* in 2005, commemorating 150 years of the “Santal Insurrection”. This literature documents the historical significance and the causes behind the movement; the magnitude of brutality and loss of innocent Santal lives; the consequences of the insurrection and its impacts on the social, historical, and economical transition of the subcontinent; and the emergence of the nation states in the sub-continental context.

Works on the Santal Insurrection provide a broader connection to the historical background and social milieu of the marginalization and oppression of the Santals in this study. They are replete with descriptions of how the Western capitalist-imperialist economy, represented and implemented by a small number of dishonest, Hindu businessmen (*Dikus*), ruthless money-lenders, and corrupt officials of the East India Company, wrecked havoc on the toiling and tradition bound Santals. They narrate how this docile, patient, and diligent people were terrorized and forced to rebel against the British colonial power and its agents.

These books on the Santal Insurrection shed further light on the discourse that continues to undermine and disregard the significance of the Santals’ contribution to the

history of the independence movement in India. In this regard, while the books critically reflect on the history of marginalization and oppression of the Santals, they reject and condemn their current situation in the nation state. These books directly speak to the past, which the participants in this study shared, witnessed, and are engaged in. The anti-colonial struggle that the Santals historically waged is not over, despite the emergence of the nation state Bangladesh. Decolonization, according to Thiophene (1995), is “not an arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist and peripheral subversion of them” (p. 95). The Santals are engaged in a seemingly never ending battle against colonization. A critical look at these publications reveals that the participants in this study share a link to a past, which neo-colonialists are desperate to eliminate.

The Adivasis of India: a History of Discrimination, Conflict, and Resistance by C.R. Bijoy (2003) addresses the legacy of imperialism and colonialism in the nation state as it continues to marginalize indigenous communities in the Indian context. Drawing on history and current day situations, Bijoy’s argues that adivasi territories, languages, privileges, and rights were denied by the majority Hindus and Muslims under colonial rule and continue to be denied in post-colonial India. Bijoy recognizes the existence of colonialism in the post-colonial India. He argues that the legacy of colonial oppression and marginalization continue to exist unabated, despite so-called decolonization. This reality is also true of the Bangladeshi context, where adivasis are on the brink of losing their language, land, religion, culture, and way of life. Bijoy’s analysis endorses the anticolonial perspective adopted in this study to explore situation of the adivasis in the Bangladeshi context.

The Santals in the Texts of the New Nation State Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh large scale studies concerning indigenous issues are few and far between. As such, it was difficult to find relevant works for this study. This lack of relevant literature highlights the exclusion of indigenous peoples, especially the Santals, and their misrepresentation in mainstream discourse. A plethora of publications are available about the indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill tracks areas, where an armed struggle took place over a number of years. This armed movement officially came to an end in 1997, after a highly politicized and volatile *Peace-Accord* between the government and the revolutionary group.

Indigenous people, such as the Santals, who led the subcontinent to the path of decolonization, and many other peasant movements against colonial oppression, are now struggling to survive. Most importantly, this situation is not recognized in national discourse. This study aims to generate literature that promotes a qualitative change in the lives of the Santals and all indigenous peoples. In order to observe the presence of the Santals in literature in the Bangladeshi context, I undertook a persistent search for relevant conventional published resources, such as research papers, journal articles, and books and non-conventional literature, such as school textbooks, newspaper articles, news reports, joint declarations, and seminar reports, among others. In the following sections I explore how the Santals are positioned in these works, and their relevance to this study.

The Santals in Traditional Resources: The Santals in Scholarly Books

First, I turn to the traditional resources namely, scholarly books, journal articles, and research papers. The *Santals of Bangladesh* (Ahsan, 1998) is one of the most well-

known books, based on anthropological research findings, on the Santals. This book showcases the lives of the Santals from the perspective of the colonial anthropological legacy that was preoccupied with knowing the exotic “others,” the uncivilized, through categorization. The *Santals of Bangladesh* introduces the Santals as a distinct ethnic group, yet it does not address the problems that the Santals have been negotiating in the nation state of Bangladesh in order to survive.

In *Ethnic Minorities of Bangladesh: Some Reflections, the Santals and the Rakhaines* Amena Mohsin (2002) urges dominant society to practice a culture of tolerance and respect towards the minority communities. She underscores the fact that Bangladesh is not a land of Bangla speaking people alone. Mohsin asserts that the Hill people, the Garos, the Malos, the Santals, and other minority communities have contributed and participated in their own ways towards building this society. Emphasizing history, which is being denied in the national discourse, she pays tribute to the contributions and sacrifices of the minority peoples during the war of liberation.

Mohsin (2002) challenges the colonial policies and practices of the nation state that deny the existence of the distinctive identities of various indigenous and minority groups, and their political, economic, and cultural rights and privileges following decolonization. She promotes an ideology of accommodation in which minoritized communities can survive and thrive in their own ways. Mohsin’s critical gaze on the issues that indigenous peoples, such as the Santals face day in and day out, resonates with the leading principles and impetus of this study.

In another extraordinary work titled, *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* Amena Mohsin (1997) demonstrates how imposed policies and

practices of assimilation and marginalization push oppressed communities to the point of extinction. She argues that certain controversial clauses of the Constitution of Bangladesh reflect a colonial legacy and establish the political and cultural dominance of Bangalees within the state. The imposition of Bangalee nationality on all citizens marginalizes the ethnic communities of Bangladesh and denies the cultural distinctiveness of the other groups (Mohsin, 1997). Although Mohsin (1997) does not use the term neo-colonialism or re-colonization, she criticizes the devastating effects of the politics of nationalism in the Bangladeshi context. Her case study of the Hill Tracts communities is indicative of the conditions of other indigenous communities in Bangladesh under the hostile politics of nationalism, radicalization, and the politicization of Islam in Bangladesh.

In Search of a Withering Community: the Santals of Bangladesh (Rahman, 2004) addresses indigenous issues from the legal perspective. Rahman discusses various Santal intra-community legal issues that are resolved through the customary laws of the indigenous Santals. *In Search of a Withering Community* documents the Santals' customary laws that represent the democratic nature of the Santal community. In a sense the book presents an account of a society, considered primitive in mainstream discourse that maintains a well ordered legal system bringing people together amidst the chaos that pervades their lives. Rahman (2004) validates the indigenous knowledge of the Santals' legal system, which has an uncommon spiritual depth that is lacking in the Western legal system. The Western legal system that sustained the colonial regime is at the foundation of the nation state's legal system in Bangladesh. Although Rahman does not advocate for the political rights and privileges or resistance of the Santals in the wider society, it defends the reputation of indigenous society's legal system, which has lately been

invaded by an alien legal system, flawed with discrimination and corruption. By validating the localized knowledge of the indigenous Santals, the book indirectly endorses the validity of the anti-colonial discursive framework which guides this study.

Aynal Haque's *History and Life Style of Tribes* (2002, in Bengali) presents a superficial portrayal of the tribal communities. Lacking in depth and breadth, this book is a version of the studies of the earliest colonial anthropologists, who were preoccupied with portraying and categorizing the adivasis in the subcontinent. Although Haque claims to include his personal interactions and experiences with the peoples he documents, these are scarce in the presentation of this book. Furthermore, this book does not address the barriers indigenous communities experience in affirming their political, material, and spiritual rights and privileges. Without recognizing the problems and delving into their causes, qualitative change for the community cannot be achieved. Change requires active engagement and direction, and this book fails on both counts.

In *Ethnic Peoples of Bangladesh* Ramakanta Singah (2001, in Bengali), who is an adivasi himself, touches on various issues, from anthropological and sociological to current political and legal factors, that impact the lives of adivasis in the nation state Bangladesh. *Ethnic Peoples of Bangladesh* has both educative and informative value as it provides running records of various local and international events, reports, demands, declarations, and amendments with regard to indigenous peoples' difficulties. *Ethnic Peoples of Bangladesh* (Singah, 2001) presents the tales of struggles, existence, discrimination, marginalization, and resistance that are inherent in the indigenous experience in the Bangladeshi context. Singah not only provides an orientation to the

lives of the adivasis, but also engages in a discursive resistance that is appropriate and relevant to the issues explored in this thesis.

Bangladesher Bipanna Adivasi: Endangered Adivasis of Bangladesh (2004a, in Bengali) and *Gonotantra, Shushason o Bangladesher Adibashi* (2004b, in Bengali), by Sanjib Drong are two interesting books written by an adivasi for the adivasis and for others. Drong is an activist and a writer dedicated to the emancipation and wellbeing of the indigenous communities. Although methodologically, Drong's (2004a, b) books lack many basic elements, they are written from the heart that aches in numbness pains (Keats, 1756) of oppression and are based on real life experiences. The strength of these books lies in the discussion of various issues rooted in the harsh reality of the indigenous peoples' lived experiences. The stories, events, oppressions, and resistance documented in Drong's books are relevant to the issues explored in this study, and are further addressed in-depth in this thesis.

Despite the dearth of relevant literature, a number of published materials from SHED (Society for Environment and Human Development) were useful to this study, including: *Bon o Boner Adivasi* (Gain, 1996, in Bengali) and *Bangladesh: Land, Forest, and Forest People* (Gain, 1998). These works combine the voices of anthropologists, environmentalists, lawyers, journalists, and human rights activists. They have been helpful in understanding the vanishing forests, the unique wildlife, and the forest-dwelling communities, their knowledge and traditions. The research findings, investigative reports, and surveys bear witness to the nation state's colonial legacy and neo-colonial strategies; these are represented, for example, in the investment of the Asian

Development Bank in domesticating natural flora and fauna that has served to separate the ethnic communities from the natural world.

The findings from the SHED materials (Gain, 1996, 1998; Gain & Moral, 1996) demonstrate the ways in which the lives of indigenous peoples are tied to the natural world and the destruction of the natural world by the profit-oriented, local and global, capitalist economic system. This system nourishes colonialism and imperialism while destroying the rural economy that is based on ecology or biodiversity. The SHED materials are not only relevant to understanding indigenous survival but also to the world around us.

The Santals in major journal articles. A number of journal articles and reports have enhanced my understanding and stimulated my awareness in exploring the lived experiences of the rural Santals. Kazi Tobarak Hossain's (2000) paper, *The Santals of Bangladesh: An Ethnic Minority in Transition*, reveals the negative effects of aggressive Christianization, education, and market presentation on the social solidarity, religion, and traditions of the indigenous, rural Santals in Northern Bangladesh. Based on qualitative data collected in the same areas this research was conducted, Hossain explores the ways in which Christianity continues to engage in the act of converting the indigenous Santals in the Bangladesh. Hossain (2000) identifies the difficulties resulting from Christianization, but does not analyze the underlying causes of this situation.

Hossain (2000) further explores the destruction of the ritual based, traditional life of the Santals as a result of the imposition of an alien culture and economy by the nation state. Although Hossain reveals a numbers issues affecting the lives of the Santals in this

rural setting, crucial factors, such as the hegemony and assimilationist policy of the nation state and the nexus between the radical groups of Christianity and the state are not addressed. Furthermore, referring to the Santals as outsiders reveals Hossain's bias and lack of historical knowledge.

Hasan Safie and Patrick Kilby's (2003) study of adivasis in Northern Bangladesh, *Including the Excluded: Ethnic Inequality and Development in Northwest Bangladesh*, addresses key issues of social, economic, and cultural marginalization the adivasis regularly encounter. Based on data from other sources, Safie and Kilby bring the plight of the disadvantaged adivasis to the forefront and suggest ways and means to solve their long-standing issues in economic terms. The article views an increase in earnings as the panacea for adivasi marginalization. Undoubtedly, indigenous peoples are financially deprived; however, their culture, tradition, spirituality, and their sense of being are not based on money. Therefore, the solution to their multifarious difficulties cannot be based in economic terms alone, a concept alien to the lives of indigenous peoples.

Muhammad Samad's (2006) article, *The Santals in Bangladesh: Problems, Needs, and Development Potentials* effectively delineates the predicament of the Santals in Bangladesh. Samad identifies most key issues the Santals face, such as their economic conditions, education, language, land-grabbing, injustice, employment, and so forth. Furthermore, he offers recommendations to address these issues. The tone of Samad's article is empathetic and he states that he is desperate to "initiate intervention for improving their situation" (2006, p. 9). I strongly agree with his recommendation to promote primary education for Santal children in their first language. Samad's (2006) ideas for development and his concern for the Santals' human rights and their existence

in Bangladesh as a distinct indigenous people correspond with my understanding of the lives of the Santals and the lived experiences of the participants of this study.

Based on survey and focused group interviews, Profulla Sarker and Gareth Davey's (2007) study of indigenous children in Northwestern Bangladesh is documented in their article, *Exclusion of Indigenous Children from Primary Education in the Rajshahi Division of Northwestern Bangladesh*. Sarker and Davey portray the existing lack of attention to indigenous children in education and the absence of educational opportunity in the region. This study illustrates and analyzes in-depth how indigenous children dropout of school and are excluded from the school system. Contributing factors, such as poverty, language, cultural alienation, lack of consciousness, and seasonal migration, along with other systemic lapses, are identified and urgent action is called for to reverse the trend and avoid catastrophic consequences. Sarker and Davey's research was conducted in the same areas the participants in this study are located. Their study provides insights and valuable schemata for this research. It enhances my understanding of the issue of education, a site through which the nation state perpetuates its neo-colonial project.

Md. Emaj Uddin (2008) explores and compares family communication patterns among Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh in his article, *Family Communication Patterns between Muslim and Santal Communities in Rural Bangladesh: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. The findings of Uddin's study suggest that Muslim families prefer more autocratic modes of communication than the Santal families, which prefer democratic or egalitarian communication approaches. Although not directly relevant to this study, this article highlights that there is much to learn from the adivasis

and that adivasi communities are not uncivilized, uneducated, and barbarians. Through conversion and assimilation, Bangladesh is losing an invaluable cultural diversity that could nourish its national morality, peace, prosperity, and sense of democracy. Adivasi communities, as Uddin's study (2008) demonstrates, are not uncivilized, uneducated and barbarians. Rather, they possess more class, quality, civility, and human values than those who claim to be the bearers of civilization.

In *Minority Rights, Identity Politics and Gender in Bangladesh: Current Problems and Issues* Meghna Guhathakurta (2004) analyzes the failure of the nation state Bangladesh to safeguard, both constitutionally and politically, the minorities and indigenous peoples, by discarding secularism and propagating communalism. In this article Guhathakurta touches on various contested issues, including the discrimination of adivasis through religion and language in the Bangladeshi context. . Guhathakurta (2004) further discusses numerous issues, such as the cultural and linguistic hegemonies and economic marginalization that the indigenous Santals regularly encounter. This article casts a critical gaze on issues that pertain to the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

The Santals in non-traditional resources in Bangladesh: The Santals and other indigenous peoples in daily newspapers. Along with my search for relevant literature by scholars and researchers, I also turned to the online sources of the daily newspapers from Bangladesh. I followed the published news reports and newspaper articles with regard to indigenous issues in the major dailies from Bangladesh on a semi-regular basis from 2007 to 2009. In the process, I not only gathered valuable information about the

oppressive situations, struggles, and resistance of the indigenous peoples, but also learned about the location of the indigenous peoples, including the Santals, in the discourse of the nation state as represented in its daily newspapers. The articles and news reports that I gathered are stories of people from their daily lives. This search revealed that indigenous issues continue to be unrecognized and undermined in mainstream discourse, as they receive limited coverage in newspapers. Neither the government nor mainstream people seem to care about indigenous issues. Although indigenous peoples suffer on a daily basis, their stories seldom hit newspaper headlines.

Bangladeshi newspapers, which are controlled by the majority people, limit themselves to publishing adivasi news on workshops, seminars, symposiums, and celebrations of adivasi day, and so forth. At the same time, a growing number of individuals, although a negligible few, are coming forward with a view to bringing indigenous issues to the forefront, in order to raise awareness and end the long-standing suffering of these marginalized peoples. In this respect, a number of Bengali and English daily newspapers are extending their support by including news reports, articles, and other forms of the emerging adivasi voice in their dailies.

In order to validate this new form of epistemic resistance, which may gain momentum over time in this part of the world, I review a number of these news reports and articles from Bangladeshi newspapers and discuss their relevance to this research. *Indigenous People Still Neglected in all Sectors (The Daily Star, August 8, 2007)* reported on a view-exchange meeting, in which various speakers demanded constitutional recognition of the indigenous peoples, a separate land commission, and the introduction of primary education in their mother languages in order to establish their rights in the

nation state Bangladesh. This report reveals the plight of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, the loss of their land, language, and rights as a result of the discriminatory policies adopted by the nation state. The report calls for the immediate intervention of the government and suggests various constructive measures in educating the indigenous children of the country. This report corresponds with the data collected in this study on the Santal community in Bangladesh. School dropout rates among indigenous children in the primary education system are very high, contributing to their illiteracy. As a result, they become vulnerable to oppression and exploitation.

Jakib Talukder's article (*Daily Bhorer Kagoj* February 21, 2007), following International Mother Language Day, *Adivasibhabna Akueshlagmata (Thoughts on Indigenous Identity in Light of the Celebration of the Mother Language Day)*, analyzes the need for recognizing the distinct identities of the indigenous peoples within the parameters of the nation state Bangladesh. Talukder urges readers to derive inspiration from the spirit of the language movement, which fought oppression of all kinds. This thoughtful article offers valuable insights on the marginalization and colonization of indigenous peoples that is in line with the colonial legacy in Bangladesh and other parts of the world. The nation state has moral, ethical, and political responsibilities to affirm and revitalize the distinct identities of the adivasis and bring prosperity, peace, and wellbeing into their lives.

Based on anecdotes from actual life situations in Northern Bangladesh, Biblob Das's (*Dainik Samokal* April 27, 2007) article, titled *Banchona Jeno Shesh Hoyna (Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples Knows No End)*, reports on indigenous peoples' loss of their property, culture, language, and religion and their departure from

Bangladesh. Das documents the adivasi Santals' experiences of injustice, violence, negligence, and discrimination by local, national, and transnational neo-colonial forces. He urges mainstream people to take action on behalf of the adivasis, whose existence is under threat.

Meshbah Kamal's (*Daily Bhorer Kagoj*, August 18, 2007) article, *Alfred Soren o adivasider Bhumir Lorai (Alfred Soren and Adivasi's Struggle for Landownership)*, describes how, rooted in the colonial legacy, adivasis are being deprived of landownership. He further describes the combined forces of local land-grabbers and the nation state's discriminatory land policy responsible for the land loss. Alfred Soren who tried to protect his land and that of others became a victim of brutality. The killing of Alfred Soren is one of numerous examples that demonstrate oppressive situations in a nation state despite its claim of decolonized status. Land, though controlled, appropriated and commodified by the state, is tied to the material and spiritual existence of adivasis and its dispossession can permanently destroy them.

Kamal (2007) documents the various tricks, forged documents, and illicit means adopted by the powerful local elite, law enforcement, and corrupt officials in the legal system to inflict violence and alienate the adivasis from their ancestral property. This article is of particular significance, as the land issue is one of the foci of this study. In addition, this article discusses the northern districts of Rajshahi Division where the research site is located. It provides insights and understandings relevant to this study.

In his article, *Adivasi Jonogoner Barnomalar Adhikar (Indigenous Peoples' Rights to Have the Alphabet)* (*Prothom Alo*, September 2, 2007), Pavel Partha discusses the legitimacy of developing a viable written form for the adivasi languages, and the

state's obligation to achieve this. Pavel argues the importance of an alphabet to the survival and richness of the culture and language of an ethnic group. I strongly agree with Pavel's standpoint as the Santals currently struggle with the use of Roman or *Ol-chiki* alphabets for the Santali language.

On August 20, 2007, *The Daily Star* published a report, titled *Ensure Indigenous Children's Education through Mother Tongue*, based on the opinions of speakers in a seminar that demanded the introduction of adivasi languages and teachers in primary education for indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. The speakers accused the government for their inaction in this regard. A few other articles, such as *Without Saving the Adivasi Communities, the Environment Cannot be Saved* (Prothom Alo, Dec. 7. 2007), *Protikul Adivasira (Marginalized Indigenous Peoples)* (*The Daily Jugantor*, August 9, 2008), and many other published materials from these daily newspapers document the stories of adivasi marginalization and discrimination in terms of their rights and privileges with regard to their land, language, education, culture, and traditions in Bangladesh.

The Santals and other indigenous peoples in the school curriculum. In order to discover how indigenous peoples are positioned and their plights portrayed in the textbooks published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board⁶, I examined the social science books for Grade 4 and Grades 6 to 10. In my review of these textbooks, I found that except for the social science book for Grade 4, none of the textbooks contain references to the existence of the adivasis in Bangladesh. The exclusion of the adivasis in this manner renders them invisible, denying their physical, social, cultural, as well as

⁶ The National Curriculum and Textbook Board is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Education; it is solely responsible for the development, production, and distribution of textbooks from primary to secondary levels across Bangladesh.

spatial existence in the nation state Bangladesh. This lack of representation acts as a double-edged sword that, on one hand, carries out the statistical elimination of the indigenous peoples and, on the other hand, endorses the nation state's colonial, constitutional policy that fails to recognize the adivasis and denies their rights, privileges, and history on its soil. Subsuming adivasi existence in the nation state denies their distinct identity and undermines the nation state's moral obligation to articulate and uphold their rights and privileges. In addition, the department of education works as a negative catalyst to perpetuate a xenophobic constitution that denies the existence of adivasis in Bangladesh.

Through the medium of education, the state implements its agenda of recolonization or neocolonization. Bangladesh is an example of the colonial nature of education offered by a nationalist government. Furthermore, while there are chapters on the history of the Indian subcontinent in some of the social science texts, these chapters do not contain references to the existence of the adivasis in the subcontinent. The textual space that covers adivasis in the Grade 4 social study book is limited. Out of approximately 70 distinctively recognizable adivasis communities in Bangladesh (Samad, 2006), only five are introduced in one eight-paged chapter that includes two pages of exercises. This represents the marginalized position, negligence, and magnitude of the exclusion adivasis in the policies and practices of the nation state.

The Grade 4 textbook describes adivasis in racial terms, identifying them as "others" and tribal, with distinct physical features. Children are influenced by this perception of the adivasis as tribal, which is a reminder of the colonial legacy that overtly and covertly undermines the existence of indigenous peoples in the subcontinent. The

representation of adivasis does not include their social, political, and cultural position and their rootedness in the country, nor does it document their struggles, resistance, and contributions to the fauna and flora of the nation. Children from the mainstream as well the adivasis communities are provided misinformation about the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. The misinformation is reinforced through media, education policies, and other discursive and social practices that shape the nation's psyche. This study explores the proliferation of this sort of misrepresentation and the fabrication of imposed misconceptions that are given permanent shape and how the lives of Santals are affected by these fabrications and misrepresentations.

Conclusion

In the West, there is a tendency to justify or suppress the aftermath of colonialism. In a similar fashion, there is a discourse of denial regarding the phenomenon of ongoing colonialism in southern countries, such as Bangladesh, where indigenous peoples suffer material, cultural, linguistic, and spiritual subjugation. As a result, few accredited scholars and researchers recognize and write about the issue of colonization in the Bangladeshi context. In the global context, a large body of literature now recognizes colonialism and imperialism as a never ending project. Mutated in its manifestation, colonialism, imperialism, and religious invasion have been wrecking havoc on the indigenous communities around the world. The physical as well as epistemic application of this phenomenon has been widely contested and examined in western academe. As a result of this contestation and examination, along with an emerging body of literature, there is a potentially powerful anti-colonial movement in the West.

Conversely, the issue of colonialism and imperialism is considered a part of the historical past in Bangladesh, thus denying its present day consequences with the emergence of the nation states. The surge of nationalism that has replaced colonialism retains the oppressive sites and has caused more devastation to the indigenous communities than colonial times. Under these circumstances, this study, guided by an anticolonial discursive framework, offers a broader understanding of the issues and a life line to the existing gap in the literature. This work, with its anticolonial gaze, will, I hope, encourage researchers to come forward and help fill the void in this field and initiate an anti-colonial discursive movement for a positive change in the lives of indigenous peoples in this part of world.

Summary

This chapter reviews literature about indigenous peoples, in general, and the Santals, in particular. The review is comprised of literature from both Bangladesh and India, as Santals live in both countries and historically share similar experiences of marginalization, oppression, and deprivation. The literature review exposes the existing gap in research on the plight of the Santals and other indigenous peoples in the Bangladeshi context. The anticolonial nature of this study will encourage others to fill this void in literature.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Value-free research is not possible and does not occur. Research may be most perniciously biased by the attitudes of the researcher when these attitudes are hidden from the reader or even from the researcher's own perception. Value-free research is not possible, but value-explicit research is more honest research in which scientists express and clarify their own value system.

–Simpson (cited in Atkinson, 2002, p. 5).

Introduction

“Research” is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous vocabulary, since “problematizing the indigenous is a Western obsession” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 91). Research, in fact, has been used as a tool in the colonization of the indigenous peoples and their territories, despite the official demise of colonization in most parts of the planet. In addition, any research is undisputedly related to power and control. Therefore, research should be part of the decolonization process, which is not only an issue of political, cultural, and economic self-determination, but is methodological in its implications as well (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999).

Colonial paradigms continue to evolve and marginalize indigenous groups and Western research, rooted in colonial paradigms and encoded in imperial and colonial discourses, influence the gaze of the researcher. Thus, from the indigenous peoples' perspective, the term “research” is linked with colonialism. Therefore, as a non-indigenous researcher, a category imposed upon me through birth, exploring the contested colonial condition of the adivasi (indigenous) Santal villagers in rural Bangladesh, I am morally and ethically obliged to critique my “gaze” and examine and

re-examine the ways in which my “worldview” may (re)inscribe the dominant discourse of the “Other”. In this thesis, as a non-indigenous but minority researcher, I examine the contemporary, colonial, lived experiences of the Santals in the Bangladeshi context. In so doing, I give much thought to the process of “decolonization” in the method of knowledge production and emphasize “a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 20).

In this study of the indigenous Santal people, I am in tune with the theoretical approaches, methods, rules, and postulations employed in indigenous research in order to ensure that the research is conducted in a more respectful, ethical, empathetic, and beneficial fashion from the perspective of the research participants. As an outsider, I have critically reflected on the research processes and outcomes, bearing in mind that the Santal peoples’ interests, experiences, and knowledge are at the centre of the research. Unlike the Western paradigm, this study is based on the principles of respect, reciprocity, and feedback, which are crucial in the process of conducting research on the lives of the indigenous peoples. With this view at the core, this thesis explores a turbulent confluence of politics, education, religion, and culture through the lens of the lived experiences of the Santals, within an anti-colonial discursive framework.

In this study I employ a qualitative case study methodology. Anchored in real-life situations, this case study is a rich and holistic account of the lived experiences of the Santals in the rural setting of Bangladesh. This case study manifests the contested and resisted emerging voice of Fourth World oppression and the dehumanization and

domination that has pervaded the Third World since the emergence of the nation states that have replaced colonial regimes.

Given the predicament of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, when I began this study, I had not intended to “give” the research participants voice. I do not believe I have the agency to empower them in this way, as it denies their agency, contests their subject position, and locates them as “passive recipients rather than agents of their own empowerment” (Cummins, 1996, p. iv). This, in my opinion, is akin to imposing my authority as an author of the research. In addition, the idea of “giving voice” seems unacceptable in the case of subaltern studies. On the contrary, as a researcher who makes every effort to dismantle the colonial western academic project, I firmly believe that I am not in a position to give the Santals voice nor do I have control over their voice. Rather, I listened to their voices and critically reflected on what I heard and what it meant, both to the speakers and myself, finally presenting here the echoes of their voices.

It is my hope that I present a meaningful interpretation of the research participants’ voices, one that they would agree with and make sense of, for the most part. This study aims to create a space for the untold voices of the Santals, who are colonized, in a broader sense, in the nation state Bangladesh. In the process, this research is not only “a means of creating knowledge; it is simultaneously a tool for the education and development of consciousness as well as mobilization for action” (Gaventa, 1991 pp.-121-122, cited in Barua, 2004, p. 113). This study aims to challenge the legacy of colonization that has created vulnerability among the indigenous Santals and has led to their economic, educational, social, religious, and political deprivation as well as their cultural annihilation.

An ex-colony, such as Bangladesh, despite having gained political independence, continues to manifest numerous neocolonial and imperial structures. Colonialism and its never-ending cycle is largely an issue of experiences negotiated by the colonized people. The experience of the devastation wrought by this vicious cycle continues long after the formal demise of colonialism and the emergence of the nation states. The voice of the colonized is unheeded, undermined, unrecognized, and controlled in these mutated but more severe forms of colonization.

In order to avoid the colonial and imperial legacy and create an epistemology compatible with the colonial lived experiences of the research participants, I employ a “descriptive case study” methodology (Berg, 2001). This descriptive case study explores the subjects’ perspectives of their struggle for survival and their experiences of marginalization and dehumanization, on their own terms and in their own words. I incorporate both the views of the people (*emic*) and my interpretations (*attic*), drawing on their history, culture, religion, politics, economy, and education. As that of Ashis Nandi (1983) I too

..reject the model of the gullible, hopeless victim of colonialism caught in the hinges of history. I see him as fighting his own battle for survival in his own way, sometimes consciously, sometimes by default. I have only sought to clarify his assumptions and his world-view in all their self-contradictory richness (p. 18).

Thus, this case study provides insight into the socio-cultural, educational, spiritual, and other existential personal and social issues of the indigenous Santals that they negotiate, resist, and challenge in the Bangladeshi context.

Qualitative Rather than Quantitative Methodology

Although qualitative research is often criticized as nonscientific, nonobjective, and thus invalid, it has certain qualities that are absent in quantitative research. It is true that qualitative research methodologies and analytic strategies are not aligned with technological advances in the ways quantitative techniques may be (Berg, 2001). However, statistically, qualitative research has left its mark, both conceptually and theoretically, on the social sciences. In this section, I do not intend to provoke a quality versus quantity debate. Rather, I highlight some of the inherent methodological strengths of qualitative research and make a case for adopting this methodology in this study.

My preference for qualitative research is generated from the topic of the study: The predicament of rural indigenous Santals in Bangladesh. As the purpose of this study is to explore the “epistemic saliency” and the subjects’ perspectives of their lives, experiences, and situations, as expressed in their own words, I have no alternative but to employ the qualitative research paradigm. I make a determined effort to create a space for the research participants’ voices to emerge and thus promote their recognition, in relation to the contestation of their identities and their oppression, resistance, and belonging in the dominant Bangladeshi society. I further explore how the Santals negotiate the fragmentation of their community through political and cultural hierarchies, how they cope with the resulting situations, and finally how these issues shape their identities and relationships within broader society. These issues cannot be addressed in terms of numbers and frequency; they require an empathic, interpretive, and holistic approach.

At the foundation of qualitative methodology, is the belief that knowledge is socially produced and meaning generates from social processes of interaction and

negotiation (Blumer, 1986, Berg 2001) between people in a bounded system. Besides, realities are linked to the ways in which people create meanings interpretively. As such, reality is not a binary number that can be fully appreciated or understood in terms of numbers and measures of things; rather, it is subjective, interactional, contextual, fluid, and interpretive. Qualitative research seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings, the individuals who inhabit these settings, and how these individuals make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth (Berg, 2001). Qualitative research assumes that the world is not an objective entity out there, but a function of personal interaction and perception. Research, according to this approach is exploratory and inductive and emphasizes processes rather than outcomes (Merriam, 1988). Therefore, to “understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions. The researchers seek out a variety of perspectives; and in doing so, they do not try to reduce the multiple interpretations to a norm” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). In light of this ontological perspective, the issues I address in this research are inherently suited to a qualitative approach.

In addition, despite the lack of standardization in qualitative research, the openness of interpretivism allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to honour that complexity. Research on human beings affect how these people are viewed (Bogdan & Taylor, cited in Berg, 2001). If humans are studied in a symbolically reduced, statistically aggregated fashion, there is a danger that the research conclusions—though arithmetically precise—may fail to fit actuality (Mills, cited in Bergs, 2001). Qualitative procedures, on the other hand, enable researchers to

explore how people structure and give meaning to their lives. Therefore, this methodology is more humane. Furthermore, my interest in qualitative research received validation as its methodological capacities fulfill my epistemological curiosity about “the patterns of the human terrain” (Glesne, 1999, p. 193) and the interactions and experiences that take place within a bounded system. The research participants, the adivasi Bangladeshi Santals, are an integral part of it.

Moreover, case study methodology offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand readers’ experiences. These insights can be constructed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence case study research plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base. My decision to employ case studies in this study is captured in Merriam’s (1988) statement that, “the decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (p. 10). In addition, case studies “concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of situation.” (p.11). Therefore, case studies, as a methodological approach, are an ideal choice for this study, in the exploration of the socially constructed reality of the colonial experience and obtaining a holistic picture of the indigenous Santals’ traditional way of life, culture, religion, and belonging in Bangladesh.

Finally, qualitative research is not without weaknesses. It cannot be considered picture-perfect in all respects, considering the fact that from the perspective of positivism, it does not guarantee objectivity. However, qualitative research is inherently subjective.

Therefore, if there are deficiencies in qualitative research, it is because a study is poorly conducted and/or not fundamentally methodological.

Gaining access to the research site. A great deal of time was spent and efforts made to gain access to the Santal community in the chosen research site. The first contact was established in 2003, during a trip to Bangladesh with my new-born son and wife. Interestingly, this Santal community is located in close proximity to Rajshahi University, where my father-in-law has been a professor for the past 40 years. During this visit I met with a few professors in the Department of Sociology and indigenous community leaders and activists, through my father-in-law and his friends. I was touched by their hospitality and co-operation, which eventually led to my contact with the Santal community; this would have been impossible otherwise.

During my visit to Bangladesh in 2003, I did not collect research data as the decision to conduct a research project in Bangladesh, involving the lives of indigenous Santals, for my doctoral thesis had yet to be finalized. Still, the graduate courses I took before the trip (offered by Dr. Roger Simon, Prof. Jim Cummins, Dr. Sheril Nestle, Dr. Njoki Nathani Wane, and later Prof. George Dei), motivated me to consider the overt and covert manifestations of all-pervasive colonialism and its continued adverse impacts on our lives on a daily basis. I came to learn how the legacy of colonialism and its mutated forms marginalize communities, especially the indigenous communities around the globe, despite the official demise of colonialism and the subsequent emergence of nation states.

While visiting the Santal community in the rural northern district of Bangladesh, the theoretical insights I acquired during my studies motivated me to delve into the lives

of the people, who are affected by colonialism and its legacy. It was like putting theory into practice through hands-on experience. Indeed, through my critical gaze, I was able to make sense of the practicality of oppression and marginalization in the real world of the Santals, who are on the edge of cultural as well as physical extinction. I was touched and appalled to observe the poverty-stricken Santal community and their lives: babies crying for food, the silent misery of the elders and women, the frustration of the frantic youth, and, above all, the sharp decline and devastation of the Santals' traditions, language, culture, land, and religion.

My visit to the Santal community was an emotionally painful experience, as I was powerless and, therefore, remained a mere onlooker. I felt empty inside to witness the practices and policies of the nation state that retained most of the policies and practices of its past colonial regime, with harsher consequences. I observed how, in the name of a nationalistic and ultra religious agenda, the nation state has failed to protect and give a new lease of life to the oppressed Santal people. My first-hand contact with a community on the verge of extinction, led to my resolve to conduct a research project that could prompt activism for a qualitative change in the lives of the Santals in that part of Bangladesh.

I visited every nook and cranny of the area to observe the plight of the Santals. I eventually returned to Canada without collecting data. However, the rapport I managed to build with community members was maintained through frequent e-mails and telephone conversations with activists and development workers from the Santal community. Thus, despite returning to Canada empty-handed, I cherished a sense of satisfaction that I had at least been able to witness first-hand, the lives and struggles of the people, who were

potential subjects for my thesis not only for my academic interest but also for the benefit of the Santal community itself.

Upon my return to Canada, I continued to take courses and through my coursework learned how the indigenous peoples around the world are being suppressed, their sense of spirituality diminished, their identity tarnished, their past removed, and their belonging to the land severed. Following the approval of this study by the University of Toronto Ethical Review Board, I planned a trip to Bangladesh to gather research data. However, the social and political situation in Bangladesh, under the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led Islamic Alliance was a matter of concern. Violence, corruption, insecurity, and the threat of the rise of the Islamist movement seized the nation. As in Iraq and Afghanistan, suicide bombers in Bangladesh began a reign of terror and judges, lawyers, and common people were killed on a regular basis. I was worried about the safety of my extended family members and in-laws, who are parts of a minority community, living in such a volatile and violent situation. The overall situation was so uncertain that my supervisor, Professor Paul Olson, cautioned me to watch my back.

As previously mentioned, I was in close contact with people in the Santal community and the Santal organizations. Therefore, before my trip, I sent consent forms in Bengali to distribute among all sections of the Santals in the area, through a local Santal organization which works, with limited resources, for cultural revitalization, education, health, and poverty reduction in the local Santal community. My father-in-law played an active role in preparing the site for data collection, according to my plans and expectations. In the process, I saved a lot of time, which is a nagging issue for an

overseas researcher studying a community with unstructured, unpredictable, and uncertain mode of life.

A total of 50 consent forms were distributed through the *Adivasi Unnayan Sangtha* (Indigenous Development Organization). Along with the forms, proper instructions were provided to explain the purpose and procedures of the study. As Mr. K and his associates are from the local community and are known to be selfless and honest individuals (which I later learned from my participants), they were whole-heartedly willing to be part of this study. Despite being an outsider (*Dikku*), access to the field was an enjoyable experience for me. The following factors contributed to my success: my local connections, my previous visit to the site in 2003, my minority identity, my genuine respect and interest in the lives of the Santals, my willingness to include / consult them, not as objects but as participants, as well as my sense of reciprocity, of giving back, and speaking a language they understood.

The promises the research in this paradigm might offer to the community. This exploration of the lived experiences and worldviews of the target population, the rural indigenous Santals, can contribute to meeting their specific needs, rather than imposing contrived solutions, based on an alien perceptual filter. This study, based on field experience of authenticity, raises awareness to the need for preserving, maintaining, and restoring indigenous traditions, languages, and cultural practices as well as revitalizing the physical, psychological, and spiritual health of the Santals, among other indigenous peoples. The research process reveals the need for cultivating local economic, social, and

governing systems and educating policy planners and other stakeholders regarding the specific needs of the indigenous Santals.

Validity, Trustworthiness, and Reliability

Reducing Biases and Preconceptions

Undoubtedly, subjectivity as well as flexibility, which provide qualitative research its strengths, also question the validity, trustworthiness, and reliability of its findings. As such, ensuring that the research findings are “believable and trustworthy” (Merriam, 1988) was a major concern and required careful reflection and appropriate action. To achieve this goal, as a researcher, I verified that the findings were “congruent with reality.” (Merriam, 1988, p.183) I established continued engagement with the research participants, developed trust and rapport, and followed up on hunches (See: Glesne, 1999).

Although my direct engagement with the participants was not prolonged, I was able to develop trust and intimacy with local individuals in the research field through regular contact with them, following my visit to the area in 2003. In addition, I applied multiple data collection methods to obtain data (triangulation), including individual interviews, informal conversations, focus group interviews, and field notes. I constantly asked for peer-feedback on emerging issues, during and after data collection and during the data analysis process. The participants were involved in the research process and reviewed the interview transcripts, providing analytical reflections; this was done to ensure the participants’ perspectives were truly reflected in the study.

Furthermore, I clarified my subjective position in the study, possible conflicts of interest and biases, and limitations at the outset and was constantly aware of my preconceived assumptions so that the research findings were not distorted. To optimize reliability I verified the consistency of the findings and the underlying assumptions and theory that guided the process. I left an “audit trail” (Merriam, 1988) in the form of memos, first in my diary entries and later in the NVivo7’s memo folders, describing in detail the processes and the data driven findings (Merriam, 1988). On the whole, in terms of validity, credibility, and authenticity, I made every effort to ensure that the descriptions and accounts of the research participants’ lived experiences are context rich and meaningful (Denzin, 1989b), explicit, and comprehensive; there are also comprehensive explanations for the triangulation of converging conclusions. In addition, I was constantly vigilant to ensure that the findings were internally coherent, uncertainties were identified, rival concepts were brought into account, and member checks properly conducted. For the past five years, I have been in close contact with a few of the research participants, in order to obtain clarifications on their points of view expressed in the interviews. In terms of external validity, transferability, and fittingness, I have been transparent, providing full descriptions of the research settings, samples, and processes. In addition, the history, construct, and limiting effects are elaborated upon; the sampling is theoretically diverse for broader applicability, and scopes and boundaries are set.

Ethical issues. Given the volatile political situation in Bangladesh and the vulnerability of the Santals in the context of this social political unrest, the anonymity as well as confidentiality of the research participants is a matter of paramount importance.

Therefore, every possible measure has been taken. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants are protected by concealing their names with pseudonyms. The names of places and communities where the participants were recruited have been concealed with pseudonyms as well. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and translated, then safely locked away. There are no foreseeable risks in terms of privacy and confidentiality, as the data is reported in this thesis alone. There is no public access to the raw data. Documented data, such as interview transcripts or field notes, do not carry name identifications.

In order to avoid conflict of interests between the Santal community and myself as researcher, I have made conscious effort, at every stage of the research, not to impose my agenda on others. I did my best not to withhold information from the participants regarding the research. I was upfront about the purpose of this study and explained it to the potential participants as simply as possible, with the help of community activists.

My Position and Role as Researcher

Locating oneself is important to knowledge production and validation. It is also crucial for how a text/discourse is read, understood, and interpreted. Personal location contributes to the production of meanings (Dei, 1999, p. 397).

In writing this thesis, I must clearly acknowledge my subject position in order to avoid ontological and epistemological confusion. I am a first generation, South-Asian Canadian. I have personally negotiated overt and covert mechanisms of “othering” as a minoritized body, both in my country of origin, Bangladesh, and in my new country, Canada. I am positioned as such to engage with and take part in the transformation of

colonialism, which as Ashis Nandi states, “survives the demise of empires” (1987, p. 170).

From my vantage point, I address the process of marginalization that the Santals experience, through imposed domination and their location in the nation state Bangladesh. This work is an expression of my solidarity with the indigenous Santals and other minority peoples’ struggles—for their rights of land and religion, and education that respects and revitalizes their culture, traditions, and customs and corrects past and present errors—to halt the process of colonialism manifested in minoritization and covert ethnic genocide. Thus, I work for equity and justice. Despite being an outsider, I can relate to my participants with the shared experience of exploitation, exclusion, and racism that I have encountered throughout my life.

Tossed, turned, and touched by a common sense of suffering, which led to mutual respect, empathy, and compassion for my participants, I was able to surmount most of the limitations of not being a physical insider among the Santals in Bangladesh. I am an insider at heart because the impetus for pursuing this study evolved from my personal and public life and experiences growing up as a minority Hindu in Bangladesh and later as a visible minority in my adopted country Canada. Therefore, I do not tend to impose my biases or the vested interests of Western academe or attempt to control the Santals’ voice. This thesis provides the Santals’ a space to articulate their experiences and points of view, which have never been allowed to be heard in public through media control and negligence or a kind of colonial epistemic violence. Through empathy, a genuine interest in their well-being, and an authentic regard for their value system, I was truly able to “acquire insider status” (Banks, 1998, p. 15) among the Santals in this study.

As researcher I was the “the primary instrument” of data collection and analysis. During the research process, I made every effort to be a part of knowledge production and was prepared for a long-term, affective, and physical engagement with the Santal community. I was not an outsider prying into the private lives of others. I endeavored to be an empathetic non-judgmental insider. Based on my own personal firsthand experiences, knowledge, theoretical insights and obtained data (Glesne, 1999), I translated the case study into a meaningful theoretical context, based on the “subjects and conditions of the inquiry”, rather than my own. Being aware of my ethical obligations I put the interests of the participants first. I also ensured that the study had no negative effects on the participants. I was constantly aware that knowledge gathered through this project, despite my academic interests, was for activism that might bring about substantial change in the lives of the Santals in Bangladesh.

Through a comprehensive exploration of the lived experiences of the Santals, their actual needs and worldviews, policy planners and other concerned agencies can meet their specific needs rather than imposing contrived solutions on the community. The issue of giving back to the community was at the core of this study. In order to fulfill this ethical obligation and my *karmic debt*, I plan to work with this community following the completion of this project.

Data Sources

The primary data of this case study was collected through in-depth audio-taped interviews and field-notes recording personal observations, experiences, and reflections. The secondary data was collected from the documents and experiences of colonial history around the world, as well as the subcontinent; newspaper articles; the official

Constitution of Bangladesh; records from documents of the historical-geographical context of colonialism, in the subcontinent and elsewhere; land ownership records, settlement bylaws, and lease agreements; education policy documents, Public Service Commission reports, and other print-media. Tribal laws and related historical documents were consulted as well.

During the field work conducted for this research, I personally engaged in close contact with different sections of individuals from the Santal community in the rural northern district of Bangladesh. I met them individually and in groups. I was in the area from October 2005 to December 2005 in order to collect data for this study. I spent a substantial amount of time with the indigenous Santal community in Palashpur village and the adjoining villages of Kestapur Union, in the Rajshahi District of Bangladesh. During this period, I conducted in-depth personal and focus group interviews and documented field notes in a personal diary.

Sampling, Participants, and Data Collection

Sampling pertains to the selection of a research location, time, participants, and events (Merriam, 1988). Sampling in qualitative research is of crucial importance as “poor study site selection as and/or poor sample decisions may weaken or ruin eventual finding” (Berg, 2001, p. 29). Therefore, proper attention has been given to selecting samples for this case study about the Santals in Bangladesh. Like most qualitative case studies, the goal of this study is not “generalization (essential part of random sampling in quantitative research) in a statistical sense”; it does not focus on the questions of “how much” and “how often”, nor does it inquire regarding “frequency”; rather, this study focuses on “discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the

relationships linking occurrences” (Honigmann, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 48). As such, I employed a non-probabilistic sampling strategy in order to address the historically inherited system of the research site, in which numerous situations, participations, events or phases of the process of colonial marginalization interact. Of the many forms of non-probabilistic sampling strategies, I found purposive sampling the most suitable for this study, as Patton (2002) argues: “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for study in depth, Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 230).

The sampling procedures in this study involved two stages that incorporated convenience and purposive and snowball techniques. In the first stage, a few leaders and grass-root level activists were personally approached; following the recruitment of these individuals, the rest of participants were recruited through snowball techniques. A total of 35 Santals were recruited. I aimed to maximize the range of demographic characteristics of the participants, in terms of gender, age, education, occupation, and religion, insofar as convenience and snowballing allowed. Apart from the Santals recruited for this study, a few government and non-government officials, mainstream political leaders, and intellectuals, who have direct contact with the Santals on a regular basis, were also interviewed to verify the data.

Data gathering strategies. Based on agreed upon schedules, interviews were held separately at the homes of the participants in a very friendly and informal manner. Questions (See Appendix for sample questions) were typically unstructured and open-ended so that the participants could open their hearts rather than suppress them, with

“yes” or “no” responses. Participants were encouraged to be as candid as possible. Participants’ background information was collected through informal conversations before and after the interviews

In gathering data I incorporated the “triangulation” technique. Multiple sessions of in-depth interviews, both individual and focus groups (See Appendix for Interview Procedures), along with field notes, were conducted over a period of two months. All participants were interviewed in Bengali, in accordance with their choice of language. Apart from the interviews informal chats before and after the interviews were also audio-taped and documented through self-guided shorthand. The audio-tapes were transcribed, translated into English from Bengali, edited, and immediate reflections were recorded. Field notes were recorded in a notebook and arranged chronologically. I also maintained a diary from the first day of data collection.

Audio-taped interviews were played back to the participants for verification after each interview session. Following the interviews there were informal discussions, which were also recorded. These discussions offered valuable insights and understandings that tapped into the inner voices of the Santals. Three focus group chats were audio and video taped. During the focus group chats, many of the emerging issues from the individual interviews were clarified. Initially, I had created a questionnaire, based on the theoretical insights and the perspectives of the colonized in boarder terms, to conduct the field work. However, in the field, I found the questionnaire inadequate in obtaining authentic responses; the responses received through the questionnaire were preconceived by my expectations as researcher. This was not what I had planned. As such, I set aside the questionnaire and began to speak with the participants informally, which created a

comfort zone for my participants to be more forthcoming. Fortunately, I learned this valuable lesson without wasting much time, effort, and energy.

The Role of Participants in the Research Process

The research participants were co-researchers who provided rich data. Their perspectives are key elements of this study. As researcher I learned *from* them, not *about* them. The research findings have been shared with the research participants. During member checking, they provided feedback for clarification.

Data Organization and Data Analysis

Nvivo 7 was employed to organize the research data, according to data sources, such as focus group interviews, documents, individual interviews, and field notes. Nodes, queries, and models were developed through creating subfolders and sets. Given the exploratory and inductive nature of this research, with its complex subject matter, NVivo7 was a valuable tool and eased the process of organizing, storing, retrieving, and analyzing the research data, within the theoretical framework of the study.

After transcribing the interviews and translating them into English, I used NVivo7 as a central repository to manage and store the data sources before conducting a formal analysis. In using Nvivo7 as a repository, I was able to streamline data management processes and easily create back-up files on an external drive. After importing the data, I created cases from the research participants' interviews. I combined the cases with extensive coding and then queries to uncover the central themes, occurring across the transcribed interviews and secondary data. In the process, these cases generated crucial themes and insights into the direct personal and collective lived experiences of the participants, which provided a critical understanding of the mechanisms that sustain

colonialism and how they affect the Santals lives on an ongoing basis. Some of the research themes emerged inductively from the data through the initial coding, while other themes emerged from coding queries.

The Coding Process

Data-driven nodes were inductively applied in the process of coding. Codes were transformed into categorical labels or themes. In this manner, the transcribed data and data from other sources were also imported into NVivo 7 for coding, namely, transcribed interviews, both individual and focus groups, field notes, and data from secondary sources. I coded the documents in terms of the dimensions defined and documented in the colonial experiences of the research participants. Broader perspectives of colonialism, its various attributes and covert and overt practices and manifestations, were identified as nodes in the process of coding and consequently all of the data was gathered as nodes, including: marginalization through education policy and the denial of language rights; deprivation of land and belonging; practices of colonialism of the nation state; imposed past; affected indigeneity, culture, and tradition; imposed religious dominance; contrived policy of development; issues of power and politics; and others. Thus, cross-examination of the nodes that were filtered from the interview transcripts enabled me to identify the lived experiences of colonialism in the Bangladeshi context. In addition, I created memos and annotations along with coding queries, which were later consulted to capture insights.

After coding, I used the Search mode to find coincidences in the coding structures across cases. I consulted tree nodes and free nodes for the analysis and interpretation of the data, and subsequently, in the process of creating interpretations for reporting the data. I produced this report by combining the frequencies of the nodes coded and

qualitative examples to show the relationships between emerging themes and the conditions that outline the colonial experience under the domination of the nation state of Bangladesh. Identified nodes and coded queries drawn from the experiences of the participants were used in order to portray a credible picture of the colonial experience of the Santals in Bangladesh.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the research methodology and methods employed in this study to demonstrate the colonial experiences of the indigenous Santals in the rural areas in the northern district of Bangladesh. I describe the methodological, ethical, and epistemological issues involved in researching indigenous peoples, in general, and the Santals, in particular. I also outline my subject position in this research and how my subjectivity may impact or affect the process of meaning making. In addition, I provided detailed descriptions of gaining access to the research site, sampling, and the procedures of data collection, data organization, and analysis. I further described the measures I took to avoid biases and preconceptions, in order to demystify knowledge about the indigenous Santals; to tell their stories in their voices; to represent their past, present, and future; and to determine their place in the broader society in Bangladesh.

Chapter Four: Neo-colonialist Language and Education Policies and the Indigenous Santals in the Bangladeshi Context

The barbarian rules by force; the cultivated conqueror teaches.

–Johann Gottfried von Herder (cited in Willinsky, 1998, p. 89).

Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the voices and responses of the research participants with regard to the impact of formal and informal education and language policies imposed upon the Santal community in Palashpur. These policies are implemented through a state-led, centralized, monolingual, and exclusionary curriculum in local primary and secondary schools, schools run by the Churches, and NGO supported schools. The education policy in Bangladesh bears the legacy of the combined forces of cultural homogenization and social exclusion, rooted in the colonial learning structure and its objectives. Embedded in this policy are elements of the civilizing mission, an ultra-religious assimilative but exclusionary nationalistic agenda, and Western values of modernity and development. In this rural context, these alien ideologies and practices are actively engaged in eliminating local institutions, the indigenous knowledge system, the texture of their lives, their mode of production, spirituality, and their sense of being.

The education system in Bangladesh is rooted in a Eurocentric, Western paradigm, with colonial and capitalist visions of materialism, acquisitiveness, and social exclusion (Barua, 2004; Gustavsson, cited in Barua, 2007). At its core is the propagation

of an incompatible and alien culture, language, and history at the cost of the indigenous community, distancing its people from their indigenous structures and drawing them toward the structures of the colonizers (Viswanathan, 1989). Barua (2007), among others (B. Barua, 2004; B.P. Barua, 2001; Mohsin, 2001), further clarifies the issue of state managed neo-colonialism through schooling: “[T]he state continues to rely on a centrally controlled and standardized educational system that is committed to cultural homogenization and social exclusion—a process that is being encouraged by foreign aid and international assistance” (p. 60).

The manner in which the West devalues the third world is replicated and repeated in the devaluation of the indigenous peoples in the southern nations, and education as a lethal weapon plays a pivotal role in this regard. Existing education and language policies in Palashpur are a case in point. Indeed, like other indigenous peoples in many parts of the world, the local Santals identify education as a crucial factor in the historical process of their marginalization, despite their belief in education as a means to cope with the imposed changes on them. The consciousness that has led to their realization is also rooted in the alien education scheme. However, the act of synchronizing with the changes is highly taxing for a collectivistic community, such as the Santals with its rural background.

The processes of transformation and transition in the Santal experience began with the onset of Western colonization through the East India Company; it continued during the rules of the Raj and the Pakistanis, and followed the emergence of the nation state Bangladesh in 1971. While pervasive in its manifestation, both in Euro-American and non Euro-American contexts, the Western educational paradigms have tended to

adopt a policy of social exclusion, through the denial of cultural and linguistic diversity (Dei, 2002; hooks, 1989). In the rural context of Palashpur, this model is predicated on the notion that Bangladesh “is culturally homogenous, with one language, one dominant religion, and no ethnic conflict” (Hussain, cited in Barua, 2007, p. 60).

Unmistakably, in the Santal community in this study, a surreptitious as well as insidious scheme of colonizing the “Other” is taking place, through an education policy of exclusion, marginalization, and denial in the name of normalizing and disciplining (see: Foucault, cited in Smith, 1999) or civilizing those who are not like “Us” namely, the indigenous Santals. In addition, by creating an illusion of utopia that it exists in the West and/or can only be achieved in the Western Way, local people acquire a xenophobic infatuation with the West, which drives the new generations to disregard local and rural education, culture, economy, and the farming profession (Barua, 2004) that sustain indigeneity. This unwholesome social phenomenon has created a chasm within and has fractured and challenged the Santal community on many levels.

This chapter explores the external interferences in terms of education and language policies from the perspective of the local Santals, within the broader perspective of colonial education, which is “conceptualized here not only as foreign or alien, but rather as imposed, dominating, and discriminatory” (Dei, 2000c, p. 42).

Indigenous Life in Palashpur: The Impact of Education through the Modernizing and Civilizing Missions

Most of the research participants, irrespective of their age, gender, religion, education, and profession consider education a key factor in their individual and/or

collective survival and success in a society that is hostile to indigenous and other minority groups. As one participant asserts:

Nowadays it is quite unacceptable not to allow children to have a good education. I had no opportunity for education. I remained stupid, illiterate, and poor all through my life. I want to educate my grandchildren at any cost (A grandfather, interview, 2005).

The participants believe that this education, shaped by powerful material and cosmopolitan values, can provide them material affluence and promise their survival in the rat-race of emerging, capitalist economic order. This economic order, which has given rise to consumerism in the community, is the bi-product of Westernization that is supported by the state. As one participant argues:

In the past we had no real education, and it was not enough to get us any jobs in today's job market. We were backward, forest dwellers. We had no sense of hygiene. We used to eat directly from the cooking pots. Now, through education from the church, we use different types of utensils, such as spoons, plates, cups, etc. Education has made us civilized and cultured. We don't want to go back to our primitive life (Interview, 2005).

A few of the participants hold completely opposite views regarding education in Palashpur, as one participant states:

In the past, we had less education but more knowledge, wisdom, than we now have. We had no crises in our society. Everyone was content. Now educated young men and women leave the village and go to the towns for employment. They are frustrated and restless. Unlike our forefathers, they have forgotten how to be happy. They have a lot of mental and physical problems. They don't respect their culture, language and the traditional way of life anymore. They are in my opinion ill-educated and frustrated people. They don't like to be called Santals or speak our language. They don't believe we had knowledge of medicine, better knowledge of the environment and our livelihood. They don't believe the Santals actually invented agriculture in the subcontinent. They take for granted what the Churches, the NGO schools, and their textbooks dictate. This

education is making our children forget who we actually are and who we used to be (Interview, 2005).

Thus we see, there are multiple perspectives among the research participants regarding the method through which education is delivered in the community. The voices that oppose or support the education and language policies reflect the ever-widening rift within the community as a result of imposed, external interferences that came with the civilizing mission through education, homogenization, and constitutional deprivation. In this rural community, the Santals are marginalized and vulnerable. Taking advantage of their vulnerability, various groups impose their vested ideologies upon the community which is struggling to make both ends meet.

There are three systems of education provided through different agencies, including the state, the NGOs, and the Churches. In terms of objectives and goals these groups pursue separate covert and overt agendas. The NGOs and the Churches are mainly engaged in educating the indigenous children in the name of community development and poverty elimination, masking their Westernizing or civilizing missions. The state-run schools have a nationalistic agenda of homogenization and solely accommodate the needs of mainstream, Bengali, Muslim students, who are the majority in schools and society at large. Education is generally provided through the majority language Bengali, and an imposed, centralized, and exclusionary curriculum maintains the status quo of the Muslim majority students.

Bengali, the medium of instruction in schools is not spoken during Santal children's early years among the family members or in the immediate village community of the research participants. The schools run by the churches and some NGOs employ the

mother tongue, Santali, on a limited basis; however they have substandard teaching staff and curriculum, and partially introduce a disputed and imposed Santali font⁷. In addition, the agenda of these schools does not coincide with that of the local people. As one participant argues: Some NGOs are also showing interest, but their interests and policies come with certain terms and conditions that do not reflect the genuine interests and well-being of the indigenous groups (Interview, 2005). As a result, despite the involvement of various agencies, functional literacy, in the traditional sense, among the local Santal community is far below the national and local averages. The research participants are critical of those desperate efforts to educate the Santals in Palashpur. One participant asserts:

The government, churches, and NGOs are taking advantage of our vulnerability. They want to educate us their way. They don't teach us our history, our Great tradition, which our ancestors made us proud of. All parties are united to see our culture, tradition, religion, language, and land end up in the museum. I know why they spend so much money on us. This is for their own benefit; they want to make profit out of this. (Interview, 2005).

The efforts of engaging the Palashpur Santals in education can be viewed as a neo-colonial project. This project sends a strong message that the only way to educate this group of “barbarians and uncivilized peoples” is the Western way, so that they learn to perceive their tradition and culture as inferior. In this manner, the Santals' group solidarity and deep-seated spiritual bond can be severed. In addition, through cultural homogenization and assimilation, the Santal forget their ethnicity, tribal depth, and home language and become Bengali/modern in mind and in taste.

⁷ The Santali font was introduced over a century ago by the churches, during the time of the earliest contact.

Imposed from above, the current education policy, as well as the associated language policy, is inherited from British colonial rule. It does not conform to the lifestyle and social and cultural realities of the Santal community. External interventions and the vested interests of outsiders have undermined and gradually destroyed the knowledge of Santal myths, legends, rituals, and customs, and their spirit, nature, and people. Rituals, music, songs, and dances that were forms of teaching and learning are now considered “meaningless and barbaric” (Interview, 2005).

In Palashpur there is a hierarchical model of schooling that is incompatible with the home culture of the Santals. The external agencies such as the NGO’s, the churches and the state run institutions have failed miserably in understanding the community. Furthermore, from the perspective of the receivers, their efforts are not engaging and empowering. Detached from the reality on the ground, this mismatch generates a feeling of alienation among learners in the Santal community, which manifests in dropping out of school, low levels of school attendance, low self esteem, underachieving, disregarding their own culture, and loss of language, and tradition, (Sarker & Davey, 2009). In the past, the Santal children learned livelihood and defense skills, the norms and modes of society, as well as their oral history and culture under the direct supervision of the community elders. Education was experiential and in tune with mainstream Santali day-to-day life. Education for the real world, provided through experiential learning, is now a reminiscence of the past for the Santals. A new alien educational format and an alien language as the medium of instruction are being imposed on this tradition bound community to erase their links to the past. However, a strong resistance is evident, as the

Santals continue to maintain their language and traditional mode of living. This is clearly evident in the statement of one participant, who has no formal schooling:

I can bet you that the Santali language will never die. We speak it at home. If we stop using this language in our daily lives, we will definitely forget it. But we uneducated Santals speak the language. In our community most people are uneducated. Therefore, we will never lose our language (Interview, 2005).

This participant voices the bitter truth about the insidious nature of education in Palashpur. Education serves as a tool of the nation state's assimilationist agenda that aims to destroy vital indigenous establishments, such as language in which the world of meanings, knowledge, and wisdom is stored. As Battiste and Henderson (2000) argue, "any attempt to change Indigenous language is an attempt to modify or destroy Indigenous knowledge and the people to whom this knowledge belongs" (p. 50). When education and language policies are not based on the felt-needs of the community, they become mechanisms of subjugation. Untouched by the corrupt influence of state-run education, the Santali language has been kept alive by the Santal peasantry. Santali is forgotten by those who are educated through the alien education system of the nation state.

In Palashpur, education and language have been highly contested establishments since the times of British and Pakistani colonial rules, when the Santals were demographically dominant in the region. Historically, after the Santal resurrection in 1855 that militarily challenged British colonial authority and during the early years of Pakistan, after the *Nachol Bidroha* (Nachol rebellion) of 1950s (for details, see Roy 2002) both the then colonial administrations began a more vigorous campaign to impose colonial education in order to "domesticate" (Friere, 1998) the Santal community. In

order to achieve complete control, the colonial regimes allowed missionaries to work among the Santals in the areas where they rose against the oppressive regimes.

The Santal spirit has always been opposed to oppression and injustice. Therefore, mindful of the repeated historical backlashes, the state has perpetuated divisions within the Santal community through an education system that can disperse and disintegrate the once closely-knit community. In this manner the colonial legacy subtly continues. Currently, the village lacks a culturally appropriate, inclusive curriculum that could promote the continuation and revitalization of indigenous languages, reverse the loss of language, indigenous history and traditions. Instead there are the contested and imposed education and language policies of the state.

Lacking in pluralistic values and inclusiveness, the education and language policies of the majority continue to devalue the Santal language and culture and wreck havoc on this rural community. In the absence of political power and privilege the Santal community in Palashpur is on the crossroads of a transition in which education has an undeniable stake. Indeed, the nexus between the ideologies of the aforementioned agencies in Palashpur complement each other to form a discriminatory education policy—the state-sponsored radical Islamization and assimilation negate the cultural values and beliefs of the minority and indigenous peoples; while the influence of Western education and the covert schemes of the NGOs and the churches lead to the “violent destruction of nature, local knowledge, culture, and memories” (Berry, 1990, cited in Baura, 2004, p. 97). As a result, like other traditional indigenous communities, the adivasi Santal community in Palashpur regards education as a mechanism of

marginalization, subjugation, and homogenisation, which has brought them to the edge of extinction as a distinct ethnic group.

Historical roots of the colonial education policy in Bangladesh. Explicit formal and informal operations and surreptitious schemes serve the neo-colonizers in gaining control over the colonized indigenous people in a civilized manner: “The barbarian rules by force; the cultivated conqueror teaches” (cited in Willinsky, 1998, p. 89). Historically, the initial objectives of the colonial education policy in undivided India, which Bangladesh has inherited, were generated from the Supremist ideas of the leader colonizers. The colonizers attempted to eliminate indigenous learning structures and localized knowledge and replace them with the Western/modern learning structures they brought with them. Edward Thornton’s statement from the late 19th century indicates this colonial racist approach: “As soon as [the Indians] become first-rate European scholars, they must cease to be Hindoos” (Thornton, Parliamentary Paper, 1852-53, 32:36, cited in Vishanathan, 1989, p. 23).

Similarly, Lord Macaulay, the mastermind of the British education policy in India, summarizes the sole purpose of colonial education in undivided India in the following statement:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect (cited in Weir, 2005, p. 80).

Colonial education promoted dependency rather than self-reliance, and the education system became a factory for the production of new local elite who could be at the service of the British Raj and its legacy. While modern day colonizers may not share Macaulay's lack of respect for the existing systems of the marginalized "Other", they share the idea that education is a powerful means in facilitating the assimilation process, the main objective of all colonial regimes. The new nation state Bangladesh, which emerged after of an anti-colonial movement, has followed the same colonial path in marginalizing the various indigenous communities, their languages, learning structures, and knowledge base within its borders.

Historically, Bangladesh has undergone several political transitions. It was ruled by the colonial British and Pakistani administrations. It emerged as an independent nation state through a bloody liberation struggle against Pakistani military rule in 1971. The emergence of Bangladesh was, in fact, the culmination of the Bengali language and cultural identity-based, secular nationalistic movement (Jahan, 1996). Islamic Pakistani Nationalism fragmented the subcontinent along religious lines while ignoring "uncontested internal fractures and divisions" (Loomba, 1998, p. 10). Unfortunately, while building the Bengali nation state, indigenous cultures, languages, and identities were completely ignored in the name of homogenisation (Barua, 2004). The Constitution of Bangladesh did not recognize the identities of various indigenous peoples and their languages. Although Bangladesh is not officially an Islamic theocratic state, Islam is the dominant religion and sets the tone of the social, educational, and cultural ethos of the nation (Barua, 2004).

After 1975, when the principle of secularism was discarded and in 1988, when the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Chowdhury, cited in Baura, 2004) officially declared Islam as the state religion, radical Islamic values and language became the dominant mode in the area of politics and curriculum foundation. The number of Islamic religious schools, *Madrashas*, multiplied. At the same time, the legacy of the British colonized education policy, manifested in the proliferation of Western education through the establishment of English Medium schools and colleges, remained unopposed and uncontested.

Evidently, the Bangladeshi government, NGOs, and Christian missions are imposing a colonialist system of education on the Santal and other indigenous peoples. This education is not always formal in nature; it is often informal, serving hidden agendas behind so-called development and modernizing efforts. These education systems have damaged the Santal traditional institutions (Ray, Das, & Basu, 1982) through which members of the society were acquainted with their cultural heritage and learned to appreciate their close bond with nature and the universe. Under the influence of the “factory model” (Miller, 1996) of the modern education system imposed upon them, the Santal society has undergone fragmentations and alienation in terms of religion, education, and class.

A distinct Babu⁸ element, which was once the objective of the British colonialist education policy, has now become prevalent among some Santals. One of the research participants expresses his concern about the Santals who shun the rural life of Palashpur, live in the cities, and blend into mainstream life:

⁸ Babu is like a “coconut”, white on the inside and brown on the outside.

They are ashamed of identifying themselves as Santals or by Santal names and titles. They have alien names, have university degrees, work in the offices, speak Bengali or/and English at home. They can be seen in Palashpur once in a blue moon. Their children do not speak or understand Santali. They love to eat alien food (Interview, 2005).

An education policy of “domestication”—with the underlying desire for “ivory collection” (Conrad, 1899), lacking in an “ethical purpose” (Freire, 2000) and “the principle of educational accountability” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 252)—has divided the Santal community beyond reconciliation. The current education policy in Bangladesh is colonialist in nature in the broad sense and has established its goal that “colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces with the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all” (Nandy, 1997, p. 170).

The nation state Bangladesh has inherited an education system, driven by a market-based rationale of colonial economic growth and exploitative imperatives; it is a centralized system of educational control for the purposes of affecting cultural imposition, domestication, and domination of the "cultural other." On the whole, this education system demonstrates a total disregard for cultural differences and social values (Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000; Freire, 1985; Shiva, cited in Barua, 2007). The Santals in Palashpur encounter this disregard through formal and informal education offered by different agencies.

**The Impact of the Colonial-Neocolonial Language Policy
and the Santal Community in Palashpur**

The Santal language is very important and essential for us as the Santals. This is our language of heart and of mind, the language of our soul. We have been surviving as Santals for centuries because of this language. Our society, civilization, tradition, and history are surviving based on this language and its orature. However, this language is dying fast. It is very perplexing for us to witness such as loss (Interview, Palashpur, 2005).

This excerpt from an interview with a research participant in Palashpur is not an overstatement; it accurately captures the existing circumstances and the bleak future of Santali, the language of the Santals in Palashpur. In a broader context, this situation is a microcosm of “linguistic genocide”, which is an essential part of the perpetuation of the colonial project. In Palashpur, the ongoing linguistic genocide is predicated on the Constitution of Bangladesh, which states: “the state language of the republic is Bengali” (The Constitution of Bangladesh, Article 3, 2006); no other language is constitutionally recognized. Therefore, the medium of instruction in schools is the national language Bengali, based on the interests of dominant groups; this is detrimental to the Santal children.

When Santal children arrive at school, the imposed and assimilationist linguistic hegemony begins, leading to a slow but irrefutable process of “linguistic genocide”. The Santal child who participates in the school system, with no or limited knowledge of the majority language, Bengali, is not allowed to speak in the mother tongue Santali. The impact of this language suppression is devastating; Santali children are deprived of their mother tongue, which is not only their tool of communication, but also the language of their thoughts, feelings, and relationships. Linguistic suppression “breaks the existing

harmony between the child and the language” (Thiongo, 1986, p.16). As one participant recalls:

As a little boy, like others I had real difficulty in understanding Bengali, not to mention what they taught [the subject matter]. I felt stupid and dumb in class. Although the problem disappeared slowly, there remained a chasm inside which was never filled. I witnessed many of my Santal classmates leave school permanently for not feeling wanted in class. Physical punishment and humiliation from the teachers and insults from fellow Bengali Muslim classmates were unbearable. We actually had a difficult time with no support system at school. I was pushed by my family, while others had no such opportunity (Interview, 2005).

The participant’s experience exemplifies the colonial nature of the nation state’s language policy as manifested in linguistic imperialism. Linguistic imperialism has been wrecking havoc on the psyches and identities of indigenous children as well as their communities all over the world. The experiences of the research participants in Palashpur are not as horrendous as the boarding school experiences of indigenous children in the North American context; however, the mechanisms employed are similar. Both physical and psychological pain is inflicted on Santal children in order to accomplish “epistemic violence” (Spivak, cited in Razack, 1998) or cognitive violence.

For the Santals, Santali is “the media through which thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented” (Hall, 1997, p.1). Santali is the language of the heart, spirituality, and wisdom of Santal tradition. By eradicating Santali, all that is embedded in it, is pushed out of the Santals’ lives. Moreover, Santali represents the meaning of the world for the Santal child, who is informed by the collective, historical memory; this memory, known as culture, is now being devalued and eradicated in order to uphold the superiority of the majority language, culture, and history.

Thiongo (1986) asserts: “Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history (p. 15). Therefore, by denying Santali, the Santal culture is being denied; in the process the collective history and tradition are being removed from the Santal community. Furthermore, linguistic discrimination in schools sows the seeds of racism, racial discrimination, and ‘supremist’ practices by privileging one group and disenfranchising the others. In denying Santal children the Santali language at school, “the exercise of colonial power in relation to the violent hierarchy between written and aural cultures” (Bhaba, 1992, p. 73) becomes obvious.

Santali, the mother tongue of the Santali children, has no universally accepted written form, whereas Bengali, the dominant language has a sophisticated written form. Therefore, the “superior status driven nation state” emerging from the Bengali, language-based written culture imposes strategies of normalization, a popular form of the colonial mechanism. Surveillance and control are applied with regard to Santali language use. The linguistic discrimination the Santal child encounters when he or she steps outside the Santali world is a normalizing strategy of the nation state, which is an extension of the colonial past. It is a sharp reminder for the Santal child that discrimination is a norm—the only acceptable standard to be educated in is the normative language of the administration of the country, as reflected in the Constitution of Bangladesh (2006).

The social hierarchy is, thus, imposed in a pre-meditated manner on Santal children, who begin to learn their inferior position in the classroom and are conditioned by the wider society from the early years of their education. This colonial mechanism affirms David Golberg’s (1993) theory that “social position is constructed and imposed rather than natural and necessarily inherited” (p. 70); the case of Palashpur is no

exception. Furthermore, this colonial phenomenon is rooted in the discriminatory discursive power of language, as Homi Bhaba (1992) asserts:

One might examine, in the context of a colonial society, those strategies of normalization that play on the difference between an “official” normative language of colonial administration and instruction and an unmarked, marginalized from-pidgin, Creole, vernacular—which becomes the site of the native subject’s cultural dependence and resistance, and as such a sign of surveillance and control (p. 73).

The Santali language has become the target of colonial surveillance and control, rather than a language of integration and rehabilitation. This discriminatory language policy, which is actively applied in Palashpur, has been instrumental in the demise of many minority languages, both nationally and globally. Many minority languages are on the brink of annihilation because of state-crafted linguistic imperialism. This linguistic imperialism that controls and dominates the languages of the others is one of the principal mechanisms of colonial and neo-colonial oppression. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) argue that “the imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities” (p.7). The Santal community in this remote village, known as ‘uncivilized and barbaric’ in the mainstream discourse, have been denied their mother tongue and the empirical knowledge. Linguistic imperialism and hegemony are prevalent in the Bangladeshi context, rather than a linguistic tolerance and language revitalization. Amidst this hostile circumstance, the Santali language is under tremendous pressure and has become subject to attrition and elimination.

The imposition of linguistic imperialism and domination began with the Aryan invasion in the subcontinent. Disturbing consequences and contradictions were evident during the Mogul Dynasty when they instated the Persian language at court (Neil, 1984)

denying the indigenous languages. The British Raj achieved the same through spreading the English language (Vishanathan, 1989), while Pakistani colonial rule attempted to continue this linguistic invasion through the imposition of Urdu. Following in the footsteps of the former colonizers, neo-colonial linguistic repression is carried out by not recognizing and patronizing indigenous languages, such as Santali in Palashpur.

Unfortunately, the nation state Bangladesh that emerged through a language movement⁹ and waged a bloody war against the colonialist imposition of an alien language is currently imposing a similar linguistic hegemony over its indigenous peoples. This act of injustice is constitutionally legitimized. The constitution of Bangladesh does not recognize the existence of indigenous languages. This colonialist and neo-colonist language policy is evident in Article 23 of the Constitution, which states:

The state shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the people and to foster and to improve the national language, literature, and the arts that all sections of the people are afforded the opportunity to contribute towards and to participate in the enrichment of the national culture. (Article 23, Constitution of Bangladesh, 2002, p. 16).

Article 23 of the Constitution reveals a radical nationalistic discourse of linguistic homogenization that does not permit indigenous languages and cultures to exist or thrive in Bangladesh. Manifesting a diffusionist ideology of hegemonic monolingualism, the Constitution fails to appreciate and corroborate the indigenous languages, literature, and rich cultural heritage associated with their identity. Until now, there was no effort to push

⁹ On the 21st of February 1952 there was a bloody language movement against a Pakistani Colonial plot to impose Urdu upon the Bengali speaking people as the official language of Pakistan, upon the Bengali speaking people. This movement is believed to have culminated in the Independent Bangladesh in 1971. The day has been declared, International Mother Language Day by UNESCO.

for a constitutional amendment to recognize indigenous languages and their cultural heritage. In Church based schools where Santali language is taught, it is employed “to foster values of Christianity” (Interview, 2005). As a result the Santals, like other ethnic groups, have been losing their cultural heritage.

One of the research participants portrays a grim picture of how losing the languages of their heart, the Santals in the remote village of Palashpur have lost their cultural, linguistic and social identity. He narrates:

In order to write a report about a group of people I went to a village. I heard that there were Santals in that village. When I started talking with them in Santali, no one could understand me; they told me that they speak only Bengali. They speak Bengali and perform all Pumas like the Hindu Bengalis. Although they know they are Santals, they cannot claim to be so, neither for their religion nor for the lack of language. As they speak Bengali and celebrate Pumas like Hindus, therefore, they are more like minority Hindus in Bangladesh. They have lost their heritage. For not having the language of their community, they tend not to believe to be Santals. They hesitate to claim it. In the larger society, they introduce themselves as Bengali (Interview, 2005).

Thus, the powerful forces of assimilation create adverse situations that destroy the structures of minority languages, oral or written. With this language loss, the community loses the collective identity associated with it. Indeed, the issue of physical and material survival becomes so acute and urgent that the vulnerable communities internalize other losses without resistance.

The loss of language has other implications as well. As a result of one particular language policy, in the case of Palashpur, a Santal child cannot receive education in Santali, the language of everyday life. A female participant, who plans to go to college, recalls her experience:

Actual emphasis on Bengali started when I went to school. At school and colleges, there is no alternative to Bengali. Under such circumstances, we are conditioned to learn Bengali or remain uneducated. Our life is broken into pieces in which Bengali, alien language to us, dominates. We don't know how to piece them together. Without Bengali our future is still dark. Even with Bengali our future is not that promising either (Interview, 2005).

The research participant's experience delineates a state of disharmony that has led to an identity crisis among the Santals in Palashpur, because of the incongruities between the language of home, from the heart, and the language of school, a forced language from the mind. For a Santal child, who attends school, "learning becomes a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience" (Thiongo, 1986, p. 7); thus language becomes the means of spiritual subjugation rather than nourishment. Santali children receive a clear message through the subjugation of their real life language, which makes them feel inferior and powerless—a baggage they will carry until their last breath.

By imposing Bengali and denying Santali, Bengali becomes a colonial language and carrier of the majority culture (Thiongo, 1986). The dominant identity of the Bengali Muslims subordinates the original identity of the Santals. Indeed, the loss of the language of their heart, Santali, can result in a major loss of the sense of the Santals' indigenous self. Without the language of their heart, Santal children are alienated from their roots and heritage. Santali is not just a marker of difference; it is, as Sapir (cited in Feuerwerker 1989) states: "a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments and values characteristics of the group; it also represents a fundamental expression of collective social identity" (p. 112). Therefore, without Santali, the Santal children in Palashpur are without an anchor, drifting on the waves of change, rooted in the linguistic aggression of neo-colonizers. The situation in Palashpur resonates with Franz Fanon's (1952, 1967)

assertion that, “to speak means to be in a position to use certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization”(pp.17-18).

The Santals in Palashpur are on the crossroads of a transition that will turn them into “other selves” (Thiongo, 1986). This experience coincides with Eva Hoffman’s (1989) in the immigrant context. She states that, “Learned language fails to make a living connection between words and feelings, between the picture and word show.” (p. 112). Besides, according to Thiongo (1986), “language as a culture is an image forming agent in the mind of a child... [O]ur whole conception of ourselves as people, individually, collectively is based on the pictures and image” (p. 16). By denying a Santal child his or her language and imposing an alien language, the neo-colonist dominant group achieves the task of domination over the mental universe of the colonized Santals at Palashpur.

Evidently, Santal children are positioned in a precarious space in which their language and culture are contested, resisted, and devalued. This negotiated contestation and denigration gives rise to an irreconcilable chasm of ambivalence and feelings of inferiority. It affects children academically as well. Cummins (1996) states that positive identity is vital for academic achievement and children can suffer when their linguistic and cultural backgrounds are overlooked. Furthermore, colonial history indicates that, “Economic and political control can never be complete and effective without mental control” (Thiongo, 1986 p. 16). This mental control is effectively perpetrated through the language of the colonizer, a process that produces “bodiless heads and headless bodies” (Thiongo, 1986, p. 28). In the case of the Santal in Palashpur, denying Santal children the

Santali language is a microcosm of the mental domination and subjugation the Santals experience day in and day out.

Through linguistic hegemony in place of linguistic integration (Dei, 2000), a covert indoctrination of ruling ideologies (Dei, 2000, p. 10) continues to be inflicted upon the indigenous communities. One of the research participants, a parent who has children at school in Palashpur, provides an account of the powerful influence of linguistic aggression in their lives. He recounts:

As the school is so powerful, the school language has invaded our families. We as parents sometimes forget our own home language and start speaking Bengali with our children. In a few years down the road, it will be a fact of life for us that there is no Santali at home. This is how with language, we will lose our culture and our heritage (Interview, 2005).

Contrary to the indigenous concern reported in the above excerpt, the Bengali monolingual ideology views linguistic diversity as a threat, rather than a resource, that can undermine the sovereignty of the Bangladeshi/Bengali nationhood. It equates the acquisition of Bengali with integration, loyalty, and patriotism at the cost of linguistic and cultural diversity. This raises the issues of belonging, rights, and privileges.

A language connected to the land legitimizes one's inherent ties with it. Therefore, the nation state, the bearer of the colonial legacy, does not recognize indigenous languages. Linguistic diversity is viewed as a threat to the existence of the nation state, rooted in Bengali nationalism. The oppressive nation state is ready to eliminate the languages and with them the rights of their speakers. A research participant, who is an activist and a teacher by profession, further clarifies this issue in the following excerpt:

Recognizing a language goes beyond the issue of language rights. It is an issue of our belonging and citizenship rights. When a language is recognized, a history, culture, tradition, and the land-rights of the people who speak the language are bound to be accepted. By denying the language, they are just ensuring the nonexistence of the Santals, and thus their rights and privileges can be discounted and dishonored (Interview, 2005).

Apart from the mainstream schools where Santali is untouchable, the church schools, where Santali is taught, reveal a more base mechanism in the use of indigenous languages in a civilizing mission to their advantage. This mission often masks exploitation, as the Church takes advantage of the vulnerability of the indigenous Santals. Churches employ the indigenous language in order to serve their vested purposes, instead of serving the community to reverse language loss. One participant recounts his experience: “I know there are church schools where Santali is taught. It is just an eye wash. If we want to learn Santali, then we will have to be Christian. Without becoming Christian, it is not possible” (Interview, 2005).

Thus, linguistic imperialism works in subtle ways to deprive the material and cultural rights and privileges of Santali speakers in Palashpur. In contrast, the Santali language has also been a powerful site of resistance against the onslaught of material, cultural, and spiritual colonization. By revitalizing and reclaiming the legitimacy of the Santal language as the language of heart and mind, the Santals in Palashpur, and elsewhere, can initiate the long awaited process of decolonization. Language, after all, is at the centre of the exclusion, ‘othering’, and stigmatization that the Santals in Palashpur have been negotiating.

Language as a Means of Exploitation in Palashpur

Apart from school where language acts as a barrier to equity (Cummins & Danesi, 1990), and a site of marginalization, racism, and oppression, there are other sites and situations where adults experience the oppressive impact of language. The research participants in Palashpur often encounter the magnitude of this covert and overt oppression in the courts and government offices. Like all colonial contexts, the language of the courts is the national language, Bengali, or English, the language of the colonial past. Therefore, when a Santal is involved in legal issues to be decided by the court, the verdict is often biased against him or her.

Corrupt court officials and office personnel take advantage of the Santals who are not proficient in Bengali, especially in reading and writing. In addition, the specific register of the court and the administration is too ambiguous for most people. Illiterate Santals folks from the rural community find it harder. Due to their language deficit or the lack of a support system, such as interpretation services, many Santals have lost their land to unscrupulous land grabbers, who have clandestine links with corrupt court officers. As one participant asserts:

Hors (Santals) are illiterate. They don't understand records. These dishonest, crooked officials give us some instructions and charge money. They ask us to go again, promising that the work will be done within a certain time limit. They say, "Come next week, everything will be done." This next week never comes; just more money is spent. This is how weeks turn into months and months turn into years. Finally, we give up (Interview, 2005).

Many of the research participants reported in detail on incidents where simple-minded illiterate Santal villagers were deceived by corrupt, local influential groups, aided by personnel in the land office and the court. However, none of the participants

interviewed were first-hand victims of this fraud. The following is a version of their accounts:

In our Santali we say “bar” to imply two, whereas in Bengali it is twelve but pronounced as bar (o) with an added vowel. When we sell two *bighas* [a local measurement unit for land] of land to a Bengali buyer, both party know that two *bighas* of land are to be transferred. However, the Bengali buyer has an ulterior motive.

Actual problems arise when the both parties approach the registry office in the town. When the land registrar asks about the amount of land to be transferred, the Santal villager tells him that “bar” *bigha*. To confirm the deal and the transfer, the registrar further asks him if he received money for “Baro”, *bighas*, of land. The Santal villager says, “Yes, I received money for “bar”, *bigha*”, not knowing the difference between “bar” and “baro”. The land registrar, who is from the dominant Bengali community (maybe from the other district with a different dialect), confirms that “baro” *bighas* land have been sold, and the land can be possessed by the buyer with immediate effect. In case of any clarification, the other officials in the register officer make the registrar convince the illiterate Santal to pronounce “baro” instead of “bar.”

Thus in a flash, a huge injustice and forgery is carried out. The poor Santal has no idea whatsoever until the time arrives for taking possession of the land. The buyer faces no resistance for taking possession of the land, as the poor Santal becomes homeless, landless, and finally rootless. If necessary, local law enforcement officials offer help in exchange of a bribe. Besides, he has the paper document from the register office. This kind of forgery was rampant until lately (Interview, 2005).

There was no immediate verification of the aforementioned incidents from a participant with first hand experience of the situation. Issues of security and safety may have played a role in this regard. I further learned that this occurred in the past “at the time of *Tebhaga Andolon* in 1950s and during the Independence movement in 1971” (Interview, 2005). According to some of the participants, the victims have already left the country for India, due to acute financial hardship and a sense of insecurity. However, it

matters little whether such stories are authentic or not. The research participants shared lived experiences of repression in which they were physically, psychologically, and financially brutalized and were forcefully evacuated from their rightful property. The killing of Alfred of Soren, an indigenous leader, is a case in point. Alfred Soren of Vimpur village in Mahadevpur, Naogaon, was killed on August 18, 2000 when he tried to resist the eviction of indigenous people from the village. The attackers set fire to his house and stabbed him to death. The killers are still at large (The Daily Star, August 2, 2005).

The narrative of “bar” versus “bar (o)” demonstrates the powerful capacity of language, that “language is power.” Language is used or abused to grant dominance for some, while it causes vulnerability for “the Other.” Indeed, lack of linguistic competence can lead to devastation for those who lack functional literacy. It provides the dominant group opportunity for further domination and exploitation, because “the entire bureaucracy, the entire court system, all industry hears and uses the colonizer’s language” (Memmi, 1991, p. 106). Language in this context is not only a vehicle for communication but it is also tied to one’s survival in a hostile world, divided along language and racial lines. Besides, “Language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group” (King & Schielmann, 2004, p.41).

In light of the prevalent lack of communicative competence in either language, Santali or Bengali, among the rural Santals, there is tremendous pressure from “various pressure groups” to introduce Santali in schools at the primary level; this is believed to assist in the revitalization of the Santal cultural heritage and language, and may scaffold

their acquisition of the dominant language of the courts and government offices. Conversely, many believe that a return to the Santali mother tongue, which is not useful in the dominant society, is counter productive and will lead to further marginalization of the under-privileged linguistic group; it may lead, they believe, to further *ghettotization*. Therefore, a more holistic and cautious approach is required to avoid the dangers of language integration.

A cautionary approach must be considered carefully before rethinking the education policy of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. The following lines from an indigenous experience in Orissa, India are a reminder of the never-ending effect of the colonialist economic mode of production that continues to apotheosize materialism over other forms of achievement:

The attempts of tribal authorities to promote tribal languages and scripts in primary education have to be de-politicized and more tailored to the actual needs of the learners; these schemes can otherwise amount to instruments of further marginalization of the already disadvantaged groups as they are faced with an additional language hurdle in the tough competition for better qualification. The privileged tribal learners will immediately try to avoid such schools and study in the regional languages or English (Lotz, 2004, p. 138).

However, I agree with Cummins (1996) who asserts that additive bilingualism is an asset rather than a liability. A bilingual child cognitively and socially outperforms a monolingual child. Therefore, fear of economic backlash is an excuse to deprive indigenous peoples of their rightful and reasonable demands for education in their own language. After all “Santali is a great cementing force” (Mahapatra, 1986, p. 2) for the Santals, and they cannot afford to lose it.

Ol-Chiki (the Santal script) versus the Roman alphabet: A conflict within.

Although the Santali language is functionally and fundamentally an oral language in the Bangladeshi context, a deep division has surfaced within the Santal community with regard to adopting a broadly acceptable written form, between *Ol-chiki* and the Roman alphabet. The necessity of having a written form is felt by all parties; because they believe that a written form can consolidate the future of Santali. The urgency for a written script is captured in the following excerpt from a participant's interview:

If a language finds a place in books, it survives the onslaught of time and regimes. If only in oral form, it may not exist for various situations. They not only want to destroy our religion, but also want to destroy our language, our tradition. If we can write down all that our ancestors did for us for this world, they cannot erase them. When people die, with them goes away everything, unless it is left in paper. Only a written form can give a lasting existence (Interview, 2005).

Many participants express deep concerns that rift regarding the implementation and promotion of written Santali not only has debilitating effects, but has caused costly fragmentation within the Santal community in Bangladesh. As one elder participant points out:

We need true realization. We should not be influenced by the external forces. Christians or Sanatan, all Santals should work together forgetting their religious orientation. Santals have been surviving for centuries. Turning to Christianity, Hinduism, or Islam will not benefit us as Santals. We need to look inward first. We need an acceptable written script. We need to sit together and depoliticize and decommunalize ourselves. Unless we keep our head held high, we are sure to struggle (Interview, 2005).

Indeed, this division is religious in nature and has a xenophobic racist tone. The converted Santals, backed by the churches, vehemently support the Roman alphabet/

extended Latin, while the other group, who call themselves adivasi Santal or Sanatan Santals, favours *Ol-Chiki / Ol Cemet*.

The Roman script was first introduced by Bodding more than a century ago, and many Santal books, its grammar, and the Santal dictionary were written in this font. The churches have been using the Roman script extensively, including in their liturgy. On the other hand, *Ol-Chiki*, a distinctive Santali script, was primarily developed by a native Santali scholar, Pundit Raghunath Murmu in 1925. *Ol-Chiki* was developed in order to avoid complications caused due to writing Santali in four different scripts, namely *Bengali, Oriya, Devanagari*, and the *Roman* script in the four Indian states where *Santali* was spoken. *Ol Chiki* has 30 letters, the forms of which are intended to evoke natural shapes. Linguist Norman Zide explains, "the shapes of the letters are not arbitrary, but reflect the names for the letters, which are words, usually the names of objects or actions representing conventionalized form in the pictorial shape of the characters" (1996, p. 615).

In order to prove the feasibility and practicality of *Ol-Chiki*, Pundit Raghunath Murmu wrote over 150 books on a wide spectrum of subjects, such as grammar, fiction, drama, poetry, and stories in Santali with *Ol Chiki* script. This effort was also as a part of Murmu's extensive program of cultural advancement in the Santal community. Although Christian groups within the Santal community in India blame the Hindu nationalists for favouring *Ol-Chiki*, in the recent years, "it was also the Marxist State Government in West Bengal that recognized *Ol-chiki* script officially" as one participant reports. And, according to another participant, "when *Ol-chiki* was first introduced in 1925, Hindu fundamentalists, who are blamed for patronizing *Ol-chiki*, were not as active as they are

now” (Interview, 2005). Zide (1996) claims that the actual objective of the introduction of *Ol-chiki* was “to ease the situation of additive digraphia” (p. 615).

Christian groups argue that using the Roman script can provide Santali learners with the advantage of being internationally in tune, as the Roman script is used in other global languages. They also assert that the Roman script is associated with the unity of the Santal community all over India; it unifies not only the indigenous Santals, but has united various ethnic groups in the north eastern provinces in India. In addition, an extensive literature has been produced and preserved in this format. Therefore, Christian groups think it will be counter-productive to eliminate the Roman alphabet and replace it with *Ol-chiki*.

In contrast, *Ol-Chiki* supporters are armed with linguists’ claims that the Roman script cannot distinguish between the Santali short and long vowels. Phonologically, the Santali long vowels are pronounced much longer than those in English and other Indic languages. Furthermore, the Roman script has no explicit mechanism to represent the Santali glottal stop. Therefore, to retain the beauty, uniqueness, and sweetness of the Santali language, a distinctive script, such as *Ol-Chiki* is required for all sounds. In addition, *Ol-Chiki* supporters believe that the Roman script was imposed upon the Santals and was created for performing the covert civilizing mission in the interests of Christian aggression. Conversely, *Ol-Chiki* was indigenously created for a better and secular Santal unity, without religious overtones and the vested interest of a particular group. One Sananton Santal participant is very critical of the local Christian Santals, who in his opinion are “spineless mortals”, guided by the interests of the Church. He claims that:

“Many Santals support this [the Roman script] because they are not free from the control of the church. As soon as they are converted, they go in line with the practice and policy of the church, totally ignoring the religious belief, values, and tradition of the past” (Interview, 2005). Another participant reflects on real motives of the churches that use the Roman alphabet Santali in their services. He questions the ostensible sincerity of the churches that use Santali in order to prove their genuine interest, masking their use of the language to their advantage. He argues that,

Christian churches are using the Santali language in the act of devaluing our people, our tradition, and our ways of life. So, what they are accomplishing is nothing but inferiorization. They don't celebrate our literature, nor our culture in our language. They just use it as a tool to spread propaganda against our religion, our culture, tradition, and our civilization. Besides, what they are learning is not rooted in the lives and living of our people or our ancestors. It is being used rather to take our people away from our tradition and culture. The Roman alphabet and Christianity go hand in hand (Interview, 2005).

Interestingly, many of participants from both groups view the induction of *Ol-Chiki* as a step forward in the process of their decolonization. The *Ol-Chiki* script, they believe, is in tune with the daily lives of the Santals, their world view, and indigenous consciousness. Unfortunately, the Santals in rural Palashpur are torn by this intra-community confrontation, as the research participants' statements have revealed. The Santals of both streams justify their stances in their own ways. However, this war of words is intensifying with no major resolution in sight, as there are no large scale plans, either by the Government or the private sector, to initiate the written form of Santali.

This dormant intra-community crisis in Palashpur has its roots in neighboring India where the majority of the Santals live, and written Santali is as important as oral Santali. *Ol-Chiki* is recognized by the state, ignoring the powerful Christian lobbyists

who consider the longstanding Roman alphabet/Latin the legitimate and most suitable script for Santali. This voice is echoed among the Christian Santals in Palashpur. As one male participant, who claims to be Christian first and then Santal, argues:

In my opinion, had they learned *Santali* in Roman scripts, they wouldn't have failed in English in the SSC Exam. Many do politics with our writing script. Some want Ol-Chiki while others want to write Santali in Bengali rather than in the Roman alphabet. I am not supporting them. Santali cannot be pronounced in Bengali, they are pronounced in Roman (Interview, 2005).

As the Christian Santals are concerned about the loss of their Roman alphabet, so the Sanaton Santals equally denounce the domination of the churches in mobilizing the innocent Christian Santals against *Ol-Chiki*. One *Ol-chiki* supporter, an NGO field worker, expresses his grievances, as follows:

The purpose of using the Roman script in writing is to make Santals civilized by converting them to Christianity. They think we Santals are barbaric, sub-human creatures. They need to be enlightened. What they are doing is not for our sake; it is for their vested interest. They want us to learn the Bible, not the Santali language. As such, in principle, I oppose the idea of using the Roman script. The main purpose is their mission of converting us into Christianity (Interview, 2005).

Interestingly, through interviews and participant observation in the community, I became aware that there are very few Santals in Palashpur who are able to write in *Ol-chiki*. The Santals who are able to write Santali write in the Roman script alone. This is the result of the large resources the Church has invested and the use of the Roman script in Church sponsored schools and outreach programs since the earliest days of the missionaries in this region. In contrast, the Santals who support the *Ol-Chiki* script are an impoverished group lacking in resources, organized efforts, and government support. No

school has been established to impart *Ol-chiki* as the medium of written Santali in this area. However, grievances and frustration against the churches and the wholesale nature of their imposed Roman script in all spheres of Santal life cannot be suppressed as one *Ol-Chiki* supporter in this study claims:

Ol-Chiki is a pure and indigenously invented script and that is why it is more acceptable than the Roman script. It is a product that touches hearts, souls, nature and cognition, and emotion of all who speak the language. There is nothing wrong in accepting Bodding's Roman script. But the way it was imposed and still is being imposed needs to be looked at. The Churches act the way that they are our only saviour. Many Christian Santals speak for the Roman script because the father dictates them to be against *Ol-Chiki*. They really don't know how suitable this is for our language. The Roman script was decided for us by others. It was imposed and did not come from our ancestors. We all know how Urdu was being imposed upon Bengali people by the Pakistanis and how it became an inspiration for creating Bangladesh. Pakistanis also planned to use Urdu script for Bengali. That was not accepted. The Roman script should not be accepted either. Christian Santals need to show some gut (Interview, 2005).

Despite the influential impact of the Church in the lives of the Santals in Palashpur, there is an emerging oppositional voice that challenges the authority of the Church and openly denounces the Roman script. Many participants believe that the "Roman script is imposed from above, like many other colonial policies and practices in the Subcontinent" (Interview, 2005). Some of the participants find it emotionally difficult to discard *Ol-Chiki* and accept the possibility of introducing the Roman script as the broadly based, written script for their mother tongue Santali. As one participant argues:

The difference between the Roman script and *Ol-Chiki* is crystal clear. Roman is foreign whereas *Ol-Chiki* is our own. *Ol-Chiki* is tied to our environment and to our life, land, and living. The symbols are compatible with our pattern of life. We can relate to it more intimately (Interview, 2005).

Many of my participants hold the converts and the Church accountable for the failure of the *Gonobiddalya* (community school) project, which, according to their statements, was proposed to teach the *Ol-chiki* written form of the Santali language. According to some of the participants the project did not succeed because of strong opposition from the Christian groups who are opposed to the use of *Ol-chiki*. As a result, all hopes of teaching Santali in the Santal script were nipped in the bud.

Apart from the oppositional voices, there are also voices of reason. Some of the participants from both groups are making sincere efforts to reconcile and find a common ground in the midst of the tensions, so that a greater movement can be mobilized to implement indigenous Santali language in schools at the primary levels. One of such voice of reason, a Christian male participant, states:

I am personally not against or for the Roman or Ol-chiki alphabet. Ol Chiki is a new invention whereas the Roman is a broadly used international script. Many books have been written in the Roman alphabet, and about 15 to 20 million people can write Santali in Roman letters. From this perspective, using Roman letters is more universal than using Ol-chiki. However, to express solidarity with the idea of indigenesness, Ol-chiki is more acceptable. It was invented by a Santal scholar. His name was Pundit Raghunath Murmu (Interview, 2005).

The Santals in Palashpur, as elsewhere, are at odds with regard to finding a broadly acceptable written script. Despite the fall of the Roman Empire, the influence of the Roman script continues to remain unchecked in many parts of the world. The influence of the Roman script among the Santals in rural Bangladesh is an example of the ever-growing influence of Romanization. Unless there is mutual understanding as well as reconciliation, at the national level, between the rival groups within the Santal community, which at times seems impossible, there is no hope for the Santal

community's linguistic decolonization. Therefore, precariously situated, the Santals require much reflection. They must emerge from this vicious cycle by cleansing their minds of the lies and falsehood. The conflict of *Ol-Chiki* versus Roman script and the failure to resolve the situation it has generated, manifest the continued presence of far-reaching colonial and imperial onslaughts on the rural community in Bangladesh. However, the Santal must find a way to achieve intellectual agency.

Neo-Colonialism in Education: the Santal in Palashpur

The activities behind the mask of the modernizing and civilizing mission of the West and its handmaiden 'evangelism' brought the impact of modern education to the Santals in the pre-independence era. After the emergence of the nation state Bangladesh, the state adopted the modernizing mission in order to achieve homogenization and/or assimilation. However, the participation of two additional agencies in the education of the Santals in Palashpur, namely the NGOs and the Churches, has been "imposing, intruding, and aggressive" (interview, 2005); this has been powered by surreptitious and open operations, with the backing of the West and the state.

Long before western education was introduced among the Santals, there were viable indigenous education systems. Battiste (2002) defines the essence of indigenous education:

Indigenous teachings provide that every child, whether Aboriginal or not, is unique in his or her learning capacities, learning styles, and knowledge bases. Knowledge is not what some possess and others do not; it is a resourceful capacity of being that creates the context and texture of life. Thus, knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by educational institutions, but is a living process to be absorbed and understood (p.15).

Similarly, the Santals had traditional institutions, which were run in line with the “*Guru School*” (Ray, Das, & Basu, 1982), and led by an elder. Education was relevant because it served the needs of the community to survive and to be in harmony with each other and with nature. Most of all, education mirrored and affirmed the distinct spirit and cultural identity of the Santali community. Dei (2000) captures the beauty and essence of community education among indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, as follow:

Education is not constrained by the age segregation of a classroom or the isolation of mother and child in the house. Learning is imparted to the younger generations by elders, such that it is an integrated part of community’s social, spiritual, ancestral, and natural environment(s). Education in this context is intergenerational and part of a holistic, respectful communal view of belongingness and learning (p. 9).

In Bangladesh, however, instead of community education, there is an imposed colonialist education policy for all indigenous peoples, including the Santals in Palashpur. A “one-size fits all” policy of education, in terms of curriculum, has been adopted for both indigenous peoples and mainstream Bangladeshis. Implemented from above, the national curriculum does not incorporate any adivasi elements. Rather, it represents and is actively engaged in mimicry of the British colonial education policy, which was strongly criticized decades ago by Noble Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore:

The education we get does not match the lifestyle of ours, the urge for improvement of our home is not there in our books; our literature does not reflect the aspirations for changing the society where we are destined to live. We do not find the faces of our parents, brothers, sisters, and friends in our education; our day to day life is never mentioned in our books, our environment, including the sky, the world around, the crops, the rivers, etc. is not there; then I get almost sanguine that there is no hope for matching of our life and education. The wall between the two will remain. Our shortcomings of life

can never be overcome by this [English] education. This education is miles apart from the roots of our life (Tagore, 1395 B.E, pp. 569-570).

Like Tagore, Gandhi (1938) also criticized the English education policy in India. He strongly argued that, “the foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us” (p. 61). In Palashpur, a similar scenario of the dominance of the education policy, incorporating the alien language and literature of Bengali, continues to shake the balance and beauty in the lives of the Santal people. For adivasi Santal children, there is a dissonance or “bicultural ambivalence” (Cummins, cited in Dei, 1995) between what they learn at school and their lived experience. Consequently, school drop out rates as well as literacy rates are far below the national average. Santal boys are conditioned to become a day laborers or porters. This is the covert objective of the neo-colonizing education policy, which “legitimizes certain hegemonic and ideological practices, while delegitimizing others” (Dei, Mazzuka, Mclsaac & Zine, 1997, p. 20).

The Santals and other adivasis are absent from the curriculum of the social sciences and history in Bangladesh. They are physically, culturally and politically invisible. When I analyzed the social science and history textbooks of the school curriculum for grade four, I realized that none of the books contain references to the existence of adivasis in Bangladesh. By not mentioning their existence, adivasis are literally denied their physical, social, cultural, as well as spatial existence in the nation state Bangladesh. This lack of representation, on one hand, achieves their statistical extermination; while on the other, it endorses the colonial nature of the nation state’s Constitution that denies the adivasis recognition, their rights, privileges, and history on its soil. Subsuming adivasi existence in the nation state denies their distinct identity and

undermines the nation state's moral obligation to protect the rights and privileges of the minority population.

Thus, a complete disregard for the adivasis is systematically and academically perpetuated and their existence in national history has been obliterated. The Santals are innocent victims of such psychological violence in the classroom (Thiongo, 1986), perpetrated by an exclusionary education policy, which is a crucial institutional structure of the state, in the interest of dominant Bengali nationalism. Evidence of the discriminatory and imposed education policy in Bangladesh is a reminder that colonization does not end with the termination of alien rule and presence; it remains intact in mutated forms, in inherent practices and policies of imposition, marginalization, and discrimination.

The documented lived experiences of the research participants with regard to the imposed language and education policies and practices, reveal that the state backed language and education policies are not only colonial in nature; they have also violated every tenet of the *United Nations' Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*.

The declaration states that:

Indigenous children have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State. All indigenous peoples also have this right and the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Indigenous children living outside their communities have the right to be provided access to education in their own culture and language. States shall take effective measures to provide appropriate resources for these purposes. (PART IV, Article 15, *United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, 1993/94)

In light of the *Draft Declaration*, it is surprising to observe, through the perspectives of the research participants, the aggressive denouncement and violation of indigenous rights and necessities in this remote part of the world. The nature of this marginalization calls into question the homogenizing education policy, rooted in the Bengali-Islamic, nationalistic paradigm and imposed colonial legacy.

The discriminatory education and language policies have suppressed tribal languages, defiled cultures, destroyed indigenes, and inflicted the spirit of humanity and human values. In fact, the policies of education and language have been used and abused as ideological state apparatus that play a role, not in social justice but in social reproduction (See: Althusser, cited in Aronowitz, 2002). The exigency of the situation is further clarified borrowing Gramsci's concept (1971, cited in Giroux, 1981) of cultural hegemony. Gramsci argues that dominant groups use education as cultural hegemony to filter and exclude people from different racial, gender, and class groups. This hegemony contests "those lived experiences that include the texture and rhythm of daily life" (Giroux, cited in Dardar, 1991, p. 33). This is accomplished through what many of the research participants term, the "intentional negligence" (interviews, 2005) of the dominant group manifested in the state's formal and hidden education policy.

In Palashpur the education system is imposed from above, manifesting all phases of the colonial and neocolonial mechanisms. Under these circumstances, the struggle of the Santals to find a space in the education and language landscape is a colonial struggle—a struggle of identity and existence, which deserves immediate attention and a positive resolution, as recommended by the *Draft Declaration* (1993/94).

Colonial Education, Modernization, and the Santal Community in Palashpur

Although the Santal society in Palashpur is commonly seen as anachronistic and outside the sphere of modernity, rapid transitions, internal divisions, and transformation are clearly evident. The changes are emerging from the impact of imposed new knowledge through modern education, Christianization, and NGO-directed educational and development projects in the community. The image of modernization and civilization fabricated through Western education, which flourished with colonization, has alienated the Santals from their roots and their traditional ways of life. The education that has brought cosmopolitan culture to this community has had negative psychological impact on the younger generation in Palashpur. One of the elder participants expresses his frustration in the following manner:

We are not what we used to be in the past. We need to be educated not to forget our past and bring division within ourselves, but to revive our past for a better future. Our young generation has learned to disrespect elders, our values, and social norms. They hate village life. They live in the city and are seen here once in a blue moon (Interview, 2005).

The Western education policy has also brought a new “money economy” based on profit, which was once unknown in this agrarian community. The new infatuation with consumerism, which permeates life in the West, has given rise to a deadly obsession with material gain referred to as “ivory collection” among the educated, new generation of Santals. Money and materialism have become major factors in defining the identities of individuals, instead of the shared interests of the community and its collective survival, with “self-respecting and generous individual living in a small co-operative community” (Gandhi, cited in Dhawan, 2005, p. 147). One participant speaks of the emptiness of consumerism, as a silent witness:

What we see around is not encouraging at all for our community. Our children and grandchildren now go to school, college, and learn new things. They want to be rich through getting college and university degrees and then getting employed. As soon as they get a job, they lose connection with the village. To keep up their status they need to live in cities, need to have a colour TV, VCR, motorcycle, and many other things that I don't even know their names. If this goes on, what is going to happen to our heritage, to our Santali culture? (Interview, 2005).

Apart from the community fragmentation along the lines of religion and the conflict of the “*Ol-chiki* versus the Roman script” Santali writing form, there is a rift in terms of value systems: that indoctrinated through the mechanisms of Western education in Palashpur and the traditional Santal values. Collectivism, which was at the core of the Santal community, is now replaced by individualism that teaches self-centeredness, self-actualization, and competition. The Santals in Palashpur are torn between “two sets of symbols, between technology and rituals, between politics and culture” (Mahapatra, 1986, p. 2). The Santals—who are instinctively proud of their identity, which embodies solidarity, uniqueness as a group, ritualistic and holistic values, and deep respect for their ancestors—have now learned to shun their traditional life-way. The imposed education system is so powerful that it leads some Santals to be ashamed of calling themselves Santals and by their tribal names. This “elitist syndrome”, which is a stark reminder of the common consequences of the colonial, Western educational mission, is consistent in the education system in Palashpur. One participant expresses her apprehension and indignation: “Maybe someday someone will stand out, not as a Santal but as a Babu Santal who will go to the museum to see what religion or rituals their ancestors practiced or the language they spoke” (Interview 2005). The disintegration and depreciation of the Santal identity imply that the passion for materialism and consumerism that pervades the

life of the colonizers also pervades the life of colonized. The Santals in Palashpur today encounter transitions and transformations, from the sovereignty of an isolated village to the complexities of modernism, materialism, bureaucracy, and a money-based economy. The Western mode of education, rooted in the colonial venture, is bringing these inevitable but silent changes to one of the remotest corners of the globe.

Summary

Analyzing, emphasizing, and documenting the inner voices, opinions, and lived experiences of the research participants, this chapter delineates how the imposed policies of education and language act as handmaidens of the assimilationist agenda of the nation state, churches, and NGOs. These policies are destroying vital, indigenous Santal establishments and denying the Santals' rights and privileges, in the remote village of Palashpur, in Bangladesh. The chapter sheds light on the process of the Santal community's devastation, which is insidious in nature. Through the voices of the participants, the chapter unmask the broader scheme of the legacy of colonialism, as manifested in the nexus between Westernization, Christian aggression, and radical Islamist nationalism. This chapter also provides an overview of the historical process of ongoing colonial education and language policies that have diminished, devalued, and exploited the Santal community in Palashpur and the Santals in other parts of Bangladesh.

Chapter Five: Land Grabbing: A Narrative of Colonial Experience of the Indigenous Santals in the Nation State

When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, "Let us pray." We closed our eyes. When we opened them, the tables had been turned: we had the Bible and they had the land.

–Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu (cited in Banerjee 2000, p. 3).

Introduction

Nobel Laureate for peace Desmond Tutu's graphic account of the colonial experience with regard to land issues in Africa underscores the surreptitious, widespread nature of land grabbing in other colonial contexts as well as Bangladesh. It further calls for exigency in addressing the burning issue and critically examining the deadly assaults of colonialist and imperialist policy and practices and their legacy that have been primarily inflicted upon the land of the colonized. The times, tricks, and contexts may be different, however, the mechanism of the colonial legacy manifested in aggressive land alienation or land grabbing of the indigenous Santals that continues unabated at Palashpur is a case in point.

The magnitude of the issue of chronic and aggressive land grabbing in Palashpur and adjoining areas is rampant; it has dispersed and dislocated the once encapsulated Santals and destroyed their social institutions, traditional ways of life, their pristine and serene milieu, mode of production, and above all the biodiversity of the hinterland. The predicament of the indigenous Santals in Palashpur, generated from land grabbing, is not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it epitomizes the material contexts and realities (JanMohammed, 1986) of the ongoing colonial aim of the neo-colonial nation state: to

exploit the land, its resources and peoples; to exert control through assimilation or elimination; to carry out containment and control over “the Other”; and to impose the colonialist legacy of modernism over primitism, materialism over spirituality and individualism over collectivism. In addition there is a deep-rooted, politically committed ultra Islamist nationalism in every sphere of the nation’s life. Islamist nationalism is engaged in “insidious ethnic cleansing”, evident in the wholesale dispossession of indigenous land as well as the decline in the indigenous Santal population in the region.

Unfortunately, governmental rhetoric and action resolutely fail to acknowledge the endemic problem, let alone take measures to prevent the adverse ramifications of this colonial condition. Therefore, the battle of the rural Santals against the premeditated and organized land alienation has multiple fronts where the Santals encounter relentless hostility. On one hand, actual dispossession on the ground is overwhelmingly violent in nature and lacks a constitutional or legal support network and meaningful support from the divided civil society; another frontier is manifested in the discourse that denies such oppressive and inhuman situations exist.

Drawing on the voices of lived experiences of the Santal research participants and outlining their cases in this study, this chapter delineates varied mechanisms that dispossess the Santals in Palashpur from their lands. Land grabbing is conducted by a section of corrupt majority people, and the state is an accessory to this operation. This chapter further examines how the mechanism of land grabbing sustains the colonial legacy and the colonialist and imperialist domination of the nation state.

The Land as a Contested Terrain for the Indigenous Santals in Bangladesh

Land rights disputes and protecting the land and forests constitute fundamental concerns for all indigenous and minority peoples in Bangladesh. Land relates to the formation of indigenous identity, religious practices, and the material base of indigenous cultural and the spiritual activities that nourish and sustain indigenous life and knowledge. For the Santals or *hor hopon* (the true men), the *hor disom* (Santal country) carries deep-seated, emotional implications of collaboration, freedom, collectivism, alternative local knowledge, and cultural autonomy, connecting land and people in oneness.

The quintessence of the profound connection between the Santals and the land, as well as their appreciation of it is often articulated in a Santal villager's saying, "*Noa do hor disom kana*" meaning, "This is Santal country" (Cited in Somer, 1977, p. 57). Therefore, the land, or "terra firma", which is the emotional and physical parameter or abode of Santal country, is inseparable from the Santal people, who call themselves "hor". Conversely, modern Western lifestyles have grown out of an increasing estrangement from the natural world, or the terra firma. The tradition of modern culture places humankind against nature, an attitude that tends to target "Mother Nature" as an enemy that must be defeated. It is in this context that the inseparable union between indigenous culture and land can be understood, and the profound nature of the rootedness of indigenous identity as well as their existence in the land. The nature-culture dichotomy, prevalent in Western thought, is an alien epistemology for indigenous peoples (Dodson, 1998; Ridgeway, 1998). Nature is an inseparable part of the Santal tradition. Various Santal rituals and festivities are celebrated according to the cycle of nature, in

which land or the village is at the centre. The symbolic and real significance of land or village is well defined by Mahapatra (1986), who states: “A Santal village is not merely a location in geography or history; it crystallizes a whole system of ritual structure. It comes into being through the special dispensation of the *Bongas*, and is sanctified by their blessings” (p. 25). Thus, nature, rituals, and the lives of the *Hor hopon* are indivisible parts of the holistic universe, manifested in indigenous Santal consciousness. One cannot exist without the other, and when one is estranged or lost by the intrusion of external forces, the whole society loses its internal and external equilibrium, or more accurately, its “rhythm of daily life”.

The rhythm of daily life “grows out of the close relationship between the activities of man and the cycle of nature” (Calshaw, 1949, 2004, p. 24). Loss of one of the elements ultimately leads to the elimination of “Santalness” and poses challenges for Santal identity. Therefore, the land, known as the nucleus of nature, which sustains and ties rituals and the people together, is paramount in the unique existence and growth of the Santals. The land helps sustain the Santals and their rituals and in the process helps promote and revitalize Santal culture, history, and tradition. Due to the close inherent ties with forests and groves, “Santal festivals and religion rest heavily on seasonal manifestation of nature” (Ray, Das & Basu 1982, p. 72). The Santals, as most indigenous peoples, prior to the onslaught of colonialism, emphasized the use of and mutual dependence on land, rather than its formal possession as property in material terms.

In the past the Santals had collective ownership of the land under the guidance of the village headman, known as the *Manjiharam*. This is in contrast to the possession of paper documents, known as *dalils*, which are largely the acknowledgment and

authentication of the private ownership or title of land in the Western system of property rights. Unfortunately, relying on paper-documents is still unpopular or not taken seriously by many Santals, especially the Santals in Palashpur. Those are the major factors, contributing to the land alienation of the Santals in Palashpur. However, the life of the Santals in Palashpur, as elsewhere, continues to revolve around the land, either working on their own farms or working as day-laborers on them.

Although 90 to 95 percent of the Santals in Palashpur are landless farmers, they have profound bonds with the land. Some of the participants in this study claim that the land is “the treasure trove of natural resources for our survival and the key to eradicate poverty, the most intimate enemy in our society,” (Interview, 2005); they “believe if they are without land, they do not have a soul, purpose in life, or identity” (Unger, 1997, p. 8). Under the circumstances, it is distressing that the Santals in Palashpur see their lands “*hor disom*” fall into the hands of the “*dikus*”, who resort to all means of coercive ploys to evict them from their lands.

Historically, the *dikkus* and the British brought the Santals into the system of the money economy, in which land was commodified and incarnated in material identity. As a result of the deliberate and forced eviction of the Santals from their valuable property, they are losing not only their foothold in the land, but their existence and identity in Bangladesh. One participant, an NGO fieldworker, discusses this loss and its rippled repercussions:

The loss of land has affected us physically, materially, emotionally, culturally, and spiritually. The damages cannot be repaired or replaced by anything. The land was our source of income, our spiritual and cultural sustenance. It was also our prime source of material growth, life, and living. When it is taken away from us, everything is taken away: our future, our past, and our present. The land gave us our culture and our dignity.

The land gave us our belongingness and unity among our people. With the loss of land, we are losing everything, including the joy of living. We are left without an anchor and thus have become homeless in our ancestral homeland (Interview, 2005).

The above excerpt from an interview with a participant embodies the collective voice and echoes of the grievances each of the Santal villagers in Palashpur feels deeply in his or her heart. The participant clarifies the centrality of land in the indigenous Santal identity and their existence in material, metaphorical, and cultural terms. He emphasizes land as a contested site, in which power and politics impose colonial relationships of domination and subordination, Westernization and the reclamation of local identity and indigenusness. The disturbing act of land grabbing and the loss of their rightful ownership of land have caused devastation to the Santals.

For the Santals, the ancestral territories not only provide the economic base for their daily lives, but are intimately bound with their cosmologies and identities as communities and as a people. The landscape that they occupy is permeated with their history, their millennial experience, and it is the home and abode of the *bongas*, the spirits or the departed souls of the ancestors, whose invisible presence explains the functioning of the visible world. The Santal village or *hor disom*, which is an essential part of the larger landscape, is now severely diminished physically, culturally, and ecologically, as a result of the constant invasion of the majority people. Thus, individually and collectively dispossessed of landownership, the Santals are on the brink of elimination physically, culturally, and materially. This concurs with Anay and Williams' (2001) assertion that: "Rights to lands and resources are property rights that are prerequisites for the physical and cultural survival of indigenous communities. It is

essential for the continuation of indigenous societies in their existing forms and individual and collective well being” (p. 53).

A Glimpse of the Colonial Past: The History of Colonizing the Land and its Peoples

Since time immemorial indigenous peoples have been living in forests because of the encroachment on their lands by majority peoples. As such, it was not a deliberate choice on their part to live in the forest. The lived experience of adversity in the jungle, surrounded by wild animals, a hostile environment, hunger, and diseases, such as Malaria, was imposed upon them. This occurred in ancient times, when “with the spread of *Sanskritization*, the *Deva* or *Brahmana* would come down to the land of aborigines and would settle down there” (Choudhauri, 1993, p. 11). A similar scenario is portrayed in the work of Saxena (1999) who argues that, “these adivasis had been forced in the medieval period to seek refuge in forests from fertile lands by more aggressive communities who are now dominant ruling class” (p. 8).

According to Chaudhuri (1993) who conducted extensive research on the migration and dislocation of the Santal in the *Barind* region in Bengal, “the extension of the agricultural economy in the eastern direction after the Gupta period had pushed the Santals farther in the jungles” (p. 11) Therefore, the cultural and territorial, colonial domination of the adivasis of the subcontinent, such as the Santals, is as old as history itself. Not only the Europeans have brought untold miseries to the indigenous peoples, but also other more powerful groups, such as the Muslims invaders and the local Hindus, known as *dikkus*, have colonized them. Indeed, the exploitation of European colonial policies and practices in the subcontinent gave new dimensions to existing

marginalization and brought new challenges to the lives of the traditional peoples, such as the Santals. Present day land alienation of the Santals in Palashpur, and other regions, is symptomatic of the age-old cultural, economic colonization that is rooted in territorial, colonial subjugation by more powerful dominant peoples.

Prior to the East India Company's rule in India, the rights associated with property did not concentrate on a land owner, but were rather dispersed among the peasant cultivators, the zamindars, and rulers who had real interest in the land. The zamindar collected "rent" from the peasantry, and after deducting a share for his own sustenance, he passed the rest on as "revenue". During this time, a zamindar was allowed to sell or transfer only his authority as revenue collector, not the land itself because it did not belong to him.

The general peasantry seemed better off as "the state could only claim tax on cultivated land when the peasant's right on that land was guaranteed" (Ghosh, cited in Barkat, Shafique, Zaman, & Raihan, 2004, p. 22). However, the Santals and other indigenous peoples continued to be dominated and marginalized subjects, no matter who controlled the state or the local administration. The indigenous peoples were systematically denied access to lands that were acquired by the empires, kingdoms, or colonizers. The legacies of these past policies have continued in different forms in the present day, particularly with regard to lands categorized as "forests" or required for state forestry (Lasimbang, 1996) where adivasis traditionally lived.

Until the beginning of the 19th century, more than two-thirds of the land mass of the subcontinent was uncultivated (Singh, 1988). These virgin forests generally comprised of infertile high lands, where the indigenous communities lived. The

relationship that indigenous peoples had with the land had been under threat since the development of the European empires from the 16th century. Under the development theory, masked in Westernization, nature was regarded as a landscape of economic resources rather than cultural and social landscapes (Willems-Braun, cited in Neil, 2004). Nature became an object of “imaginative geography” (Said, 1986) in the process of the socio-political construction of conquest and exploitation, based on political economy. Therefore, when the British colonized India, little thought and empathy was offered to protect and nurture indigenous peoples and their lands. They viewed themselves and the indigenous peoples as the two different systems (modernism versus primitism, metropolitan versus peripheral wilderness) holding conflicting interests, rooted in different epistemological and ontological standpoints.

The arrogance as well as insensitivity expressed in colonizing the land of the indigenous peoples is well exemplified in Lindsey Wiersma’s (2005) statement that, “the Colonizers saw themselves not as dispossessing indigenous peoples but as creating economic use out of wasted land” (p. 1065). Indeed, the colonizers felt justified in the land alienation of the indigenous peoples, following the Lockean doctrine, which states, “They had no rights to land which they did not cultivate.” This myopic *terra nullius* (Cited in Banerjee, 2000) devalued the existence of indigenous peoples as sub-humans and perceived nothing as worthy beyond Western understanding, even the indigenous system of land cultivation.

The Lockean position on land continues to control the land policies and practices of many governments around the world, in relation to indigenous lands. Thus, British presence, from the late 18th century onwards, brought much change to land and forest

usage in the Indian subcontinent. The colonialist, capitalist, and imperialist land policy was masked in commercial interests; the British viewed forests as crown lands, limiting private property rights only to continuously cultivated lands. Even lands managed by the communities were annexed by the government, alienating the people from their common resources. The land as well as nature was turned into property and resources in material terms, discarding the historical, cultural, and existential ties of the forest dwellers. The dislocated indigenous peoples were immediately threatened by this commodification of their lands, which they perceive as *Mother*.

Under Lord Hastings there were a series of devastating failed experiments in leasing and auctioning the right to collect taxes. By the 18th century the British came to believe that land as private property alone could bring about progress and stability. At the same time, the *physiocrats* in France claimed that land was the basis of all wealth (Guha, 1982). Influenced by physiocratic views, Philip Francis, who sat on the Bengali Council, proposed a plan for a “rule of property” for Bengal. He made every possible effort arguing that the public revenue will sink fast along with general produce of the country if the private property is not permanently secured on a solid footing (Metcalf & Metcalf 2002). In fact, the “rule of property” policy intended to reproduce the 18th century Whig notion of a British hereditary, landed aristocracy in Bengal. Thus, behind this vision was an intended replication of English-Bengali gentleman farmers, who would be as enterprising as their English counterparts (Guha, 1982).

Unfortunately, Francis’ policy was misconceived because it did not conform to the social and cultural reality of the native soil. However, the notion of land as the source of all wealth, based on an analysis of agricultural production according to the physiocrats,

found momentum in the introduction of the *Permanent Settlement Act* by Lord Cornwallis in 1793. This act established a "Zamindari"¹⁰ system that conferred control over vast territories, including adivasi territories, to designated feudal lords for the purpose of effective revenue collection for the British. *The Permanent Settlement Act* was a turning point in land control and private ownership, and had devastating impact and enduring consequences on the lives of indigenous peoples in the subcontinent. The act nullified their inherent rights and privileges, along with the communion indigenous peoples had once enjoyed with the lands. By ensuring that zamindars' lands were held in perpetuity, with a fixed tax burden, they became desirable commodities.

The East India Company's policy of auctioning zamindari lands created a market for land, which previously did not exist. Many of the new purchasers of this land were "insiders" Indian officials within the East India Company's government. These bureaucrats had large monetary and administrative advantages in purchasing lands they knew to be under-assessed to maximize their profitability. In addition, their position as officials gave them opportunity to obtain the necessary wealth quickly in order to purchase land through bribery and other unfair methods. The Indian officials could also manipulate the system to sell land that they exclusively preferred.

Historians such as Bernhard Cohn (1959) and others have contended that the *Permanent Settlement Act* led to a commercialization of land, which formerly did not exist in Bengal. As a consequence, they further argued, it led to a change in the social background of the ruling class from "lineages and local chiefs" to "under civil servants and their descendants, and to merchants and bankers". The new landlords were different in their outlook; "often they were absentee landlords" who managed their land through

managers and had little attachment to their land. This created a large chasm in the relationship between the land owners and the marginalized tenants. Under the new land system, the peasantry found themselves reduced to the status of tenants without rights. The zamindar could now sell an entire estate. As initially the demands of the East India Company were unchecked, many zamindars were financially challenged and estates were placed on the market.

Thus, British rule brought a new economy of profit, surplus value, and competition to the tribal areas; it also brought money, government officials, and moneylenders into these areas. Thus began the process of encroachment on adivasi land by outsiders. As a result there were tribal revolts in several parts of eastern India, beginning in the mid-19th century; these revolts forced the administration to recognize the vulnerable position of the tribal peoples and pass laws to protect their lands from outsiders. However, in practice, most of these laws, which became mainly “eyewash of the colonial regime”, were widely disregarded and unscrupulous merchants, corrupt officials, and money-lenders found ways to elude them.

The consolidation of British authority through the land policy brought unprecedented change in the then undivided Barind region, the home of a large number of Santals. Barind comprised of large tracts of land, which currently belong to both India and Bangladesh. The historical phenomenon of land grabbing in this particular context is relevant to the discussion, as the site of this research is situated in this region. Barind was once *the hotbed* (Choudhury, 1993) of the marginalization and resistance of the Santals. As a matter of fact *Barind* was torn apart by a broader colonial scheme to “divide and

rule”; as a result indigenous communities, such as the Santals, suffered further marginalization and territorial crises.

After the imposition of the *Permanent Settlement Act*, the growing pressure for land increased the power of the zamindars, who were “the *de-facto* landowner as well as the master of the tenants” (Barkat, Zaman, & Raihan, 2004, p. 23) and took full advantage of the situation (Choudhuri, 1993). As the price of land significantly grew, there was also a change of attitude among the money lenders, who were now dissatisfied with agricultural products alone, and began to acquire possession of the land itself. Pressures from the zamindars and money lenders and support from the British policy of property protection through legal battles in the courts (Choudhuri, 1993, p. 68) began to wreck havoc on the land of the poor, illiterate Santal. The Santal are those who had actually cleared the inaccessible wild forests of this region and transformed them into cultivatable land through hard labour, love, and the sweat of their brows.

As the population of the Barind region began to grow, following the arrival of new settlers from the neighboring areas, many of the Santals who were the first people to populate and make the area habitable, began to lose their lands through treachery, tricks, and various means of oppression and intimidation (See: Choudhuri, 1993). The current situation of land-grabbing in Palashpur is a continuation of the colonial policy that attached high material value to land as private property, in order to gain control, supremacy, and domination at the cost of “the Other.” This situation can be explained through the “core value” of property theory the British adopted during the periods of colonial and imperial expansion.

The colonial property theory that the British introduced is based on *Deductive Reasoning*, which is a culture-free universal guide for the material and political interests of the empire. It denies the guidance of *Inductive Reasoning* that is based on the localized knowledge (Tanner, 2007). The hegemony and eccentricity in the attitudes and actions of the nation state Bangladesh are inherited from colonial policies that dispersed the indigenous communities, such as the Santals and other indigenous peoples in this region.

The Partition of the Subcontinent, Emergence of a New Nation, Enemy Turned Vested Property Act, Failed Land Reforms, and the Continuation of Colonial Policy

The partition of the subcontinent in 1947 on the basis of religion had devastating impact on the territorial identity, belonging, and marginalized position of the adivasi Santals in Bangladesh. After the prolonged coercive control of British rule over the indigenous peoples, who were identified as criminals, a large civilizing mission was undertaken to show the benevolence of the British Raj. Many laws were initiated to empower and validate indigenous rights, such as land rights and other rights of indigenous peoples in various parts of the subcontinent, including the Barind region. Without raising uproar, many of the laws that were established for the exclusive interests of the indigenous peoples, immediately slipped into the fog of oblivion following the partition of the subcontinent. Therefore, the demise of the British Empire did not result in the demise of colonial rule. Its legacy continued with more adverse ramifications in the Islamist nation state Pakistan. Indigenous communities across the subcontinent were territorially, politically, and culturally torn asunder because of the partition. Indigenous issues that immediately affected the lives of the indigenous peoples, especially the land

issues, were overlooked. Unfortunately, the colonial legacy continues to operate in present day Bangladesh, which emerged as an independent nation after a bloody campaign against the neo-colonial Pakistani Junta. Roy (2004) portrays the marginalization of the adivasis in the new nation state Bangladesh. He states:

The Bangladeshi polity generally has very little “space” for the political aspirations and basic human rights of its indigenous peoples and other minorities. This is also the case with regard to the indigenous peoples’ custom-based land and natural resource rights (p.140).

Bangladesh’s First National Forest Policy, which was instated on July 8, 1979, was not significantly different from colonial policies during the pre-independence periods. This policy was guided by the economic interests of the state, dismissing pluralistic perspectives, and discounting the existentialistic issues of the forest dwellers; it emphasized, as in the Western colonial model, the preservation and “scientific management” of forests and the extraction of forest produce for economic development and ecological balance.

In reality, the Forest Department has become corrupt and has failed to achieve material or ecological prosperity. The Forest Department has further denied “people’s participation” in the management of forest resources in the country (Halim, 1999, p. 86). In addition, indigenous peoples were evicted from their rightful place in the forests and ancestral lands through the abuse of existing laws. This was accomplished through tricks, forgery, and extreme coercion by the Government and a section of the majority people. In a report published in the IWGIA, (The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs 2008-2009), the situation in the Barind region is substantiated. The report states:

According to a survey conducted by the Jatiya Adivasi Parishad (National Indigenous Peoples Council), which was released in Dhaka on 10 May 2008, around 1,983 indigenous families in 10 north-western districts of Bangladesh have lost 1,748 acres of their ancestral land. Of the 1,983 indigenous families, 521 lost their land through forged documents, whereas the Forest Department acquired over 1,185 acres of land belonging to 466 indigenous families in the name of social forestry. In Dinajpur district alone, the Forest Department acquired around 1,182 acres of land from 411 indigenous families (p. 3).

Many policies with colonialist, capitalist, and imperialist operations, imposed through the hegemony (Gramsci, 1971, cited in Howson, & Smith 2008) of the nation state, have had devastating impact on the lives of indigenous peoples in the sub-continent. After liberation in 1972, policies of land reform were instated. However, most of the land reform laws have been limited in the degree of their implementation, mainly due to deeply ingrained, structural prejudices in the society that are reflected in bad governance, vested interests, existing power structures, and corruption, among others (Lasimbang, 1996). Furthermore, the adivasis are systematically excluded in government projects, such as the failed Agrarian Reform (See: Jannuzi & Peach, 1990; Sobhan, 1993) and in the official policy for the distribution of *Khas* land to the landless (Barkat, Zaman, & Raihan, 2004). Instead of becoming beneficiaries, the adivasis are victims of these discriminatory and exclusionary government policies. The following report is an example of the negative impact of these policies:

On 22 June 2005, the houses of 65 indigenous families in Parbatipur, Dinajpur district, were destroyed by order of the government. More than 400 people, including women and children, are now living under the open sky. The villagers, most of them Santals, lost their ancestral homes to the government's "model village project". Government officials, in the company of about 300 Bengalis, announced that the "old" village would be demolished to make way for an Adarsha Gram, a model village (IWGIA, 2006, p. 368).

The most racist act in the history of property rights in Bangladesh is the *Enemy Property Act* of 1965 and its post-independence version, the *Vested Property Act* of 1974 (For more details on its aftermath see, Trivedi, 2007). These acts have illegally and forcefully evicted millions of minorities, especially Hindus, from their ancestral lands, homes, and other forms of property. Established as a “powerful instrument for ethnic cleansing” the impact of this law is catastrophic not only for the minority Hindus, but also for the indigenous Santals, who converted to Hinduism in large numbers in this area (Choudhuri, 1993). By abusing the *Vested Property Act* other Santals, whose religious beliefs and rituals are akin to Hindu religious practices in Bangladesh, were evicted from their lands as well. Many of the Santals in Palashpur have lost their property as a result of the *Vested Property Act*.

Embedded in the colonialist and imperialist mechanism of material domination and corruption, the property rights established by the Bangladesh government are fraught with politics of discrimination, domination, and deprivation. The Fundamental Rights of the Constitution of Bangladesh (2006) states that:

Subject to any restrictions imposed by law, every citizen shall have the right to acquire, hold, transfer, or otherwise dispose of property, and no property shall be compulsorily acquired, nationalized, or requisitioned save by authority of law (Article 42 (1) of Part III, Constitution of Bangladesh, p. 26).

However, new clauses were introduced in the proclamation (Order No. 1) of 1977. One of those clauses, Clause 2, states:

A law made under Clause (1) shall provide for the acquisition, nationalization, or requisition with compensation and shall either fix the amount of compensation or specify the principles on which, and the manner in which, the compensation is to

be assessed and paid; but no such law shall be called in question in any court on the ground that any provision in respect of such compensation is not adequate.

The constitutional clauses of 1977 are problematic; they are rooted in the notion of “Governmentality” (Foucault, cited in Banerjee, 2000) as they establish a neo-colonial mechanism of state control, under the pretext of “save by the authority of law”. In addition, the qualifications to the right to property disqualify it from the broader perspective of personal freedom, equity, and justice. The Constitution of Bangladesh is a “cut and paste” version of the Pakistani and Indian constitutions that retain many of the colonial policies and practices, depriving adivasis of their fair share of land rights and forest resources in their regions. However, the Constitution of Bangladesh, in the name of an officially homogeneous country, does not mention provisions for minority or adivasi land rights, as articulated in the constitutions of India and Pakistan (Banglapedia, 2006).

Land rights related to religious minority and indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, are ignored in government and public policies. Thus, there is a total disregard for the declaration of the ILO (International Labor Organization) Convention, which states that:

International law now accepts that indigenous peoples enjoy collective rights: to ownership, control and management of their lands and territories; to exercise of their customary laws; to represent themselves through their own representative institutions. It is also recognized that laws, policies and “development” should not be imposed on them without their prior and informed consent (Colchester, cited in Ulloa, 2003, p. 3).

Unfortunately, the ILO’s (International Labor Organization) declaration has been discarded in the name of nation building. The denial of adivasi property rights and their customary laws denies their inherent rights of ownership, causing landlessness. Among

the adivasis across Bangladesh, the adivasis' customary laws have not traditionally required the type of documentation that is recognized by statutory law. In the adivasi communities, personal family ownership and communal land ownership have always been entrusted to local chiefs and village leaders. Therefore, the adivasis' claims to lands have been vulnerable to modern land laws, rooted in a Euro-centric, colonial-imperial legal system. In the name of national interests, the land law represents an ongoing colonial desire to exploit the land, its resources, and peoples. This law paves the way for unscrupulous administrative officials and the more powerful landed elite to exploit the illiterate, simple-minded, and vulnerable Santals. A large portion of Santal land has been appropriated, leaving many Santals locked in bitter and ultimately futile land disputes with unscrupulous, dishonest, politically powerful land-grabbers. (Kamal, in the daily *Bhorer Kagoj*, August 28, 2007) Thus, the gaps between the International and Local Land Rights of the nation state sustain the stronghold of colonialism's *Vested Property Rights*.

In mainstream discourse, adivasis, such as the Santals, are portrayed as outsiders. By denying their history in the region, the Santals are labeled as anachronistic and external to the realm of modernity and progress. This trend of vilification, portraying the existence of the Santals as frozen in the present, denies contribution of the Santals to the anticolonial struggle and their hard labour that turned the region into inhabitable land. It obliterates the undivided sub-continental land, where the Santals had rights to settle, unhindered by the political boundaries erected in 1947. These political boundaries, which were erected based on a notion of the nation as an imagined community, manifested through the birth of India and Pakistan, and later Bangladesh. Therefore, history must be (re)examined before denying the Santals their adivasi status.

History did not begin with the emergence of the nation states in 1947, in the aftermath of the colonial policy of divide and rule. The Santals are one of the earliest inhabitants of the subcontinent and in Barind; they were the first settlers before the Muslims, who are currently an overwhelming majority, following them after the land was cleared. In this context, Choudhuri (1993) reports that the “Santals came to Barind after 1871 in large numbers”, and “between 1881 and 1890 nearly 20 thousand Santals from the Santal Parganas and 16 thousand Mohammedans from Murshidabad migrated in the district” (p. 62). In national discourse, the Muslims are portrayed as the sons and daughters of the soil, while the Santals are denied their adivasi status. Until and unless the land and property rights of the adivasis are established, the rightful place of the Santals in national discourse will remain unresolved as a contested issue.

Land Grabbing in Palashpur

Various vicious mechanisms of onslaughts, such as forging documents, forcing eviction, filing false cases, hurling verbal threats, physical violence, turning the Santal land into a vested property, entrapping the Santals through money lending, and various other means of coercions and deception operate to alienate the Santals from their ancestral property, agricultural land, and their sacred burial grounds. The perpetrators engaged in this ruthless act are “a network of vested parasitic groups comprised of local influentials—rural *tauts*, and *matbars*, dishonest politicians and governmental officials” (Barkat, Zaman, & Raihan 2004 p. xxiii). In Santal terms, they are all *dikkus* of the contemporary world, representing the more powerful and resourceful usurpers who, since time immemorial, have been denying the Santals’ territorial identity. Thus the successors

of the “Great Tradition” relentlessly search for the “promised land” (Mahapatra, 1986, p. 24) that all Santals cherish. The issue of land grabbing in Palashpur manifests as the historical process and legacy of age-old marginalization and colonization. In the following sections, four case studies are presented in order to capture scenarios of land grabbing and the Santals’ vulnerability as well as resistance.

Case Study One

The falling of a sacred burial ground into the hands of outsiders

In Palashpur there is a burial ground for the Santal community. This place is considered sacred and essential to final rites by all members of the Santal community. As in other communities, the burial ground is religiously, culturally, and emotionally close to the Santals’ hearts, as their ancestors have been buried or cremated there since time immemorial. In 2004, the local Santals found themselves in the midst of a precarious situation when some local powerful Muslims took hold of the place and claimed that the burial ground belonged to them. They managed to produce a document of ownership of the land.

When the Muslims took hold of the land by force, they began to oppose the burial of Santals in this location. However, this was the only place in the area the Santals knew of to bury or cremate the dead. The local Santals were furious but decided to maintain their burial / cremation rights on this burial ground. The possible loss of their heritage site shocked the community beyond consolation. The dispossession of agricultural and domestic homesteads was common experience for them. However, they could never have imagined that their burial ground would slip from their hands and be turned into

agricultural land by the Muslims. The perpetrator Muslims are outsiders, who actually came from the other side of the border.

Shocked, angered, and upset by the event, the Santals went to the local Chairman and the local member of *Union Parishad*. They demanded an explanation from the local chairman and what he was doing on their behalf. The Chairman did nothing. He tried to placate the Santals saying, “You Santals are my country brothers, while the others who took over the land are also my country brothers. My hands are tied to go against you or them.” The Santals then turned to the local union member who, in a similar fashion, disappointed the Santals. Finding no real friends in this critical time, the Santals continued to search for an individual who could help them restore their sacred land. Soon they found a number of sympathetic Muslims, who advised them to write a petition to the Deputy Commissioner (DC). They also advised the Santals to have the petition signed by the local union member.

It took the Santals a long time to meet the local member to obtain his signature on the petition. When the member finally saw the petition, he became furious. He asked why they were writing to the DC instead of the executive officer of the *Upazila*, the TNO. The Santals replied that it was their collective decision not that of member. They further told him that they were doing what they felt was right for the local Santal community. They reminded the member that he was obligated to sign, not ask questions. The member became furious and refused to sign the petition. After being turned down by the member, the Santals returned to the benevolent Muslims who had suggested the petition and reported on their interaction with the local member.

The Muslim friends then advised the Santals to submit the petition to the DC office as soon as possible. Without further delay the Santals went to the DC office to submit the petition. The petition was handed to the peon of the DC office, who asked them to wait outside on the porch for ten minutes. After ten minutes the peon told them that a few officers would come to the Santal village to investigate the matter in a few days. As promised, a team comprised of the DC and few officers came to Palashpur for an enquiry. The DC and his officers confirmed the situation that was presented in the petition. The DC talked to the Muslim land grabbers and gave them three days to evict the property, with their temporary houses. He cautioned them that they could not stay more than 72 hours.

The events that followed deserve special attention and scrutiny. While the DC ordered the land grabbers to leave the property, he also asked the Santals if they had records of ownership for the burial ground. Since the Santals are illiterate people and they have no records of their own property, they were unable to produce the record of the burial ground. When the DC asked to see the ownership record, the *Manjiharam* instructed a few young Santal men to dig up the bones of their buried ancestors and made an emotional plea that those were their records of the ownership for the sacred place. The *Manjhi haram* claimed that the bones were an authentication of their ownership of the burial ground. Overwhelmed by the Santals' emotions, the DC keenly observed everything and pronounced his verbal verdict that the property belonged to the Santal community of this area; he also ordered the demolition of the illegally erected structures of the land grabbers. The DC advised the Santals to contact him directly if the land grabbers did not comply with his order.

Ten days after the departure of the DC the Muslims structures were still standing and they had not moved. The local Santal leaders then returned to the DC and informed him that the land grabbers were still in the possession of the land and their structures were intact. The DC passed the issue on to the local TNO and the situation deteriorated. The Santals waited seven long months and no action was taken against the land grabbers. The local officials delayed their response to the DC's order in order to obtain bribes from the perpetrators. The aggrieved Santals then turned to the Circle Officer (CO) at the police station and further pursued a resolution to the matter. No action was taken on their behalf.

One day the son of the *Manjhi haram*, the village head, became impatient and went to the CO office and where he spoke with the CO in English. The CO was furious and attempted to kick him out of the office, telling him never to bother him in this regard. The semi-educated, Santal Youngman retorted that the office was not the CO's and belonged to the public; like everyone else, the Santals had every right to be there. He further reminded the CO that he must, as a public servant, work for the public, including the Santals. He argued with the Circle Officer about the legitimacy of the Santals' demands and their equal rights as members of the public in the country. The headman's son further asked the CO to issue an order immediately or provide a written explanation why he would not. The CO then locked his office and left with an excuse, to avoid the Santal Youngman.

Four days after the headman's son met the CO, he returned to the office. There the office peon demanded a 20 rupee bribe from the Youngman for the order. The Youngman replied, "I'll give you 20 rupees extra if you hand in the paper." The peon

said that the order had been sent to the TNO. Verifying that the document had actually been sent with official records, the headman's son paid the peon and left. The Youngman returned to the village with the good news. The land grabbers immediately demolished their structures and left. The government officials, the local OC from the police station, the magistrate, and other officers from the Upazilla came to verify that the structures were properly demolished and the grave occupiers had evicted the property.

Although the land-grabbers have left the property, the case is still pending. The perpetrators were ousted through an executive order from the DC office. However, the perpetrators obtained the illegal documents from the land office. This kind of case will continue for an indefinite period of time before resolution. The land grabbers are politically and financially powerful. Conversely, the local Santals are day-laborers, lacking political, administrative, or financial support. Their lives are spent in making both ends meet. They are no match for the land-grabbers.

Nonetheless, everything depends on the court's decision. Unfortunately, the local Santals have no faith in the justice system. They believe the court is corrupt and will take the side of the more resourceful land grabbers, because of the "unholy alliance between them" (Barkat, Zaman, & Raihan, 2004, p. xxiii). The Santals believe that the land grabbers are powerful and have many resources. Therefore, it is only a matter of time before they lose the burial ground. As a result, the Santals in this area have no peace of mind. Every Santal in Palashpur believes deep in their heart that the courts cannot solve their problems. They just complicate the situation and create corruption.

Fortunately, to date, there has been little violence surrounding the burial ground. The Santals are acting peacefully and not responding to the provocations of the Muslims.

It is reported that these Muslims are searching for excuses to attack the Santals. The desperate and temporarily evicted invaders attempt to resort to violence while the instinctively peace-loving Santals are demonstrating restraint and reason. If the Santals attempt to fight back, physical aggression will definitely occur. The Santals reported that they are unhurt, because they have not responded to the aggression. For example, when the Muslims frequently resort to verbal abuse, the Santals bow their heads and leave the place immediately without a word.

This case study illustrates how ruthless, aggressive, organized, and powerful the land grabbers in Palashpur are. This case is also symptomatic of the prevailing situation across Bangladesh, where minority and indigenous peoples face forced and illegal eviction from their ancestral properties and sacred heritage sites. The organized land grabbers are endowed with immense power, shrewdness, privilege, and the necessary resources to take advantage of the silent support of the ruling parties, nationalist-Islamist forces at all levels of the government and civil society. They are so powerful that they are able to achieve their goals and evade the law, order, and justice. They are in fact serving for the elimination of the minority and indigenous peoples through silent ethnocide and acquiring material benefits as well.

Case study two

Trust is an enemy: A Santal is not allowed to own land. This case study occurred in 1992 when the BNP was in power. Bidhu Soren of Palashpur, an illiterate Santal, began to work on the agricultural farm of a local Muslim land owner, named Mohammed Kalimullah. Bidhu worked elsewhere in his spare time in order to make extra money.

Bidhu himself owned a few bighas of land as well. While working on the field one day, Bidhu was approached by Kalimullah, who asked if he had submitted his *Khajna* (property tax) for the year. Kalimullah further mentioned that if Bidhu had not paid yet, then he could pay on his behalf when he goes to town.

Bidhu had never paid the property tax himself. Someone had always helped him. Therefore, when Kalimullah offered to submit his tax money after going to the land office, Bidhu was touched. He at once trusted the smiling and seemingly modest Kalimullah. Accordingly, Kalimullah asked Bidhu for his *dalilnama* (title deed) to take with him. Bidhu gave Kalimullah the *dalilnama* without hesitation. The *dalilnama* would allow Kalimullah and the land office to finalize the details of his plot. Bidhu and Kalimullah reached an agreement that Kalimullah would pay Bidhu's tax money from his own pocket and Bidhu would return the debt through work on his field for a certain period of time. Everything seemed okay to Bidhu, when three days later his title deed was returned.

Within a few months, Kalimullah forcefully took over a portion of Bidhu's land and built a fence around it. Bidhu Soren was dismayed. Kalimullah was revealed as aggressive, insolent, harsh, and merciless. Many advised Bidhu to file a case against Kalimullah, while others discouraged him from acquiring further troubles. A *shalishi* (a hearing led by the local elites) was held in which it was proven that Bidhu Soren borrowed a large sum of money from Kalimullah in order to pay his debt and had pawned his title deed. In the *shalishi*, which was merely a staged drama, everyone took Kalimullah's side. Therefore, the land grabbing was formally justified. Bidhu, an

illiterate minoritized Santal, found no supports, nor means to pursue the case further and he lost his land.

Case Study Three

When Friendship Is a Mask, Owning Land Becomes a Curse. Jitu Hashda belongs to an affluent Santal family. The family has bighas of landed property. Jitu associates with local Muslim influentials that appear to be his friends and well-wishers. Like many Santals, Jitu has a drinking problem. In 2002 Jitu was charged with rape. This was a false charge, filed against him by Dhauti, a poor Santal girl, whose family was forced by some local Muslim conspirators to file the charge. The law enforcement officers searched for Jitu to arrest him. To avoid arrest Jitu went into hiding. While in hiding, Jitu attempted to reach a settlement with an officer from the Law Enforcement Department and the victim's family, with the help of a few of his Muslim friends.

Jitu's family provided a large sum of money and he also borrowed money from his close relatives for the purpose of the settlement. However, the harassments did not end there. Jitu required more money, which he borrowed from his Muslim friends, who were secretly involved in the conspiracy against him. Jitu accumulated a large amount of debt, to the extent that he mortgaged his property. In this manner Jitu Hashda lost his land to his unscrupulous Muslim friends and he has become a day labourer. Some members of his family have left Palashpur for India.

Case Study Four

Fighting for Land is a Sacred Duty Pran Murmu is well off among the Santals in the village. He does not wage labour on the farms of others. He has a great deal of land property. His father left him *bighas* of land property when he died. However, most of Pran's land property is disputed because he does not have documents to validate his permanent ownership of the lands. He has been fighting for his lands for decades. The dispute began in the 1950s, when his father was still alive. His father had acquired the land with a verbal agreement and physical labour from the then zamindar, and he had no permanent title deeds. Before 1947 his father did not encounter difficulties. When Pakistan was formed and people began to migrate to the area from the other side of the boarder, the situation became problematic.

Pran has a number of cases pending in the courts. In the past, he lost most of the cases he filed, which made him desperate to acquire permanent ownership of the rest of his lands. To this end he has spent large sums of money. However, the ownership of most of his land property continues to be disputed. Pran is frustrated, sick and tired due to the material, physical, and psychological cost of dealing with these issues on a daily basis. In search of relief from this misery, Pran turned to the local Christian church and eventually became a convert. However, his struggle continues unabated.

In 2003 Pran lost a case to a local Muslim, who had sent a group of mercenaries to scare him in order to prevent him from attending the court hearing. The mercenaries threatened to kill him if appeared at the final hearing. Due to his absence, the verdict went against him. In addition, Pran often receives threats from his opponents that the female members of his family will be raped or kidnapped if he pursues the cases. Under

such constant pressures, Pran sometimes considers giving up his efforts and leaving the country. That is what his opponents actually want in order to grab his land. However, Pran's inner drive to continue the struggle is generated from his moral and ethical obligation to protect the land he inherited from his ancestors and keep their memory alive. Pran is energized by the sacred duty of protecting the land. Now, the question is how long he can continue to fight as his opponents, the politics of discrimination, the courts, the administration, and, above all, the constitution are all united against him.

Implications of Land Alienation for the Santals in Palashpur

Land alienation has had devastating impact on the lives of the Santals in Palashpur. Land alienation caused through land grabbing has robbed the indigenous Santals of their physical, cultural, material, and spiritual survival and distinctiveness. It has completely dispersed the once encapsulated Santals and has dismantled the traditional institutions that sustain their collective and individual spirit and consciousness. This consciousness grew from the memory and myth of the "Great Tradition", a guiding force of "their peoplehood and shared fate" (Mahapatra, 1986. p. 2). Land alienation is a fatal blow to this consciousness as the loss of land deprives the Santals of the practices, ceremonies, and rituals that reinforced and renewed this consciousness.

Disenfranchised from their land, alienated from the cycle of natural reciprocity, the Santals have been transformed into commodity and they have become dependent on their usurpers. The Santals have been separated from the lands they inherited from their ancestors, where their ancestors are buried, where their ceremonies and rituals were once performed, where they pursued their livelihood, their sense of localized knowledge and skills. The Santals now have lost their sense of belonging, their physical and material

security, and their inherent joy of living. Overwhelmingly disturbed, dispersed, and frustrated, they have lost confidence in the law, justice, and administration of the nation state and have been leaving Palashpur in large numbers. Many of the Santals have reportedly left the country for India. Others are turning to the alternative alien support systems provided by the NGOs and the Christian Churches.

The devastation caused as a result of land alienation has pauperized the Santals in Palashpur to such an extent that most of them have now become marginal day laborers and share-croppers on the land that once belonged to them. Due to the seasonal nature of these occupations and the low wages, the Santals live from hand to mouth and remain unemployed for a significant portion of the year. As a result, there is evidence of chronic impoverishment, hunger, and associated maladies that engulf every household. One of the research participants, a landless Santal Palashpur, describes his helpless situation in the following lines:

If you have control over your land, you have control over your life because land is our life, our means of cultural and material survival. Now, the *dikus* control our land and our life. As a result, they have our land while we have their miseries and poverty (Interview, 2005).

The link between landlessness and poverty is evident. The ownership of land not only provided the Santals group solidarity, it was the means of their survival, sustenance, and economic security as their mode of production was land based. The Santal community in Palashpur, as elsewhere, was highly dependent on their natural resource base for survival. Therefore, they had a much stronger relationship with the land than the majority. When they lost their land, the consequences were severe. The loss of land has

led to a sense of powerlessness and alienation within themselves. Land alienation has undermined the social capital of the Santal community. This is evident in the powerful influence of the external forces in Palashpur. The major decisions revolving around the lives of the Santals in Palashpur are no longer made by the community; they are pre-determined and prescribed by the Churches and NGOs, and come with conditions.

Land grabbing in Palashpur by the rich and powerful and the government's silent support reveal autocratic attempts to assert state power over marginalized 'others' and the landscape that nourishes their distinctive culture and associated rituals. The issue of power contestation indicates a colonial relationship in which the colonizers, namely the majority Bengali land grabbers under the direct and indirect patronage of the state, impose territorial, cultural, material, and physical domination over the colonized others, namely the Santals. Thus, land grabbing, as an overt neo-colonial project, is dispossessing traditional Santal people of their ancestral lands, and, in the process, is destroying their self-sufficiency and economic, cultural, and traditional autonomy.

The issue of the inherent belonging of the Santals to the land in Palashpur, and elsewhere, puts pressure on the need for official identification and constitutional recognition of the Santals as indigenous people in Bangladesh. There is a surreptitious ploy to deny their identity as indigenous people in Bangladesh, through uprooting or territorially alienating them. This insidious act is expressed in the voice of a participant, who states that,

If our customary law were respected, the Santals were given protection by the law to grant land ownership, many so called mainstream people will go landless. If the Santals were given adivasi status, many mainstream people, who claim to be the real people of this region, will feel the heat of being outsiders. The government is not constitutionally

granting our adivasi status because by making us Bangladeshi, they can exploit us, oppress us, make us landless and thus cover up their vicious actions (Interview, 2005).

The most subtle and devastating impact of land alienation manifests in the appropriation of space and history. By appropriating space, which is a site for knowledge production, the neo-colonizers put an end to the resources that produce and sustain the empirical knowledge (Dei, 2002) of the indigenous Santal community. While dispossessing peoples of their sacred and cultural sites, such as the burial ground in Palashpur, the past is being remolded and rewritten. The past that “reflects the history, customs, cultural practices, ideas, and values handed down from one generation to the next generation” (Dei, 2002, p. 12) is being erased in order to exact the cultural imperialism of neo-colonialism.

To summarize this section, land alienation has three crucial implications: The first is a reminder of colonialism’s physical and material misappropriation of the lands it occupies in order to instill the majority alien culture. It thus characterizes, as mentioned elsewhere, a trend that cultural colonization is not simply a discursive act but is an attack on cultural space in all senses of the word. The second is the contestation of land and the state manifested in conquest, containment, dominance of civilization over primitism. Third, colonialism introduced a new concept of land as property—private property. The new policy generated a conflict between the collectivist Santal society, who value land as a Saviour to be shared and treasured, as oppose to the capitalist and individualist view of nature that it is to be plundered for material gains. The crisis in Palashpur is captured by Khajan, a key adivasi spokesman in the campaign against the *Narmada Dam Project* in India (cited in Baviskar, 2005):

God made the earth and the forest; then He made us, adivasis, to live upon the earth. Ever since we have come out of our mother's womb, we have lived here. Generation upon generation of our ancestors lived and died here. We are born of the earth and we bring forth grain from it. Governments live in cities and live on our grain. We live in the forest and we keep it alive. Governments and politicians come and go but we have never changed; we have been here from the beginning. The government cannot create the earth or the forest; then how can it take it away from us (p. 5109).

Conclusion

The documented emerging voices, narratives, and case studies of the Santals in Palashpur assist in the examination and reexamination of the ongoing colonial condition, emerging from various insidious mechanisms engaged in land grabbing. The endemic land grabbing that results in chronic landlessness among the Santals has threatened their existence and caused cultural and material vulnerability and deep seated systemic discrimination. The acts of marginalization, injustice, and brutality of the state reveal insights into the ways in which culture is devalued through the appropriation of the lands that belong to the culturally "Others."

Land rights are not just an issue of material belonging; they are connected to the spiritual, social, and cultural existence of the Santals with their distinct identity. Therefore, securing land rights would be a process of recovering or revitalizing the Santal history and tradition, which is tied to the indigenous Santals' recovery of self and solidarity. By controlling land the nation state can hasten the assimilation or elimination of the indigenous groups and in the process exclude them from human development in the real sense.

In the name of the assimilationist agenda acute landlessness is occurring in Palashpur and elsewhere. Landlessness is the major cause of the cultural, physical, and

spiritual extinction of the indigenous groups in Bangladesh. This phenomenon emphasizes the urgency of the intrinsic and sublime integrity of the land. As long as the individual or the community has power over land, their system, identity and culture survive. Without land the Santal culture loses its life-support and is destined to become extinct. With landlessness, the number of Santals is decreasing. Clearly, without ownership of land, they are left without an “anchor” to sustain their physical, cultural, and spiritual rootedness and material security.

The struggle of the Santal for land is more than restoring the land; it is a struggle for restoring rituals and reinstating the *hor hopon*'s fight for symbols, rights, and culture. It is an anticolonial struggle. It embodies Escoba's argument, which states, “It is above all a struggle over symbols and meanings, a cultural struggle” (cited in Banerjee 2000, p. 23). Awareness of the Santals immediate environment based on their rituals will be enlightening experience for those who aim to devalue it. A critical gaze at the appropriation of Santal land provides a powerful lens for understanding the neo-colonial or re-colonial situation in Bangladesh. This neo-colonial situation, manifested in the “integration” or “assimilation” process, is a subversion of the Santals' traditional culture, languages, beliefs, and values, replacing them with the exploitative, discriminative, and consumerist values of mainstream society influenced by the Western world. The vicious act of land alienation expedites the process of integration, assimilation or elimination.

To separate the past from the present is to relegate colonial oppression to the past; in the process past oppression is used to cover up its present ramifications. In light of the case studies, participant narratives, and the historical analysis it becomes obvious that the nature and the magnitude of the present day oppression and struggles of the Santals in

Palashpur, and elsewhere, are more aggressive and insidious than ever before. Indeed, the struggle is ongoing and its ramifications are real. Therefore, the battle for land is an anti-colonial struggle in the present, not a struggle frozen in the past. By denying the Santals' land rights, the government is legitimizing the de-legitimized ploy of undermining and uprooting indigenous knowledge and the existence and identity of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. The way the life of the indigenous peoples is threatened, epitomizes and refreshes the memory of colonial rule (or worse).

Finally, the site of this research demonstrates land alienation caused by a more aggressive group within the parameter of the nation state, reaffirming how the nation state acts as an agent to serve the legacy of colonialism. Internal colonialism is often perceived as imposing and dominating in economic terms, rather than the alien control of territory. The land alienation and its ramifications in the Santals' lives in Palashpur offer an impetus to re-theorize and re-emphasize the territoriality associated with internal colonialism. This issue demands immediate attention and resolution.

Summary

In light of historical contexts, theoretical perspectives and based on the voices, narrative and case studies of participants at Palashpur, this Chapter documents and examines the symbolic and real significance of land in the lives of indigenous Santals living in the rural setting. This chapter further portrays how land is commodified under colonial rule and has disturbed the belongingness of the ritualistic nature-loving-indigenous Santal community. This chapter also sheds light on brutal mechanisms of land grabbing cases in the rural Bangladesh and helps make critical gaze at those practices that

sustain the continuation of colonial legacy and colonialist and imperialist domination of the nation state. Finally, this chapter analyzes the material, cultural and spiritual ramifications involving land alienation resulting from land grabbing.

Chapter Six: The Invisible Agenda: Civilizing Mission Or Missionizing Civilization

Thousand years back we did possess a civilization, which could have challenged the world civilizations. You should be proud of that ancient civilization.

–Jaipal Singh Cited in Mahapatra (1986, p. 8).

Introduction

This chapter explores the cultural and religious imperialism of evangelization, which is masked under the civilizing mission, among the Santals in rural Bangladesh. The eco-friendly beliefs, wisdom, and practices of the Santals, manifested in their unique local customs, indigenous religion, and rituals, can serve as a powerful lesson in terms of cross-cultural environmental scholarship (See: Raj & Madhok, 2007) for the so called civilized world. However, the once encapsulated Santal community in Palashpur is currently negotiating an unforeseen and irreconcilable internal chasm and external invasion as a result of imposed cultural and religious imperialism. The Santal religion, known as *Sarna*, which is at the heart of the indigenous texture of life, spirituality, and identity, is at stake. The act of cultural invasion is conducted through imposed evangelization under the guise of the civilizing mission and assimilationist, turned eliminationist, agenda of the radical Islamist nation state.

At the outset of this chapter, it is essential to clarify the application of the terms “mission” and/or “evangelism”, in order to avoid conceptual confusion. Some Christians and churches perceive and apply the terms “mission” and “evangelism”, although related, differently; for others the two are virtually identical in meaning, structure, and content. In this study both terms are used synonymously in order to imply the broader notion of Christianization, which is understood as a mission and evangelism in unity. The process

of Christianization began as a handmaiden of colonization under the guise of the civilizing mission, during the British colonial era. Christianization continues to be aggressively active, with large Western funds and a unique version of the development agenda in the rural community of Palashpur.

The condition in Palashpur concurs with Nkrumah's (1965) view, who contends that "the most insidious method of the neo-colonialist is evangelism" (p. 247). In the context of this ongoing, intense neo-colonial mission, this chapter documents the lived experiences of the participants, through their voices and case studies. It examines the nature and ramifications of the nexus between evangelized cultural imperialism and the nation state's brutality in the lives of the Santals in Palashpur, in particular, and the Santals elsewhere. The evangelization of the indigenous peoples reveals a disturbing facet of centuries of oppression and pressures of assimilation that the Santals encountered through the processes of *Sanskritization and Islamization* by the Hindus and the Muslims. In fact, the assimilative pressures and encroachment of the *dikkus* (See" Culshaw, 1949, 2004 and Mahapatra, 1986) have robbed many aspects of the Santals' indigenous culture that is inherently rooted in their religion and rituals.

The Christian missions are taking advantage of the Santals' vulnerability, caused by the local and national *dikkus* and have been adding to of their helplessness and marginalization. Indeed, the missionaries are aggressive in mass conversions and show little sensitivity and respect for the transition and transformation, the psychic and social upheaval the converts negotiate and also create in this rural community.

The Santal Religion, the Core of the Santal Culture, and the Ongoing Challenges

Despite the portrayal of the Santals and their religious belief as heathen, benighted, pagan, animist, barbaric, superstitious, devil worshipping, and many other derogatory terms in colonial and missionological discourse, the Santals have a separate but distinct religion and it is called "*Sarna*." In the colonial past the Santals were regarded as an untouchable caste, rather than an ethnic group, within the hierarchical Hindu society under the oppressive *Brahmanical* influence. In the present day, the Indian Constitution now treats the Santal religion as separate one (A Portal of Santals, 2009). Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, in line with colonial past, the Santals are known as tribal, animist, and minoritized, and their adivasi status is unrecognised by the constitution.

Considering the contested and negotiated religious identity of the Santals, it is time to recognize that Santal religion is no way inferior to other mainstream religions. Like most professed civilized denominational religions, the Santals have a "Creation Narrative" (See Hembrom, 1996), which embodies the theological, mythological, anthropological, and historical base of their religion. It is not an old wives' tale comprised of superstition, folklore, or unverified claims with exaggerated fictional details. On the contrary, the Santal "Creation Narrative" is a manifestation of the in-depth understanding, wisdom, spirituality, and sense of divinity of the civilized Santal tradition. Hembrom (1996) elaborates on this point:

The creation tradition also serves as historiography to trace the sociological history of the people anchoring their history right in the creation of the world.... [T]he creation of the world and the foundation of the clans then it is led up to the founding of the village up do date by leading to the birth of the children in the particular family with which the villagers are at the moment concerned. Thus the creation narratives of the Santals prefaces their ethnic history to mark them as a distinct people, just as the Genesis creation

narratives have been considered as prefacing the history of Israel. Besides, the Santal creation narrative has etiological motif also, in its own way, it explains why do man and woman have natural attraction towards one another, why do they want to live in pair, why does earthquake take place, etc. (p. 126).

Therefore, the aggression of evangelizing a civilized people like the Santals, under the pretext of a civilizing mission, raises questions about the colonial nature of the power, political economy, and culture of evangelization and its cultural and religious intolerance towards religiously and culturally ‘others’. In fact, the Santal religion is a living religion that has survived for a longer period of time than most other religions, including Christianity that claims to be the founder of civilization. In the context of cultural imperialism and the missionological reality associated with Christianity, *Sarna*, the religion of the Santal, is more egalitarian, respectful, spiritual, holistic, and reflective and embodies more human values. One participant expresses his grievance towards Christian evangelism, sending a powerful message:

They always come to convert us because they believe we have no religion; we are uncivilized. But we have our religion; albeit much superior than theirs. We don’t try to convert them. That’s not our way. We respect everyone. On the contrary, they don’t respect us. They spread propaganda against us in the Church and spread it around. Can you call it a civilized religious practice? (Interview, 2005)

The Santal religion, in fact, is the hallmark of ‘grudge-free’ collective-living “*hor*” (man), with ecological virtues and moral behaviors in harmony with nature. The consciousness of such soulful living is at the core of the indigenous Santals’ tribal depth, which is tied to their traditional mythology and rituals. In addition, “like all other human

societies, the religion in the Santal society is intimately connected with every facets of life” (cited in Ray, Das, & Basu, 1982, p. 43).

As many indigenous peoples, the Santals believe in various impersonal spirits and forces, such as the *bongas* and the spirits of the ancestors that control human destiny in the mundane world. The *bongas* or the spirits are “intermediaries between *noa puri* (visible world) and the *hana puri* (the invisible reality) of the *Supreme Being*, the Creator” (cited in Marandy, 2006, p. 4). Broadly speaking, the Santals’ beliefs in these supernatural spirits and their relationships with them constitute their religious consciousness (Ray, Das, & Basu, 1982). On a deep, spiritual, theological level, the Santals believe in monotheism, apart from their pantheistic mind-set. *Thakur Jiu* (Life Giver), or *Marang Buru* (Great mountain), is considered to be "Supreme" among all the "religious beings"; He is the cause of all causes.

Unlike other religions, the Santals’ belief in the Supreme Being, or *Thakur Jiu*, has deep cultural sensibility and meaning that correspond with their understanding of the world around them. This distinct sensibility and its unique meaning, rooted in their tradition, are well defined by Marandy (2006) who writes:

[T]he application of the name of "God" which is transliterated into foreign terms—like *Ishwar* or *Bhagwan* used by the Hindus, or the term Allah used by Muslims, or "God" by Christians—does not seem to be suited to the Santals. For the Santals, the concept of a powerful God who conquers and wins all the time, just as imperial power, does not appeal to their hearts. Santals prefer to think of a God who is fatherly or a God who is tender or motherly. Therefore, the use of terms like, *Thakur Jiu* (Life Giver) or *Cando Baba* (Sun Father) finds some resonance with their own cultural and traditional expression (p. 6).

Thus, *Sarna*, the Santal religion is the central element of the Santals' socio-cultural living, in which customs, social behaviour, and individual and group identity, are predicated on ritual practices and cultural celebrations. Unfortunately, *Sarna*, with its richness and spiritual distinctiveness, is on the verge of annihilation in the hands of the missionaries, whose Western colonial roots are aligned with the covert assistance of the Islamist-nationalists.

**The historical context of colonization, the evangelization
of the Indian subcontinent, and the contested Santal religion and culture.**

The history of evangelization in India goes back to the first century AD; it is believed that St. Thomas the Apostle introduced Christianity in south India in 52 AD (Neil, 2004). Although the advent of Christianity on the sacred soil of India is ancient, evangelization did not make significant headway among the mainstream populace until the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries towards the end of the 14th century. The missionaries followed the trail of the Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama, who landed in Calicut, a port city in India in 1498, via the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa. The discovery of this water way ushered a new chapter for the European colonizers and missionary workers, who found a fertile land to sow the seeds of Christianization, civilization, and “ivory collection” (Conrad, 1899). With a view to civilizing and christianizing people, “colonization and missionization personnel sailed on the same boat; gun and gospel were carried on the same ship” (Dharmaraj, 1990, p. vi). In line with the supremacist and expansionist European attitude, the mission society in Europe agreed, in principle, that the colonization of India had a divine purpose; it was the duty of the colonizers and missionaries to civilize and Christianize the natives (Dharmaraj, 1990, p. vi). In this

context the Indians were depicted as racially inferior, intellectually backward, and unfailingly superstitious; the Indian social and cultural life was portrayed as outmoded, incompetent, and stagnant.

In their blue-book, India was portrayed as a place of the heathens and “had to be dusted, disinfected, and injected with Western style of education, jurisprudence, and religion” (Dharmaraj, 1990, p. vi). The attitude of the colonizers is further elaborated by Shohat and Stam (1994) who assert that, “the religions of the colonized were institutionally denounced as superstition and devil worship” (p.17). To justify evangelization and colonization, many missionaries and colonialists were persuaded to believe that God had commissioned them to share the benefits of European civilization, in general, and Christianity, in particular, with the Indians. In many contexts, the missionaries were so desperate that “instead of relying on the absolute and transforming power of the *Gospel* alone, they made all out efforts to achieve success adopting colonial means and method” (Dharmaraj 90, p. 78).

In many places, such as Bengal, forced conversion took place and missionaries were actively engaged with the colonizers to perform this task (See: Dharmaraj, 1990 for details). Merciless brutality was often enacted as an effective method, under colonization, to expedite the act of evangelization. Dharmaraj (1990) cites examples of the alternative means of Christianization in his research. He writes:

The stories of Portuguese savagery haunted the memory of the Bengalis for several centuries and in our own times the novelists exploited themes with much power and feeling. The conversion of Bengalis into Christianity not only coincided with the activities of Portuguese pirates in Bengal, but the pirates took an active interest in it. The Bengalis who accepted Christianity were forced to abandon their faith at the point of sword or they were allured by money (p. 22).

Despite the triumphalism of the Catholic Church's self-history that emphasizes the positive influence of the missionaries on the indigenous populations and the claimed sacredness of the missionaries' venture, the realities were different. The track records of numerous other Christian groups that were also active in evangelization were not free from these oppressive practices in propagating religion and civilization.

Historical data reveals that Christianization became a part of the colonizing project under the East India Company and the British imperial rule in India. Missionaries and the lead colonizers held a common view that Western education would bring religious transformation and cultural unity within the host society and will pave the way for evangelization to thrive in India (Dharmaraj, 1990). The initial objectives of colonial education in undivided India, which Bangladesh has also inherited, were generated from the supremacist ideas of the leader colonizers. They attempted to distance the natives from their indigenous learning structures, termed "temple of darkness" (Vishwanathan, 1989) and draw them toward the ways of the colonizers.

The statement, "as soon as [the Indians] become first-rate European scholars, they must cease to be Hindoos" (Thornton, 1852-53, 32:36, cited in Vishanathan, 1989, p. 23) testifies to the supremacist and racist attitude of the colonizers. In this regard, the sole purpose of colonial education in undivided India can be summed up in a previously documented statement of Lord Macaulay:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect (cited in Weir, 2005, p. 80).

Thus, from the beginning of the European colonial mission, the common goals of both the colonizers and the missionaries were premeditated spiritual genocide, cultural imperialism, and mutual material interests. Colonial history informs that the East India Company directly or indirectly patronized missionary work until the middle of the 18th century. However, towards the end of the 18th century, with the expansion of territories and the assumption of administrative responsibilities over Indian territories, the East India Company, for strategic reasons, decided not to interfere with the local cultures of the peoples, by supporting missionary work. This superficial stalemate did not last long, as Company Charters were renewed in 1813. With increasing pressures from evangelicals in England, in 1833 the missionaries resumed activity in India. Renewed collaboration and cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial power were established to aid one another in their missions (Dharmaraj, 1990).

The colonizers and the missionaries worked hand in hand on other occasions in colonial history, in order to impose cultural imperialism to consolidate the colonial grasp over the native peoples. In *Regulation Act V*, (Joshi, 1988) Lord Bentinck encouraged the European planters to settle in the countryside not only for their material success but also to increase contact with the local people, and in the process civilize them. As a result of the direct and constant influence and presence of the Europeans in their backyard, it was believed the locals would eventually feel motivated and obliged to embrace Christianity (Dharmaraj, 2009). Therefore, it can be assumed that the colonial mission in India was a “cultural and missionological fact” (Dharmaraj, 1990, p. xi).

Before 1947 many Indians condemned Christianity as the handmaiden of colonialism, and accused it of being used to extend Western political control over India.

Currently, with the official demise of the colonialism, Christianity has changed its evangelization strategies and appears as the religion of the oppressed and downtrodden. A close examination of the history of evangelicalism reveals that it has always taken advantage of the vulnerability and simplicity of so called backward communities, such as the indigenous peoples; they have adopted all possible means at their disposal to win their hearts and minds and draw them towards its religious beliefs and customs. As such, while evangelization gained ground among mainstream Indians, who were befriended by the European colonizers, the missionaries felt encouraged to expand their networks among the indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, who were one of the earliest adivasis in the Indian subcontinent.

The act of evangelization became easier with the establishment of colonial-capitalist and consumerist policies, such as the *Permanent Settlement Act* or the *Cornwallis Code* (1793) and *Forest Act* (1878) (Bandyopadhyay, Soumya, & Shah, 2005). These policies disenfranchised indigenous peoples by appropriating their natural habitat, namely their lands and the forests, bringing under the imperial control. The introduction of the money economy of the West made the indigenous peoples vulnerable to the exploitation of money lenders and zamindars from the majority Hindu and Muslim communities. Oppressed and brutalized, the indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, turned to the Christian missionaries who were ready to offer material support in exchange of their spiritual sacrifice.

The first contact of the missionaries with the Santals was reported in the papers of the then *American Free-Will Baptist Mission* in 1838 (Calshaw, 1949, 2004). After their discovery, which occasioned a celebration among the missionaries seeking evangelical

expedition, the Santals became a soft target for missionaries from many Western European and Scandinavian countries. The intensity of evangelization was intensified after 1855, when the Santals rebelled against British rule and its local agents, known as the *Santal insurrection*.

In order to Christianize and civilize the Santal “heathens”, the missionaries employed a Western model of education, the Santal language, and health care services as viable tools to serve the dual purpose of drawing them towards Christianity and consolidating colonial grip over the Santals. In this act the strategic alliance between missionization and colonization is evident; on a deeper level it “undermined Santal culture by denying important traditional mythology and rituals” (Somers, 1977, p. 2). This evangelization continues today in Palashpur, as elsewhere, with further intensity; it is assisted by the neo-colonial oppressive and marginalized situations perpetrated by the nation state. In this manner “colonialists and missionaries, regardless of the country from which they came, universally regarded nature- cultures, and religious traditions as pagan and diabolic, to be eradicated and replaced with Western values and ways of life” (Weaver, 1998, p. 9). In the context of Palashpur, Christianization, carrying Western civilization and values, is at its core a negation of the indigenous Santals’ ritualistic culture, in which religion plays a pivotal role.

The emergence of imposed religious nationalism and its impact on the Indigenous Santal religion. The religious as well as spiritual identities of indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, are under threat in Bangladesh, which emerged as secular country in 1971; however, Bangladesh is currently engaged in regaining its image as a

moderate Muslim country. No matter what the movers and shakers of the nation claim, the process of radical Islamization, in its policies and practices, is on the rise. Radical Islamization began in 1975 after a bloody military takeover backed by pro-Islamist groups. In order to appease the radical groups and uphold their interests and agendas, the then government removed “Secularism and freedom of religion” from the Constitution of Bangladesh (Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972, Article 12) in the Proclamations Order (No. 1) of 1977. In a similar fashion, Article 2 of the Constitution, which states that, “The state Religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic” was, removed as well (Constitution of Bangladesh 2006, p. 6). These changes intensified the course of Islamization.

The constitutional changes and their ramifications, played out by the pro-Islamic fundamentalists, brought about a dark chapter in the minority and indigenous peoples’ histories in Bangladesh. Their rights, recognition, survival, and safety in practicing their distinct religious and spiritual beliefs as well as their physical and cultural existence came under threat. The country returned to its immediate colonial past under Pakistani rule, when political Islam, intolerance, and fanaticism disrupted the state policy instead of protecting the followers of other religions.

In addition, the declaration of Islam as the state religion has distanced the minority and indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, from the core of the state in Bangladesh. Furthermore, many attempts were made to introduce a “blasphemy law” to prosecute individuals who spoke against Islam. More recently, there has been a rise in Islamist terrorism, engaged in the *Talibanization* of the nation. In the context of xenophobic and hard-line theocratic circumstances, enduring physical and cultural

violence has become an everyday experience for the religious and indigenous minorities in Bangladesh. The intensity of violence against minorities, through covert ethnic cleansing, has pushed millions into a state of silent decline (Chowdhury, 1998).

The oppression of minorities in Bangladesh illustrates the agenda of oriental colonialism and Islamization in the name of nation building. The impositions of one's will on others, through coercive laws, restrictions, and the state machinery, is nothing but repression. Along with other minorities, the Santals experience this repression on a regular basis. Indeed, the constitution of Bangladesh does not recognize the existence of the cultural and ethnic minorities, as it promotes the development of the "national culture", namely the Bengali culture, alone.

The spirit of cultural nationalism (Cesaire, 1950/2000), which once rejected the Pakistani colonizer, becomes a tool for the marginalization and oppression of indigenous peoples, such as the Santals, in Bangladesh. These conditions are the result of the neo-colonizers' efforts to gain absolute power (Cesaire, 1950/2000) and domination at the cost of the culturally and religiously 'Others'. Therefore, with the rise of national culture, which is now a covert mission of Islamization, the religions and cultures of the indigenous and other minority peoples are being destroyed, their pasts denied, their heritage sites ravaged, their tribal depth, sense of spirituality, and identity devalued, and their existence threatened, only to be rescued by Christian evangelization.

The Santals' poverty-stricken lives and their insecurity compounded by exclusionary, repressive, pro Islamic governmental policies and practices, push the Santals into the hands of the Christian missionaries. The missionaries promise them economic security, "prospect of social advancement and political protection" (See

Hossain, 2000, p.10), rather than spiritual salvation (Anwar, 1984). Thus, indigenous peoples and other minorities are expected simply to disappear under the pressures of the rising Islamic nationalism.

The Civilizing Mission and Evangelization in Palashpur

Case Study One

Go with the flow when social pressure is too much to resist. Rasa Mardi is a born again Christian, with a wife, Mani, and five children. He is 55 years old and a day laborer by profession. Rasa has been struggling to make both ends meet since his family lost their land to local land grabbers. He tried to restore his property, when his father was still alive, but suffered further loss and became completely landless. Currently, his homestead is situated in the *khas* land and he may face eviction at any time. Therefore, Rasa believes that his future in Bangladesh is bleak. He may be forced to leave Palashpur one day, as many of his neighbours and family members have already left for India, because of the oppressive situation caused by the local majority Muslims.

Rasa cannot afford to keep his oldest son in school because of poverty. After dropping out of school, his oldest son began to wage labour to support the family. Amidst this financial hardship and uncertain future, one day Rasa and his family became Christians. However, he claims the decision to convert was not as easy as it sounds today. He also commented that, “I really don’t know why I finally became Christian” (Interview, 2005). Rasa recounts that he experienced a difficult period, both personally and socially. He witnessed everyone in his neighborhood, including his friends and

relatives, convert to Christianity. He was bombarded with messages that the Santals are barbaric, pagan, and diabolic and soon he came to believe that, “We Santals have no real religion” (Interview, 2005).

Rasa experienced the pressure and questioned how he could survive socially as an outcaste among all the newly converted Christians. He states, “The whole village becomes Christian; under the circumstances, what else could I become? I need to be a part of the society too” (Interview, 2005). In addition, he was also motivated by the foreigners and nicely attired Santal converts, who approached him numerous times with promises of a life as good as theirs, material gains, and salvation in the afterlife. Rasa provides an account of the context of his pre-conversion:

They told us that what we did before was wrong. It will take us to *Hell*. Besides, they said we were dirty people; not civilized. The Santals came with them were clean and looked happy and healthy like rich people. They gave us hope. They promised that our children would get education and we would get help from them and have a good life (Interview, 2005).

Unfortunately, Rasa believes that although he was directly and indirectly promised many things before becoming Christian, his situation has not changed. He continues to be a day labourer, as he was before conversion. Rasa claims that before conversion, he was more valued by the Christian missionaries, as they regularly approached him with kind words. Nowadays, he rarely sees them, as they are busy with others who haven't converted. At present, Rasa goes to church every Sunday and hears a many “do's” and “don'ts” and from the Father as he narrates the following interview excerpt:

It is the Father who reminds us of our Christianity and instructs us not to celebrate other rituals and drink *Handi*. Old ways are gone forever from our lives. The church people

(Shaheb) say those are not good. They will take us back and make us backward. We will not be able to prosper in life following old ways. They always talk about new life. It is a sin to talk about the old ways (Interview, 2005).

Rasa Mardi cares little about his old tradition and culture; however, he truly misses the excitement around the *Parabs* (festivals) and the pure and profound joy he experienced celebrating them. He is upfront about his feeling of loss in his new life, as he states:

During our *Parabs*, we enjoyed ourselves a lot. It was an experience of immense joy and happiness. Now, we no longer take part in those activities. The Father at the Church has forbidden them for us. The celebrations, which are really few and far between in the church, are not as good as they used to be in the past among Santals. Now everything is controlled by the Church (Interview, 2005).

Despite a mild disillusionment in his transformation and the transition to a new life as Christian, Rasa tries to be content with his conversion. He argues that, “a hen cannot be slaughtered twice for propitiating the same God. Real God is the Christian God. So, it is not possible to go back to my own roots. I am Christian and will remain Christian for ever” (Interview, 2005). Rasa is rather optimistic that the people who gave him hope will not disappoint his two sons, who are receiving a Christian education. He believes that when they graduate, they will be employed in the Christian organizations or will be able to go abroad with their help. Until then, he and his oldest son will continue to work as day-labourers in the fields of others and attend Church services every Sunday, or alternatively they will leave for India where Rasa believes the Santals have the opportunity to survive and be happy.

Case study two

Can Roman Catholicism educate and civilize the dirty Santals? James Tudu converted to Christianity in 1987. He is a Roman Catholic. James believes that Roman Catholicism is the best form of Christianity. Years ago when he was concerned about the education of his two sons, he turned to the Christian mission. The mission helped his two sons receive an education at the church school. Initially, he paid large sums of money for their education. However, when they became converts, the mission began to charge less and less. The following is the context for James' turn to the Church. He narrates:

Initially, we didn't go to the church. My two sons attended a nearby public school. Once my son had a fight with Muslim kids there and stopped going to school out of fear. Then what else could I do? I was worried about the education of my children. I was worried about their future. How can I help them grow with education? I contacted the church. When I took them there, the father said that they (my sons) lacked light. If they get the light they would make good Christian in future. They assured me that they would accept my son if I allowed them to have Christian education. I had no alternative. So, I agreed for the sake of education of my sons. It was decided that for each of my two sons I would have to pay taka 200 monthly. Two of my sons studied there until grade five. Then they went to the Christian college at Kaliakair. Now, they are studying at the University (Interview, 2005).

By the time James' sons finished grade five, his contact with the Church increased. He listened to Church sermons many times. He also got a job with the Church and finally he took initiation as Roman Catholic. James wants everyone to convert to Roman Catholicism, so they can receive the blessings of the Pope and Jesus Christ, the Saviour. James is involved in the act of missionization with the local Catholic Church as well. He claims that:

When Santals become educated, they realize the true value of Christianity and the benefits of cleanliness. Non-Christian Santals are very dirty; they have no sense of staying clean. They don't use spoons but serve themselves right from the cooking pots. They do that because they are uneducated. They have no culture. When they become Christian, then the Church takes initiative to educate them and then they realize how important and valuable it is to become Christian" (Interview, 2005).

James truly feels lucky that he is no longer an indigenous Santal, practicing rituals and *Parabs*. In his opinion, they are meaningless practices and cannot be a part of civilized religious activities. He states,

The Santals should forget those meaningless rituals activities of their ancestors sooner than later because that way they will be civilized and make their life meaningful and free from superstitions and other vices. Only Christianity has the ability to protect them from oppression and sufferings. They are the ones that can educate them and give them stability in life (Interview, 2005).

James is actively involved in evangelization among the Santals in the region. He shares the techniques he employs in the evangelical mission:

First we approach them in their homes or other convenient locations. We invite them to the church. Then, we try to convince them explaining the good news from Jesus Christ and his power to transform their life. We talk about the education of their children. If someone is sick, we ask them to come to our medical facility for help. It is an ongoing process and we never feel tired of approaching them. We take them to the church; show them the affluence they can have by being converted to Christianity. Then, when they feel motivated from inside, we give them the initiation (Interview, 2005).

James likes to be called a Christian, rather than a Santal. He no longer associates with adivasis, as they are "uncultured" and "unclean." He further believes that, at present, none of the Santals are adivasis. Some of the Santals are followers of the Sanatan Dharma (*Baisnab*), but they practice all the rituals and festivals of the adivasi Santals. James

states that the Christian Santals never practice superstitious *parabs* and rituals; they are forbidden by the Church. He believes that only the Christians have the true light of education, and Christianity is the most important part of their lives. James believes that one day all will turn to Christianity, as there are very few families in this area who are not Christians. Christian Santals, he believes, have a divine responsibility to convert others to receive full blessings from Jesus Christ. According to James, although it is not easy, it is possible to convert everyone, as Christianity provides the light of education.

Case study three

Faith moves mountains but Nidiram is unmoved. Eighty years old, widower Nidhiram Tudu is a Sanatan Santal. His children are all Christian. Despite their efforts to convert him to Christianity, Nidhiram has remained unmoved. He asserts:

My ancestors were not Christians. I am with them. I follow them. Besides, I do not want anything. I am happy with what I have. My father and grand fathers were all happy. Why shall I become Christian? My children believe in new things for which I have no interest (Interview, 2005).

Nidhiram is frustrated that many Santals, including his family members, are losing their religious faith and indigenous identity, without much thought. His children do not listen to him, but listen to the missionaries, who are destroying their religion, culture, and way of life. Nidhiram is emotionally hurt that his Santal children have forgotten to abide by their moral obligation to listen to and respect the opinions of the elders. As such, he considers himself a burden on the family, infirm and powerless. Nidhiram expresses his frustration in the following words:

I am almost a dead person having no voice. So, they can do whatever they like. Everything is being run according to their way. So, I am getting attuned despite holding my beliefs secretly at

heart. My family is not a traditional Santal family at all. It is a Christian family. The Church controls everything (Interview, 2005).

Nidhiram worries about the future of Santal culture, religion, and tradition. He believes that there is no way to resist the onslaught of missionization; not even the government considers the true wellbeing of the Santal community. Nidhiram points out:

As far as I understand the Santal community is going to be eliminated from this part of the world. Now, the *dikkus* are within us. Christianization has divided us beyond reconciliation. The Christians are degrading us and sending a wrong message for our children and grandchildren that our age-old rich tradition was nothing but barbarism. They do not respect our culture, our language. Rather, denigrate us as being uncivilized, unclean and backdated. This conversion is not doing any good to our society, to our people. Taking advantage of a few negligible percentage of people's greediness, promising empty hopes and false interpretations of our religion and rituals, they have been causing enormous devastation unopposed (Interview, 2005).

Nidhiram finds it ridiculous that many of the Santals, who have become converts in the hope of material gains, are still poverty-stricken and struggling to make both ends meet. He perceives the process of evangelization, as a sinister ploy to Westernize and, at the same time, subjugate the rest of the world. Nidhiram expresses his resentment in the following manner:

I don't know if they give them anything secretly. I do not see any visible prosperity among Christian Santals in this area. I am old; I don't know about other areas. Poverty is all around. I do not see conversion has solved any problem in this area. Rather, it has created divisions and restlessness among our people (Interview, 2005).

Nidiram is old but has the ability to resist the onslaught of Christianity. He speaks from the depth of his experience and understanding of the world around him. He does not endorse evangelization, as he thinks it has been misguiding people. Had they really wanted to help the Santals, he believes, they would not have affixed a religious tag to

their help. However, Nidiram feels powerless in his old age. He is not concerned, but wonders if he will receive a Christian or Santal burial after he dies. Finally, Nidiram is glad that someone will hear his voice of resistance, through this research project.

Case study four

Santals Don't need to be civilized by the uncivilized. Mati Mardi is a housewife-cum day labourer. She is 35 years old and the mother of two sons. She works very hard at home and outside the home. Mati Mardi is serious about the adivasi Santal culture, tradition, and religion. She claims that the family has been maintaining its adivasi religious beliefs in spite of the pressures from various Christian groups, engaged in missionization. Mati often faces evangelists who visit her at home to convince her to become Christian. Unlike many adivasi Santal women, she is educated and has finished grade eight. Mati is concerned for the education of her two sons, who are currently attending a local missionary-run primary school. She wants her sons to grow up with adivasi Santal values and beliefs, contrary to what they are being taught at the missionary school. Mati expresses her resentment that there is no public school in the area. As such, she has no option but to send her sons to the school. She complains:

We are neglected by the government in every way. There is no program for us here to survive with our indigenous way of life. The government doesn't even care for the education of our community. It is shocking that we cannot send our children to the public school in this area. The churches take advantage of this situation. Through education, they are taking our children away from our family, our roots. We are helpless that is why the missionaries can dare to approach us to convert to Christianity. They can't do it to our neighbouring Muslim brothers, sisters and their children. The Christian missionaries would be in trouble if they try to convert them (Interview, 2005).

Mati believes that she enjoys more freedom and has more power in the family than the majority Muslim women in the neighbourhood. She knows that converted Santal women face many restrictions from the Church as well. She recounts:

I tell them that we are not dependent on our men. We earn for our family. We provide for ourselves. We try our best for the wellbeing of our family and that is the source of our power. In my family my voice is loud, when any decision is made. On the contrary, converted Christian Santal women lose their free will. They are controlled by the Church. In contrast, most Muslim women stay home, bear children, take care of their family and husband, but must listen to what their men say to them. They have more comforts but less liberty. If we compare our systems with other systems around, we must be more civilized (Interview, 2005).

Mati worries not only about her family but also about the future existence of the Santal community, with its indigenous identity. She thinks that the Muslims can no longer harm the Santal community, as there is no Santal land left to be grabbed. She further states that “The Muslims were never interested in converting us but grabbing our lands” (interview, 2005). Mati believes that the real enemies are the missionaries, who do not allow the adivasi non-converted Santals to live in peace with their religious, cultural, and traditional rites and rituals. Mati explains as follows:

The Missionaries and new converts come to us with promises of education, health care, bundles of tin, winter-clothes, and blankets in order to convert us; not to help us. They say you are unclean, uncivilized and uneducated. They come and say you should not live like that. When they say like that I tell them not to approach me anymore and talk like that. These are not civilized manners. We have our God, our way of worshiping Him. Maybe we are poor but not unclean or uncivilized. They must respect us. They say their religion is the best. Muslims also say their religion is the best. This is not the right way of making other look bad. I know they want to destroy our adivasi religion and want us to follow theirs. After conversion, the living condition of many Santals has not improved. They are not as happy as they used to be. They are now controlled by the Church. I don't want to lose my freedom and lose my Santal religion. I cannot offend my ancestors. After

all, I don't want to be civilized by those who are actually our enemies; who want to see us destroyed culturally and spiritually. I can challenge them that we are more civilized than those so called uncivilized ones (Interview, 2005).

Mati Mardi is a hardworking, educated, and culturally conscious Santal woman. She does not want to jump on the Christian bandwagon with the others. She is proud of her religion, culture, and tradition. However, assimilationist pressures from the state and the Christian missionaries are strong. The various tricks and techniques of the missionaries have not been able to convince her to give up her culture and distance her from her roots. Until now, she has been able to resist the evangelical onslaught with her head held high. Mati believes in reincarnation, which may be the influence of Hinduism. She would like to be born again as a Santal woman in a land, where the Santals are not oppressed and dishonored.

The Impact of the Civilizing Mission of Evangelization in Palashpur

The historical record of evangelization in the subcontinent, as previously outlined in this chapter, suggests that it does not, or cannot, exist without the core mission of cultural and religious imperialism, the imposition of its supremacy, and the civilizing mission of the West. These are widely acknowledged as the three basic mechanisms of colonization. For centuries, as handmaidens of colonialism, evangelization has had impact on indigenous communities across the globe. The ramifications manifest on various levels: from claimed enlightenment and socio-economic security to real fragmentation, devastation, and obliteration, through cultural and spiritual genocides, among others.

In the region around Palashpur, globalization, the market economy, and established processes of evangelization have been flourishing with absolute monopoly, and their impacts on the vulnerable Santal community are evident. Apart from the rise of materialism, consumerism, and the destruction of the tradition-bound rural life of simplicity, tranquility, and contentment, the Santal community has disintegrated and as a result internal divisions have become widespread. A strong sense of internal chasms and conflict has resulted in more socio-economic and religio-political damages. Hossain (2000) describes this situation in his ethnographic study of the same area, as follows:

The Santals who are converted and who are not converted often confront conflicting social and cultural values, resulting disintegration of their cultural solidarity and cultural values, resulting disintegration of their cultural solidarity as an ethnic minority. In my study....I observed that those who are not converted feel isolated and ignored by those who are converted Christian.... [T]he situation is such that eventually they will have no option other than becoming Christian and cope with the current (p. 10).

Hossain's (2000) documentation of the phenomenon is affirmed and expanded upon in the narratives and voices of the participants in this study and in the case studies documented in the previous sections of this chapter. The primary data from the above sources reveal the following emerging issues and their ramifications the Santals in Palashpur negotiate, contest, and confront daily: Fragmentation within, the invasion of materialism, and the demise of the indigenous social, cultural, and political structure.

Fragmentation Within

The Santals in Palashpur are fragmented along religious lines. Through the influence of various Christian missionaries, the Santals in Palashpur are turning to Christianity in growing numbers, leaving behind their traditional religion and culture.

This process of aggressive conversion is expedited through premeditated propaganda, such as, “If they become converted Christian, they will have better prosperity and social-economic security” (Hossain, 2000, p. 8), and “only Christianity can protect the Santals from the oppression of the majority Muslims, who enjoy the benefits of political windfalls” (Interview, 2005). As a result, the Santals are now divided into two major groups, the Christian Santals and the *Sanaton* Santals or *adivasi* Santals.

The Christian Santals or converted Santals are divided into the various sects of Christianity that they converted into. Within this divisive reality, the homogeneous collectivistic ‘Great Tradition’ (Mahapatra, 1986) is fractured into divisions and subdivisions, with no possibility of reconciliation. This faith-based, fractured Santal identity was generated and imposed by sanctions from the Church. The Church is diminishing the core values, solidarity, and unity of the Santal community in Palashpur. The immediate impacts of this situation are outlined in the reflections of one of the participants, in the following lines:

By converting the Santal community into different sects of Christianity, the missionaries have been dividing our Santal community into different groups. These new Christian converts belonging to different Churches cannot get married each other. This is imposed by the church they are attached to. It is so ridiculous that a Christian Santal loses his or her rights to get married another non-Santal only because of the religious orientation. Personally, I cannot accept this. Although I am Christian, I am Santal at heart. My blood is Santal blood. How can I not get married one who belongs to the same blood.

Through imposition of differences, which have divided the Western world across different sects, Christianity has been dividing our people. This is how a sense of alienation has been created through Christianization. There is less tolerance among our people now than ever before. Alien religious consciousness has been influencing our sense of ethnic identity, solidarity and feeling for each other. It is absolutely unjustifiable

and inhuman that I cannot get married a non Christian Santal girl whom I love and care because of fanaticism of a religion imposed upon us (Interview, 2005).

As a result of religious differences, the Santals are politically, socially and culturally more vulnerable. The collectivist indigenous values were once a powerful platform for mobilizing resistance against oppression from the state and the majority people; they are now replaced by selfish individualism and the interests of a particular group, controlled by the invaders, who have no respect for the Santal culture and rituals. This situation of disintegration, as well as its adverse consequences, is outlined by an adivasi participant:

Our demands and their demands are not the same any more. Their demands come from the churches. Our demands come from our community itself. Undeniably, we suppress our internal chaos and conflict. If we want to put up demands on the government, we must show our unity by bringing all Santals together. Our ancestors such as Sindhu and Kanai did that. However, we can't do that because of this internal fraction coming from external sources (Interview, 2005).

Other than disintegration at the societal level, there is evidence of debilitating impact of internal fractures at the family level. Many families have been crippled and their internal bond has been threatened. The land, nature, individual, and family once formed the oneness of the Santal holistic worldview and their inherent spiritual consciousness; these are currently meaningless to many Santals as a result of evangelization. Family members, who were once integral parts of the self, have become "others" to be converted, conquered, and cleansed before associating with them.

Each convert places the missionological obligation as the highest priority in his or her life and the interests of the Church have become more important than the integrity of the family. The Church reigns over home and the hearth, while Christianity reigns over

cultural allegiances and family values. Therefore, family cohesion and intimacy have given way to the invaded values of the West, imposed through Christianity. Thus, the faith-based colonization involves not only the conversion of people, but their social and family structures at a deeper level. One participant provides a graphic description of this situation in his own way:

The new converts, who were our family members only days ago, have learned to despise us. They call us unclean, uneducated, and superstitious. They do not consider us as parts of their family any longer. They have different association with those who are converts controlled by the Churches. They are hostile to our presence as we continue to follow our tradition, religion and rituals. They do not respect or practice our religion and ritual. Rather, they look down upon them as they are forbidden by the churches. They are totally different in thought and action after they became Christian. Christianity has poisoned their minds against us; against our way of life. Our social life as well as our family life is under a potential threat of demise. It is shocking to remember that only a few days ago, we were the same. However, by the foreign influence, they are totally transformed (Interview, 2005).

Invasion of materialism. The package of the civilizing mission, wrapped in modernity and Western values, is an integral part of evangelization and has engulfed the tradition-bound, Santal community in Palashpur. As a result, there prevails an overwhelming sense of erosion of the traditional values, and a rise in materialism as well as consumerism. The indigenous worldview that once nurtured and nourished a life of simplicity and contentment, provided by nature, is missing in the community. In contrast, among the Santals today there is an alien concept of life, a yearning for material success, competition rather than collectivistic co-operation, and consumerism. One participant describes the existing condition in the following manner:

In our community people with resources are rare. With the help of the churches and Christian NGOs, some converts have managed to go abroad and have become financially solvent. They have brick-build houses, colour TVs, DVDs, cameras and many other things, I can't even name them. This sets examples for other Santals to follow their footsteps. They have been catalyst in turning innocent but poverty stricken Santal to the churches. It is not because of spiritual reason they are becoming converted; it is for material gains, which they have been denied for centuries (Interview, 2005).

Thus, evangelization, which is engaged in the devaluation and the erasure of the Santals' traditional way of life, has generated an obsessive fascination for the West among the Santals. This obsessive fascination acts as an alternative to the poverty, oppression, and marginalization in their lives. The infatuation with the West leads to an elitist mentality among a section of Santals, who are "coconuts" (Rodriguez, 1982), or in Homi Bhaba's terms, "white but not quite" (cited in Young 1995, p.175); they are Western at heart but have indigenous external features. The paradigm shift that occurred through a "factory model" (Miller, 1996) of education, blatantly masks the agendas of evangelization and Western values of material success. Indeed, it is distancing the Santals from their inherent roots, ingrained in the rural milieu, and positioning them in the competitive and restless life of the urban context. The impact of the invasion of materialism is well-defined by an elder participant, who elaborates on the matter as follows:

Many educated Santals particularly the youth have left this area. I don't see them here any more. They prefer to live in the big cities where they can find jobs or run after money and be affluent. In the village, they cannot survive because they are not content. They don't know farming or they look down upon this ancestral occupation. They went to school unlike us who are illiterate. They call us ignorant. They, I guess, don't feel comfortable in the village. They have education, which they got from the Churches. They

think they are civilized while we are backward. This is how because of education they have forfeited rural life and our way of living (Interview, 2005).

Demise of the indigenous social, cultural, and political structures. The most devastating impacts of evangelization reported by the participants in Palashpur are the loss of the social, cultural, and political agency of the indigenous Santals, who have been economically and territorially disenfranchised for centuries by the majority people. This experience resonates with Weaver's (1998) observation that, "Colonists and missionaries, regardless of the country from which they came, universally regarded Native cultures and religious traditions as pagan and diabolic, to be eradicated and replaced with Western values and ways of life" (p. 9).

The neo-colonialist government of the nation state imposes and exercises "political instrumentalities" (Somer, 1977, p. 114), such as the assimilationist agenda and domination, through the *Union Parishad* (the local government), district council, and local and national administrative functionaries. The nation state thus affects the ability of the Santals to maintain their traditional authority structure. The missionaries are also destroying the socio-cultural and political structure of the Santals, through aggressive evangelization in Palashpur. One of such devastating impact is exemplified in the dismantling of the village council that is headed by the *Manjhi Haram*, the traditional custodian of the "Charter of Santal Identity" (cited in Somer, 1977).

With increasing numbers of Christians in Palashpur and the adjoining areas, the churches are replacing or weakening the traditional village council and have assumed the social, political, and cultural authority to make all important decisions with regard to the lives of the Santal converts. The churches are now all pervasive "power house" that

controls every aspect of the social, cultural, and political voices of the Santal community. After conversion, the new converts no longer show allegiance to the village council or the authority of the village headman, the *Manhji haram*, who traditionally performs the dual-duty of exerting authority and providing leadership in the time of crisis (Somer, 1977); the *Manhji haram* also represents the community's "agency for the preservation of Santal culture" (Somer, 1977, p. 2) in the rural context.

As external interventions are prevalent, the village council has become ineffective in dealing with issues affecting the lives of the Santals. Moreover, contrary to the interests of the indigenous Santals' tradition and social and cultural practices, such as the *parabs*, rituals and festivals are strictly forbidden by the churches. By denying the Santal converts these traditional and cultural practices, the churches are insidiously engaged in erasing the memory of their past, thus aligning the converts with the values and norms of the Church and the West. In so doing, the churches are consolidating colonial and neo-colonial control. Thus, cutting the roots of every component that constitutes the Santal identity and indigeneity; evangelization is reshaping and constructing an imposed reality and identity that is alienated from the social, cultural, and political exigencies of the Santals in Palashpur.

Conclusion

As a result of cultural and religious imperialism, manifested in aggressive evangelization supported by the West and overlooked by the nation state, the indigenous texture of life and the spirituality and identity of the Santals in Palashpur, and elsewhere, are at stake. The rural Santal village of Palashpur was once a unified Santal society, sustained and nourished by nature, blessed by the *Bongas* and spirits of the ancestors, and

undisturbed by modernity and external invasion. The community is now polarized and seriously diminished. Christianization is built on colonial policies of domination, Westernization, the civilizing mission, and supremacist and expansionist ideologies; it lacks a true understanding and tolerance of the irreplaceable value of the indigenous worldview and ways of life. On the contrary, focusing on their development agenda, the Christian missionaries justify their conversion, aggression, and intrusion.

The policies, practices, and laws that embody the colonial past have reinvented indigenous and other minority groups as colonized, through distorting and erasing their historical past; devaluing their culture, tradition, and religion; and imposing an agenda that serves the interests of the West and the majority people. Like all other indigenous contexts, evangelization and the nation state as a legacy of colonial past have set a disturbing example in Palashpur. The Santal religion, *Sarna*, is at the core of indigenous Santal's tribal depth, which is tied to traditional mythology, culture, indigeniety, and rituals. Therefore, the struggle of the Santals to rescue their religion is an anti-colonial struggle—a struggle to recover their collective identity, agency, and existence and revitalize indigenity, namely the soulful, connected way of life and dialogic space. The Santal religion as well as its culture deserves to stay alive.

Before drawing to the end of this chapter, the advisory statement of the former Secretary of the UNO, Boutros Boutros-Ghali deserves consideration. He states:

We have seen how a culture that is marginalized eventually disappears, and we know that when a community is left out of the mainstream of international life, it is very difficult for its members to preserve even the most elementary human rights. (UNO, Documents, December, 1992).

Summary

This chapter portrayed the ramifications of cultural and religious imperialism imposed on the Santal community in the remote village of Palashpur, Bangladesh. The chapter is based on a number of data sources: primary data from the voices and lived experiences of the research participants; the participant case studies; secondary data derived from historical records with regard to the aims, objectives, and mechanisms of evangelization; and this secondary data further includes the context of the rising impacts of Islamist nationalism in this part of world. This chapter documented a brief overview of the history of evangelization in the subcontinent, the emergence of exclusionary Islamist nationalist politics, and the ongoing Christian aggression that have been fragmenting the cultural-religious identity of the once encapsulated, indigenous *adivasi* Santals beyond reconciliation. This chapter critically analyzes the disintegration of Santal society and its divergence from its core indigenous values and traditions, as a result of evangelization that serves as a handmaiden of Westernization.

Chapter Seven: Indigenous Peoples' Life Struggles and the Survival of the Planet: Insights from a Rural Indigenous Community in Bangladesh

“Westward the Star of Empire takes its way”, and whenever that Empire is held by the white man, nothing is safe or unmolested or enduring against his avidity for gain.
—Maris Bryant Pierce, 1839, cited in Maureen Konkle, (2008, p. 297).

Introduction

The predicament associated with the disappearing of the indigenous rural Santal community in Palashpur is a microcosm of broader contexts and as such demands a wider cognizance. The predicament in Palashpur raises serious questions with regard to the fast approaching extinction of the indigenous peoples' diverse worlds and ways of life, their languages, lands, religions, culture, traditions, and their invaluable knowledge systems, as a result of imposed domination of the majority society. Based on the insights and issues generated from the research participants' lived experiences this chapter examines the process of assimilation, commodification, and marginalization of the indigenous peoples, rooted in the indigenous land, religion, language, and education policies of the so-called civilized society.

This chapter further analyzes the ways in which the materialistic and mechanized Western industrial civilization has been negatively affecting the lives of tradition-bound indigenous peoples, as well as the biodiversity and the ecology of the planet. This has been occurring faster than ever before as a result of the ongoing imperialist-colonialist practices and policies imposed on indigenous peoples in the name of progress, development, and homogenization. I draw on instances from other contexts where the imperialist West and/or its agents are engaged in plundering the natural and mineral resources of indigenous regions: destroying the serenity and biodiversity of the flora and

fauna; homogenizing linguistic and religious diversity; and demeaning local knowledge and wisdom, pertaining to the awareness and deep appreciation of the holistic nature of the cosmos. These acts of portray a false binary: one as the hero and the other as villain, question the issue of power, representation, and ordination. Finally, this chapter re-examines the research data from indigenous Santal context in Palashpur, and reveals how indigenous peoples are being oppressed and finally eradicated from the face of this planet. This chapter provides a critical consciousness and understating of how, with the demise of indigenous cultures, the world is losing indispensable knowledge and wisdom to safeguard the planet from the damaging influence of unbridled industrialization in the name of so-called modernity.

The knowledge and acknowledgement of these issues will help generate a broader understanding in order to formulate appropriate education policies, pedagogy, and practices that address, educate, and enlighten the world about the colonialist-capitalist agenda of exploitation and the eradication of the indigenous way of life around the world. More specifically, this chapter reflects on the possibilities of an ecologically, economically, and culturally sustainable world; it recommends ideas and concepts for sustainable education policies and practices to educate various stakeholders to reform damaging attitudes towards the planet we call our home.

A Revelation of Global Crises through the Lens of the Local Issues

Modernity's imperialist as well as capitalist-colonialist operations are pervasive, therefore, the act of ethnocide and its insidious mechanisms that have been affecting the indigenous Santal community are not isolated; they are an integral part of the broader

narratives of the endangered Sierra Nevada Indians, whose spiritual practice holds their world in balance (Wade, 2008). A similar situation continues to exist among various indigenous nations across continents that are struggling for their land, language, culture, religion, and wisdom.

The brutality of indigenous oppression and extinction is experienced by the persecuted Tibetan monks in inaccessible terrains in Tibet, who are engaged in a nonviolent struggle. So is the case among the embattled tribes-people of the Ecuadorian or Brazilian Amazon (Borg, 2007), who are retreating into the wilderness to be left alone. A parallel destiny has befallen the indigenous peoples in Kerala, India, who picketed for more than a thousand days in front of a *Coca-Cola* factory that is drying up their water sources and polluting their land (IWGIA, 2006).

The global blueprint of numerous local maladies brings further indictment against the Western model of civilization, for example: the risk of extinction or death of the *San* and *Khoe* languages, spoken by indigenous peoples in the South Africa (Crawhall, 1999); the political, cultural, and existential erosion of the *Sammy* of the Arctic Europe (Conrad, 1999); and the vulnerable *Mirrar* people, an aboriginal community around the *Jabiluka* Uranium mine field in Australia, who are bearing the brunt of state-sponsored economic terrorism, and social and territorial encroachment in the name of national development (Banerjee, 2000) and industrialization of the globe.

The phenomenon in Palashpur further offers a critical gaze at ethnocidal development projects in Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Malaysia, where indigenous peoples, such as the *Orang Asli*, the original aborigines of peninsular Malaysia, are on the brink of extinction due to governmental schemes to promote a uniform national culture

(Clarke, 2001). Again, this situation is evident in the “shared cultural and community traumatization” and “cultural decomposition” (Adelson, 2000, p. 12) of the aboriginals in the continent of Australia and the indigenous peoples of the North and South Americas.

The instances cited above exemplify the many innocent but targeted victims of the all pervasive and invasive, covert or overt imperialist-colonialist projects, designed and rooted in the West. However, no nation, not even the oppressive and materially powerful West, is immune to the consequential devastation this barely three hundred years old, civilization (Wade, 2008) is about to cause. Regrettably, with the loss of indigenous peoples and their sustainable ways of life emerges a potential threat like “*a fire burning over the earth, taking with it not only plants and animals, but the legacy of humanity’s brilliance*” (Wade, 2008). As such, there is a pressing need to inculcate the spirit of “Conscientization” (Friere, 1970) and ecological wisdom, rooted in indigenous ways of life, for the very survival of the planet.

Mother Earth is being ceaselessly ravaged by the Western, imperialist-colonialist agenda that is masked in various forms of the civilizing mission, education, and the economy and is mainly built on the rituals of consumption (Suzuki, 2003) and exploitation. In Palashpur, and elsewhere, Western hegemonic policies and agenda and deceptive policies of development cannot be denied or masked. These policies and agenda are a disguised form of colonialism (Moffatt, cited in Dei, 2006), which operates under the guise of a powerful rhetoric that justifies the destruction of traditional ways of life, causing the ethnocide of distinct groups of people and the destruction of the nature (See Venkateswar, 2004, for details on the *Andaman* context).

In the process of ethnocide, with the loss of the invaluable knowledge systems and wisdom of the indigenous peoples, flora, fauna, and human diversity face unprecedented, disastrous ends. These knowledge systems, which are empirical and experiential in nature, could be and/ or could have been powerful resources for sustainable development and cross-cultural environmental scholarship (See: Raj & Madhok, 2007). Thus, the indigenous voices of lived experience in Palashpur are actually a wake-up call to redress the ways in which our so-called civilization—through its expansionist, consumerist, supremacist, and capitalist core-values—is destroying this planet, which is increasingly becoming a dumping ground for large quantities hazardous industrial waste. This malevolent civilization is thus destroying the biodiversity and ecological balance of earth and challenging our very existence.

Hidden narratives of the colonial-neocolonialism of the nation state in an indigenous context. In Palashpur the insidious civilizing project is based on the ongoing colonial condition, in which the indigenous Santal language and education system (See Chapter Four for details); land ownership (See Chapter Five for further details); and religious beliefs, culture, traditions, and rituals (See Chapter Six for details) are being eliminated. The exclusionary and assimilationist policies and practices of the modern nation state Bangladesh bear the legacy of the Western neocolonial and homegrown neo-nationalist agenda. In previous chapters the oppressive situation of the rural Santals was elaborated upon in detail as well as the extent of colonial rule and its mutations, based on contexts and subject politics. These chapters further demonstrate the powerful presence of the West, replacing every aspect of indigeneity, both ideologically and materially, as

Ashis Nandy states “the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds” (Nandy, 1997, p. xi).

Thus, the presence of the West in the remote corner of planet Earth, Palashpur, is unquestionably active through its development agenda; its notion of modernity, contesting indigenous Santal tradition; its missionological projects of Christianization, diminishing indigenous ways of life and religious beliefs; its act of commodifying the land, dispossessing the Santals of land ownership and belonging; and its formula for education, generating a xenophobic infatuation with the West and driving new generations to “ignore village-based education, culture, economy, and the profession of farming” (Barua, 2004, p.129). These are being accomplished by the external intervention and vested interests of outsiders with the consent of the nation state, acting as an extension of the West.

The above issues further affirm the notion that the structure of nationalism and imperialism sustain each other as part of the ongoing neo-colonial project. Ideologically, the nation as well as nationalism has Western roots that, in the name of modernity and progress, undermine, devalue, oppress, and dehumanize tradition-bound indigenous communities. Under these oppressive circumstances, the Santals in Palashpur, as elsewhere, are quickly losing their lands, language, traditions, knowledge systems, rituals, and religion; this phenomenon of destruction is not an isolated event nor without wide-spread adverse consequences. Indeed, this phenomenon goes back to the emergence of nations as empires in Europe that replaced feudalism after the industrial revolution and the enlightenment. This era initiated a paradigm shift in the world order, creating a sense of superiority and the capacity of the European empires to control, civilize, and rule the

rest of the world. They believed that the rest of the world was anachronistic and inhabited by barbaric, uncivilized, and prehistoric peoples.

“Enlightenment” was, in fact, a major catalyst in the construction of a systemic and institutionalized racism that shaped notions of supremacy, domination, “difference” and “race” (Better, 2002; Foley, 2000; Hokowhitu, cited in Hippolyte, 2008), which eventually gave birth to colonization in the modern world. With a view to accumulating wealth and expanding territorial control, the European nations began to push the boundaries of their empires. Therefore, the notion of nation and empire became synonymous with dominating and domesticating the rest of the world. The conception and emergence of the nation states, in the 20th century, were born out of the same dynamics of domination and domestication, and the process continues to wreck havoc on indigenous communities, such as the Santals, around the world.

The newly emerged nation states, such as Bangladesh, are an extension of colonial and imperial history, in terms of exerting domination and control. Many of the previous practices and policies receive new garbs as they retain the core systemic foundation of colonial and imperial oppression and domination; these have been spreading in a new version of colonization known as the nation state. In fact “nationalism begets a sentiment of intolerance and ‘Othering’; that it is a potent site for power discourse, and there is a recurrent hierarchy and hegemony within its structure” (Quayum, 2005, p. 14). Similarly, the everyday lives of the Santals have become increasingly “colonized” by a managerial and oppressive ethos of nationalism that is fundamentally at odds with the core values of indigeneity.

The nation state Bangladesh is nothing but a replica of past colonial rule; it is, as elsewhere, exerting the toxic influence of the “factory model” (Miller, 1996) of modern education on the tradition bound indigenous peoples. Driven by the rationale of market and colonial economic growth, exploitative imperatives, a centralized system of educational control has been established for the purposes of affecting cultural imposition, domestication, and domination of the "cultural other”.

The education system has damaged the Santal traditional institutions (Ray, Das, & Basu, 1982), through which community members once became acquainted with their cultural heritage and learned to appreciate close bonds with nature and the universe. The Western mode of education indoctrinates these nature-loving individuals to be unmindful of the environment and ecology and thus become materialistic, self-centred, disconnected, ambitious, restless and discontent. Other than the nation state education policy, an extreme example of linguistic hegemony in place of linguistic integration (Dei, 2000) is evident in Palashpur. Through the imposition of an alien language, a covert indoctrination of ruling ideologies (Dei, 2000) continues to inflict the indigenous Santal community in Palashpur.

In addition, the adivasi land is a neocolonial site of contestation as well. Land relates to the formation of indigenous identity and religious practices and is the material base for indigenous cultural and spiritual activities that nourish and sustain indigenous life and knowledge. Land grabbing in Palashpur by the rich and powerful, with the overt and covert support of the state, reveals the autocratic nature of the exertion of state power over marginalized peoples and the landscapes that nourish their distinctive culture and associated rituals. This issue of power contestation, with regard to land ownership,

indicates a colonial relationship, in which the colonizers, namely the majority Bengali land grabbers quietly supported by the state, accomplish territorial, cultural, material, and physical domination over the colonized, namely the indigenous Santals.

As nature is an inseparable part of the Santal tradition, various Santal rituals and festivities are celebrated according to the cycle of nature, in which the land or the village is at centre stage. Once the land sustained the rituals and the Santal community and, in the process, helped promote and revitalize the Santals' culture, history, and tradition. However, the colonial land policy, adopted by the nation state Bangladesh, has given rise to a situation in which, as a result of deliberate and forced eviction (a version of *terra nullius*) the Santals are losing not only their material foothold, but their cultural, spiritual, and social existence and identity as well.

Another component of the hidden narratives of the Santals in Palashpur is faith-based colonization, which involves not only the conversion of the indigenous Santal people to Christianity, but also the impact of Christianization on their social and family structures. The civilizing mission, wrapped in modernity and Western values, is an integral part of evangelization and has captured the tradition-bound Santal community in Palashpur. As a result, there is an overwhelming sense of erosion in traditional values, disintegration, and a rise in materialism as well as consumerism. The indigenous worldview, which once nurtured and nourished a life of simplicity and contentment provided by nature, is apparently absent in the community. In its stead, is an alien concept of life, a yearning for material success, and competition rather than collectivist co-operation pervades.

Evangelization, which masks Western values and development for material success at the cost of spiritual emancipation, is distancing the Santals from their roots ingrained in the rural milieu; it positions them in the competitiveness and restlessness of the artificial life of urban contexts. The once unified Santal society, which was sustained and nourished by the treasure trove of nature, blessed by the *Bongas* and spirits of the ancestors, and undisturbed by modernity and external invasion, is now polarized, pulverized, and disintegrated. Christianization, built on colonial policies of domination, Westernization, the civilizing mission, and supremacist and expansionist ideologies, lacks a true understanding and tolerance of the irreplaceable value of the indigenous worldviews and ways of life. On the contrary, by solely focusing on their development agenda, the Christian missionaries justify their acts of conversion, aggression, and intrusion. Thus, like other indigenous contexts, evangelization and the nation state, as legacies of the colonial past, have set a shocking example in Palashpur.

Whose Development is It? The Development of the Rural Indigenous Peoples

I always hear about development projects, but I don't see any real development in our community. There are many NGOs working here for our wellbeing. But I only see poverty, hunger, diseases, and death. Those are the ones for which we were destined to be born. The situation is getting worse everyday. The number of landlessness is increasing and with landlessness we are losing our material base. You cannot develop us by empty promises and exploiting us. They don't give us what we need; rather they give us what they want us to have. For example: they give us cell phones, colour TVs, or a new religion; but we need our land, our language (Interview, 2005).

Nidhiram Tudu, an 80 year-old Santal elder, provides a compelling observation and understanding of the harsh reality of the indigenous Santal community in Palashpur. His perspective, articulated in the above interview excerpt, corresponds with the voices of various other indigenous communities enmeshed and devastated by institutionalized development ideologies. (See Bodley's *Victims of Progress*, and Davis's *Victims of the Miracle*, cited in Little, 2005). These ideologies, rooted in the civilizing mission of the former colonial era and now recast as development (Dossa, 2007), promote the globalization of cultural, political, and economic systems; this globalization results in degrading "Earth's ecology and resources but enhancing indigenous peoples' social dislocation, alienation, and furthering the dominance of technological rationality" (Chatterjee, 2001, p. 2). In this manner, the once autonomous, eco-friendly, contented, and humble lives of the tradition bound Santals are materially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually affected.

Contrary to the benchmark of progress imposed by the regime of development that is based solely on the modern Western knowledge system (Banerjee, 2000), the once encapsulated Santal community in Palashpur had their own economic system, in which they knew neither profit making nor stockpiling. Rather, the Santals shared their resources with one another, instead of preying on each other. This encapsulated, vibrant community enjoyed a sense of connectedness, well-being, and self-sufficiency that bonded the people with a common goal of material and spiritual interests. However, with the influence of the Western, liberal-Christian "development" model that Washington, London, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank have been pushing

on the South (Dossa, 2007), money and materialism have become controlling factors in defining the identities of individuals and the community.

In Palashpur, the mechanism of this development agenda is implemented by the NGOs, who represent the West and the state. Instead of the shared interests of the community and its collective survival in the spirit of self-respect, and connected living “in harmony with nature” (Gandhi, 1938, p. 61), the Santals in Palashpur are now positioned in a competitive consumerist and capitalist mode of living. In addition, the sense of modernization and civilization fabricated and imposed through institutions—such as Western education, money economy, land policies, and missionization that flourished hand in hand with colonization—has alienated the Santals from their roots and their traditional ways of life. These institutions are engaged in asserting processes that systematically de-legitimize traditional modes of livelihood by impoverishing the natural resource-base upon which the lives of communities depend (Escobar, cited in Chatterjee, 2001).

Evidently, in Palashpur dozens of aid agencies are ostensibly active in improving the socio-economic conditions of the Santals and other marginalized communities. These agencies are funded by Western dollars and dictated by the Western worldview that “created the notion of poverty based on capitalist indicators” (Escobar, cited in Banerjee, 200, p. 11), rather than the felt needs, knowledge, and worldview of the Santal community; they “operate on the assumption that economic progress ultimately leads to social progress, and that development can solve poverty and social problems on a global scale” (Banerjee, 2000, p. 11).

The imposed indicator of development has in no way assisted the Santals in achieving a sustainable way of life. Rather, “the strategy”, as Banerjee (2000) asserts and Nidhiram Tudu, the Santal elder quoted above, echoes (see p. 221) has “produced the opposite effect: underdevelopment, debt, crises, and exploitation” (Shiva,; Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 1987; Mies & Shiva, 1993 cited in Banerjee, 2000, p. 10). Indeed, existing development programs lack the earnestness and wisdom of “ethno-development—the autonomous capacity of a culturally differentiated society to guide its own development” (Batalla, cited in Little, 2005, p. 14). Evidently, the welfare of the Santals is on the line. As the developmental regime is separating the Santals from their natural resource-base, the community is becoming materially, culturally, and spiritually vulnerable.

The notion of development that set the benchmark of progress views the Santals, “low consuming, environment friendly lifestyles as poor and unfit for modern folks” (Nandy, cited in Dossa, 2007, p. 890). Thus, “never neutral, politically or racially, development is quintessentially developmental imperialism” (Dossa, 2007, p. 891); it is wrecking havoc not only on the lives of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, but on the lives of other marginalized communities across the globe as well. In the name of developing the communities, there is an enthusiasm for urbanization, which is separating people from each other, from nature and their traditional ways of life; this ultimately leads to the rejection of the natural world and the indigenous ecological wisdom.

The aggression of urbanization, which is leveled as the major cause for pollution, due to the high concentration of population and industrial production (See: Calvert, 2001), has detrimental consequences beyond economic and environmental concerns. Kozlov, Vershubsky, and Kozlova (2003) demonstrate that modernization and

urbanization have a serious stressing influence on the aborigines of *Khanty* and the *Mansi*, North Siberia. They conclude that there is a substantial link among modernization and urbanization, individual and socio-psychological characteristics, and the health and wellbeing of aboriginal communities. This corresponds with the Royal Commission report on Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Context (cited in Ship, 1998). This report outlines the onslaught of Western diseases among the indigenous peoples in Canada, as a result of modernization and urbanization. It states:

Chronic conditions are sometimes called the diseases of modernization, or Western diseases, because they attend to lifestyles typical of western industrial nations: reduced physical exercise; diets overloaded with fat and sugar; high levels of stress; and increased exposure to a wide range of pollutants in the air, water, and food supply. These risk factors set the stage for a wide range of diseases, including cancer, heart disease, obesity, gall bladder disease, and diabetes (Royal Commission Report, 1996).

Thus, modernization has given rise to numerous maladies previously absent from the lives of the tradition-bound, nature-loving, indigenous communities. Modernization has positioned communities in opposition to nature, to be exploited and appropriated for immediate material profit, with enduring adverse impact on their lives. Instead of respecting nature and environmental resources, based on a symbiotic relationship, modernization dictates the disregard, devaluation, and control of nature. Influenced by the violence associated with development agenda of the West, the indigenous communities are negotiating existential and internal threats. The operating principles and policies of the developmental regime disenfranchise and annihilate the indigenous communities, but privilege the West. In the long run, the by-product of this faulty notion

of development in the modernistic paradigm, which operates at the cost of indigenous communities, negates the interests of humanity and the planet.

The Survival of Indigenous Knowledge in the Context of Linguistic Imperialism and Genocide in the indigenous Context

The bleak future of *Santali*, the language of the heart of the indigenous Santals in Palashpur, exemplifies the condition of “linguistic genocide” or language death, which is at the core of the perpetuation of modernity’s colonialist and imperialist project. This situation echoes that of the American context, where according to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) the native people are at the receiving end of ‘linguistic genocide’ taking place in our society and schools. UNESCO expresses similar concern in its assertion that, “half of the world's 6,700 languages and dialects could vanish by the end of the century if governments don't take action now” (CTV report, 2009). A Statistics Canada report, published two years ago, states that in Canada irreversible damage has already been done to ten once-flourishing, Aboriginal languages that have become extinct over the past 100 years (CTV report, 2009).

Francis & Reyhner (2002) affirm a similar trend in the United States, where only two million people speak their indigenous language, and less than 1% of the current population identifies themselves as possessing a native language ancestry, including Native Americans Hawaiians and Alaskans. Of the 154 indigenous languages still spoken in the United States, only about 20 are being transmitted to children by their families. In other words, after a generation or two, most languages will not be maintained or used. Indigenous peoples elsewhere are experiencing similar situations.

The indigenous languages, such as *Quechua*, *Aymara*, *Nahuatl*, and *Maya* mostly spoken in Central and Latin American countries, are facing erosion. Similar situations exist in the continents of Australia and Africa. In Australia alone, some 500 languages have been lost since the arrival of Europeans. At present, the indigenous people in countries, such as Guatemala, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru prefer to speak Spanish to their indigenous languages. Of the recorded 10,000 or more languages that have existed around the world over time, only about 6,000 are now spoken, 3000 of which are not spoken by the younger generation. As a result of ongoing assimilation pressures and pressures from the dominant languages, the number of languages is projected to drop by 50-90% over the next 100 years (UNDP report, 2004a). In the African context, the issue of “language death” is more pressing, as Nigel Crawhall (1999) documents:

Of the scores of *San* and *Khoe* languages spoken by indigenous peoples when Europeans first arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in the 17th century, only a handful survives today. The surviving languages are all at risk of dying out in the next generation (p. 1).

The documented above instances demonstrate the seriousness of the issue of “language death” among indigenous languages in the global context. They further corroborate that education and language policy legitimize the accumulated knowledge and authority of conquest and colonization (Willinsky, 1998) as they continue to be imposed on marginal communities around the globe. This is achieved “through linguistic racism and the symbolic capital of language that serves to discriminate and disadvantage the colonized” (Dei, 2006, p. 16), such as the indigenous peoples. Discriminatory

language policies, evident in indigenous communities, such as the Santals in Palashpur, are responsible for the demise of many minority languages, both nationally and globally.

Many minority languages are on the brink of annihilation because of state-crafted linguistic imperialism, as in the case of the indigenous Santals in Bangladesh. This “linguistic imperialism” that controls and dominates the languages of the others, is one of the principal mechanisms of colonial and neo-colonial oppression. The powerful forces of assimilation create adverse situations that destroy the survival of minority languages, oral and/or written. In this respect, media plays a devastating role (See: Fourie, 2007; Tomlinson, 1991). Many nation states, such as Bangladesh, do not recognize indigenous languages; they view linguistic diversity as a threat to the integrity of the nation. These oppressive nation states are ready to eliminate the languages and with them the rights of their speakers. Thus, linguistic hegemony, in place of linguistic integration, is a covert indoctrination of ruling ideologies (Dei, 2000) that continues to afflict the indigenous communities across the world.

The consequences of language loss are devastating not only for the linguistic communities but for the world at large, as valuable knowledge resources embedded in the languages are lost with them. When even one language falls silent, the world loses an irredeemable repository of human knowledge. Nettle and Romaine (2000) observe that,

..every language is a living museum, a monument to every culture it has been a vehicle too. It is a loss to every one of us if a fraction of that diversity disappears, when there is something that can have been done to prevent it (cited in McCarty, 2003, p. 14).

Thiongo (1986) asserts that, “Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history” (p. 15). Therefore, by denying these diverse languages, the diversity of culture is being denied, and, in the process, the collective history and tradition are being removed from the lives of the communities. With language loss, the community loses their collective identity and the wisdom associated with it. Thus, language loss is irreparable.

From the perspective of equity and justice, language death and recovery are human rights issues. Through the mother tongue, a child comes to know, represent, name, and act upon the world. As such, to speak one’s mother tongue is a birthright. No one can naturally or easily renounce this fundamental birthright. In various indigenous contexts the loss of a language reflects the exercise of power by the dominant group over the disenfranchised indigenous peoples. Accordingly to Fishman (1997) it manifests “in the concomitant destruction of intimacy, family, and community via national and international involvement and intrusions. (p. 4). Thus, linguistic imperialism not only destroys languages, but marginalizes communities as well.

For indigenous children, the loss of their mother tongue has negative affect on their academic success. Cummins (1996) argues that positive identity is vital to academic achievement, and children can suffer from the disregard of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. He states:

[W]hen students’ language, culture, and experience are ignored or eradicated in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage. Everything they have learned about life and the world up to this point is being dismissed as irrelevant to school learning; there are few points of connection to

curriculum materials or instruction and so students are expected to learn in an experiential vacuum. Students' silence and nonparticipation under these conditions have frequently been interpreted as lack of academic ability or effort, and teachers' interactions with students have reflected a pattern of low expectations, which become self-fulfilling (pp. 2-3).

Furthermore, language loss leads to the irreversible loss of vital founts of knowledge, accumulated for centuries by different races of mankind. With the death of indigenous languages and indigenous knowledge, many aspects of biological diversity and the wisdom of sustainable management of different ecological systems will also be at risk of vanishing. By adopting measures to prevent linguistic genocide and maintaining linguistic diversity, indigenous knowledge can be saved in order to ensure a linguistically, culturally, and ecologically affluent society for all.

Turning the Tables on Education:

A Sustainable Education Policy, Pedagogy, and Practice

Historically education, in its formal and informal modes, served as a colonialist-imperialist tool; it was implemented by monolithic prescription (Dei & Kempf, 2006) and, for the most part, imposed from above. Education, as such, has played a central role in the promotion of colonialist-imperialist, epistemological, axiological, and ontological paradigms around the world. As a result of this education, the world has become uni-dimensional, where the West is privileged and exerts material, ideological, cultural, and linguistic domination. The supremacist ideology in education continues unabated despite the political decolonization that brought the emergence of various nation states on both hemispheres of the globe. Furthermore, under the influence of globalization / neo-

liberalism (Giroux, 2005), which is yet another mutated version of the modernist, colonial-imperial project, these nation states have become puppet states, controlled by local elites and transnational, hegemonic corporations. In addition, “under neo-liberalism everything” including the worldwide, dominant, public education system “either is for sale or is plundered for profit” (Giroux, 2005, p. 4).

Under the influence of the “factory model” of education (Miller, 1996), which acts as an engine for consumerist job seekers, the nation states have thus far failed to address the genuine interests of the indigenous communities as well as the wellbeing of the planet. On the contrary, indigenous languages, wisdom, knowledge, and cultures were and continue to be exclusively proscribed, demeaned, and diminished by the states through its various institutions, including the education system. The education system, at the helm, is a system that came into being hand in hand with the flourishing and expansion of colonialism and imperialism; it continues to exist as their inherent legacy years after political decolonization. As a direct consequence of the colonialist education policy, the indigenous languages, knowledge, and cultures have been constructed and treated as antediluvian and unnecessary in the modern world. In contrast, national languages and cultures, or more specifically the languages and cultures of the dominant ethnic groups, have been viewed as the pinnacle of modernity and progress.

There is a nexus between the colonialist–imperialist mode of education, modernity, and the Western version of progress. Indeed, the education system that has propagated this myopic and racist vision, lacks respect for and understanding of the importance of local knowledge, collective experiences, “Conscientization” (Friere, 1970), and action. This “educational project that was originally intended to profit and delight

some at the expense of others” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 264) is further devoid of the essential elements of “spirituality, which is manifested in our search for wholeness, meaning, and interconnectedness and values” (Wane, 2006, p. 89). Devoid of inclusiveness, service ethics, and ecological awareness, this version of education, embedded in “market-driven values” (Giroux, 2009), has “not only facilitated the normalization of Western education, but actively left deep spiritual and mental scars, causing mental and physical enslavement” (Wane, 2006, p. 88); in the process it has been perpetuating ecological, cultural, and economic degradation.

Western education affects the biological diversity and environment of sustainable life on the planet. The devastating consequence of this mode of education is that “by its all pervasive influence, the knowledge of the environment is being lost in communities around the world, and there is an urgent need to conserve this knowledge to help develop mechanisms to protect the earth’s biological diversity” (Battiste, 2000, p. 8). In order to ensure an ecological sense and help create a holistic and integrated world for generations to come, we cannot afford to evade the responsibility of rethinking and reformulating curricula; curricula should incorporate inclusive visions and rhythms of life and languages and pedagogical praxis’s that encompass “multiple lived experience and alternative knowledges” (Dei & Calliste, 2000, p. 11).

Community-based education (Corson, 1998) offers a good example of a pedagogy that “enable[s] learners to become active participants in shaping of their own education” (Corson, 1998, p. 240). This education will, indeed, help liberate us from the colonially tainted understanding that we carry (Willinsky, 1998) and offer opportunities to unlearn and relearn, and thus initiate engaged learning. Rethinking the curriculum, in this manner,

and a “social pedagogy” that engages ecological literacy, derived from indigenous wisdom, will enable learners “to see the connections that are inherent in the environment” (Miller, 1996, p. 155). The consciousness that emerges from the holistic nature of such education will lead our understanding of words towards a broader understanding of the world (Friere, 1972). Similarly, according to Miller (1996):

..this will offer opportunities to reeducate ourselves about “the basic laws of ecology and how these impact on our day-to-day lives. It would also involve a study of how we got ourselves into the present mess. This would involve: a critical look at history and how industrialization and consumerism contributed to the destruction of the planet (p. 155).

In this manner education can play an important role in healing and renewal. To implement such a paradigm-shift in education, efforts must be made to incorporate indigenous knowledge—guided by an “anti-colonial discursive framework” (Dei, 2002) that contains ecological sense, spirituality, empirical, and experiential learning—into the curricula as well as the instructional and pedagogical practices of educators and learners. This shift would not only be empowering from the perspective of the indigenous peoples but also essential for the soulful existence of our planet. Unquestionably, the future of our planet largely depends on how we come to terms with the application, dedication, and our investment in such education policies and practices, which have been overlooked, demeaned, and destroyed.

Summary

This chapter offered a brief but in-depth analysis of the devastating consequences of modernity that serves the operation of the imperialist-colonialist project, under the guise of materialist, consumerist, and mechanized Western industrial civilization. The

analysis further shed light on how education, embedded in the ethos of the West, perpetuates the colonial legacy, marginalizes indigenous wisdom and meaning, and leads to spiritual poverty, lack of ecological awareness, and action against the wellbeing of the planet itself. This chapter suggests the urgency and agency of restoring indigenous ecologies, consciousnesses, and languages, so that they can re-emerge in our private and public lives in order to rebuild nations, peoples, and communities. This can be achieved by incorporating indigenous connected wisdom, meaning, and healing into our education policies and practices.

It is essential to create a balance between the fast disappearing indigenous traditional wisdom and modern knowledge in order to save the planet from the damaging influences of the industrial civilization, for which the West is solely responsible. This chapter documented the damaging influences of modernity, by analyzing the predicament of the indigenous communities imposed and inflicted upon them through the insidious expansionist, consumerist, supremacist, and capitalist core-values of the West. These damaging influences demand urgent awareness and action not only for the survival of the indigenous peoples but the planet. Thus, this chapter is not only a revelation of the overwhelming issues of injustice, oppression, and dehumanisation against the indigenous peoples in the global context, but also points at the urgency of ecological education for the survival of the planet Earth and its inhabitants.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Outline of the Major Research Findings

This thesis contributes to the critical understanding of the anti-colonial versus post-colonial perceptual quandary, by engaging in the study of the indigenous Santals' struggles and resistance for their land, language, localized knowledge, religion, and culture within the context of the nation state Bangladesh. This research explored, as already mentioned, the complex and contested confluence of politics, power, and identity issues, through a web of local, national, and global insidious mechanisms that encompass the legacy of colonialism; and this legacy is conceived as “not foreign or alien rule but it is rather as imposed, dominating and discriminatory” (Dei, 2000c, p. 42). The thesis demonstrated the ways in which the legacy of colonialism equips the local neo-colonizers and/or the colonial-model of the emerging nation states, such as Bangladesh, with theoretical and practical tools; these tools maintain the oppressive colonial condition by denying indigenous peoples their mother tongues, devaluing their cultures and religions, and finally dispossessing them of the lands they had been rooted in for centuries.

This research analyzed the lived-experiences of the Santals in Palashpur, Bangladesh. In their voices and case studies, within a broader “historical, political, and cultural context”; this study further examined their “critical nature within those dynamics” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 6). The research findings demonstrate that the indigenous rural Santal community in Palashpur is on the brink of extinction; this process is rapidly occurring, due to imposed and inherited colonial, assimilationist, racist, and exclusionary policies and practices inflicted upon them by a number of external forces: the radical Islamic nation state; modernity; the development agenda, rooted in Western

values; and finally Christian-aggression, disguised by the civilizing mission. The research findings revealed a nexus between the nation state and the West, which has been wrecking havoc on the tradition-bound Santal community in Palashpur. The community is engaged in a silent resistance in order to survive and thrive culturally, materially, and spiritually, rather than become relics in the national museum.

The participants in this study perceived their struggles as well as their survival as closely linked to the issues of land rights, religion, language, and education, through which oppression, subordination, and injustice are produced and perpetuated. The sites of oppression—including schools, which contest the issues of language and education, leading to knowledge production; land ownership, which contests the issue of belonging and identity; and religion that contests the issue of spiritual identity and indigeneity—are crucially intertwined in the process of marginalization.

This study revealed that the imposed policies of education and language, as handmaidens of the assimilationist agendas of the nation state, the churches, and the NGOs, are destroying vital indigenous Santal establishments and denying their rights and privileges in the remote village of Palashpur, Bangladesh. It further demonstrated that the Western mode of education, rooted in the colonial venture, has devalued and destroyed the collectivistic Santal way of life and generated a passion for materialism and consumerism in the once tradition-bound, encapsulated Santal community in Bangladesh. In this process, the sense of modernization and civilization, fabricated through Western education, has alienated the Santals from their roots and their traditional way of life. Furthermore, the discriminatory education and language policies of the nation state as forms of covert *cognitive imperialism* (Battiste, 1986), have suppressed tribal languages,

defiled indigenous cultures, destroyed indigenesness, and assaulted the indigenous spirit and values.

In addition to the issues of education and language, this thesis presented the magnitude of chronic and aggressive land grabbing in Palashpur and its adjoining areas. The research findings reveal that the brutal mechanism of land grabbing sustains the continuation of the colonial legacy and the colonialist and imperialist domination of the nation state. The research demonstrated that colonial land policies, which commodified land, continue to this day and disrupt the belonging of the ritualistic, nature-loving, indigenous Santal community. Furthermore, this land alienation ultimately leads to the destruction of “Santalness” and poses challenges for the Santal identity and belongingness in Bangladesh. This study further demonstrates that by denying indigenous land rights, the government is legitimizing the de-legitimized ploy of undermining and uprooting indigenous knowledge and the existence and identity of indigenous peoples on Bangladeshi soil.

Finally, in the context of the Santal religion and culture, this thesis revealed that faith-based colonialism and/or religious imperialism are insidiously and violently engaged in erasing the indigenous Santals’ collective memory and their past, thus aligning the Santal converts with the values and norms of the Church and the West. In this manner, religious imperialism is reshaping and reconstructing an imposed consciousness on the Santals, a reality that is alienated from the local Santals’ social, cultural, spiritual and political consciousness. Within the context of this religious and cultural invasion, this thesis reports and rescues the genuine voices and knowledges of the community that reclaim their collective identity, agency, and existence and thus

contribute to the revitalization of their indigeneity, namely their soulful connected living, dialectic and dialogic space.

This study contributes to the development and legitimization of indigenous paradigms that may serve to link the local indigenous peoples with the recent surge of the broader, Fourth World, indigenous movement across the globe, and pressure the Bangladeshi neo-colonizers, who have persistently ignored indigenous issues. This thesis established the political and social injustice and the marginalization of the indigenous peoples, evident in Palashpur, thus making a case for anti-colonial history and literature with regard to indigenous peoples in the Bangladeshi context.

More significantly, this case is established through the Santal experience at the micro-level, through its focus on insiders' perspectives, which tend to be overlooked in conventional sociological and ethnic studies or lost in theorization. In this study the voices of the research participants are not overshadowed by discourse, and are clearly recognized and valued in order to generate real change from below. This study calls on researchers to follow this research paradigm and contribute to a larger proliferation of scholarship in this area, thus legitimizing indigenous issues in this part of the world. Finally, this study has challenged the nationalist and missionological discourses that stereotypically portray indigenous peoples as "heathen, barbaric, superstitious, and backward" that must be civilized.

Implication of this Research on a Personal Level

This research has touched me personally and professionally in many ways. It brought me in close contact with the Santals, who taught me and shared with me the distinctive features of their rich culture, tradition, wisdom, spirituality, and their unique

consciousness of life and living. Unfortunately, this research found that this irreplaceable treasure is on the verge of extinction, due to external encroachment manifested in: the alienation of Santal land, *hor disom*; the demise of the Santal language, *Santali*, and community education; and the devaluation of the Santal religion, *Sarna*. The loss is profound. As a researcher as well as a human being, it was personally painful to helplessly witness this loss. Borrowing from John Keats (1819), I feel that, “*My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains my senses.*” I sincerely hope that this research effects transformation in the attitudes, policies, and practices of the government, the majority people, and the other agencies in Bangladesh that “participate in and benefit from the oppression” (Dei & Kepf, 2006, p. 308) of the Santals in Palashpur.

The process of becoming engaged in this research was a rediscovery of my spiritual self and my identity that had remained colonized for a long time, by a web of illusions created by Western values and the nationalist ego. I now feel liberated and more grounded in my roots, where I come from and where I truly belong. It has been in a sense a self-awakening for me, through the process of personal decolonization. In the process of working with the Santals in this study I have, in fact, fulfilled my “*karmic debt*” to the land, air, nature, water, sunshine, and moonlight that holistically nourish and nurture both their lives and mine.

I feel spiritually and emotionally connected to the Santal people, who opened their hearts and hearths to me. I am glad that, as a researcher, despite being a part of the Western academia, I can claim to go beyond the stigma in which most researchers are “armed with *goodwill* in their *front pockets* and *patents* in their *back pockets*” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 24). I have learned how one can smile with an empty stomach; and one

can survive without many things, despite the temptations brought on by the influences of consumerism and materialism. I have further learned how one can forgive the usurper, who has deceived the land; befriend those who have taken away one's language and replaced it with a foreign tongue; and tolerate those, who have profaned and banished nature and God and replaced them with an alien patriarchal God. I am thus humbled and, at the same time, reformed and enriched by this community.

Reflection and suggestions. Through this study I listened to the inner voices of the Santals and witnessed the silence of their lived experiences—their emotional, material, and spiritual crises and conflicts. In the process, I became aware of the realities that surround the pastoral community in Palashpur. Therefore, I was able to experience the daily rhythm of the community. I could sense that there was a common hunger among the Santals, in general, to reclaim their cultural, political, and spiritual indigenous identities. There is also a collective consciousness and sense of urgency, amidst the polarized Santal community, that strives for a broader understanding to bring the community together.

Furthermore, among the educated Santal youth there is an effort to transcend the Santal life and reality, which is “broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls” (Tagore, 1910), erected by external forces, such as the churches, political parties, NGOs, and other alien institutions. Through various electronic communication media, these educated young men are increasingly becoming politically and culturally aware of the existence of the global Fourth World movement and its relentless efforts for agency and the recovery of the world's indigenous peoples rights and privileges. Enlightened by up-

to-date information and understanding, these young men are able to locate their position in this hegemonic world of power, politics, and domination. They are becoming acquainted with the root causes of their own subjugation, exploitation, and sufferings.

It is inspiring to find that many educated young Santals have been working with profound commitment for the wellbeing of the community, ignoring the call of the West. Indeed, they have been resisting the forces engaged in destabilizing the interests of the community. What is more encouraging is that these open-minded young people, irrespective of their religious orientation, are engaged in forming and forging alliances with other indigenous groups, both locally and nationally, in order to put pressure on the government to grant constitutional recognition for indigenous peoples as well as other rights and privileges. However, the government has yet to respond and is insincere with regard to the demands of the indigenous peoples.

In contrast with the positive and inspiring trends this research discovered in Palashpur, is a diametrically opposite scenario: a section of the Santals are nonchalant about the past, present, and future of the Santal collectivist, soulful way of life that has been eradicated by the spirit of self-actualization. This is in fact, symptomatic evidence of the external influences on the lives of the Santals in Palashpur. These Santals lack a reasonable sense of concern for their community. As a result, there is an unchecked exodus from the rural community. Therefore, the good work of the individuals, previously mentioned, is mired by others, who senselessly reject their indigeneity and community values. There are various fundamental factors associated with this phenomenon, including the denial of Santal land, language, and education, imposed Western values, and the development agenda that deny the Santals an anchor in their

roots. To reverse this trend, a concerted effort must be adopted, based on the actual needs of the community, integrating the Santals' values, beliefs, and voices; these should be attained through informed knowledge, derived from the community and its rhythm of life, and not from contrived imposed recommendations. The following recommendations are based on the perspectives of the Santals who participated in this research:

1. The Santali language and the indigenous Santal identity must be recognized through a constitutional amendment. Proper steps, such as primary level education in the home language, should be implemented to promote the language. In addition, the rights of the indigenous Santals must be established in accordance with the *United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* (1993-94).

2. Appropriate measures should be taken by state functionaries, civil society, the judiciary, and other concerned agencies to stop land-grabbing, eviction, harassment, systemic discrimination, and deception permanently. Immediate measures must be taken to recover the Santal lands that have been grabbed.

3. Forced conversion must be investigated and a monitoring system should be established to prevent this from occurring in the future. A rehabilitation program should be established for those who wish to return to their former religious faith. In addition, churches should refrain from spreading propaganda against the indigenous beliefs, values, and rituals. The missionaries belonging to various denominations must educate themselves about the indigenous culture, religion, and value system in order to foster mutual respect. The Catholic Church must rethink Vatican II (Marandy, 2006). There should be room for the critical contextualization of Christianity and the rehabilitation of

the Santal faith, so that the convert Santals can take pride in their cultural heritage, traditions, and rituals and bring emotional and psychic balance to their new identity.

4. Assistance from any agency should be offered to the community on humanitarian and human development grounds, without imposing conditions. Donor agencies must recognize the moral and ethical obligations of masking vested agendas, in their efforts to promote the wellbeing of the marginalized communities.

5. The state and other local and international agencies must recognize their complicity in the marginalization and oppression of the indigenous communities. They must create a positive environment in the rural context, by incorporating the needs and knowledge of the local Santals, so that they are not misguided by the restlessness of the cosmopolitan culture and the agenda of the development regime.

6. The Santal community, the various NGOs, and the government must build a dialogical and participatory relationship in order to foster co-operation, not confrontation, in the community's education and development, and to foster public awareness, empathy, and respect for the indigenous community.

7. NGOs must stop taking advantage of the vulnerability of the Santals through the commodification and appropriation of their cultural heritage. They must sincerely work for the Santal community, instead of serving themselves.

Research outcomes. This study provides knowledge and research data that critique national policy in the context of prevalent practices and politics that deny the basic rights of the indigenous rural Santals in Bangladesh. Furthermore, this study provides insights into the social dynamics in other localities that can assist in the revision

and reevaluation of policy-making. The spirit of advocacy of this thesis intends to build pressure for policy change from the grass-roots level, which is often overlooked, as policy is determined and implemented from above.

This thesis serves as an effective mouthpiece for the indigenous Santals, to raise awareness of the oppressions they experience. The research participants voiced their opinions about multilayered issues, involving party-politics, communal disharmony, and homophobia, racist national agenda that limit personal growth, spiritual enlightenment, and social development, among others. These issues were identified by people who instinctively speak little and retreat to more silence when entangled by layers of complex abnormalities imposed upon them.

This research project is not intended for academic consumption alone but for initiating activism against the ongoing colonial situation in Bangladesh. The situations explored and analyzed in this study apply to other indigenous communities, struggling to survive in the context of the nation-building agenda. As such, the study has broader significance. Increasing activism among the local indigenous peoples and raising awareness of their actual conditions on the global stage will play an important role in implementing indigenous rights and improving their situation, while making injustice visible.

Limitations of the study. Due to limited resources, in terms of time, space, and funding, this research involved participants from a limited number of villages in one part of the greater district of Rajshahi. A long-term engagement with the day-to-day life situations and realities of the research participants would have resulted in richer outcomes. At the same time, this study reflects in-depth, the lived experiences of the

research participants in their specific context. Therefore, a generalized view regarding the lives of the Santals, based on the conclusions from this study, will surely be contested and questionable.

In addition, the lack of relevant literature and statistical information, with regard to the economic, demographic, spiritual, social, and political conditions of the indigenous Santals limits the areas of exploration. This research outcome is thus based on description rather than statistical data and concrete numbers. Besides, one may question the use of non-scholarly publications in this study, such as news articles and news reports or school textbooks. In this regard, I argue that these sources actually represent the holistic nature of this study. I left no stone unturned in exploring information and knowledge relevant to this study.

Furthermore, being a non-indigenous, Bengali Hindu by birth, in conjunction with a variety of other subjective factors, I do not claim to be absolutely impartial in my interpretation of the research data. Despite my best efforts to maintain neutrality and impartiality, my personal viewpoints are affected by my emotional engagement in an advocacy research such as this; these perspectives may have unwittingly impacted the subjectivity of the research findings as well.

Gender issues are basically absent from my analysis, despite the fact that the Santal women doubly suffer by the patriarchy of the state and within the Santal society. The Santal women are the most vulnerable among the indigenous peoples, as they suffer “multiple jeopardy” (Gerber, cited in Voyageur, 2000, p. 83) on the basis of gender and their ethnicity. This issue must be addressed in the future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Indigenous communities have better understanding, scholarship, and wisdom in relation to biodiversity. Therefore, losing the indigenous communities means losing this localized knowledge. This loss of localized knowledge is an irreparable loss of invaluable knowledge resources of the ecosystem, plant technology, and biodiversity, which could have positive impact in preventing the increasing environmental degradation and devastation. Therefore, ways and means must be determined in order to protect further loss of the indigeneity of the Santals in Palashpur and indigenous peoples elsewhere. In this context it makes more sense to protect these communities, rather than allow the vested interests of the majority, the West, and the state to eliminate the indigenous peoples in the name of state-building or building the kingdoms of so called superior faiths.

While engaged in this research study within the parameter of the research objectives, many intriguing issues emerged that are not only important to the indigenous communities but also to the general wellbeing of all human beings and this planet. As such, there are a wide-range of potential areas to explore in relation to the indigenous Santals. The following are possible areas for further research projects and working papers:

1. A longitudinal qualitative study, such as an ethnographic research study, should be conducted year round, in order to collect more in-depth data, adding qualitative richness and detailed understandings of the indigenous Santals' situation. As the life of Santals revolves around the cycles of the seasons, a year round ethnographic participatory

research would be effective in exploring how other colonial conditions of the indigenous Santals are compounded by natural calamities common to the area of Bangladesh.

2. Apart from a long-term ethnographic research study of the Santals' situation, integrating a large scale quantitative design, based on random sampling and triangulating it with qualitative methods, would allow for generalization of the outcomes and for a greater and more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, a comparative research study, with a similar agenda, should be conducted, involving various territories, where the Santals live, in both India and Bangladesh, with dissimilar social-economic and political conditions.

3. A long term ethnographic research should be conducted with regard to the loss of the Santals' knowledge about medicinal plants, with the encroachment of land in the rural Bengal, and how this knowledge could have contributed to modern pharmacopoeia.

4. A strategy should be designed through action research to incorporate the home languages of various indigenous peoples effectively in the national curriculum and an in-depth exploration of the pedagogical implications of this incorporation should be undertaken.

5. A study should be conducted to explore the link between the dispossession of lands and the demise of the Santal "Sacred Grove" and its ecological implications against the backdrop of profane modernity.

The protection, or lack of linguistic, educational, religio-cultural, and land rights of the indigenous peoples, under varying circumstances of neo-colonialism, modernization, missionization, and the assimilationist agenda of the nation state and the West must be examined more deeply for a better understanding of the situation and an

agreeable resolution to be reached. The neo-colonial state and the omnipresent West must acknowledge the problem and act accordingly. By not only accommodating the indigenous voice and location but also making a case for valuing indigenous perspectives, this research study is a stepping-stone in the fight against injustice and engaging in action towards equity, justice and peace, the core components of decolonization

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Glossary

Adarsha Gram:	Model Village
Adivasi / Adivashi:	Original settlers of the land, from Sanskrit <i>Adi</i> =original and <i>vasi</i> =inhabitants. Used in line with the international notion of the indigenous identity
Ashram School:	Residential school with a community centred approach
Ashuras:	Demons
Babu:	Elitist persona
Baksheesh:	Tip
Bangla:	The official language of Bangladesh
Bangalee:	The people of Bangladesh, nationality
Bar:	The number 2 in Santali
Bar(o):	The number 12 in Bangla
Barind:	Geographic region in parts of northwestern Bangladesh and north-central West Bengal, India
Bhil Jaratha:	Hunters belonging to the lower caste
Bidroha:	Uprising
Bigha(s):	Measurement for land
Bongas/bongus:	Spirit or gods the indigenous Santals believe control human destiny and diseases (good and bad bongas)
Bhramanical:	Associated with the supremacy of the higher caste in the social hierarchy in India
Chairman:	Elected head of the local government
Dalilnama:	Title or ownership of a property
Dasa:	Servant
Dasyu:	bandit/Robber

Devanagari:	The Script for Sanskrit
Deva or Brahmana:	Gods or priestly class in India
Dikku / Dikus:	Oppressors in Santali
East India Company:	British Company that became ruler of colonized India (1757-1858)
Enemy Property: / Vested Property:	Term for the property of Hindus who left Pakistan for India under the Enemy Property act of 1965. After liberation, enemy property became vested
Gandhians:	People who follow the principles of Mahatma Gandhi
Guru School:	Schools in the tradition of the Santals, based on empirical/experiential learning
Handi:	Locally brewed liquor
Hor disom:	Santal country or land
Hor hopon:	Sons of mankind /true man
Jol Jammin / Jangle:	Water, land, and nature
Karmic debt:	A debt generated from <i>Karma</i> . By fulfilling <i>karmic debt</i> one can enjoy life after overcoming negativity in life.
Khajna:	Property tax
Kolarian:	One of the three non-Aryan races. The indigenous non-Aryan races of India are divided into three classes: Tibeto-Burmese, Kolarian, and Dravidian
Kola, Villa, Karate, NiCad:	Derogatory terms for indigenous peoples
Khas:	Land owned by the government
Krishna:	Hindu God, the Supreme personality of Godhead

Lord Macaulay:	(1800-1859) Promoted European literature and science among the natives of India through the establishment of English language use in Indian educational institutions.
Manjhi haram:	Head of the Santal village for both material and spiritual engagements
Matbars:	Influential people in the village
Mr. K	An adivasi activist (pseudonym)
Murshidabad:	A district in present day West Bengal, India.
Munda:	Language family spoken by about nine million people in central and eastern India and Bangladesh
Nachol Bidroha:	Peasant movement in the 1950s in the area of Nachol, Rajshahi
Narmada Dam Project:	Project for the construction of irrigation and hydroelectric dams on the Narmada River, India, displacing indigenous communities
Notified tribes/ Criminal tribes:	Indigenous peoples who were considered criminals by the colonial regime
Ol-Chiki:	Santali font invented by Pundit Raghunath Murmu
Orissa:	Eastern state in India
Oriya:	Language of the people of Orissa
Palashpur:	Metaphor for contested space where the colonial power and politics of the nation state exert domination and subordination. Pseudonym for the site of my research
Parabs:	Cultural festivals
Peace-Accord:	Agreement between Indigenous groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Bangladesh Government to end violent insurgency and military repression
Permanent Settlement:	Also known as the Cornwallis Code (1793) that brought land under the control of the East India Company for revenue collection

Puranas / Samhitas:	Hindu scriptures describing the role and manifestation of gods, goddesses and <i>Ashuras</i>
Sarna:	The religion of the Santals
Sanskritization:	Form of cultural assimilation found in India
Santali:	The Language of the Santals
Sepoy Mutiny:	Mutiny of the soldiers (<i>sepoys</i>) of the British East India Company that started the Indian Rebellion of 1857
Shalishi:	Localized unofficial judiciary comprised of the local elites
Talibanization:	Spreading an oppressive version of political Islam manifested in radicalism and associated violence
Tauts:	Dishonest men
Tebhaga Andolon:	Peasant movement for a tenancy system of three shares, in which the land owner receives one third of the produce for rent and the tenant receives two thirds for labour and other inputs (1950s)
Thakur Jiu:	The Supreme Personality of God head for the Santals
Thana:	Police Station
Union Parishad:	Local government
Upazila:	Sub-district. Term used for a new administrative unit that contains the same territory of the Thana, but acts as a district and local administrative centre
Vedas:	Ancient Holy Scriptures of the Hindus (also <i>knowledge</i>)
Zamindar / Zamindari	Large land owners in Bengal with revenue collection and tax extraction rights instituted during the Mughal dynasty and modified during the British rule. Zamindari is the entitlement for the land

Appendices: Appendix A: Consent Letter

Dear Participant,

I am carrying out a study for my doctoral studies at OISE/UT in order to write a thesis about the present-day situation of indigenous Santal in the Bangladeshi context. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore your experience of challenges you face as being adivasi (indigenous) in the Bangladeshi Society. Your statements may be taken as the evidence of how the Santali people feel about their existence in the Bangladeshi society at large.

This study involves multiple sessions of in-depth interviews and informal talk, which will not exceed more than two hours for each session and will be conducted either in Bengali or in English according to your preference. The interviews will be taped, transcribed, and then will be safely locked away and only I will have access to these records. The names of the interviewees as well as the locations (the name of the village and union and district) will be concealed through pseudonyms and other means right from the beginning. In case of any publication of this research, I will not incorporate any information that makes it possible to identify you, any other participants or the locations

There are no foreseeable political, emotional or physical risks from your participation. If you still feel that sharing personal stories with others (during the interview and/or later) may cause your emotional distress, or you feel your statement might cause further harm to your community please feel free not to take part in this study.

You will receive no payment for participating but the findings of this study will, at least, recognize your struggles to belong and as such by participation you will help find voice for Santals in the Bangladeshi society. Besides, I will send you a copy of the summary of my paper upon completion of this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to refuse to answer a question at any time or discontinue the interview. You are also free to withdraw at any time without any penalty. As such, I am wondering if you could possibly help my study on an agreed-upon time schedule.

Should you have any questions or need further clarification regarding the nature of the study, your rights and privacy as a participant, please contact Dr. X at (416) xxx-xxxx ext. xxxx or Mrinal Debnath at (416) xxx-xxxx

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrinal Debnath

I have read and understood the terms and conditions under which I will participate in this study. Therefore, I give my consent to be a participant.

Participant's signature

Date

Place

Appendix B: Approval of the Ethical Review Board



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Office of the Vice-President, Research and Associate Provost

Ethics Review Office

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #13637

April 21, 2006

Prof. Rose Baaba Folson
Dept. of Sociology and Equity Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West
University of Toronto

Mr. Mrinal Debnath
328 – 10 Gower Street
Toronto, ON
M4B 3N3

Dear Prof. Folson and Mr. Debnath:

Re: Your research protocol entitled, “Living on the Edge: Neo-Colonialism and the Adivasi (Indigenous) Santal Identity in the Bangladeshi Context”

ETHICS APPROVAL Approval Date: April 19, 2005

We are writing to remind you of the expiry date of your ethics approval for the above study.

Please complete and submit one of the following continuing review forms to update your ethics approval:

- 1) Annual Renewal Form: If your data collection and/or data analyses extends beyond one year (i.e. beyond the expiry date), you will need to renew your ethics approval for the study.
- 2) Study Completion Report: If your study is completed prior to the one-year mark (i.e. prior to the expiry date), you will need to complete a Study Completion Report to close your file.

Both forms can be found at: http://www.research.utoronto.ca/ethics/eh_forms.html. Please submit one copy of the signed form to the Ethics Review Office. Fax submissions are acceptable. Our fax number is 416-946-5763. Email submissions are also acceptable, provided they contain electronic signatures. Unsigned email attachments will not be processed.

An approved protocol may be renewed up to 4 times. All protocols are subject to full re-evaluation after 5 years.

Graduate students who have finished their programs and left the university are **not** required to submit these forms. Please inform the Ethics Review Office if you are no longer a U of T student so that we can update your ethics file.

Yours sincerely,

Bridgette Murphy
Ethics Review Coordinator

Appendix C: Interview Guidelines

Interviews were semi-structured/ unstructured around the following themes:

1. Self-perception
2. Collective Identity
3. Family and Social Issues
4. Educational/language
5. Political Issue
6. Issues of Resistance
7. Spiritual Issues/Religious issues
8. Legal Issues
9. Land Issues

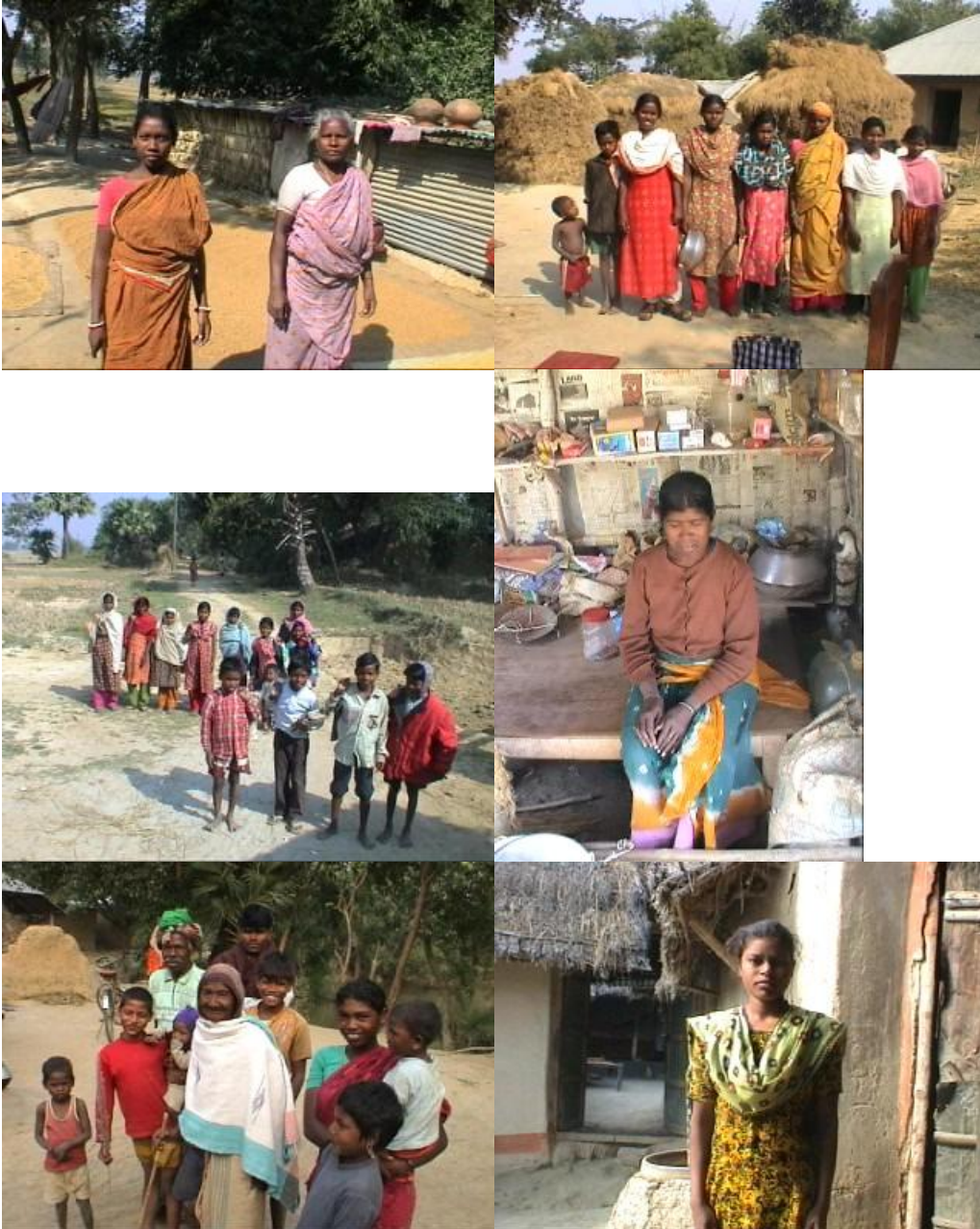
Sample questions for In-depth Interviewing:

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. How do you feel being Santal?
3. Is maintaining Santal identity important for you? If yes, what measures do you collectively and individually take in maintaining it?
4. Do you see any changes in the life of Santals after the emergence of Bangladesh? If so, what are the changes you think have occurred?
5. What do you like or dislike about living in this particular area of the country?
6. With whom do you socialize? Can you describe your social life and your interpersonal relations outside of the family?
7. How do you celebrate the holidays (national and Santal)?
8. Do you work outside the home? If so, do you socialize with people you work with outside work? If you don't work, why do you not work? (For female participants)
9. Where do you send your children to school and why?
10. What languages do they study at school?
11. In what language do you speak with your children at home?
12. What have you thought about speaking languages?
13. What language do you speak at home/at work?
14. Do you think it is important to speak your language? If so, why?
15. Are you a member of any Santal organization? If so, why? If not, why not?
16. Do you think you enjoy all the rights as Bengalis do? If not? Why?
17. Is the government sensitive enough about Santal issues?
18. What do you think of the sensitivity of the mainstream people about Santal issues?
19. Do you think Bengalis are different from you? If yes, how?
20. Do you practice any religion? If yes, what it means to you?
21. What do you think of conversion?
22. Do you face/feel any pressure for practicing your religion/rituals?
23. Do you know any Santals practicing other religious beliefs? If so, why do you think they have changed their religion?
24. Do you associate those converts? How do they justify their conversion?

25. Do they actively get themselves involved in the cultural activities?
26. Do they face any challenges or discrimination from the community?
27. Could you tell me about those converts whether they are better off or secured financially and socially?
28. What do you think about the future of Santal community in Bangladesh?
29. Do you feel threatened materially or physically for practicing your religion?
30. Are there any important topics that you would like to share in relation to this study?
31. Do you think it is important to survive and grow as Santals rather than as Bangladeshi? If so, why?
32. Do you rent or own your home?
33. Do you own any land property? If so how did you manage to have it?
34. Do you feel at home in your current place? If no, what problems do you face?
35. How would you like to change things in your life?
36. Can you vote?
37. What political and cultural condition(s) could be beneficial for Santal population?
38. How does situation of Santals change with the change of a government?
39. What is the role of Bangladesh Government regarding the existence of Santal community?
40. Do you ever receive any favour from the government? What kind of favour do you expect from the Government or the mainstream population?
41. How does the civil law affect or influence Santal community?
42. Do you believe in reincarnation? If so, do you want to be born as Santal in Bangladesh?
43. Are you a Bangladeshi citizen? If so, what does it mean to you?
44. Do you feel you have all the privileges and rights as a citizen of Bangladesh?
45. What is your religious belief?
46. Tell me about your story of conversion?
47. How do you feel with your current religious belief? Please describe in more detail?
48. Why did you become Christian? Was there any pressure from the Church?
49. How do you describe your present situation compared to you past one before conversion?
50. Why don't you want to go back to your former religion?

(Questions will be further revised and more questions will be added to the list)

Appendix D: (The Photos of Santals in the natural setting)





(The Photos of Santals in the natural setting)

Appendix E: Geo-political Location of Palashpur (unidentified), Rajshahi in the National and International Map

