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## Study on the agricultural activities of Santal women along the Barind tract of Bangladesh

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### Abstract

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The study was carried out to explore the different agricultural activities of the Santal women and their pattern of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, being involved in the job. It was undertaken in Rajshahi, which infact represents the greater area of Barind tract of Bangladesh. A sample of 120 Santal women engaged in different agricultural activities were selected by using random sampling method. The study revealed that the common agricultural activities were paddy cultivation, post-harvest operations, livestock rearing, poultry raising, maintenance of mulberry trees and tree plantation. The economic independence, freedom of work and condition of the working environment were the major factors, causing satisfaction to the Santal women. The main factors contributing to the dissatisfaction were the non-availability of permanent work throughout the year (seasonal work) low salary than the male labourer and more work less pay and lack of time for rest.

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## Introduction

Ethno-linguistically homogenous Bangladesh has considerable number of ethnic population (Qureshi, 1984). From the prehistoric era, people of different culture and races started migrating here for the habitat and living. As such there was a rise of mixed groups of population in this country (Maloney, 1977). The continuation of such migration led to the settlement of a group of ethnic minorities in the Barind tract, viz. the Hoes, Mundas, Malos, Malpaharias, Mahalis, Polias, Tures, Oraons, Kochas, Mahatos, Rajbansis, Santals etc. (Sattar, 1983; Ali 1989). However, the migration of the Santals into Barind region began in the 1880s, mainly after the failure of the great Santal rebellion in 1855, on a large scale. The *Zemindars* of the region welcomed this group of people for their own interest and gave them barren jungles and *danga* (high) lands for cultivation. The Santals as reclaimers, cleared the jungles, terraced the slopes and made the land fit for cultivation. The Santals settled here mainly as a settled agriculturists under the tutelage of the permanent *Zemindary* system of Bengal. They played an important role in the extension of agriculture in the region, but later on were evicted from their land holdings when the interest of the landlords has been served. Ultimately, they became the share cropper on fifty-fifty basis of the product. The Santals, being the largest indigenous-population, has come across with the main-stream population through acculturation and adaptation.

The Barind tract, known locally as 'Barindra Bhumi' overlaps Bangladesh (70%) and India 30% (Ali, 1989). In Bangladesh, the tract covers 2.1 million acres of land, spread over five old districts of Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra and Pabna, under Rajshahi Division with undulating topography and terraced rice fields on extending slopes. The Santals are mostly concentrated in this elevated tract of quasi laterite soil called Barind Region (BBS 1991). In 1996 census, Santals appeared to be about 2,02,744 in the country, when in Rajshahi it was 1,88,359 (Statistical Pocket Book, 1996).

So, the Santals play an important role in the cultivation of greater Barind and there by contribute to the economy of the country. The Santal women, although were habituated to work from very early period along with their male partners, but their contribution in their everyday livelihood were hardly studied. Keeping this background concept in mind, the principle aim of the study would include the finding of common agricultural activities and associated occupation for earning their everyday livelihood. The other aims of the study would be the exploration of different contributing factors regarding them satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the job, and their degree of contribution to the overall household income.

## Materials and methods

The study place was Godagari Upazilla of Rajshahi district. As a part of purposive random sampling, a Santal-village of Deopara union of Godagari Upazilla was selected comprising about 120 respondents (Santal women). A survey questionnaire was developed in a simple manner in conformity with the objectives of the study so that all necessary information relating to socio-economic aspects of Santal women could be included. The expected and relevant data were collected from selected women during January 2012 to June 2012 through face to face interview and participation observation method in accordance with the research methodology practiced in social-science. Finally, the collected data were scrutinized, edited, tabulated and analyzed carefully to achieve the meaningful interpretation

## Results and discussion

### *Distribution of respondents according to their participation in agricultural activities*

Data presented in Table 1 shows different pattern of agricultural activities of the Santal women. The activities were paddy cultivation, post-harvest operations, livestock rearing, poultry raising, maintenance of mulberry trees and tree-plantation. Here majority (81.67%) were self employed and rest (18.33%) were in private agencies. But nobody had the access to the government organization. Chi-

square tests ( $\chi^2$ ) was applied, considering the Santal women's agricultural activities being in private agency and self-employment when P-value is found to be 63.08. So, it appears to be significant. The notable private agencies (Non-government Organization), working in the present study area were CARITAS, BRAC, ASA, PROSHIKA, CARE, ACD etc. The NGOs, as a part of their rural upliftment programme were providing assistance in livestock rearing, poultry

raising and other income-generating activities. CARITAS, especially was forming group of Santal-women during harvesting of paddy and was advocating for better wages from the landlords. BRAC was holding the programme of tree plantation and maintenance of mulberry trees. Again, the Santal-women were the major working force in these regards.

**Table 1.** The agricultural activities of the respondents (n=120).

| Different agricultural activities | Number of respondents working with |                  |                 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|                                   | Private agency                     | Self-employed    | Total           |
| Paddy cultivation                 | 0                                  | 36               | 36 (30.00)      |
| Post-harvest operations           | 05                                 | 48               | 53 (44.17)      |
| Livestock rearing                 | 01                                 | 02               | 03 (2.50)       |
| Poultry raising                   | 02                                 | 08               | 10 (8.33)       |
| Maintenance of mulberry trees     | 11                                 | 0                | 11 (9.17)       |
| Tree plantation                   | 03                                 | 04               | 07 (5.83)       |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>22(18.33)</b>                   | <b>98(81.67)</b> | <b>120(100)</b> |

**Note:** Figures within parentheses indicate percentages

**Table 2.** The nature and place of work of the respondents.

| Place of work         | The nature of work of the respondents |                  |                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|                       | Private agency                        | Self-employed    | Total           |
| Outside the homestead | 19(18.45)                             | 84(81.55)        | 103(85.83)      |
| At home               | 03(17.65)                             | 14(82.35)        | 17(14.17)       |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>22(18.33)</b>                      | <b>98(81.67)</b> | <b>120(100)</b> |

**Table 3.** Average time spent by the respondents on different sources of income.

| Activities                    | Duration of time (hrs/day) | Respondents (%) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Paddy cultivation             | 5.0                        | 30.00           |
| Post-harvest operations       | 3.5                        | 44.17           |
| Livestock rearing             | 4.0                        | 02.50           |
| Poultry raising               | 1.5                        | 08.33           |
| Maintenance of mulberry trees | 2.0                        | 09.17           |
| Tree plantation               | 1.0                        | 05.83           |

#### *The nature and place of work*

The data, given in Table 2 indicate that most (85.83%) of the respondents worked outside of their homesteads, only 14.17% of the respondents worked at home. Again, it was noted that 18.33% respondents were in private agency and 81.67% were self-

employed. Considering these fact chi-square tests ( $\chi^2$ ) was applied and P-value was found to be 0.006, which proves it to be insignificant. So, the nature of work does not depend on the working place. The finding of the present study (Table 2) differs with the main stream rural women of Bangladesh, where

majorities worked in their homestead (Golbagi *et al.*, 2013 and Sangwan *et al.*, 1989). It explains the Santal women's poverty and absence of cultivable land when

they are used to work in others land as day-wage earner regularly as a part of their livelihood.

**Table 4.** Distribution of respondents according to their satisfaction level from agricultural activities.

| Satisfaction level  | Level of satisfaction |                  |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|                     | No. of respondents    | % of respondents |
| Very much satisfied | -                     | -                |
| Satisfied           | 68                    | 56.67            |
| Non-satisfied       | 52                    | 43.33            |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>120</b>            | <b>100.00</b>    |

**Table 5.** The factors causing satisfaction to their job.

| Factors causing satisfaction         | Level of satisfaction |                  |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|                                      | No. of respondents    | % of respondents |
| Economic independence                | 74                    | 61.67            |
| Freedom of work                      | 68                    | 56.67            |
| Attitude and behaviour of employer   | 53                    | 44.17            |
| Condition of the working environment | 48                    | 40.00            |
| Income/salary/daily wage             | 35                    | 31.67            |

**Table 6.** The factors considering the dissatisfaction of respondents.

| Factors explaining dissatisfaction | No. of respondents | % of respondents |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Seasonal work                      | 42                 | 80.77            |
| Low salary than male labourer      | 30                 | 57.69            |
| More work less pay                 | 22                 | 42.31            |
| Over busy schedule                 | 18                 | 34.62            |
| Work pattern not preferred         | 16                 | 30.77            |

**Table 7.** Contribution of the Santal women to the overall households income.

| Yearly Income               | Working Santal women |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Total family income (Tk/yr) | 38,000               |
| Respondents income (Tk/yr)  | 10,000               |
| Contribution %              | 26.32                |

*Time spent on different agricultural activities and the monthly income*

The data given in Table 3 show that time spent by majority of the respondents (71.66) was 3-5 hours/day engaged in different agricultural activities. Maximum time was spent (5 hours/day) on paddy cultivation. Time demands for livestock rearing and post-harvest operation were 3.5 and 4 hours/day. Minimum time (1-2 hours/day) were spent on tree

plantation, poultry raising and maintenance of mulberry trees.

Regarding the income earned from different income generation activities, it was found that maximum income per month (Tk.2700) was from paddy cultivation. It was followed by post-harvest operation (Tk.2400), livestock rearing (Tk.2000), poultry raising (Tk.1300), tree plantation (Tk.1200) and

maintenance of mulberry trees (Tk. 1200). As the income generating activities were only the seasonal one, in other parts of the year they have to undergo with immense poverty.

#### *Level of satisfaction of the respondents*

Table 4 indicate the level of satisfaction, when it was measured on a self-rating three point scale, viz. 'very much satisfied', 'satisfied' and 'not satisfied'. Nobody was 'very much satisfied'. 56.67% of the respondents were 'satisfied' and 43.33% were 'not satisfied'. Table 5 shows the major factors causing satisfaction. Most of the respondents expressed their satisfaction considering economic independence (61.67%), condition of the working environment (40.00%), freedom of work (56.67%), attitude the behaviour of the employer (44.17%) and income/salary/daily wage (31.67%).

#### *The underlying factors or reasons for dissatisfaction in their agricultural activities*

Table 4 reveals 52(43.33%) of the respondents were dissatisfied in their income generating activities. Table 6 shows the factors or reason for dissatisfaction in their job. The respondents reported that only two rice yielding seasons and post harvest processing periods were the main working phase in the Barind tract. So, 30.77% considered 'seasonal work' as the important reason for dissatisfaction, 57.693% respondent noted that men work more in a particular time and were paid better than the female labourers. Study showed that the Santal women had Tk.90 per day as a daily wage when the male labourer received Tk.120 per day which once again proves the gender discrimination. 42.31% found they had more work and less pay. To 34.62% respondents 'over busy schedule' was another factor for dissatisfaction. Considering this factor they further elaborated that these busy schedule interfered their leisure time, self care, children care and home making. 30.77% respondents noted their work pattern as not preferred one. Because economic pressure was forcing them to break down their traditional roles as housewives and as such they had to spent greater bulk of time, outside the homestead.

#### *Santal women's contribution to overall households income*

The average total family incomes of the respondents were Tk.38000 respectively. Respondents' contributions were 26.32% of their overall yearly family income which directly help to maintain the family livelihood (Table 7). A report from FAO (2006) reflected that the women contribute 42 percent of the total labour force. The present study shows resemblance to this observation.

#### **Conclusion**

The Santals, although a marginalized population, have immense contribution in the agro-based communities of the Barind tract. But the seasonal work, low income and low salary than the male labourer are the barrier for exercising of their economic freedom. Karl (1995), noted four dimensions of the women empowerment, viz the resources, the power, the relation and the self-reliance. As such, the state and policy maker should enhance their further cooperation for upliftment of the miseries of these indigenous groups, so that the Santal women can achieve the empowerment, in its truest sense.

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