

HOR DISOM: SANTAL INTERPRETATION CENTRE

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ABSTRACT

The Santals are known as one of the oldest and largest group of indigenous community in the northwestern region of Bangladesh. Today they are one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable indigenous communities as well. Ignorance to their basic needs have marginalized them to such an extent that their existence in Bangladesh is currently at stake. Their socio economic state is initiating changes in their deep rooted culture. Culturally they are in a transitional state of situation where their ethnic identity is at the verge of getting lost. If this process of cultural disintegration and transformation continues under the intervention of external forces, time may come when they will have a new social and cultural formation, leaving behind their distinct cultural traditions and traits. If they realize to nurture their own age long tradition, culture and religious belief, it is possible to grow as a community that is self-sufficient. With a little help and awareness they can come out from the obscurity. This project proposal will aim to give the Santal community a direction to evolve without overlooking their cultural values.

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CHAPTER 01: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Project:

There are about 45 different ethnic minority groups reside in Bangladesh comprising a population of 1.6 million, which is 1.10 percent of the national population, according to 2011 population census (Sharif, 2014). They are speaking different languages, practicing different religions, and following different cultural rules. Santals are one of the major ethnic group in Bangladesh. According to Bangladesh Population Census of 1991, the total Santal populace in Bangladesh is almost 261,746 (UNESCO, 2005).

It is assumed by historians that the Santals came to Bangladesh from Indian state of Bihar, especially Santal Pargana, for settlement in the period between 1840 and 1940. They inhabited the plain land of north Bengal, mainly in 16 districts including greater Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Pabna and Bogra of Bangladesh. Apart from North Bengal, Santals also inhabit tea gardens of greater Sylhet and Chittagong (Sharif, 2014).

The word '*Santal*' is derived from two words; *santa* meaning calm and peaceful and *ala* meaning man (Scheduled Casts & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, 2014). The Santals are simple and unsophisticated people.

The Santals were originally hunters and gatherers. However, when they migrated to Bangladesh, they were engaged primarily as agricultural laborers. These people are very poor as they do not generally own land for cultivation. For decades they have been the victim of illegal land encroachment. Due to the lack of their knowledge and education the buyers forge them with information. The foregoing indicates how the

indigenous Santals are being deprived of their rights on land, tortured and harassed by the majority influential and government functionaries in particular (Samad, 2006).

Santal community is extremely lagging behind in terms of education. The literacy rate among them is very low. Their financial inability leads them to field work rather than institutional education. The Santal children face discrimination and negligence for their communication skills. As they talk in Santali at home, it becomes difficult for them to communicate in school. This results in dropping out from school at early stage.

The Santals have excellent community life and culture. There are several festive occasions around the year. Every occasion is celebrated with dance, songs and music of their own. It is observed that the age-old traditions and culture of the Santals are undergoing changes due to the intervention of external forces, such as Christianization, education, market penetration, interaction with mainstream population (Hossain, 2008).

The identity, culture, history and tradition of the Santals, and their distinct ways of life are now threatened. Their lack of information and awareness is stopping them from getting access to services they deserve. If they get access to proper education, technical training and awareness they might be able to promote their own community with the use of their native wisdom.

1.2 Project Brief:

The Santals do not have any say about what kind of 'development' they require. Very few organizations work with the Santals, but even there they do not have meaningful participation in the programs undertaken. There is a significant lack of understanding

among both the government officials and the NGOs about the needs of the Santals as a nation and as a community. The major issues are thus unidentified, ignored, and finally, unheard by the 'development' agencies led by representatives of majority Bengali population. Dr. Muhammad Samad (2006) stated in his article that it is not just a case of ignorance and added that a basic change of attitude is required.

As the indigenous peoples has very limited or no access or involvement in the planning and policy making, the choices taken by the development agencies do not bring much fruit. In some cases the plans are so alienated from the social, cultural and natural context that it creates adverse impact. So, the right way to identify the issues concerning the Santals is to involve them at every level of any project undertaken.

In order to improve the basic needs of the Santals the mainstream community has to come forward and recognize them as an equal part of the society. This will be possible when the Santals themselves are going to believe the same. Their self-awareness needs to develop at the very beginning. This will require the proper study of the problems they are facing and come up with suitable proposals.

Firstly the Santals need to educate themselves about the surroundings and realize their native knowledge. Secondly they have to be skilled enough to survive in the conventional society. Along with these two elementary requirements their cultural norms and values needs to be protected and preserved which makes them exceptional and different from others. One of the essential part is to portray the individuality of the Santals to the world and mark their existence through their ancient identity.

The necessity of a project like this is highly essential in Bangladesh's context, as the cultural heritage of our country is struggling to continue its existence in the rapidly developing Bangladesh. If this process of cultural disintegration and transformation continues under the intervention of external forces, time may come when they will have a new social and cultural formation, leaving behind their distinct cultural traditions and traits.

1.3 Project Rationale:

The Santals have been living in the pristine natural surroundings of the area for thousands of years. Their way of living and culture is a breathing heritage for Bangladesh. A report published by RDC shows that almost 92 percent Adivasis (indigenous peoples) of the North Bengal, most of them are Santals.

Santals are a cause of concern for several reasons. Firstly, because their cultural identity is at stake due to tremendous changes in their social structure. The numbers of affected are very high secondly and most importantly the chain of exploitation is impeding the social and economic development of the country.

Culturally Santals are in a transitional state of situation. The distinct religious and cultural ethnic heritage of the Santals is undergoing rapid changes. Though the tendency to hold back traditions are still there. Santals who have converted into other religions do retain some of the cultural traditions and traits of the non-converted Santals.

The Santals do not have cognizable access to education and income generating activities. They hardly have any knowledge about the legal provisions and documents relating to the landed property. Due to lack of knowledge and information

they are at the verge of losing land accessibility. Education has become a luxury as financial inability does not allow them to study and drives them to get into work.

A very little has been done by the government and the NGOs forget private initiatives for the Santal people. But whatever little opportunity came their way, they took full advantage of it. They are keen to improve their lot but they do not have resources. They need help of others.

In an article by Jerome Sarkar (2001) he mentioned that tribal culture is rich but is fading away fast due to neglect, isolation, lack of opportunities, scope and support. Tribes on their own cannot do anything significant to enrich and maintain their cultural heritages. They need assistance of others.

Continuity and promotion of cultural norms and values is an inalienable urge of any race or society. They lag behind others in education and vocational training. Therefore, emphasized the need primarily to improve their living condition by creating sources of income for their sustainability, scope for education and vocational training. This project will aim to achieve the attention of common people towards the Santal community and provide a chance to interact with them at a common ground. Through this process the Santals will get the opportunities to enhance their age old heritage and exhibit it to others as well.

1.4 Aims and Objectives:

The existing situation of the Santal community is vulnerable in cultural, social, economic and human rights contexts. This project proposal will cover the areas of where the Santal community needs to develop their identity communally. The project

aims for such a place where they find the comfort of sharing their problems and needs along with the support to overcome those.

Architecture is the tool with which this idea can be manifested. A community based development can be proposed where the design will entail several programs with the idea of promoting their distinctive lifestyle.

- providing technical training where they learn to use their skills and develop them further.
- helping the community to be economically solvent through different programs
- introduction to education system that involves learning about their heritage, culture and language.
- promoting their authentic skills of construction by using their methods in the project.
- preserving the Santal culture by providing them proper exposure to their native knowledge about their ancient values.
- creating awareness through information that will help them make conscious about their human rights.

CHAPTER 02: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Indigenous Communities in Bangladesh:

At least 350 million people worldwide are considered to be indigenous and in Bangladesh about two million indigenous people of 45 different distinct communities are living throughout the country. These people with distinctive social and cultural practices, languages and customs are commonly known as '*Adivasis*' (Indigenous) by themselves (Ahmmed, 2005).

According to the 1991 census, their total number is estimated as 1,205,978 and formed 1.13% of the total population of the country. Majority of the indigenous people reside mainly in three geographical regions of the country: Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT), Northwestern Bangladesh and central Bangladesh. However, some indigenous communities also live in the coastal districts of the country (Sultana, 2005).

The major ethnic communities are Chakma, Murma, Garo, Santal, Hajong, Tipra, Khasi, Murang, Shendhu, Panko etc. They struggle to maintain their life style, culture and protect distinct religious beliefs from the influence of the dominant culture and religions. In the North and Northwestern belt of Bangladesh a number of ethnic communities live who still have to struggle hard to sustain their original culture and traditional heritage. The adivasis in this region comprises of several groups Santal, Oraon, Munda, Mahali, Mahato, Malpahara etc. (Khandoker, 2000).

2.2 History & Background of Santal Community in Bangladesh:

The Santals, a significant community among the forty five distinctive minority groups in Bangladesh, possess a rich cultural heritage and they bear a unique cultural identity. Since how long the Santals landed in the territory of present Bangladesh, is not precisely known. The 1881 census mentions that at that time Santal settlements were already present in the districts of Pabna, Jessore, Khulna and Chittagong (Banglapedia, 2015). According to another viewpoint, the Santals migrated to Bangladesh during the British rule in search of employment. At that time, the Santals were living in India in the regions of Chotonagpur and Santal Pargana (Sarker and Davey 2009).

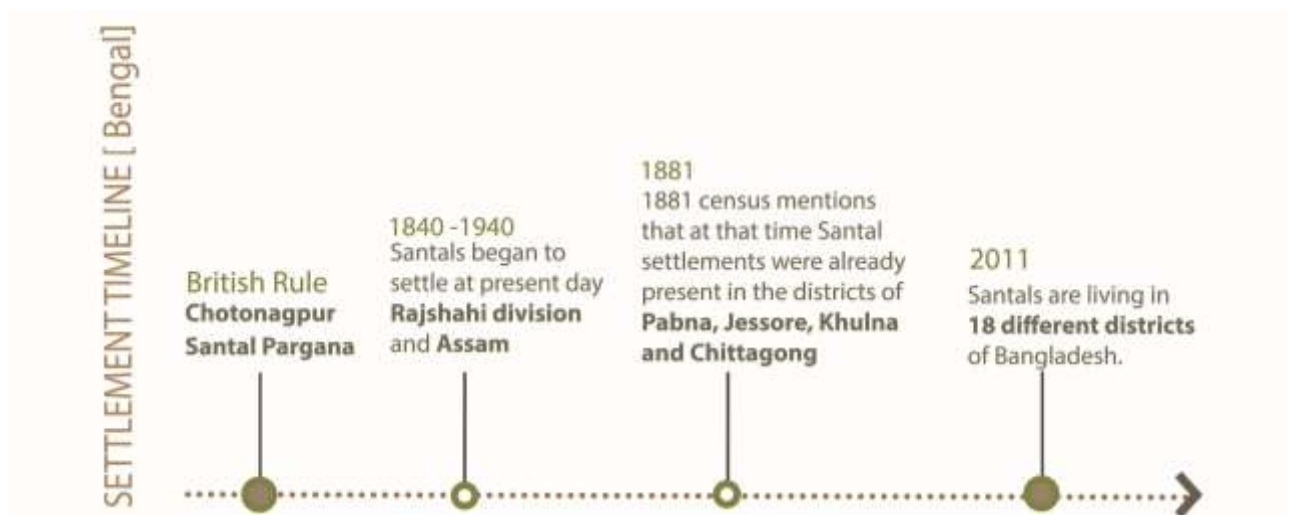


Fig: Settlement timeline of Santals in Bengal

Anthropologists and Sociologists think that the ethnic people or the adivasis of the east central India came to ancient Bengal in search of work, land and food. These ethnic communities included Santal, Oraon, Munda, Mahali etc. In an article Sohana Khandoker (April, 2000) states that according to certain section of academicians, 'Santal are probably the first settlers of Barind tract.' The zaminders or feudal

landowners have initially brought them here, from different areas of central India including Bihar, for clearing up forests.

They have actively participated in the Tebhaga movement led by Ila Mitra in 1950, the Santal revolt, Birsa Munda Uprising, Kol revolt, Jitu Samur Rebellion, Pandu Raja Insurgency, Swadeshi Movement and the War of Liberation in 1971 (Wikipedia, 2016).

2.2.1 Geographical Distribution and population Size:

Among the ethnic people in the north and northwestern belt of Bangladesh Santals are largest in number. But there is no accurate and reliable statistics regarding their actual population. There is also a great difference between the official and unofficial figures and estimates (Khandoker, 2000).

According to the government census of 1991, the adivasi population was estimated 3, 14,337 in 16 administrative district of the Rajshahi division. In an article Sohana Khandoker (April, 2000) states that an indigenous community leader, Badla Oraon of Dinajpur Adivasi Academy claimed that the number of indigenous people in Rajshahi division was 3,222,000 way back in 1984. A survey report reveals that the total population of Santal is 1, 43,932 in Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Bogra, Pabna and some other areas of Bangladesh. According to the other sources, the total number of Santals are much higher than estimated. Most of the scholars also questioned the authenticity of the numerical data. In their opinion, the census takes language as the basis for identifying any person as Bengali or indigenous. They have also alleged that the existing policy is to show the number lower than the actual number (Khandoker, 2000).

The People of the Santal community are found mostly in the northern districts of Bangladesh. Around one third of the Santal population lives in Dinajpur district. They are also found in the districts of Tagoregaon, Panchagarh, Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi, Nawabganj, Natore, Naogaon, Sirajganj, Joypurhat, Nilphamari, and Gaibandha (Sarker, 2014)



Fig: Districts where Santals reside

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Table 1.1: District wise Santal population

Sl. No.	Name of the Districts	Santal Population (as on census 2011)
01	Dinajpur	49,861
02	Rajshahi	26,469
03	Nawabganj	6,228
04	Natore	2,496
05	Naogaon	24,409
06	Sirajganj	621
07	Joypurhat	2,689
08	Bogra	881
09	Gaibandha	3,087
10	Nilphamari	9
11	Panchagarh	920
12	Rangpur	5,645
13	Tagoregaon	6,382
14	Hobigonj	6,450
15	Moulavibazar	6,245
16	Meherpur	8
17	Chuadanga	590
18	Satkhira	105
Total		1,43,425

(Source: Population Census 2011, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics)

According to the census of 2011, the Santals resulted present also in the southern districts of Meherpur, Chuadanga, and Satkhira. Some population of them have been

living in Hobigonj and Moulavibazar as they, saying is there, migrated from the northern area to work in tea gardens. According to the census of 2011 the total ethnic population is 15, 86,141 (1.10% of total population). The total ethnic household is 3, 56,175 (1.11% of total household). The Santal population living in the said 18 districts is 1, 43,425 which is 8.96% of ethnic population and 0.09% of total population (BBS, 2011).

2.2.2 Occupation and Economic State:

The Santals were originally hunters and gatherers. However, when they migrated to Bangladesh, they were engaged primarily as agricultural laborers. These people are very poor as they do not generally own land for cultivation. As a result they work as laborers in agriculture and agriculture related activities. They are generally employed by the Muslim landowners who represent the dominant culture of Bangladesh (Hossain, 2008).

The ecological degradation of Barind tract has caused further sufferings to the people of this area. The Padma River was the main source of fishing among the Santals. This is now seriously threatened due to lack of water in the river. Most of the Santals have adopted wage laboring and share cropping. Most of them are living their livelihood on agriculture (Khandoker, 2000).

The Santal people do not have alternative skill or scope for employment, sometimes they are compelled to sell their labor at a low rate. Besides, in lean season, they become unemployed and due to severe economic hardship many of them have to starve day after day. In that case, sometimes they have to sell their labor in advance at low rate. Thus the economic condition of the Santals is deteriorating day by day

and they are now among the poorest groups of all indigenous communities (Samad, 2012).

The division of labor in Santal community is according to the physical ability of male and female. Hunting was always a male activity, gathering activities being dominated by women. In agriculture, men plow and sow, while women transplant and weed; division of labor by gender extends through most agricultural work. Boys and young men herd the cattle; women do the milking, collect the dung, and collect fuel in general. Poultry is tended by women, who also catch freshwater crabs, shrimps, etc. in the ponds; fishing by boat or with large land nets is done by the men. Women, as noted, dominate most trade. Ironwork, woodworking, and rope making are male activities; basketwork, weaving, and leaf work are done by women. Ritual specialists are traditionally male; women are formally excluded from such activities (Bouez, 1996).

Absences of resources have leaded them to work as day laborers and nowadays livestock is secondary source of earing for them. Santal household heads are engaged as wage laborers in their own village and outside (neighboring villages). Due to scarcity of employment opportunities in village areas, a good number of Santals have migrated from villages to urban fringes of Rajshahi city in search of nonagricultural employment opportunities.

2.2.3 Language:

The Santals have their own language which they call *Santali*. The Santal language (*Santali*) belongs to the family of Austric languages. Santali has profound similarity with Kole and Mundari languages. Today most Santals of Bangladesh speak both Bangla and Santali. Also many Bangla words are now adopted in Santali. There is no written Santali literature, but the rich heritage of folk songs and folk tales of

Santals is acknowledged by all (Banglapedia, 2015). Kim, Kim, Ahmad and Sangma (2010) stated that the Santals have a saying: “The spoken word is better than the written word.” As is the case with all the other groups within the Santali cluster, this outlook is reflected in their rich oral tradition of songs, stories, and histories.

Santali alphabet (Ol Cemet'/Ol Chiki)

ᱠ	a [a]	ᱡ	at [t]	ᱢ	ag [g, ɟ]	ᱣ	ang [ŋ]	ᱤ	ai [i]
ᱥ	aa [a]	ᱦ	aak [k]	ᱧ	aa [c, ɟ]	ᱨ	aam [m]	ᱩ	aw [w]
ᱪ	i [i]	ᱫ	ia [a]	ᱬ	ih [h]	ᱭ	iy [y]	ᱮ	ir [r]
ᱯ	u [u]	ᱰ	uch [c]	ᱱ	ad [d]	ᱲ	urn [ɳ]	ᱳ	uy [i]
ᱴ	e [e]	ᱵ	ep [p]	ᱶ	ed [d]	ᱷ	en [n]	ᱸ	er [r]
ᱹ	o [o]	ᱺ	ott [t]	ᱻ	ob [p, b]	ᱼ	ov [w]	ᱽ	oh [ʰ]
᱾		᱿		ᱠ		ᱡ		ᱢ	
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Fig: Ol Chiki Script

In a dissertation by Md. A. Razzaque Sarker (May, 2014) claimed that the Santali script is a relatively recent innovation. The Santals did not have a written language until the twentieth century and it used Latin/Roman, Devnagri, Oriya and Bangla writing systems. Paul Olaf Bodding who was a Norwegian missionary, linguist and folklorist serving in India for 44 years (1889–1933), created the first alphabet of Santali language and wrote the first grammar for the Santali-speaking native people in eastern India (Adibasi Janogoshti, Bangladesh Asiatic Society, 2007).

2.2.4 Education:

Literacy rate among Santal community is very low. It is observed that the new generations Santals are enthusiastic to be educated for improving their socio-economic condition. Education of Santal community suffers from various problems and the major reasons behind it is the financial inability of them and the communication gap from language differences (Samad, 2006).

Dr. Muhammad Samad (2006) also narrated that according to them financial inability is the main obstacle for education of Santal people. Due to severe poverty, they cannot provide teaching materials and incidental facilities (e.g., books, papers, fees, clothing etc.) for their children, which hinder the education of the community at large. He also added that as the children speak Santali language at home and in community, they cannot understand Bengali at School. Hence, Santali students cannot communicate with their teachers as well as with their schoolmates. Even they cannot seek permission to go to bathroom. Due to this communication gap, they become victim of mental and physical torture, lose their interest in study, and finally leave the School.

Though literacy rate among the Santals is generally very low in rural areas, recently changes are apparent. Christian Missions have established schools in and around the Santal villages that the Santal children get inspiration to go to schools (Hossain, 2008).

2.2.5 Land Disputes:

Land is the main source of social, political and economic power structures of Bangladesh which is mainly an agricultural society depending on the land based farming. In a poverty stricken country like Bangladesh, land is scarce therefore establishing ownership right over land has always been highly competitive.

Needless to say, land is the vital resource of Santal community. Like other indigenous peoples, land and resource grabbing is the most tragic problem of the Santals in Bangladesh. The land peoples grabbing has been taking place mainly in two ways: firstly by the majority influential and secondly by Forest Department (FD) of the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) (Samad, 2006).

A recent study shows that lands are in possession of few powerful hands. Ethnic minorities are the one who have been the victim of illegal land encroachment. The Santal hardly has any knowledge about the legal provisions and documents relating to the landed property, therefore, they easily fall under the prey of the local elite, the cunning cheaters who often take their signature on blank paper and forge their document (Khandoker, 2000).

Corruption in the Land Registration offices of Bangladesh and Land Record and Survey department as well as in Land Management department makes many people, either adibasi or native, landless and poor. Even in cases of recorded land, where adibasi people actually have title deeds to their land, they may nevertheless lose possession of the same, when powerful local individuals or economic interests obtain false registration papers from the Land Registration office, or obtain predated titled deeds procured illegally. Lack of sufficient documentation and records in the case of petitions by ethnic community in the case of unrecorded land (including common lands such as forests, graveyards, cemeteries, and privately owned lands), the non-recognition of the prescriptive rights of adibasi communities or individuals of such land results in its being misclassified by the concerned authorities as *khas* (government owned) land (Sarker, 2014).

For hundreds of years, they have been facing serious violations of human rights and the pace has accelerated since the independence. Land-grabbing, threats, evictions and killings have marginalized them to such an extent that their existence in Bangladesh is currently at stake (Samad, 2006).

2.2.6 Religious Belief:

Religion is a very important element of culture for any group of people. Like many tribal groups, the Santals believe in various impersonal spirits and forces which control human life. They believe in a number of deities of which *Bongas* are very powerful and can do harm to mankind. The Santals worship the supernatural powers. They call their religion as *Sonaton Dharma*. The rites and rituals, belief in a number of deities, etc., tend to be quite close to Hinduism (Hossain, 2008).



Fig: Districts where Santals reside

Santals believe in supernatural beings and ancestral spirits. Santali rituals consist mainly of sacrificial offerings and invocations to the spirits, or bongas. It is believed by some scholars that Bonga means the same as *Bhaga* (Bhagavan) (Rahaman, 2012).

The distinct religious and cultural ethnic heritage of the Santals is undergoing rapid changes, particularly through the unending process of Christianization. Their social solidarity, religion, and traditions as a distinct culture of the Santal are at stake today. A large number of this ethnic minority have converted into Christianity, leaving aside their age-old traditional religion. Christianization process has brought tremendous change in their beliefs, traditions and life styles. This process of conversion of the Santals into Christianity started during British period and is still continuing unabated. It is observed that the Santals who are converted were more attracted by the

prospect of social advancement and political protection (generally promised and/or offered by the Christian Missions) than by the promise of spiritual salvation (Hossain, 2008).

2.2.7 Cultural Heritage:

The Santal society is marked with feasts, festivals and ritual celebrations. Like Bangalis, they also have many festive occasions around the year. Their year starts with the month of Falgun (roughly, 15 February-15 March). Almost each month or season has a festival or fiesta celebrated with the pomp of dances, songs and music. The *Shialsei* festival of Santals takes place in the New Year month of *Falgun*, *Bongabongi* occurs in Chaitra, Home in Baishakh, Dibi in Ashwin, and *Sohrai* at the end of Paush. Sohrai is a kind of national festival for Santals celebrated with great pomp on the last day of Paush (around 16 January). To express gratitude to the god of crops is also a part of this festival.

It turns splendid with dance, songs, music and pleasant beauty of flowers along with food and drinks. Probably its greatest attraction is the chorus dance of Santal girls. Another important ceremony of Santals is called *Baha* or the festival of blossoms. The purpose of this festival at the beginning of spring is to welcome and offer greetings to the beautiful blossoming of colorful flowers. It is also characterized with an overflow of dancing, singing and music (Banglapedia, 2015).



Fig: Santali Festivals

One of the terms often used by the Santals is *rāṣkṇ* meaning happiness, or joy, which is not only dear to their hearts but is part and parcel of their life. Dancing and singing have a very important role at every festival occasion. It brings a Santal to forget worries and stresses of his or her day-to-day life. In the social life of the Santals, feasts and festivals have great significance for these are the living expression of the deep aspiration of joy and happiness, and also demonstrate the feeling of community and solidarity integrated as part of the nature of the Santals. Many of such characteristics are expressed in songs, music and in dance. In fact, the Santals don't give any space to individualism and it is really during the feasts and festivals that an individual realizes himself or herself in the community and his or her future role in the life of the community. Although, most of these festivals seemingly appear as mere gathering of close friends and relatives, individuals of the same sub-clan or that concern only the inhabitants of a village; yet, there are also occasions that involve more villages, as it usually happens on the occasion of marriage when participation is mostly unanimous.

The Santal community mainly prefers group performance than solo. Group dancing and singing is the most important medium to express their joy and happiness. The most well-known dance form of the Santals is a group of women with interlocked hands forming a semicircle, encircling a relatively smaller group of male percussionists at the centre. The *Dasai* dance is performed only by males of the community on festive occasions. *Langre*, *Guluri*, and *Humti* are danced all the year round, whereas *Baha* and *Sohorai* are only for festive seasons. In social ceremonies like marriage, *Dong* is danced. The Santali songs also have similar variety like their dance. The Santali word for song is "Sereng". The Santali culture is depicted in the paintings and artworks in the walls of their houses (Sarker, 2014).



Fig: Santali Musical Instruments

The Santals have inherent talents in art and crafts which is reflected in their beautiful wall paintings, housing architecture and wood works. Artwork on earthen walls of the

house is an evidence of Santal women's liking for beauty and of their artistic mind.

(Banglapedia, 2015).



Fig: Arts & Crafts

Art is an integral part of Santal's life. Whether it be building houses, painting it or making bowl, plate out of leaf. With help of some braiding technique making brooms and mats. All these things are used in their daily life. The resources or things used in their art are mainly found in nature. Their life style and culture is full of art. The adaptation of artistic creativity in their life has come from nature and needs in their daily life and where some are generation by generation Their way of building the houses, thatching the roof, decorating the floor, carving the doors and painting the walls signify a lot about the artistic skills and creativity of Santals .Man and woman while building wall of house, layer by layer technique The houses in Santals are built of soil and no cement, bricks are used. It is their natural technique that with no help of artificial things, only with natural resources the houses build by them can lasts for centuries (Santhaledisom, 2015).

CHAPTER 03: SITE APPRAISAL

3.1 Common Ground for Santal Community:

In Bangladesh, the Santals are found mostly in North Bengal (Northern part of Bangladesh) especially in the greater districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi and Chapai Nawabganj. The Santals has a tendency to live away from the mainstream localities and built their own small communities. Due to this the *Santal paras* or their communities are scattered in different locations even in the same district. As the major three districts where they reside are Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Chapai Nawabganj, it would be rationale to connect these three parts and find a common ground for the Santal community to meet and share their resources.



Fig: Three main districts where Santals reside



Fig: Creating connection among them

3.2 Selecting Chapai Nawabganj:

Geographically Chapai Nawabganj positions in the middle of Rajshahi and Dinajpur which are the two major places where Santals live. Historically and culturally Chapai

Nawabganj has always remained significant for Santal Community. Its geographical position has an additional advantage to create a common ground for the Santals.

3.2.1 Geographic Position:

Chapai Nawabganj is a district in northern Bangladesh. It is a part of the Rajshahi division. Originally it was a subdivision under Maldah (India) district. In 1947, this was severed from Maldah and was given to East Pakistan as a sub-division of Rajshahi district. Eventually, it became a separate district of Bangladesh in 1984. It is said that this area had strategic and commercial importance due to its location at the junction of the rivers Mahananda and the Ganges. Because of its importance, Nawab Alivardi founded Nawabganj town which in course of time known as Chapai Nawabganj.

Chapai Nawabganj district is bounded on the north by India, on the east by Naogaon and Rajshahi districts, on the south and west by India. The total area of the district is 1702.54 Sq.Km. (657.35 sq.miles) (BBS, 2013).

3.2.2 Social Background of the Santals in Chapai Nawabganj:

The Santal communities residing in Chapai Nawabganj are socially distressed and neglected. They form their own villages far from the localities. Most of the Santals are involved in agricultural activities. Some of them are involved in the occupation of pulling a cycle-van and some of them work as cleaners in the City Corporation.

There are few NGOs working to develop their situation and trying to bring awareness about education, religion and human rights.

3.2.3 Historical Events:

Indigo Resistance Movement led by Dewanatullah Chowdhury in 1830-35 and Nachole Krishak Andolan (peasants' movement) organised by Ila Mitra in 1949 are memorable historical events of this district (BBS, 2013)



Fig: Historical events by Santals at Chapai Nawabganj

3.2.4 Tourist Attraction:

Chapai Nawabganj has always been a traveler's delight because of its historical importance. Several heritage sites are situated in this area. They are Chota Sona Mosque (1493-1519), Darashbari Mosque (1479), Rajbari (palace), Baragharia Kacharibari (revenue office), Chapai Mosque, Naoda Stupa (Buddhist monument), Jora Math (twin monastery), Nachole Palace, etc are notable archaeological heritage and relics (BBS, 2013).

3.2.5 Connection between Chapai Nawabganj and Rajshahi:

Creating a connection between Chapai Nawabganj's and Rajshahi's tourist interest points can be a vital relation to attract people from all over the world and make them aware of Santal community's existence. Choosing a site within this connection will benefit the Santals to portray their presence to the outer world while remaining to their roots.



Fig: Connection from Chapai Nawabganj to Rajshahi



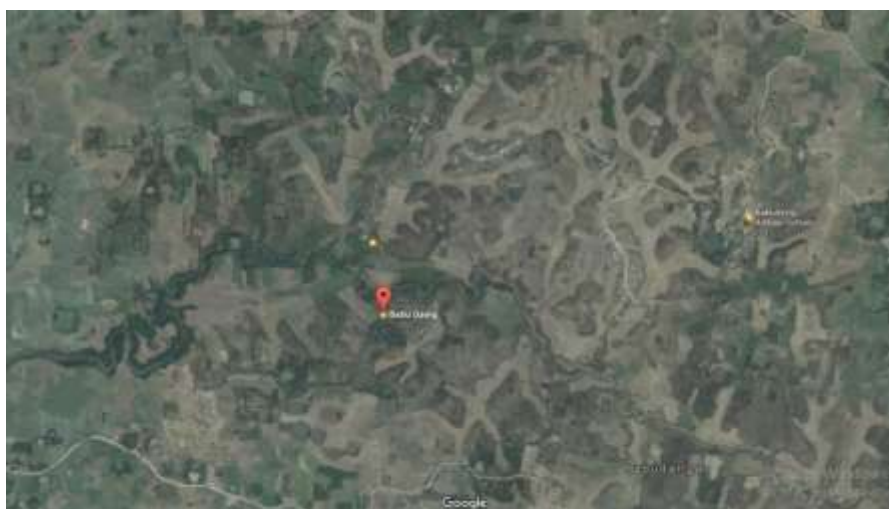
Fig: Places of tourist interest

3.3 Considered Sites:

Considering the surrounding resources and Santal community's convenience two potential Government lands are selected. Both of the lands are situated under Chapai Nawabganj Upzila.

3.3.1 Babu Daing:

Babu Daing is in the outskirts of Nawabganj Upzila. The land potential for this project is a Government owned land. There are some Santal communities residing beside the land. Though the land is in outskirts, it is very well known to the residents of Chapai Nawabganj. It is because this land is a picnic spot which only works in the winter as the climate is too hot on the other months of the year.



Source: Google maps

There is a Kol language school by SIL International which is situated in the Babu Daing village and a Primary School is also found near the village which is founded by Prothom Alo.



The land is surrounded by cultivable land and trees. The topography of the land is a bit different than other surrounding lands. It has undulations of the surface and there used to be a canal on the land which is now dried up.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

- The site is set on natural terrain with mounds, vegetation and water body.
- Well known to the locals.
- Already acting as a picnic spot.
- There are some Santal communities living beside the site
- Site is surrounded by cultivable lands.

Weakness:

- The site is situated in the outskirts of the city.
- Less known to the people from other districts
- Existing canal dried up due to poor water connection.
- People don't regularly visit due to hot climate.
- Communication is not well developed.

Opportunities:

- As the land is already a picnic spot so it is convenient to attract people from any community.
- The variation in heights of the site can provide interesting opportunities to segregate programs and create spaces of interest.
- Already existing NGO schools in the nearby localities can grab the attention of the NGOs working for the Santals.

Threats:

- Due to situated in the rare end of the area, the site is vulnerable to local muggers.
- The site is under constant threat of encroachment by the local influential.
- The site is away from the urban setting, may influence unrestrained urban growth density in this part.

3.3.2 Atahar Village, Amnura:

The Atahar village is also known as Santal para. There are few Santal communities living in this village. The village is surrounded by natural green spaces, cultivable lands and water bodies.

Atahar is situated right beside the Nawabganj-Amnura highway, so the communication is not an issue. The highway connects to the roads to Rajshahi as well as Dinajpur. The site which is potential for this project is a Khas land (government owned).

There is a private owned High School right beside the land. In recent time some industries are developing around the land. These are rice mills mostly.

The positive points for this site is that it is very near to the Nawabganj city and communication is very convenient for the Santal communities as they reside there.



SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

- Communication is very well developed due to the highway right beside the site.
- Well connected to the Chapai Nawabganj town.
- A private owned charitable High School next to the site.
- There are some Santal communities living beside the site
- Site is surrounded by cultivable lands and vegetation.
- Well known to the locals and outsiders.

Weakness:

- Recently developed industries are growing by the highway.
- Fewer site forces

Opportunities:

- Santal community's existence can be more evident to the outsiders as the site is on highway.
- Accessibility to the site can attract visitors very easily.
- Due to the cultivable lands around and the industries Santal community can be drawn to the site for employment.
- Children will be driven to the site as a High School is next to it.
- The Santal communities residing beside the site can make the place livelier.

Threats:

- The rapid urban growth industries threat the site to be soon engulfed on all sides by alien urban structures.

- The site is under constant threat of encroachment by the local influential.

3.4 Reasons for Selecting the Site:

The site chosen for the project is Atahar Village, Amnura. There are some key features of the site that influenced to take this as final site for the project.

3.4.1 Location of the site:

The location of the site is one of the key reasons for choosing it. The site is situated in middle of the connection of Rajshahi and Chapai Nawabganj which makes it more accessible to the visitors. This site is easier for visitors to locate who are travelling to the heritages points along the connection.

There are several Santal communities residing around the site location. The Nawabganj-Amunra Highway connects all these communities.



Fig: Location of the site in respect to the connection between Chapai Nawabganj and Rajshahi

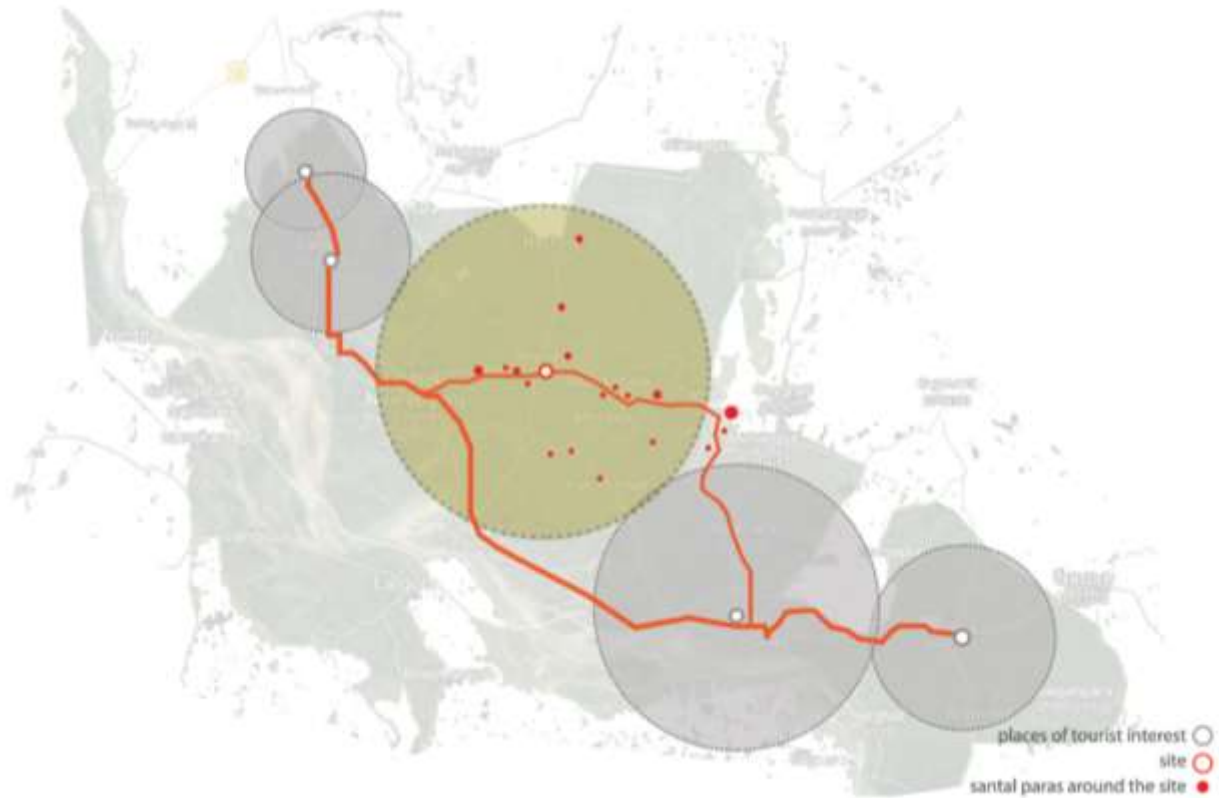


Fig: Santal communities around the Nawabganj-Amnura Highway

3.4.2 Site Surroundings:

There are three Santal communities at walking distance from the site. The communities are Dokkhin Shohor, Atahar and Gucchogram. There are around 112 Santal families in these three communities. The site is surrounded by agricultural lands where the Santals work.

There is a charitable high school beside the site. This school already attracts children around the site. Some industries have started developing around the site which brings the site to light for employment purpose.

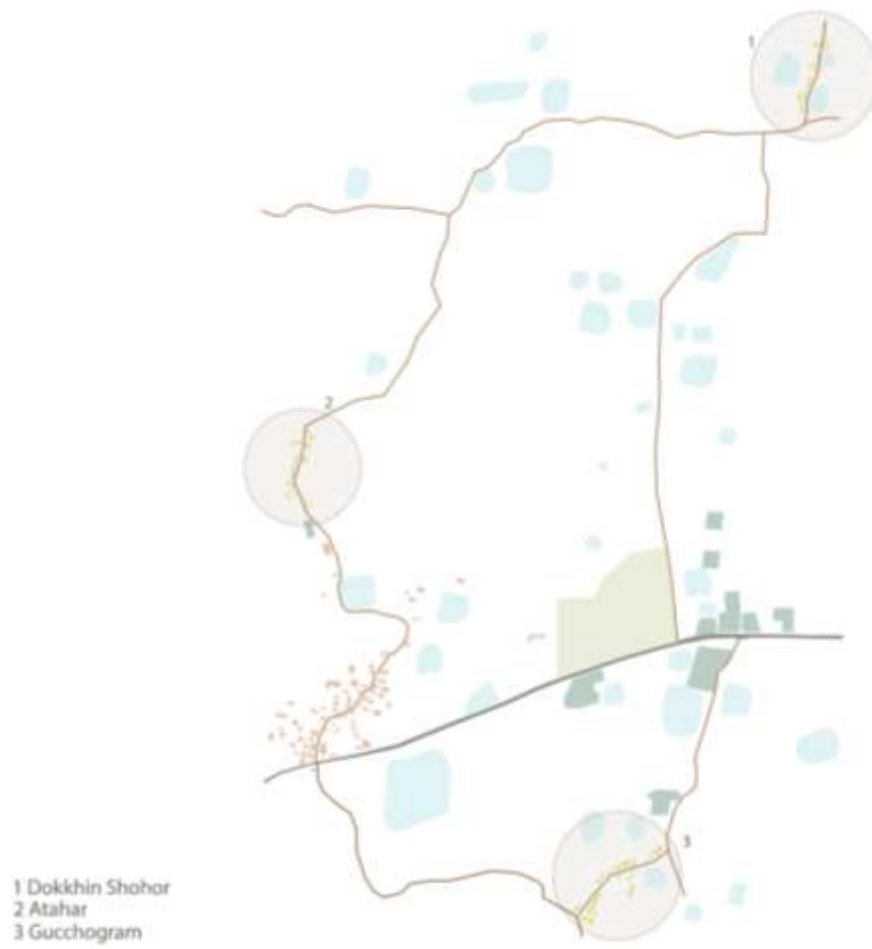


Fig: Santal communities around the site

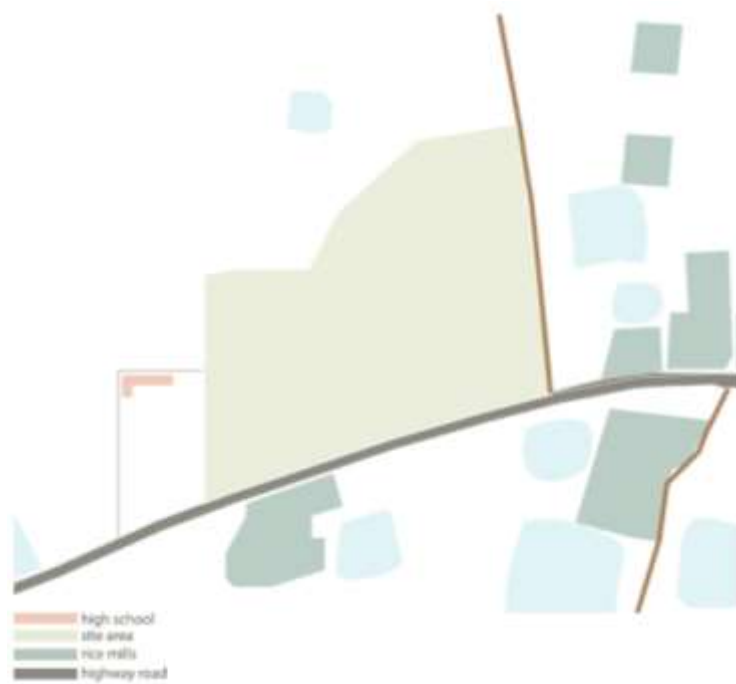


Fig: Site Surroundings

CHAPTER 04: CASE STUDY

4.1 Case Study 01: Friendship Centre, Gaibandha, Bangladesh

4.1.1 Introduction:

The Friendship Centre in Gaibandha, Bangladesh is designed by Dhaka based architect Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury which had been nominated for Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 2016. The Friendship Centre is for an NGO which works with some of the poorest in the country and who live mainly in riverine islands (*chars*) with very limited access and opportunities. Friendship uses the facility for its own training programs and will also rent out for meetings, training, conferences etc. as income generation.



Fig: Friendship Centre, Gaibandha, Bangladesh

4.1.2 Design Considerations & Approach:

The site for the centre is a low-lying area outside Gaibandha, a predominantly agricultural land susceptible to flooding if the embankment for the town is breached. Prohibitive costs for landfill, as well as seismic activity and the low weight bearing capacity of the silty soil, discouraged adopting the usual response of raising the

whole site above the high flood level (8 feet); limited funds for the project were directed towards the extensive program of the centre.

With topographical modulation in mind, Kashef Chowdhury decided to create a mini embankment around the site and to construct the buildings inside that enclosure at the existing ground level in load-bearing, exposed brick. Rainwater and surface run-offs are collected in internal pools, and excess water is pumped off to an excavated pond, also used as a fishery.



Fig: Water body



Fig: Courtyard

The design inspiration came from the surrounding historical elements. As the architect compares the project to some of the ancient Buddhist monasteries constructed elsewhere in the region. "Simplicity is the intent, monastic is the feel," he added. The use of the local handmade bricks are inspired from the ruins that holds the history of this region.

The building blocks are divided by two types of functions. Firstly the residential part consist of dormitory, staff quarters and dinning. The public block has library, a conference room, a prayer space and a small shop.

One of the design ideas were to have broken forms, pavilions and open spaces to maximize the flow of ventilation and light within the spaces. The green roof works as thermal protection to the built form which eliminates the need of using air conditions.

Large openings in the walls bring natural light and ventilation through the buildings, while a sequence of small courtyards and pools allow cool air to circulate.

4.1.3 Analysis:

Kashef Chowdhury's approach towards the context in this project shows how simplicity can do wonders. The way he considered the contextual elements with the history and archeology, the place became more successful. The sensitivity of the architect towards his decisions regarding the details are sheer genius. The design overall complement the site and do not over power at all.



Fig: Locals at the centre

This centre is also very successful when it comes to the users. In architect's words, "It serves and brings together some of the poorest of the poor in the country, yet within the extreme limitation of means, there was a search for the luxury of light and shadows, of the economy and generosity of small spaces, and of the joy of movement and discovery"

4.2 Case Study 02: Yorkin Indigenous Reserve, Bribri community, Costa Rica

4.2.1 Bribri community:

The Bribri are an indigenous people of Costa Rica. They live in the Talamanca (canton) in Limón Province of Costa Rica. They speak the Bribri language and Spanish. There are varying estimates of the population of the tribe. Yorkin community is situated along a river of the same name which serves along part of its course as the boundary between the countries of Panama and Costa Rica.

Agriculture has been the lifeblood of the indigenous communities for generations. Bananas and cacao beans are the two main products which the locals harvest and then sell to large companies.



Fig: Entrance to the Yorkin Indigenous Reserve

4.2.2 Community Based Development:

During the last 30 years, the Bribri people have been struggling to recover their culture and sacred traditions, which have been threatened by the encroachment of the dominant Costa Rican culture. People in the village were frustrated because there were no jobs, and people were moving away to stay and work in the cities or

on the large banana plants in the area. They almost lost their traditions, cultures and language. The community women started feeling the need to retrieve the original way of living and to find new opportunities and sources of income for our community. This gave birth to the Stibrawpa Women's House Association in 1996 (Fariña, 2012).



Fig: Local Guide



Fig: Bribri people

At the beginning the members of the association decided to focus on three major issues: the rainforest, the culture, and the economy. The women started learning their age old arts and crafts. As the organization grew, the women received training from institutions such as the INCAE Business School, INA (National Institute for Learning) and INAMU (National Women's Institute) on such topics as leadership, organizational skills, accounting, and tourism.

Stibrawpa offers tourists a unique opportunity to explore the Bribri people's ancient culture, and learn about their sacred traditions and contemporary life. Visitors stay in two thatched-roof buildings that can accommodate 30 people. Tourists explore the lifestyles of the community through staying with the locals.



Fig: Yorkin Indigenous Reserve tour



Fig: Bribri woman making cocoa

With earnings from ecotourism, the association established a local health clinic, a high school, and a water aqueduct. They are now building a community center which will be their main area for rituals, community gatherings, graduations, and other events.

4.2.3 Analysis:

Through the tourism program Bribri Community has overcome their economic lacking and culturally they find themselves more embedded. This led the young generation to embrace their deep rooted culture. This small initiative proves that through communal support and willingness any community can achieve their dream. They have found a sustainable way to preserve their precious lifestyle.

economic state. Documentation was done by traditional survey methods of drawing the plans on scaled graph papers.

Observation:

The formation of the villages and individual houses are observed by visiting site and surrounding. The use of spaces were documented by observation. The Santal culture and lifestyle is also observed through the site visit.

Interview:

For further analysis some interviews were taken from the locals and experts to understand the lifestyle and Santal culture. Survey of the individual homesteads were done by interviews as well.

5.2 Documenting a Santal Community: Dokkhin Shohor:

Dokkhin Shohor is situated 7km away from Chapai Nawabganj city. The community is surrounded by serene nature. 37 individual families reside in this village. Almost everyone earns through agricultural work.

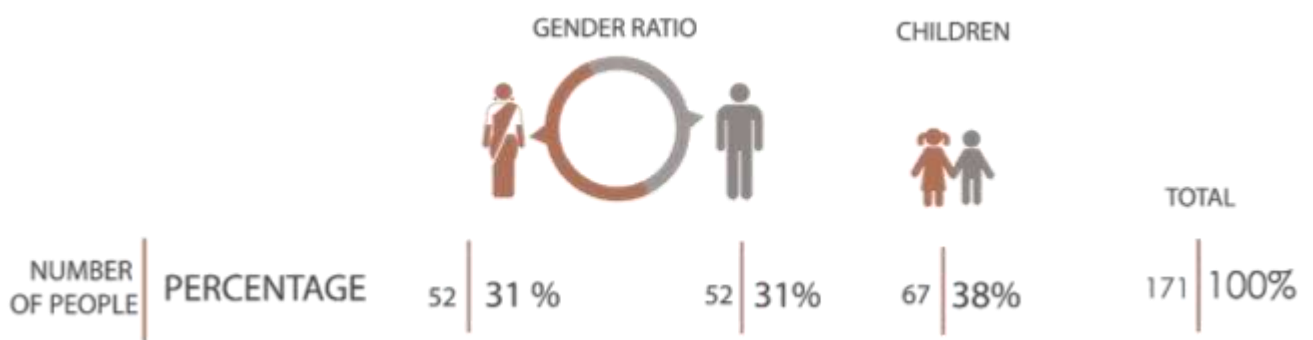


Fig: Population Distribution of Dokkhin Shohor

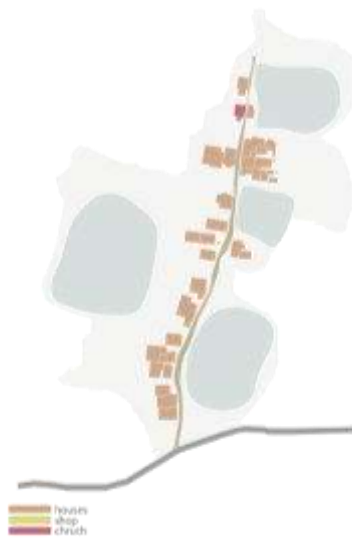


Fig: type of built forms



Fig: religion



Fig: type of activity



Fig: plan of Dokkhin Shohor



5.3 Architectural Features:

5.3.1 Distinctive Features and Materials

From the field study, it is found that the Santal houses are mainly constructed of mud, bamboo, straws, thatch, rice husk and woods. Mud is collected from the lands beside the villages. The bamboos are found in the neighboring villages.



The Santal people in the North Bengal do not use any reinforcement materials in the mud walls. In an interview with local construction worker, Bhorot Chan stated that they use straws and husks to construct mud houses. The straw or husk serves to reinforce the plaster layer and prevents it from cracking. They cannot use any reinforcement due to lack of financial soundness. In the contrary, recently there are few houses using concrete poles.



Usually the houses are made constructed on a thick high plinth that acts as foundation to the houses.



The houses are low height in general. It reduces the construction cost and as the climate is hot and humid, it also keeps the interior comfortable.

Nowadays there is a new trend of using tin roofs instead of thatched roofs. It is because many NGOs and missionaries are coming up with economical help to build long lasting houses.



The windows of the houses of santal people are significantly small in size. Most of the time there is no window frame because it cost them extra to build window. So they prefer small openings instead. The opening is sometimes blocked with few bamboo sticks. The doors are also of low heights and made out of wood.



Economically solvent families build two storied mud houses. The houses are solely made out of mud, wooden planks and bamboo. The stairs features uniqueness as they are made out of mud and placed in the corner of the form.



One of the distinctive features of santal houses is the wall paintings on the walls. Women are solely responsible for plastering and painting, and often help in building the wall as well. They apply the plaster mixture on the wall by hand and smoothen it out.



When it has set but is still a little damp, women scrub the surface with a stone to make it very smooth. After this surface dries, a thin layer of cow dung is applied as a wash on the wall after which it is ready to be painted.



Courtyards are one of the prominent spaces of the house. It is like the heart of the house where every daily activities take part. The kitchen is situated within the courtyard. There are few kuti (rice stores) seen in the corners of the courtyard. The livestock also stay in the courtyards. Small gardens are also found in the courtyards of the houses. It shows the artistic mind of Santals and they appreciate cleanliness within the house.



5.4 Axonometric Drawings of Santal Homesteads:

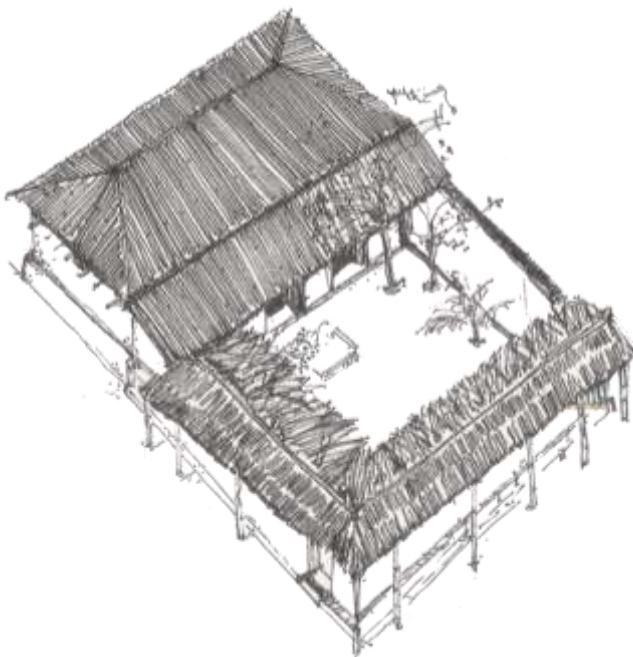
জায়নাল এর বাড়ি

[HOMESTEAD OF JAYNAL BASHDI]



মালতি মুরমু এর বাড়ি

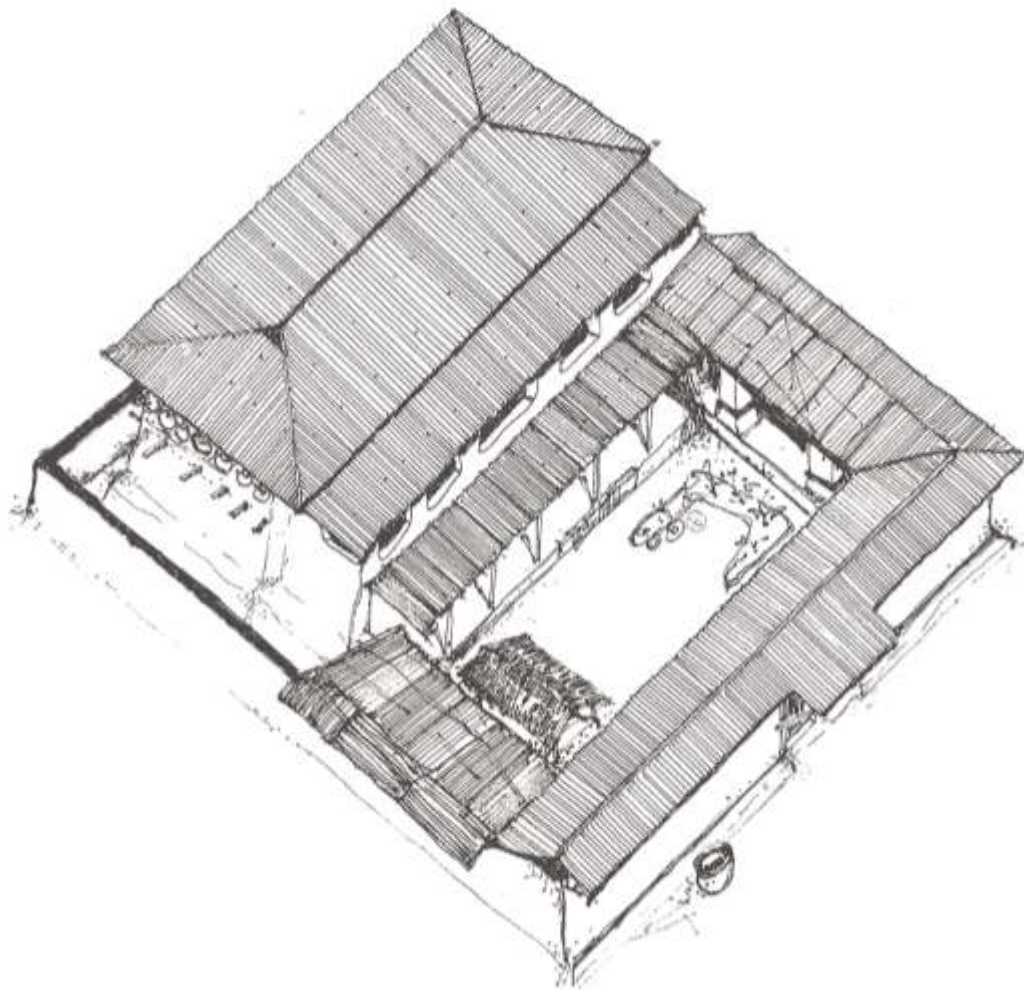
[HOMESTEAD OF MALOTI MURMU]



সারতি মাদি এর বাড়ি

[HOMESTEAD OF SHAROTI MADDI]

Dhumdham Village, Mundumamla, Rajshahi



CHAPTER 06: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Current Factors of Change:

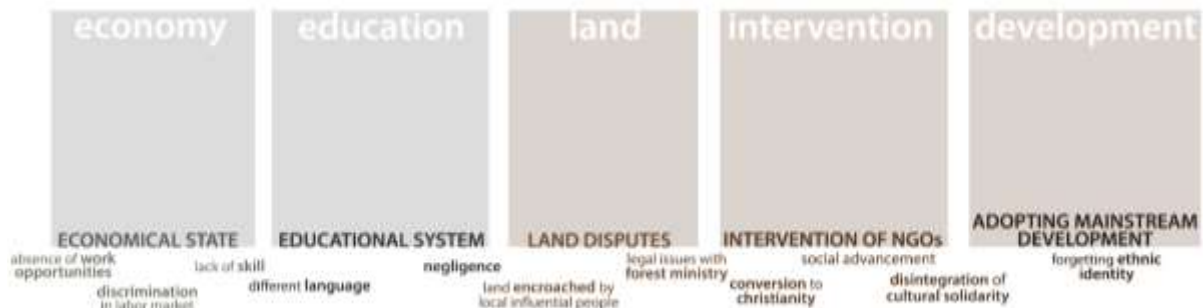


Fig: Current Factors of Change

6.1.1 Economic State:

Lower economic status has led to major issues for Santal communities. 25% Santals are hardcore poor and 75% Santals are absolute poor. Due to land disputes and low income Santals are at the verge of losing their lands and this results in absences of work.

Since Santals landed in flat land, they had been doing agricultural work and this is only skill they know to earn money. The lack of skills is another major reason for their lower economic state.

Santals face distinctive discrimination in labor market due to being minority. Their daily wage is lower than the mainstream labors. The Santal women get even lower wage for the same amount of work as a male.

6.1.2 Education System:

Current literacy rate among Santals are very low. One of the key reason is that they have a very different language of their own which is not connected to the academics. They cannot relate to the education and most of the children drop out from school.

The mainstream society treats Santals with negligence. Even the teachers treat the Santal children as lower cast. As a result the Santal children feel inferior to the other children.

6.1.3 Land Disputes:

Santals are easy prey to local influential people. They get forged and lose their land. Due to lack of knowledge about legal rights the Santals do not know how to protect their land. This causes them to live in Governmental lands. In recent times the Santals are also facing issues with the Forest Ministry about lands. In few of the areas Santals are forcefully moved out from their houses.

6.1.4 Intervention of NGOs:

There are several NGOs working to improve the state of Santal community but most of them have hidden agendas to convert them into Christians. The NGOs offer the Santals education, health facilities and shelter. This attracts the Santals in need and they convert into Christianity. This is directly hampering their age old religious belief and resulting in disintegration of Santal communities.

6.1.5 Adopting Mainstream Development:

The mainstream idea of development is bringing major changes in Santal lifestyle. The Santals started to forget their ethnic identity and seem more interested in becoming Bengali. They are adopting the language, outlook and lifestyle of general people. This is causing them to leave behind their ethnicity.

6.2 Interrelationship among the Factors of Change:

The factors that are causing the changes in present Santal community are internally connected. The lack of education and awareness is causing land disputes and low income generation.

Land disputes and low income are also interconnected. Land dispute causes the Santals lose their land which leads to absences of work. This results in lower earnings. As the Santals belong to the low income group, they are easy prey of land grabbing by the local influential.



Fig: Interrelationship of the Factors of Change

Land disputes and Low income generate Social Insecurity in Santals. The social insecurity leads them to two choices. Either to adopt the mainstream development or to take the offers of the NGOs and convert into Christians for privileges. Both the choices results in Degradation of Santal cultural heritage. They start to move away from their roots and leave behind their ethnic identity. This creates disintegration in cultural solidarity.

CHAPTER 08: DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Transforming Elements:

7.1.1 Courtyards:

Courtyard is the most important element of any Santal house whether it is a small house or large. It consists almost all activities of a homestead. It is the soul of the Santal houses. Designing a communal space for Santals demands for such space that are familiar to them.

8.1.2. Central Circulation:

Almost every Santal villages are constructed along a central spinal circulation. The houses are built along the central circulation facing each other.

8.1.3. Water bodies and Agricultural land:

Communal interaction among Santals mainly happen around water bodies and agricultural lands. Every community is surrounded by agricultural lands and water bodies. Water bodies are used for household chores, so women interact more around ponds. As most of the Santals work as agricultural labor, they interact at fields.

8.1.4. Space usage:

From the study of Santal houses it is found that there is a significant distribution of space usage. The center of the house is the most public part. Then comes the semi-private portion where it works as circulation, storage or acts as veranda. Bedrooms are the private section of the houses.

8.1.5. Materiality:

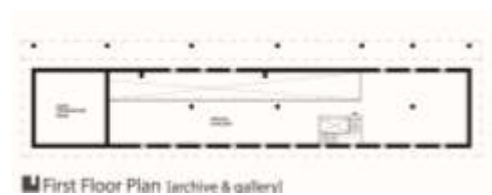
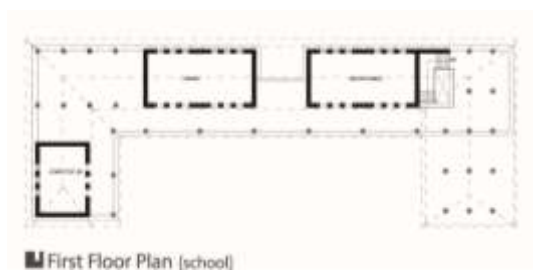
Santal community is known for their simplicity in living. Their choice of materials for building houses project that as well. The vernacular materials are proof of this. Mud is a key material of Santal identity. They use is in the most valued way. The landscape is also influenced by their material choices. The palm trees, coconut trees and various flower trees are found around the villages. The leaves of the palm and coconut trees are used for roofing and fencing.

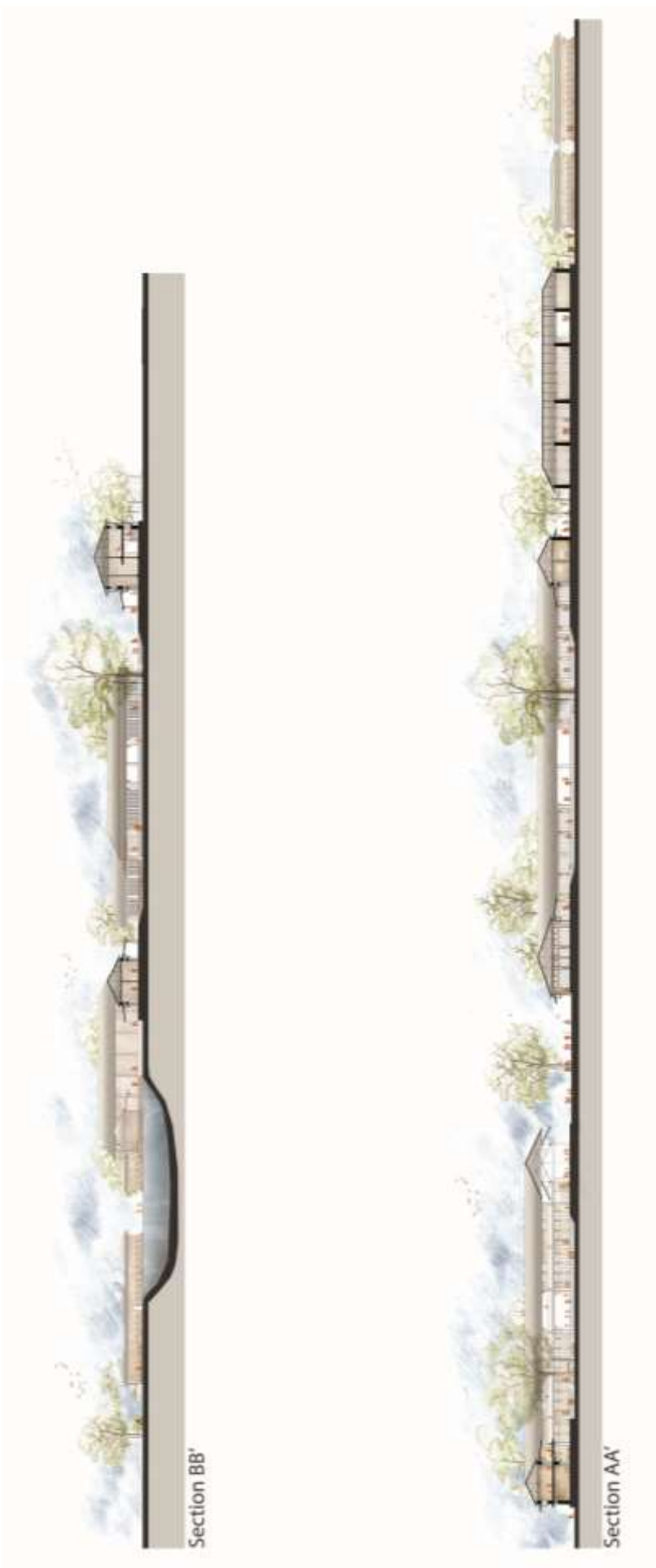
8.2 Zoning & Orientation:

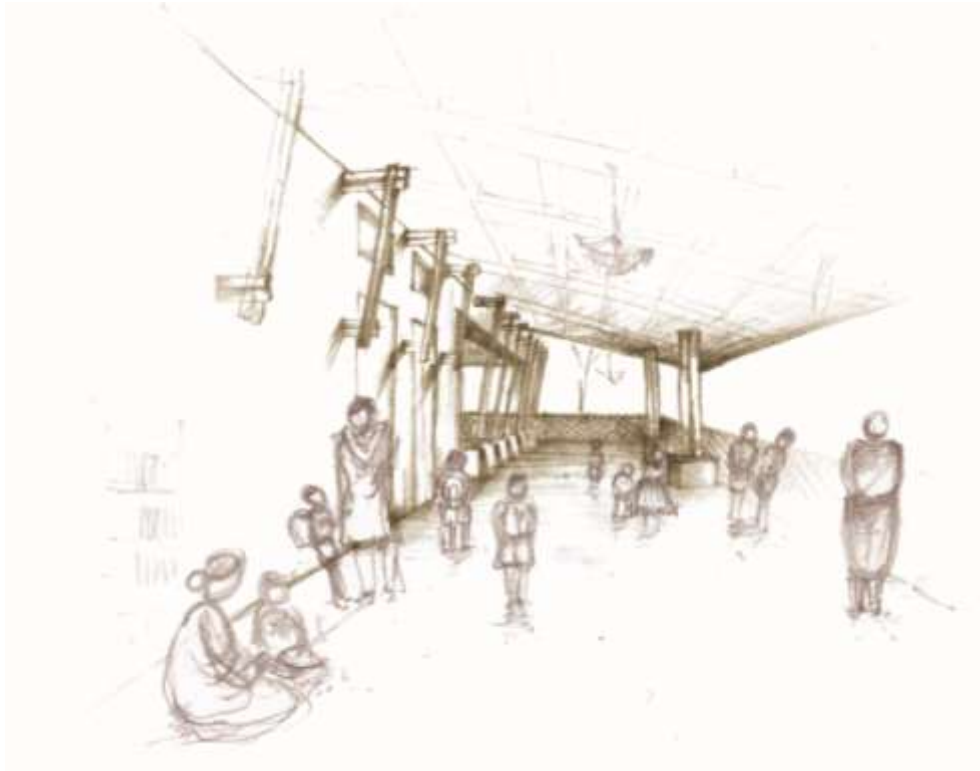
The built form is arranged in such a way that reflects the same space usage as the Santal houses. The public facilities like arrival court, School, Health Care, Workshops and Gallery are placed at first. Then comes the training court which will be used by the Santal community but it also acts as a buffer for the private part of the project which is the accommodations.

Orientation of the built form is designed in a way that the main facilities get the north-south ventilation. The services and open pavilions are placed along the east-west orientation to avoid heat gain.

8.3 Plans, Sections, Perspective views and Models:











CONCLUSION:

The Santal have been living in the pristine natural surroundings of the area for thousands of years. Their way of living and culture is a breathing heritage for Bangladesh. Today their socio economic state is initiating changes in their deep rooted culture. The information and discussion provided in the present paper tend to indicate that the social cohesion and consistency of the ethnic minority of Santals are weakening and disintegrating their way of living. Their authentic ways of social formations and individuality needs to be protected and preserved. The intention of the project is to start the thinking and journey towards creating a society where individuality of every human being is appreciated. This project is not just for Santals but a platform for everyone to express their eccentricity. This approach can be an inspiration for everyone to retain their identity and be proud about it.

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