

Voting Behavior of Santal Tribal Community: A Case Study on Deopara Union of Godagari Upazila, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

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Abstract: *In this research we have investigated the voting behavior of Santal tribal community in Bangladesh. The Santals are one of the most homespun communities in Bangladesh. The Santals are the second largest tribal group in Bangladesh. They usually live in the Rajshahi Division of Bangladesh. They live isolated from mainland people, proper attention was never given to them. They are dominated and discriminated by the local majority communities: businessmen, landlords, political leaders. Poverty, landlessness, illiteracy and exploitation are their daily associates. Due to poverty and illiteracy they did not get a touch of political awareness, leadership and modernity. Due to this their active participation in politics at local and national level is not seen. But it is often seen that their vote play a vital role to elect representative in the election. But the real facts are yet to be discovered in spite of many works done in Santals culture, history and socio-economic condition. There is a target to find out which issues they value in voting by random sampling among people of different age. The research has been carried out in Deopara union of Godagari upazilla of Rajshahidistrict in Bangladesh. We collected our data through a field survey in Santals community. The study argues that the Santals are day by day showing the mainstream political behavior. They are prioritizing party politics over local politics in terms of national election and vice versa on the local election. The dominance of their communal leader still cast a big shadow. However, as a emerging voter group Santals are receiving a considerable amount of priority by the political elite.*

Keywords: tribal, santal, voting behavior, political consciousness, rajshahi.

Introduction

The voting Behavior is a set of impressions and opinion towards elections at the national and local level which play complicated role of election in the political system of any country. Voting Behavior is an important and authentic aspect of political behavior of man. According to R.T. Jangam, "Voting behavior is the behavior which indicates the votes choice preferences alternatives arguments, concerns, ideologies, programs and so on in respect of various questions or issues on which the various elections may be contested and fought".³

Voting behavior as a primary unit of political analysis of establishment of relationship with the behavior and political events of an individual or individuals. There are some basic aspects of human behavior that can considered to analyze social and political events and functions. Behaviorism deals with political outcomes or events by discussing the political behavior of individual and individuals and other political entities. Systematic monitoring of behavior of political entities is essential to provide a comprehensive introduction to the effective values of a political system.

Santals is the second largest tribe and it has a significant impact on local and national elections. But the voting behavior of Santals is different from other ethnic groups. In voting they considered different individuals, groups, parties, symbols etc. In the national election, they give more priority to the symbol. But the local election especially member election they come together to decide who chose to be appropriate for vote. According to the decision they all encourage to vote for the specified candidate. The Santals maintain the decision of the group leader.

Due to the large number of Santals they play important role in local elections. So they have considerable influence in all these elections.

Bangladesh is one of the most noticeable mix cultural country in South Asia where lives various kinds of indigenous people. With the several numbers of rivers, the land of country is very fertile that's why many ethnic people came to live here. In Bangladesh live different types of aspect ethnicity, cultural, language, religion, tradition and so on. These diversities have created combined culture in Bangladesh. These people are much conscious to their culture belief, ritual, practices and unique values. Because of rapid deforestation and various kinds of social economic aspects the living styles of the ethnic people is changing day by day. Therefore it is necessary to talk about the term of indigenous or ADIVASI. First ADIVASI is Sanskrit word which include two parts, where

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³R.T. Jangam, Text Book of Political Sociology (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH publishing company, 1982), p. 201.

the first one indicate ADI means original and BASI or VASI means inhabitant.⁴ In many countries this adivasi people are considered as small tribe or small ethnic group. In Bangladesh there are over 54 groups of indigenous communities that's analyze about 2% of the total people have been living Chittagong hill tracts and different flat surface among Bangladesh.⁵ The Santals are the most ancient and second largest indigenous communities in Bangladesh. Santals are the descended od-Austric speaking port Austroloid race. They mainly belong to Austro Asiatic groups of pre Aryan Settlers. They have their values own culture and language. The Santals mainly live in the Barind region of Bangladesh. The Barind area refers to the district in north western part of the country as like Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bogura and Chapainawabganj. There is the one third of Santals lives in Dinajpur.⁶ But the main origin of the Santals in India especially Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Chotanagpur. According to census report 2011 there are 1586141 ethnic people living in Bangladesh who cover 1.10% of its total population (BBS 2011). Santals are 8.96% of total ethnic population and 09% of the entire population of the country. About 143425 Santals people are living different district of Bangladesh.⁷ The Santals make their living through agriculture. They are also industrious and hard worker. They have little knowledge about scientific cultivation and management system of land has not been developed. The Santals are lagging behind of education system. For this their rights and identity goes under threat. Due to political ignorance they could not change their identity on the other hand they couldnot play such a role in the political development of the country. But their role is important in the election of people's representatives at the national and local levels. Because they have significant residence in this region. This initiative was dedicated on this target.

The fertile land of Bengal always attracted people. In the course of time, different groups of people from various parts of the world migrated towards Bengal and settled here. The Santals have been living in the country since ancient time. Santals are the second largest tribal community only after the Chakma in Bangladesh. Santals are the largest tribe in the Jharkhand state of India in terms of population and are also found in the state of Assam, Tripura, Bihar, Odisha, Chattisgarh and West Bengal. They are the largest ethnic minority in northern Bangladesh of Rajshahi Division and Rangpur Division. The Santals inhabited the plain land of North Bengal mainly the District of Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogura, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Chapainawabganj. The terms refers to inhabitants of saont, now in the Midnapore region of West Bengal the traditional homeland of Santals.⁸ According to Linguist Paul Sidwell, Austro-Asiatic language speakers probably arrived on coast of Odisha from Indo-China about 4000-3500 years ago.⁹ It is probable that the Santals scattered throughout Bengal at the time of the Muslim invasion of this region during the last decades of 12th century or the beginning of the 13th century.¹⁰ In 1836 the British Government selected the area for the Santals to live peacefully, later the area was known as SantalPargana.¹¹ They are physically very strong and hardworking. Usually they have medium height, dark complexion, round shaped face, high cheekbone, large mouth, voluptuous lips and wide nose. The Santals also spelled as santhal formerly also spelt as santal or sonthal. The Santals belongs the Proto Austroloid group who arrived in the indian sub-continent after the negitos. Santhal where SAN means partner, company or friends. Some of the Anthropologist think that they are from saoot (plain land) they are recognized as Santal. Some are believe that their name was kherwar.¹² The word Santal is the standard form in English Literature. The language spoken by the Santal is Santali. The Santali language is a part of Austro Asiatic family. The Santal script is a relatively recent innovation. The Santals did not have a written language until the 12th century and it used Latin, Roman, Devnagri, Oriya and Bangle writing system. Paul Olaf Booding (1929) who was Norwegian missionary, Linguist and florist serving in India for 44 years

⁴Collins English Dictionary, Copyright©Harpercolins Publishers.

⁵ Chowdhury M.S. &Chakma, P. (2016) Human Rights Report 2015 on Indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, Kapaeing Foundation, Dhaka.

⁶<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki>.

⁷Government of Bangladesh (2011). Bangladesh population Census 2011. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

⁸Schulte-Droesch, Lea, verfasser (2018). Making place through ritual: land, environment and region among the santal of central India. ISBN 978-3-11-053973-80 CLC 1054397811.

⁹Sidwell, paul (2018), Austroasiatic Studies: State of the art in 2018. presentation at the Graduate Institute of Linguistic. National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, 22 May 2018.

¹⁰Pussetto, L.(2003)Santals of Bangladesh (<http://srpbypst.blogspot.com/2010/06/Santals-of-Bangladesh-of-L-pessetto>).

¹¹ Bleie, T (2005), "Tribal peoples Nationalism and the Human Rights Challenge (<http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1004931.ToneBleie>).

¹² Rahman, T (2008). Evaluation on Santal Development project by BNELC-Df, 2008 (<http://www.bangladesh.org/pics/download/NETZ-study.pdf>).

created the first alphabet of Santali language and wrote the grammar for the Santali speaking native people in Eastern India.¹³ In Santal inhabited rural areas they speak each other in Santalilanguage. But why when they speak other they speak in Bengali. Their children generally learn both the language at their early ages. Their ethnonym is HorHopon.¹⁴ In the Santal religion the majority of reverence falls on a court of spirits (Bonga) who handle different aspect of the world and who are placated with prayers and offering.¹⁵ The Bonga are intermediaries between NoaPuri (visible world) and Hana Puri (the invisible reality) the adobe of a creator. The creator is variously called Marang Buru (Supreme of Deity or Literally the Great Mountain) or Thakur Jiu (Live giver) and is the cause of all causes making the Santals religion in deep sense, monotheistic as well as pantheistic.¹⁶ Sohrai is the principle festival of Santal community. Beside that Baha, karam, sakrat, mahmore, rundo and magsim are important festivals. Decision making matters is done through a village council which is headed by a person tried majhi is aided by other council members to carry out and deal with local affairs.¹⁷

The family is the fundamental unit of society. Both the nuclear and joint family system in Santals community. But the family bonding with each other which is decreasing gradually. Santals are a patrilineal society where family centers on the father.¹⁸ The father exercises supreme authority in the family and possesses decision making power. Santals are divided into many clans. In Santali language these clans are known as Paris. Santals are mainly divided into 12 clans these are leiscu, hnasdak or hnosdamurmu, hembrom, marandi or mardi, soren, tudu, Baskey or Baski, Besra, pnaoriar, orpauria, guasoren and chnorey.¹⁹ Basically Santals were the hunters and gathers. They were very close to nature and dependent on it. They collect their food from nature. Agriculture was their main occupation. Santals are the minority in society and thus are not represented in national politics. They are not very active in politics due to lack of education and advancement. They are a very peace loving community and have their own system of village manage. The study portrayed Santals political thought, ideology, practice and perspective from both local and national point of view.

Research Methodology

This is mainly a survey based qualitative research work. Data was collected carefully from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data was local residence of Goddaing, Nibaibattala who were from Santal tribal. 120santal people including male and female were interviewed with a structured questionnaire. Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS ver. 23. Frequency distribution is used for representing the findings.

Data Analysis

	yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Casting vote Regularly	120	100		
Casting vote in the national election	119	99.2	1	0.8
Casting vote in the local election	120	100		
Prioritizing national election over local election	53	44.17	67	55.83

[Source: Field Survey, 2021]

¹³Booding, P.O. (1929), ASantal Dictionary (5 Volumes), 1933-36, Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1929.

¹⁴Somers, George E. (1979). The dynamics of Santal traditions in a peasant Society. Schenkmanpub.co.OCLC 5668202.

¹⁵Heitzman, James (1996). Tribal Religions. In Heitzman, James; worden, Robert L. (eds.) India. A Country Study.

¹⁶Dednath, MrinalKanti (2011), Living on the Edge: The predicament of a Rural Indigenous Santal Community in Bangladesh (Thesis).

¹⁷Winston, Robert, ed. (2004), Human: The Definitive Visual Guide, New York: Dorling kindersley. P. 440. ISBN-0-7566-0520-2.

¹⁸Chakma, S.(2002), Bangladesh opajatioAdibashiderShamaj, Sangskriti o AcharBeboher (Socio Cultural Behavior of the tribal & indigenous people of Bangladesh) Dhaka: Nuros publication.

¹⁹Toru, M.I. (2007). Santal In. M. Kamal, Z Islam & S. Chaka (Eds) Indigenous Communities (p. 353), Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

Table 1 is the depiction of how the Santals caste votes. According to table 1 no of the Santals abstain from casting vote. While they were asked whether they caste vote regularly or not, 100% of the respondents said that they caste vote regularly. About regularity of casting vote in the national election was 99.2%. In terms of local election the rate of the Santals caste vote was 100%. However, while the respondents were asked whether prioritize national election over local election or not, the result was different. About half 44.17% of the total respondents said that they prioritize national election over local election. Therefore, it can be said that, the Santals are very active in terms of practicing their voting right. On the other hand, a considerable portion are very interested in the national election.

Table 2: Reason for casting vote and choosing particular candidate

	yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%
For establishing own political ideology	120	100		
For economic benefit (taking money from the candidate)	09	7.5	111	92.5
For the betterment and the development of the locality	89	74.17	31	25.83
For the development of the nation	72	60	48	40
Casting vote is my civil responsibility	97	80.83	23	19.17
For getting political safety	103	85.83	17	14.17
Receiving support from the elected representative during crisis	108	90	12	10
Receiving government facility smoothly	113	94.17	07	5.83

[Source: Field Survey, 2021]

For more in-depth understanding Santals were asked, what is their motive for casting vote. In terms of establishing one’s ideology 100% responded positively. A tiny portion 7.5% were found casting vote for economic benefit (taking money from the candidate). 74.17 % were on the side of their local development where 60% were on the side of nation’s development. Among the Santals 80.83% were found practicing their civil right. 85.83% of the respondents think that casting vote to a specific person will grant them political safety. Apart from that, 90% believes casting vote will bring support from the elected member in the time of crisis where 94.17% respondents said that casting vote will make it easier for them to avail the government services. In terms of reason behind casting vote, response was diverse and mostly remained getting support from the elected representatives as well as the nation (table 2).

Table 3: Access to mass media

	yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Regular access to TV	93	77.5	27	22.5
Regular access to newspaper	19	15.83	101	84.17
Regular access to social media	26	21.67	94	78.33

[Source: Field Survey, 2021]

Table 3 shows the participation of mass media in the Santals community. Among them 77.5% Santals are interested in watching television regularly. 15.83% Santals were reading newspapers regularly. 21.67% of respondents had regular access to social media. Reviewing this above table we can see the interest of Santals in social media is not much high. That is why there is less political awareness among them.

Table 4: Issues which determine the voting preference

	National				Local			
	yes		no		yes		no	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%
Candidate	13	10.83	107	89.17	59	49.17	61	50.83
Symbol	109	90.83	11	09.17	91	75.83	29	24.17
Tribal leaders guideline	103	85.83	17	14.17	86	71.67	34	28.33
Religious identity of the candidate	03	2.5	117	97.5	93	77.5	27	22.5
Candidate among relative	54	45	66	55	58	48.33	62	51.67
Spouse	18	15	102	85	35	29.17	85	70.83
Offspring	24	20	96	80	42	35	78	65

[Source: Field Survey, 2021]

There are several issues which determine the voting preferences; in Bangladesh the issues are diverse.²⁰ The selected respondents were asked multiple questions regarding the topics. The questions were thrown at them from two perspectives. The mandate of the researcher was to understand what are the issues that determine their voting preference and in which election. In response, Santals said, Candidate doesn't matter at all when it comes down to the national election since 89.17% responded in this regard where in the local election the response was difference. In local election about half (49.17%) said that, the candidate matters. However, still rest of the half remained regardless about the candidate. In terms of symbol, 90.83% respondents were considerate in national election where in local election the number of considerate person is slightly lower (75.83%). therefore, it can be said that, in terms of national election the symbol plays a dominant role where in terms of local election the symbol plays a dominant role as well but lower than the national election. Among the Santals tribal leaders still casts a big shadow in influencing their political behavior. 85.83% Santals found overly influence by their political leaders in the time of deciding whom to vote during the national election. On the other hand in terms of local election the percentage is slightly lower (71.67%). However, the influence of tribal leader is still present among the Santals to a great extant. Santals also get influenced by the religious identity of the candidate but in terms of local election only, 77.5 of the Santals held the view. On the contrary, only 2.5% of the Santals found considering the religious view of the candidate. When it comes down to candidates among the relatives 45% of the Santals prefer them over anything else in the national election. The issues remains almost same during the local election since 48.33% held the same view. Spouses also have the ability to influence Santals voters since 15% among the national and 29.17% in local election is influence. Although the percentage is lower than the other issues mentioned above but still it can be considered significant. Offspring also Impact their parents in choosing the candidate during local and national election. 20% during the national election admitted that they are influenced by their children where 35% of the Santals were found admitting the fact that they are influenced by their children during local election.

Table 5: Involvement with political party

	yes		no	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%
Personal Involvement	08	6.7	112	93.3
Family members involvement	07	5.8	113	94.2

[Source: Field Survey, 2021]

In the table 5, the involvement of Santals people in political affairs is discussed. According to the statistics 6.7% people are directly involved in politics. Family members of Santals involved in political party, such families were found among 5.8% of total Santals respondents.

Table 6: Impediments during casting vote

	yes		no	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Feeling pressure as a minority/ from ethnic community	47	39.17	73	60.83
Feeling pressure as a women	33	84.62	06	15.38

[Source: Field Survey, 2021]

The impediments on casting vote of Santals community is depicted in table .39.1% Santals found feeling pressure as a minority from ethnic community. Beside, 84.6% women feeling pressure from their own family members when they give their vote. In this table it is observed that women do not have the freedom to vote. Because the Santals peoples still held the view that women are not aware of voting.

Table 7: Patriarch perception on women voter

	yes		no	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Women are welcome to vote	73	90.12	08	9.88
Women are ignorant about election candidate	59	72.84	22	27.16
Possibility of dispute inside family	53	65.43	28	34.57
They are not capable of choosing candidate	71	87.65	10	12.35

²⁰ Harun, Shamsul Huda. 1986. *Bangladesh voting behaviour: a psephological study, 1973*. [Dhaka]: Dhaka University. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/15054065.html>.

[Source: Field Survey, 2021]

Table 7 shows the patriarchal perception about the women voter. 90.1% Santals have a positive view of women participating in the local and national elections. 72.8% Santals thinks that women are not eligible as an election candidate. During the time of election there is a possibility of dispute inside the family which is the concept of 65.43%. Above all, 87.6% of Santals considered that women are not capable of choosing candidates.

Findings:

The illiteracy rate is very slight among the Santals people. They are not aware of their rights and are not aware of the exercise of the rights of vote. They believe in various superstitions and traditional ideas. In voting, they abide by the decision of the group leader. The group leader highlights their problems through discussions with candidates and promises for solving those problems.

They give most priority to symbol when it comes to vote. Although they think that in order to be an elected representative, the candidate must be honest, competent, efficient and educated. But when voting, they vote by look at the symbol.

Another important point here is that there is an idea among the general people that the Santals vote for a particular symbol. And while the Santals vote for another symbol, different ideologies people don't believe it. For all these reasons they vote for a particular symbol and think of it is a bulwark.

Although the education rate of the Santals is negligible, but there are number of educated people among them. Those who are aware of their voting rights. But when it comes to vote, they give more importance to the symbol.

In ancient time the Santals have been quite conscious of educating their children. In the past, they pushed away education for their livelihood, but now they give more priority to education.

They mainly lead their life by farming. The amount of their land is insufficient. They work on other people's land to meet their daily needs. Men as well as women work in the land.

Irrespective to national and local level elections Santals are found highly symbol driven voter. But in terms of local election they are found influenced by their group leader. In voting women are influenced by the decision of their husbands or fathers leaving the mark of patriarchy to a great extant. The women are incapable of voting, such concept is still lurking among the Santals till today. In the past Santals were frightened showing direct political involvement but at present, political parties or leaders don't prevented them from to cast their vote. In past Santals were illiterate but the light of education has spread among them to the recent past. Now they are quite aware of the election. Tendency of being guided by the tribal leader during vote is still found among the Santals. Various determiners are found more effective in terms of local election rather than national election.

Recommendation

Based on the field observations and findings the following recommendations are put forwarded so that the Santals community can easily accommodate them combating the Voting Behavior of Santals.

1. Education should be spread among the Santals people.
2. We need to make them aware of their rights.
3. Some initiatives need to be taken to increase their political awareness.
4. Negative perceptions about them need to be eradicated.
5. Santals need to be involved in politics.

Conclusion

As today is the age of modernization, the people of all over the world are facilitated by education, science and development of modern technology. On the other hand Santals community is an ethnic group lived in southern part of Bangladesh especially at Rajshahi Division, do not meet up their basic needs, which is totally unexpected. Santals is an ethnic community are also different from others, because of their livelihood patterns and some of their special characteristics. As they are ethnic people, they share common culture, religious beliefs, norms, values, rituals and festivals. Besides most of the people of Santals community are illiterate and can't know how to read and write, even they are not aware of the rights as a member of an independent country. They are also unconscious about their voting rights. They have no land so they cultivate the land of others. They live from hand to mouth. They are deprived of all kinds of privilege which is providing by the government. Santals do not get their basic services from government as well as they are also racially segregated and neglected by the civil people of our country. They face a lot of problem to continue their livelihood because of illiteracy, high growth of population, unemployment problem, landlessness, lack of money and also ethnicity.

There has been a lot of research on Santals tribal community in Bangladesh. The current study, entitled "Voting Behavior of Santals community", seeks to delve deeper into the political awareness of Santals, the type of political participation and the importance of voting system.

The Santals are still far behind in politics as the light of education has not spread among them. They only give their vote but not much conscious about politics. In the national election they give their vote on the basis of symbol. But the local elections some people from the society including village leader come together and decided whose person they giving their vote. In this way everyone decided among themselves and giving their vote the same person. And women are usually influenced by family decisions for vote. Because women are ignorant about the politics of the country.

Although Bangladesh is a non-communal country, the Santals are still considered a minority tribe. We have need to change the mentality and give equal opportunity to the Santals in politics. If the Santals participate in politics, they will be aware of the contemporary issues of the country.

Santals need to be aware of their own responsibilities. Santals have to come out illiteracy and enter into the mainstream of society. They also need to be politically aware through direct participation in politics.

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