

Empowerment among Santal and Oraon Women in Godagari Upazila of Rajshahi District, Bangladesh: A Comparison

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Abstract: The Santal and the Oraon are two well recognized ethnic groups residing in northern Bangladesh. These ethnic groups have their own cultural traits which are easily differentiated from the culture of the majority Bengali Muslim population. As such it is very likely that the nature and level of empowerment among the Santal and Oraon women are quite different from that of the women among the general population in Bangladesh. The present study endeavours to investigate the nature of women empowerment among the Santal and the Oraon, residing in villages named Modhumath and Muraripur respectively within Gogram Union of Godagari Upazila under Rajshahi district, Bangladesh using social survey method. It has been found that there exists no significant difference between the empowerment-level of women residing in the two villages. The factors that influenced empowerment of the respondents mostly included access to family income, ability to spend own income, literacy, schooling years, role in family decision making, expression of opinion in village organization, ability to visit the doctor independently and ability to mix with the Bengali people.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Santal, Oraon.

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Introduction

The Santal and the Oraon are well recognized ethnic groups residing mainly in northern Bangladesh. These ethnic groups have their own cultural features which can be distinctly differentiated from the culture of the majority Bengali Muslim population of the country; and as such it is very likely that the nature and level of empowerment among the Santal and Oraon women would be quite different from the general population in Bangladesh. Under such circumstances, the present

researcher, being keenly interested in gender issues wishes to investigate the nature of empowerment among the Santal and the Oraon, residing in villages named Modhumath and Muraripur respectively within Gogram Union of Godagari Upazila under Rajshahi district.

Empowerment of women is a widely studied concept all over the world, especially in developing countries (See for example, Mahmud 2003, Mahmud 2012, Ethiopian Society for Population Studies 2005, Kabeer 2005, Garikipati 2008, Banu *et al.* 2001, etc.). The concept has been viewed, explained and modeled in many different ways. “. . . definitions of empowerment usually include a sense of people making decisions on matters that are important in their lives and being able to carry them out” (Mosedale 2005). Many studies have specifically been carried out on empowerment of women in Bangladesh, with rural and urban divide. Many studies have been carried out relating empowerment to microcredit (Mahmud 2003, Pitt *et al.* 2006, Banu *et al.* 2001, Lakwo 2006, Garikipati 2008, Fernando 1997, Amin 1998, Akmam *et al.* 2007 etc.). There are some studies carried out on empowerment of minority people in India (e.g. Das 2012, Puttaraja and Heggade 2012, Sethuraman 2008, Awais *et al.* 2009, Sindhi 2012). However, studies carried out on empowerment of ethnic minority women in Bangladesh, especially among the Santal and Oraon are only a handful (e.g., Bleie 1987). As the socio-cultural features of the tribal people in Bangladesh are somewhat different from the majority Bengali Muslim population, the conceptual framework for this study would be a little different as compared to the conceptual frameworks designed to study the general rural women of this country (e.g. in Mahmud 2012). Mahmud considered mobility of women as a criterion for determining the empowerment level of a Muslim rural woman, as this is a constraint faced by the general women in observance of the custom of *purdah*. The researcher of this study however, did not consider mobility as a constraint among the Santal/Oraon, as women of these ethnic groups are not compelled to observe *purdah* in their cultural environment. The conceptual framework for this study therefore, has been developed by making necessary changes to the frameworks developed by Martha Chen (as quoted in Nawaz 2010 and Mayoux 2005) and by Mahmud *et al.* (2012), which the researcher regards as appropriate to examine empowerment among Santal and Oraon women of the study area.

In order to study the nature of women empowerment among these two ethnic groups, the variables chosen are earning capacity, language skills, amount of income and income security, access to, control over and ownership of assets and income, fulfillment of basic needs—health care, nutrition, education, housing, water supply,

energy source, sanitation etc., perception of own individuality, and value (self-esteem), perception regarding own ability and capacities, capacity to think and plan for the future (self confidence), others' recognition and respect for individual's contribution and value, decision-making role played within the family and community, bargaining power, participation in local institutions, local government and the political process, self reliance regarding access to resources, markets, public institutions, ability to act independently, organisational strength (leadership ability) (Mayoux 2005).

Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this research is to study the nature and level of empowerment among the Santal and Oraon women within the study area and compare between them. More specifically these objectives are as follows:

- (1) To study the socio-demographic condition of the Santal and the Oraon women living in the study area and compare between them;
- (2) To find out the nature and level of empowerment among women belonging to the two ethnic groups residing in the study area;
- (3) To make comparisons among the Santal and Oraon women of the study area regarding the nature and level of their empowerment.

Methodology

Social survey was the principal method used for this study. The study locale included two villages named Modhumath and Muraripur under Godagari upazila situated within Rajshahi district, inhabited by two different ethnic minority groups. The residents of Modhumath were Santals and Muraripara was inhabited by the Oraon people. The main reason for selecting this area is its manageable distance from the researcher's residence and because a baseline survey providing basic data on the inhabitants of the area was available.

The total number of households living in Modhumath and Muraripara were 100 and 150 respectively. Among these households 51 from Modhumath and 72 households from Muraripara were selected through systematic random sampling. The female heads of households were the respondents of the study and the unit of analysis was naturally, the individual. Data were collected from these respondents through face to face interview using an interview schedule consisting of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Some sessions of in-depth interviews with a few of the respondents (who were the key informants) have been carried out to know about the

overall cultural characteristics of the villagers. The data collected were processed and analyzed with the help of SPSS software. Along with the social survey method, the case study method was used as a supplementary method for this research. Moreover, while interviewing the respondents in their homes, observations were also made regarding the features of their dwelling place.

Cultural Traits of the Santal and Oraon

The Santal and the Oraon are two ethnic minority groups who mainly live in north-west region of Bangladesh, and have come to this region from India. A brief cultural description of these two minority groups is given below.

The Santal

The Santal are identified by anthropologists as Proto-Australoids in terms of racial categorization. The characteristics of their physical appearance include dark complexion, medium height, black and curled hair, and heavy lips (Rafiq 2013). They are one of the oldest ethnic groups of South Asia (Siddiquee 1984, Ali 1998). Their principal home was in the forests of Jharkhand and Orissa, West Bengal, and Chhota Nagpur. In Bangladesh they are more or less concentrated in the north-western districts of Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Rangpur (Hossain 2000). Originally hunters and gatherers, the Santals were forced to spread themselves to surrounding areas in search of livelihood. They speak in Santal language, which does not have any written form. There are of course many popular folk songs and stories in this language. There are 12 clans (*gotras*) among the Santal. Usually, males and females within the same *gotra* do not get married. In the village (Modhumath) inhabited by the Santal, respondents belonged to ten clans, e.g., Akka, Baski, Hasder, Hasto, Hemrom, Kisku, Mardi, Murmu, Saren and Tudu. The largest clans were Murmu, Saren and Tudu.

The original religion of the Santal is known to the respondents in Modhumath as 'Sanatan.' However, most of them in Modhumath had converted to Christianity (n=44, 86.3%). Only 7 (13.7%) households retained their original religion. The Santals were animistic nature-worshippers. They did not worship idols and acknowledged *Thakurjiu* as their creator. The concept of immortal soul occupies a central role in this religion. Supernatural soul (Bonga) is the determinant of the good and evil that occur in this world (Rafiq 2013). Staple food of the Santal is rice. With rice they eat fish, vegetables, crabs, pork, chicken, meat of squirrels, and beef. Their daily diet also includes jute spinach (*nalita*), duck-egg, chicken-eggs, and eggs laid by birds, and

turtles are included in the list of their delicacies. Special drinks and native cakes are a must in Santal festivities. They are fond of drinking *Hadia*—liquor distilled from decomposed rice (*pachai*), and liquor made at home by distilling *mahua* or Palmyra Syrup. Santal young girls-- who are by nature beauty-conscious-- wear different kinds of simple ornaments on their hands, fingers, feet, ankles, ears, nose, neck, etc. They use flowers for beautification of their hair-buns. Santal women wear coarse cotton colorful sarees, although their style of wearing sari is different from that of the general Bengali women. When Santal boys and girls reach adulthood they draw tattoos on their bodies. The men wear dhuties and gamchha (native towel). Nowadays, they prefer to wear T-shirts, pants etc.

The Santal observe many festivals all throughout the year. Choral dance and music are a part and parcel of these festivals. The Spring Festival brings forth an opportunity for Santal young men and women to choose their marriage partners at a community organization known as *akbra*. In Santal society, premarital free-mixing between male and female partners, is not forbidden. But breach of faith in their married life is very rare. Paying bride-price at the time of marriage, although a small amount, is a custom among the Santal. Divorce and remarriage of the widows and the divorced women are allowed in their community (Rafiq 2013). Patriarchy is prevalent among the Santal. Nevertheless, the Santal women play a significant role in income-generating activities, especially agricultural chores performed by their families. They keep their small houses and yards very clean. Drawings on earthen walls of Santal houses is an evidence of the artistic mind of Santal women. The simple furniture they use, reflect their plain style of life. Santal communities are “still ruled by traditional Panchayet system and the village headman enjoys special dignity” in it (Rafiq 2013). Most of the women respondents of Modhumath opined that they expressed their opinions at the Panchayet meetings.

The Oraon

According to Taru (2013), the Oraon have “a good deal of similarity with the long-headed, broad-nosed Santals in physical features, language and culture. Similarity is also there in their village *PANCHAYET* administration, in social values, and their characteristic love for dance, singing and music.” This statement was proved true in the present study. The Oraon predominantly live in the Varendra region of Bangladesh. Godagari Upazila is located in this region. It is believed that this ethnic group migrated to this region during the Mughal period. The Oraon people speak Kurukh language, which does not have alphabet but a rich oral literature. The

Oraon of the study village (Muraripur) were worshipers of nature. They believed that Dharami/Dharmesh/Dhormesh is the creator of the universe, who exists in the sun. Resembling the Hindus, the Oraon observe the Lakshmi and Saraswati Puja. They try to keep Dharmesh and the evil spirits satisfied through their offerings. Drawing tattoos on bodies before adulthood is also a means of pleasing the supernatural deities. Belief in the doctrine of re-birth inspired the Oraon to perform some rituals for the “salvation of departed souls.” Although they had a tradition of cremating dead bodies, burial is preferred now-a-days perhaps due to price-hike of fire-wood. Like Hindus Oraons performed the ritual of pindidan (Taru 2013). Although a huge majority of the Santals under this study had converted into Christianity, the Oraon in Muraripur retained their original faith.

The Oraon are divided into many clans. Inter-clan marriage is prohibited. The clans to which the respondents of Muraripur belonged were *Akka, Bagh, Baroyar, Kajbur, Khakha, Khanko, Khalko, Lakbra, Meen, Minj, Oraon, Panna, Tappo, Tekka, Tirki, Tudu*. *Baroyar, Minj* and *Tappo* were the largest clans in Muraripur. Traditional dresses worn by the Oraon were very short. A single cloth named *nengti* was worn by men and women used an extra piece of small cloth called *fata* to cover the upper portions of their bodies. But at present Oraon males put on *lungi* and *dhuti* as well as shirt/*punjabi*. The educated Oraon men and women wear shirt-pant and salwar-kamij/sari respectively. Oraon women like to wear different kinds of ornaments e.g., karna shikri (nose-pin), muddies (rings for foot-fingers), paira (attires), and khangsho (a silver hair clip) etc. (Taru 2013).

Marriages take place in the Oraon community based on customary practices. In Oraon culture, marriage arranged by guardians and love marriages are acceptable. In most cases, guardians arrange marriages after taking consent of the bridegroom and the bride. After marriage, the wife may retained her parental clan-title (Bleie 1987). In modern times the Oraon women have to shoulder most of the earning activities. They work as labourers in villages inhabited by the majority Muslim Bengali people. In spite of not abiding by the rules of purdah in their own village, these Oraon women were bound to wear their saris in such a way, so that most parts of their bodies remained covered (Bleie 1987). The Oraons eat rice as their staple food. They also eat wild fruit, meat of animals and birds (e.g., beef, mutton, pork, lamb, buffalo meat, rabbit-meat, meat of porcupine, squirrel, and chameleon), different types of fish, eel, turtle, oyster, crab, and scorpion, eggs etc. They enjoyed and offered hard drinks to guests, which is a major characteristic of traditional Oraon hospitality.

Panches (consisting of 7/8 senior members) is the name of the traditional village organisation of the Oraon to maintain law and order and resolve internal conflicts.

The tenure of each Panches is three to five years. If a judgment cannot satisfy its complainant, she or he may appeal to a higher body known as Pinarha. Among the respondents of Muraripur, we observe that most of them expressed their opinions at meetings of these organizations. Oraons live in small huts with clay-wall and flaxen roof. “Most of the houses have thatched roof, consisting of four parts with a veranda. But the height of the door is so low that none can enter without bending down his or her head” (Taru 2013). But they kept the huts very clean, and decorate walls by painting different motifs of natural objects with bright colours. Dance and music are a part and parcel of Oraon culture. They made their traditional musical instruments by themselves (e.g., *tal*, *magra*, *khanjani*, *dbol*, *madal*, flute, *ghutur*) and played on them during festivals. The festivals they celebrated include *Sarhool*, *Paus Utsab*, *Khariani*, *Karam*, *Faguna* and *Sohrai* (Taru 2013).

<i>Cultural Traits</i>	<i>Santal</i>	<i>Oraon</i>
Language	Santal (No written form)	Kurukh (No written form)
Physical Appearance	Dark complexion, medium height, black and curled hair, and heavy lips	Dark brown-black complexion, jet black course hair, projecting jaws and teeth, thick lips, low narrow foreheads, and broad flat noses
Origin	Forests of Jharkhand and Orissa, West Bengal, and Chhota Nagpur	Chota Nagpur region of Jharkhand and adjoining states of India
Religion	Christianity (86%)/Sanatan	Sanatan
Marriage	Endogamous; marriage partners selected by guardians/self	Endogamous; marriage partners selected by guardians/self
Food	Rice, wild fruit, meat of animals and birds, different types of fish, eel, turtle, oyster, crab, and scorpion, eggs etc.	Rice, fish, eggs, vegetables, crabs, pork, chicken, meat of squirrels, turtles and beef
Drink	Handia, Mahua	Handia
Clothing	Men: dhuti-gamchha, Women: coarse cotton sari,	Men: nengti, Women: nengti-fata
Festival	Baha, Karam, Dansai, Sakrat, Mahmore, Rundo, Magsim	Sarhool, Paus Utsab, Khariani, Karam, Faguna, Sohrai
Housing	Sturdy mud-structured decorated walls, tiled roofs that are sloped on all four sides, at least two rooms with veranda	Small huts with colorful clay-wall and thatched roof, consisting of four parts with a veranda, height of door is lower than usual.
Social Organization	Akhra	Panches, Pinarha

Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic Condition of the Respondents

It is almost taken for granted that empowerment level of a person depends on her/his socio-demographic condition. Therefore, before discussing empowerment of the respondents it is necessary to depict their socio-demographic situation.

Table 1: Age of the Respondents

<i>Village</i> <i>Age in Years</i>	<i>Modhumath</i>		<i>Muraripur</i>	
	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
0-20	1	2.0	5	6.9
21-40	29	56.9	41	56.9
41-60	19	37.3	20	27.8
61-80	2	3.8	3	4.2
81-100	0	00	3	4.2
Total	51	100.0	72	100.0

Age of an individual often determines social status of a person. **Table 1** shows age of the respondents. We observe that most of the respondents (56.9%) in both villages belong to the '21-40 years' age group. None of the respondents in Modhumath belonged to the 'over 80 years' category; however, 4.2% of the respondents of the respondents in Muraripur were more than 80 years old.

Table 2: Completed Schooling Years among the Respondents

<i>Village</i> <i># of Completed Schooling Years</i>	<i>Modhumath</i>		<i>Muraripur</i>	
	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No schooling	36	70.6	50	69.4
1-5 years	2	3.9	7	9.7
6-8 Years	7	13.7	6	8.3
9-10 Years	4	7.8	8	11.1
>10 Years	2	3.9	1	1.4
Total	51	100.0	72	100.0

Schooling years completed by the respondents in Modhumath and Muraripur is shown in **Table 2**. We observe that almost 70% of the respondents in both villages did not complete even a single year of schooling. Overall, a better position is observed among the respondents in Muraripur than those in Modhumath.

Table 3: Occupation of the Respondents

<i>Village</i> <i>Occupation</i>	<i>Modhumath</i>		<i>Muraripur</i>	
	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Agricultural Labour	27	52.9	44	61.1
Farmer	6	11.8	9	12.5
Housewife	14	27.5	17	23.6
Teacher	2	3.9	2	2.8
Others	2	3.9	0	00
Total	51	100.0	72	100.0

Table 3 portrays occupation of the respondents of the two study villages. We observe that more than 61% of the respondents in Muraripur and 52.9% in Modhumath were agricultural labourers. Almost one quarter of the respondents in both villages were housewives, not formally involved in income generating activities. Almost 12%-13% of the respondents were farmers, engaged in agricultural jobs carried out in farmland under the ownership of their own families.

Table 4: Religion of the Respondents

<i>Village</i> <i>Religion</i>	<i>Modhumath</i>		<i>Muraripur</i>	
	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Christian	44	86.3	1	1.4
Sanatan	7	13.7	71	98.6
Total	51	100	72	100.0

Religion is a dominant factor that determines one's socio-economic status, as well as her/his daily activities and empowerment level in the long run. There is a significant difference between the inhabitants of Modhumath and Muraripur regarding their religion. Whereas 86.3% of the people in Modhumath had been

converted into Christians from their original Sanatan religion, 98.6% of the residents of Muraripur retained their original religion. The ‘Sanatan’ religion of the people of Muraripur resembles the religious beliefs and rituals performed by the Hindu population in Bangladesh (**Table 4**). It is interesting to note that the respondents in Modhumath converted their Sanatan beliefs into those of Christianity, rather than into the Islamic faith (the religion of the majority).

Table 5: Monthly Income of the Respondents’ Families

<i>Village</i>	<i>Modhumath</i>		<i>Muraripur</i>	
	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Monthly Family Income (Taka)</i>				
0-4000	1	1.66	11	15.2
4,001-8,000	23	45.0	57	79.2
8,001-12,000	25	50.0	3	4.2
12,001-16,000	1	1.66	0	0
>16,000	1	1.66	1	1.4
Total	51	100 (approx.)	72	100.0

The field data reveal that family incomes of the respondents of the two villages vary significantly (**Table 5**). Whereas 94n% of the respondents in Muraripur earned Taka 8,000 or less, only about 47% of the respondents in Modhumath belonged to that income category. Although more than 53% of the households in Modhumath earned more than Taka 8,000, only 5.6% of the respondents in Muraripur belonged to that category. Twenty four (47.05%) of the respondents of Modhumath and 45 (62.5%) respondents in Muraripur lived in self-owned houses, the rest lived in houses owned by others. Seventeen (33.33%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 40 (55.55%) in Muraripur used electricity for illuminating their houses at night. Others used kerosene lamps.

It is very likely that the expenditure pattern of respondents would follow their income pattern. As can be expected, the expenditure level of the Modhumath respondents-- who were mostly Christians and earned more—is higher than the expenditure of the Muraripur respondents. Almost 35% of the Muraripur respondents spent Taka 4000 or less, whereas all the respondent families in Modhumath spent more than Taka 4000 per month. More than 43% of the respondent families in Modhumath spent more than Taka 8,000 per month,

whereas only 5.6% of those living in Muraripur spent that amount of money per month (**Table 6**).

Table 6: Monthly Expenditure of the Respondents' Families

Village Monthly Family Income (Taka)	Modhumath		Muraripur	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Number of Respondents	Percentage
0-4000	0	00	25	34.7
4,001-8,000	29	56.9	43	59.7
8,001-12,000	21	41.2	2	2.8
12,001-16,000	0	0	1	1.4
>16,000	0	0	0	0
Missing	1	2.0	1	1.4
Total	51	100 (Approx.)	72	100.0

Whatever the income of the respondent families may be, a huge majority of them could not provide sufficient protein for all members. Forty four (86.27%) of the respondent households in Modhumath and 60 (83.33%) households in Muraripur could not provide sufficient amount of protein for all members, everyday. All of the respondent households were using tube well water for drinking and cooking. Tube wells used by the respondents were located mostly in *khas* (government-owned) land. Only 8 (15.69%) and 11 (15.78%) of the respondent families in Modhumath and Muraripur respectively used sanitary latrines, and 31 (62%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 24 (33.33%) in Muraripur defecated in open places.

Table 7 shows the amount of land owned by respondents in Modhumath and Muraripur. We observe that whereas 70.6% of the respondents in Modhumath were landless, 47.2% of the respondents in Muraripur were of the same category. Three families (4.2%) in Muraripur owned more than 6 bighas (1 bigha=0.33 acres) of land, but none in Modhumath. Only 19.6% of the respondent families in Modhumath owned up to 3 bighas of land, whereas 38.9% of the respondents Muraripur owned that amount of land.

Table 8 depicts that more than 41% of the respondents in Modhumath and only 9.7% in Muraripur were not involved in agricultural related work. In Muraripur, 41.7% of the women cultivated their own land and 36% were involved in sharecropping. Out of the 30 respondent families that were involved in agriculture

Table 7: Amount of Land Owned by the Respondents' Families

<i>Village</i> <i>Amount of Land</i>	<i>Modhumath</i>		<i>Muraripur</i>	
	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No land	36	70.6	34	47.2
0.5-3 Bigha	10	19.6	28	38.9
3-6 Bigha	5	9.8	7	9.7
More than 6 Bigha	0	00	3	4.2
Total	51	100	72	100.0

Table 8: Type of Land Tenure

<i>Village</i> <i>Type of Land Tenure</i>	<i>Modhumath</i>		<i>Muraripur</i>	
	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Borga (Share-cropping)	10	19.6	26	36.1
Borga + personal ownership	1	2.0	1	1.4
Lease contract	3	5.9	5	6.9
Personal ownership	7	13.7	30	41.7
others	9	17.6	3	4.2
Not related to cultivation	21	41.2	7	9.7
Total	51	100	72	100.0

in Modhumath, 10 (33%) were involved in sharecropping (cultivation of land owned by others) and 7 (13.7%) cultivated their own land.

The respondents were asked whether they considered their families as solvent or not. **Table 9** shows that 27 (52.94%) of those in Modhumath and 51 (70.83%) of those in Muraripur considered their families as solvent. There is significant difference between the two ethnic groups in this regard ($\chi^2=4.119$, d.f.=1, level of significance= 0.042). Many more of the respondents of Muraripur considered their families as solvent.

Happiness is an internal feeling of well being. We find in **Table 10** that most of the respondents in spite of their poor socio-economic conditions in general considered themselves as 'happy'. Thirty eight (74.5%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 54 (75%) of them in Muraripur considered themselves as 'happy'

persons. Thus we observe that there is not much difference in respondents' response on grounds of their ethnicity.

Table 9: Whether Considers Own Family as Solvent

<i>Village</i>	<i>Whether considers family as solvent</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
Modhumath	24 (47%)	27 (53%)	51
Muraripur	21 (29.17%)	51 (70.83%)	72
Total	45	78	123

Table 10: Whether considers self as a happy person

<i>Village</i>	<i>Whether considers self as a happy person</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
Modhumath	13	38	51
Muraripur	18	54	72
Total	31	92	123

Nature of Empowerment among the Respondents

Empowerment is a social and psychological status that enables an individual to develop the potentials embedded within herself/ himself to the greatest possible extent. Moser has defined women's empowerment as "...the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources" (1989: 1815). It is an ongoing process throughout one's life. Empowerment is a relative concept—e.g., women's empowerment relative to men, empowerment of urban women relative to rural women, empowerment of women who belong to ethnic minority groups in relation to the women belong to a majority cultural group, empowerment of women belonging to one specific ethnic minority group in relation to another minority ethnic minority group.

Earning an income does not automatically ensure empowerment, unless an individual is able to spend the earned money as s/he wishes or as is felt necessary by her/him. In Modhumath 24 (47.05%) of the respondents had unabated access to their family income, while 43 (59.72%) of the respondents in Muraripur had the same opportunity. Nineteen (63.33%) of those respondents who had personal monthly income in Modhumath could spend it as they wished, and in

Muraripur, 33 (66%) of those who had personal income could spend that money as they desired. Assets owned by individuals also give a sense of security that enhances empowerment. In the study villages, 11 (21.6%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 32 (44.44%) in Muraripur owned some assets (mainly in the form of gold ornament). Ability to avail certain services independently also reflects empowerment. We observe that 24 (47.05%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 25 (34.72%) of them in Muraripur could go to the market and do their shopping by themselves. In Modhumath 32 (62.75%) of the respondents could go to the doctor when necessary independently, whereas 55(76.88%) of those in Muraripur could do the same. Thirty (60%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 42 (58.33%) of them in Muraripur were able to take loan on their own. Twenty five (50%) and 20 (27.78%) of the respondents in Modhupur and Muraripur respectively availed microcredit services. However, they seemed to be less capable to do official work by themselves. Only 14 (27.45%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 7 (9.72%) of them in Muraripur were able to go to an office by themselves and receive the service they desired.

Ability to influence others and acceptability to others also represent one's empowerment level. Forty one (80.39%) respondents in Modhumath and 60 (83.33%) in Muraripur informed that their friends and relatives sought their advice when they (friends and relatives) needed. Moreover, 50 (98%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 65 (90.27%) in Muraripur claimed that their suggestions were followed by their community members. The respondents were asked about the extent to which they were capable of establishing their opinions (**Table 9**). According to more or less half of the respondents, they were moderately capable to establish their own opinions (n=28, 54.9% in Modhumath and n=35, 48.6% in Muraripur). Seventeen (33.33%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 31 (43.05%) in Muraripur said that their capability to establish their own opinions was of a low level. Only 5 (10%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 9 (12.5%) in Muraripur claimed high level of ability to establish their own opinions.

Table 11: Ability to Establish Own Opinion

Village	Ability to Establish Own Opinion				Total
	High capability	Low capability	Moderate capability	No capability	
Modhumath	5	17	28	1	51
Muraripur	4	31	35	2	72
Total	9	48	63	3	123

Table 12: Role in Making Family Decisions

Village	Role in Making Family Decisions					Total
	No role	Husband and yourself together	Make decisions by yourself	Some husband, some yourself	Others	
Modhumath	5	32	5	6	3	51
Muraripur	5	41	9	14	3	72
Total	10	73	14	20	6	123

Table 12 depicts the role of the respondents in making family decisions. Most of the respondents (n=32, 62.75% in Modhumath and n=41, 56.44% in Muraripur) have opined that they made family decisions together with their husbands. Only 5 (10%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 9 (12.5%) in Muraripur made family decisions by themselves. Six of the respondents (11.76%) in Modhumath and 14 (19.44%) in Muraripur have said that some of the family decisions were made by them and some by their husbands. Husbands made decisions related to income, economy and outside work and wives made decisions relating to education of children and decisions related to home making.

As the Santal and Oraon are minority ethnic groups, their level of empowerment is very likely to be affected by their ability to communicate with the majority Bengali speaking community. A huge majority of the respondents have said that they were able to communicate well the majority Bangali people (n=44, 86.27% in Modhumath and n=58, 80.55% in Muraripur). Thirty (58.82%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 48 (66.66%) in Muraripur were able to select their job through bargaining with their employers. Most of them negotiated with their employers personally (n=40, 78.43% in Modhumath and n=50, 69.44% in Muraripur). Thirty six (70.58%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 50 (69.44%) in Muraripur expressed their opinions in their community organizations (e.g., *samaj/panchayet*), while 50 (99%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 68 (94.44%) in Muraripur cast their votes in local and national elections.

$$\chi^2 = 0.926, \text{ d.f.} = 1, p = .218$$

On an average empowerment level of the women in Modhumath was 6.56 while the average empowerment level of the women in Muraripur was 6.35. **Table 13** shows that there was no significant difference between the empowerment level of respondents residing in the two villages ($\chi^2 = 0.926, \text{ d.f.} = 1, p = .218$). A little more than half (50.9%) of the respondents in Modhumath and 59.7% of the respondents in Muraripur achieved the empowerment level ranged between 1.00 and 6.99.

Almost half (49.1%) of the women in Modhumath and 40.3% of the women in Muraripur achieved an empowerment level between 7.00 –10.00.

Level of Empowerment

There are various studies that have focused on measuring women's empowerment level. Considering the characteristics of the populations under study, I have selected 10 criteria based on which empowerment level of the Santal and the Oraon married women living in Modhumath and Muraripara was calculated. The criteria were: (1) literacy, (2) amount of personal income per month, (3) ability to spend family income as necessary, (4) ability to spend self-earned money as desired, (5) ability to go to the market, ability to go to the doctor, to take loans, and to go to an office and get official job done, (6) ability to mix with the Bengali people, (7) ability to establish own opinion, (8) role in family decision-making, (9) expressing opinions in community organizations (Panchayet), (10) voting behavior. On the basis of these criteria, empowerment level of the respondent have been calculated, which has been presented in Table 13.

Table 13: Respondents' Level of Empowerment

Village Level of Empowerment	Modhumath		Muraripur	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.00-6.99	26	50.9	43	59.7
7.00-10.00	25	49.1	29	40.3
Total	51	100	72	100.0

Empowerment Level in Relation to Different Factors Affecting Socio-economic Status

In this section attempts have been made to find out association between different factors relating to socio-economic status and the empowerment level of the respondents. **Table 14** depicts this association found through *Chi-Square* (χ^2) *test*. From the table it is clear that there is no significant difference regarding the factors that influenced empowerment level of the respondents in the two separate villages inhabited by two different ethnic minority groups. According to Rashid and Gao (2014), “family size, family asset, personal income, media exposure and decision-making ability had positive significant relationship with tribal women's

empowerment.” Findings of the present study reveal that the factors that influenced empowerment of the respondents most with very high significance level (P value 0.007 or less) include access to family income, ability to spend own income, literacy, schooling years, role in family decision making, expression of opinion in village organization, ability to visit the doctor independently and ability to mix with the Bengali people. The factors that had moderate influence on the respondents’ empowerment (with P value 0.015 to 0.043) level include age, ability to go to the market alone, and ability to establish one’s own opinion. The factors that came out to be not significantly associated with empowerment level of the respondents (with P value 0.05 or higher) included family income, whether the respondents earned or not, personal asset of the respondents, amount of personal income and borrowing money from microcredit disbursing organizations.

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of the study it is observed that the two ethnic groups have many phenomena in common, but differ mainly in terms of language, religion, occupation, ownership of land, education and monthly income and expenditure. The residents of Modhumath seemed socio-economically more vulnerable, which may have led them towards conversion into Christianity. Further research can be carried out to address this issue. Although they had to shoulder the income earning responsibility and home making affairs within the framework of a patriarchal social structure women of Santal and Oraon communities were able to make their own choices, and participate significantly in decision-making activities within the family as well as within their households. This finding matches findings of a World Bank Study Despite their relatively poor overall socio-economic status, the women in Modhumath and Muraripur were well empowered.

Table 14: Association between Socio-economic Factors and Empowerment Level

<i>Village</i>	<i>Modhumath</i>			<i>Muraripur</i>		
	<i>Chi-Square Value</i>	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>P Value</i>	<i>Chi-Square Value</i>	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>P Value</i>
<i>Socio Economic Factor</i>						
Age	15.125	6	0.019	15.74	6	0.015
Literacy	11.264	2	0.004	10.542	2	0.005
Schooling Years	21.9333	8	0.005	21.18	8	0.007
Family Income	5.632	6	0.466	5.582	6	0.472

Village Socio Economic Factor	Modhumath			Muraripur		
	Chi-Square Value	Degrees of Freedom	P Value	Chi-Square Value	Degrees of Freedom	P Value
Whether Earns or not	3.268	2	0.195	3.501	2	0.174
Amount of Personal Income	4.028	4	0.402	4.191	4	0.381
Access to Family Income	21.751	2	0.000	22.667	2	0.000
Ability to Spend Self- earned Income	14.863	2	0.001	15.79	2	0.000
Whether taken Micro- credit or not	3.151	2	0.533	1.400	2	0.497
Personal Asset	3.209	2	0.201	3.181	2	0.204
Ability to Mix with Bengali People	11.023	2	0.004	11.370	2	0.003
Ability to Go to Doctor Alone	14.602	2	0.001	15.208	2	0.000
Ability to Go to the Market Alone	7.20	2	0.027	7.784	2	0.020
Role in Making Family Decision	26.296	8	0.001	27.430	8	0.001
Whether Expresses Opinion in Akhra	13.896	2	0.001	13.043	2	0.001
Ability to Establish Own Opinion	14.339	6	0.026	12.987	6	0.043

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APPENDIX

CASE STUDIES

Case 1 (Nachan Tudu, Modhumath)

Nachan Tudu (pseudonym) is a 50 year old illiterate Santal woman who lives in a family consisting of 6 members—her husband, son, daughter in law, a grandson and a granddaughter. Her natal clan is Tudu, but her husband's clan is Murmo. Although her husband is illiterate, her son has passed the SSC and her daughter in law has completed primary education. Nachan's household owns around one acre of land and she herself also owned a little plot. They lived in a self-owned house. Monthly income of her household was Tk. 4000 and they had to spend all of it to meet their daily necessities. With their income they could not provide protein diet for all everyday. She had to collect drinking water from a tube well located on a *khas* land. Her family used Kerosene oil to illuminate their rooms at night. The household members used a non-sanitary toilet for defecation. Nachan can speak in Santali and Bangla, however, she cannot read or write in any language. She cannot spend any money (from the total family income) as she wished. She could not go to the doctor or to the market alone. Neither could she take any loan or get official work done independently. Her friends/neighbours hardly seek her advice while making any decision. Nachan can mix well with the majority Bengali community. However, she does not have any ability to establish her own opinion. Neither does she play any role in making family decisions. Nachan does not express her opinion at Panchayet meetings, but she casts her vote in elections. Although she does not consider her family as solvent, she thinks herself as a happy person.

Case 2 (Chichilera Hembrem, Modhumath)

Chichilera Hembrem (pseudonym) is a 45 year old Santal woman who has not completed a single year of schooling, but could only sign her name. Her family had only three members—her husband, daughter and herself. Chichilera's parental family belongs to the *Hembrem* clan, but the title of her family of procreation is *Tudu*. Chichilera's household owns around one acre of land but she herself does not possess any. Her family lives on a house built on government-owned land (*khas land*). Monthly income of her household is Tk. 5000 out of which they had to spend Taka 4500 to meet their daily expenses. She herself earned Taka 3000 per month through selling her agricultural labour. She had to collect drinking water from a tube well located in the Church compound. All the members of her household were provided with sufficient protein everyday. Her family used Kerosene oil to illuminate their rooms at night. The household members defecated in open places (bushes, etc.). Her family has some beds (choki) and a sewing machine (manual). Chichilera can speak in Santali and Bangla. She can spend money (from the total family income) as she felt necessary. She could also spend her self-earned money as she wished. She could go to the doctor and to the market alone. Also she was capable of taking loans and getting official works done independently. She directly negotiates with her employer regarding the conditions of her job and usually gets the job she wants to do. Her friends/neighbours seek her advice while making a decision and follow the instructions carefully. They evaluate her positively in terms of her qualifications, honesty etc. She never took microcredit.

Chichilera can mix well with the majority Bengali community. She possesses high ability to establish her own opinion. She and her husband make family decisions together. Her husband seeks her opinion regarding giving birth to children. Chichilera expresses her opinion at Panchayet meetings,

and casts her vote in elections. She wishes to educate her daughter up to a high level and build a good home on self-owned land. She considers her family as solvent and she thinks herself as a happy person. The calculated empowerment level of Chichilera is 10.

Case 3 (Moyna Murmo, Modhumath)

Moyna Murmo (pseudonym) is a 22 year old Santal woman who has completed six years of schooling, and was literate. Her family had four members—her husband, a son, a daughter and herself. Moyna's parental family belongs to the Murmo clan, but the title of her family of procreation is *Soren*. Moyna's household does not own any cultivable land, and she herself also does not own any. Her family lives on a house built on government-owned land (*khas land*). Monthly income of her household is Tk. 5000 out of which they had to spend Taka 4400 to meet their daily expenses. She herself earned Taka 3000 per month through selling her agricultural labour. She had to collect drinking water from a tube well located in the house of a neighbour. All the members of her household were provided with sufficient protein only once a week. Her family used Kerosene oil to illuminate their rooms at night. The household members used a non-sanitary toilet for defecation. Her family possesses *alna* (a furniture to hang clothes on), some beds (*choki*), chair, tables, a motor bike and a some other furniture. Moyna can speak in Santali and Bangla. She can spend money (from the total family income) as she felt necessary. She could also spend her self-earned money as she wished. She could go to the doctor and to the market alone. Also she was capable of taking loans independently. Moyna some gold ornaments as personal asset. She directly negotiates with her employer regarding the conditions of her job but she does not always get the job she wants to do. Her friends/neighbours seek her advice while making a decision and follow the instructions carefully. They evaluate her positively in terms of her qualifications, honesty etc. She never took microcredit. Moyna can mix well with the majority Bengali community. She possesses high ability to establish her own opinion. She and her husband make family decisions together. However, they make their own decisions regarding personal purchases and decisions relating to their jobs. Her husband seeks her opinion regarding giving birth to children. Moyna expresses her opinion at Panchayet meetings, and casts her vote in elections. She wishes to educate her children up to a high level and build a good home on self-owned land. She considers her family as solvent one and she evaluates herself as a happy person. The calculated empowerment level of Moyna is 9.75.

Case 4 (Onadasi, Muraripur)

Onadasi (pseudonym) is a 50 year old Oraon woman who has not completed a single year of schooling, and was illiterate. Her family had only three members—her son, daughter and herself. Onadasi's son has passed the SSC exam and works on their own land and as a day labourer. Onadasi's household owns around one acre of land and she herself also possesses some. Her family lives on a house built on self-owned land. Monthly income of her household is Tk. 7000 out of which they had to spend Taka 5000-6000 to meet their daily expenses. She herself earned Taka 1000 per month through selling her labour and raising poultry and cattle. She had to collect drinking water from a tube well located in a *khas* land. All the members of her household were provided with sufficient amount of protein everyday. Her family used electricity to illuminate their rooms at night. The household members defecated in open places (bushes, etc.). Her family has some beds (*khats*). Onadasi can speak in Bangla. As she herself is the head of household in the absence of her husband, who passed away, she can spend money (from the total family income) as she felt necessary. She could also spend her self-earned money as she wished. She possessed some gold ornaments.

She could go to the doctor alone. She was also capable of taking loans independently. She directly negotiates with her employer regarding the conditions of her work and usually gets the job she wants to do. Her friends/neighbours seek her advice while making a decision and follow the instructions carefully. Onadasi can mix well with the majority Bengali community. She possesses high ability to establish her own opinion. She herself makes family decisions. Onadasi expresses her opinions at Panchayet meetings, and casts her vote in elections. She wishes to make her family more solvent in future. She does not consider her family as solvent but she thinks that she is a happy person. The calculated empowerment level of Onadasi is 8.5.

Case 5 (Nanti Minj, Muraripur)

Nanti Minj is a 25 year old illiterate Oraon woman, who claims she had completed four years of schooling. Nanti is a house wife and lives in a family consisting of 5 members—her husband, herself and three daughters. Her natal clan is Minj, but her husband's clan is Toppo. Her husband has completed five years of schooling and her eldest daughter is a student of Class IV. Nanti's household owns around one acre of agricultural land and she herself also owns a little plot. They live in a self-owned house. Monthly income of her household is Tk. 1500 and they had to spend all of it to meet their daily necessities. Nanti herself did not earn any money. With their meagre income they could not provide every member with a protein diet everyday. She had to collect drinking water from a tube well located on a *kbas* land. Her family used electricity to illuminate their rooms at night. The household members use a non-sanitary toilet for defecation. Nanti can speak in Oraon and Bangla, however, she cannot read or write in any language. She cannot spend any money (from the total family income) as she wished. She could go to the doctor alone but not to the market. Neither could she take any loan or get official work done independently. Her friends/neighbours hardly seek her advice while making any decision. However, they have a moderately positive attitude towards Nanti's abilities and honesty. She did not take any microcredit from any organisation. Nanti cannot mix well with the majority Bengali community and she does not have any ability to establish her own opinion. Neither does she play any visible role in making family decisions. Nanti does express her opinion at Panchayet meetings, however, and she casts her vote in elections. Although she does not consider her family as solvent, she thinks she is a happy person. Nanti's empowerment level is only 2.25.

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