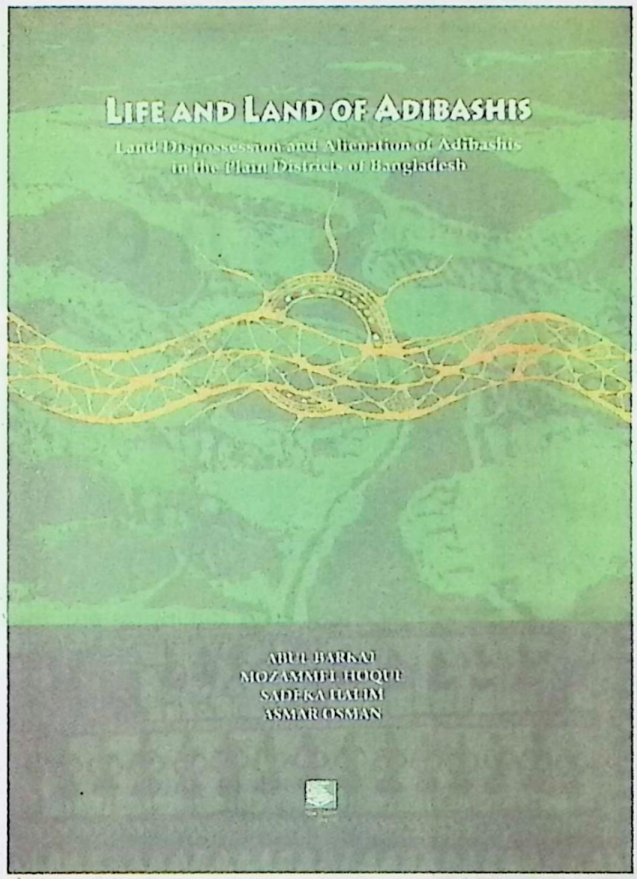


land regions, however, has been recorded as 1971-80. The process, in actuality, commenced after the partition of India in 1947 when vast tracts of indigenous lands began to be grabbed following the communal Hindu-Muslim riots or under the pretext of 'Enemy Property' after the 1965 Indo-Pak war. This trend of land grabbing and marginalisation continued in independent Bangladesh under the pretext of 'Vested Property.' Involvement of Hajong, Garo and Santal people in the communist *Tebhaga* Movement (Movement for fair share-cropping in the sub-continent) in the last two or three years of the 1940s also encouraged the then pro-land elite Pakistani government to grab lands of these indigenous peoples as "land of the communists." Among the Santals in particular, around 23 percent of all dispossessions took place in between 1961 and 1970 and another 23 percent of dispossessions took place in the 1970s.

Undue political influence and local class-based hegemonic culture, criminalised political economy, grabbing land by influential Bengalis with political back up, non-recognition of the traditional land rights system of the indigenous communities by our government, communal riots and the consequential land grabbing incidents, 'distress sale' by indigenous people of their valuable lands at a much lower price to escape communal tension and flee to India, illiteracy, poverty and lack of knowledge regarding the land laws to regain the lost land among the indigenous people, different sorts of governmental acquisition of indigenous lands in name of arrangements for 'reserve forest' or 'eco park' are the pertinent causes behind indigenous land grabbing in the plain lands.

To briefly share from some personal experiences, once worked within the Santal community in Rajshahi and Dinajpur of North Bengal for 10 days in 2004. I had to visit a number of Santal villages and spend the night among the villagers during those days as the member of a study team conducting a socio-economic survey on the community. During this 10-day period I came to know an eighty year old Santali man Sana Hansda from Jaypur village whose 84 bighas of land was acquiesced by the Rangpur Sugar Mill authority in 1948 at a nominal price and the Sugar Mill has also been laid after decades of loss a couple of years ago. Sana Hansda is now a landless peasant. I met another aged Santal man at Mission village of Amnura, Champainawabganj of Rajshahi division who is now landless and who is fighting the case with state over his 100 bighas of land as 'enemy property' for last fifty years. "I lost all of my money to fight this case and yet to regain if," he told us. All of his fellow Santal villagers lost their land as an aftermath of the stern measures undertaken by the then Pakistani government to control the 'communist Santals' taking part in the 'Tebhaga Andolon' or 'movement of fair share-cropping.' A Norwegian Christian missionary tried to fight for them but all were in vain. The Santals have also been converted to Protestant (Lutheran) Christianity since the British regime and Norwegian missionaries worked hard within them. But, very little price they have got through forsaking of the ancestral religion as most of the missionaries quitted after their purpose of conversion were satisfied. Still, it cannot be denied that the missionaries helped the Santals and other indigenous communities much more than their Hindu and Muslim Bengalis neighbour who rather tried to evict them and grab their lands.

Implementation of Article 11, 12 & 13 of the ILO Convention 107 (1957) stating land rights of indigenous communities and Article 26 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007), establishment of an Indigenous Land Commission in the plain land regions and its proper functioning, increasing land legislation awareness within the indigenous people in the plains and decriminalisation of politics and economy among the local Bengali elite can serve to create a better condition of understanding within the communities.

1 Authored by Dr. Abul Barkat, Mozammel Haque, Dr. Sadeka Halim and Mr. Asmar Osman.
2 ibid, page 291.
3 ibid, page 281-291.
4 page 256, ibid