

# Santal Village in Dinajpur under Attacked

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Bangali villagers, in hundreds, reportedly attacked and robbed a Santal village (Raghunathpur) in Bulakipur Union in Ghoraghat upazila of Dinajpur district on 6 June. The factor behind the attack is a dispute over a piece of land, which is a mango orchard. The adivasi inhabitants, mostly Christians, have been passing days in fear of further assault while some of them have fled the village.

The sons of one Azizar Prodhan of Veline, a neighboring village to Raghunathpur, caught, tied, and beat Nicolas Murmu and his nephew Rabon Mumru at Kanagari bazar on allegation of collecting mangos from the disputed mango grove. The police rescued Nicolas and Rabon an hour later and took them to Bulakipur mission centre. Azizar Prodhan claims he bought 3.06 acres of land from Hopna Murmu, father of Nicholas Murmu. The Dinajpur Additional Deputy Commissioners (Revenue) court is to settle the dispute over the land.



Mango orchard on disputed land. © Md. Ashraful Haque

Azizar Prodhan and the people he brought with allegedly started collecting mangos from the mango grove on the disputed land at about 10:00 am the same day and in the presence of the police. At one point, Nicolas's brother, Khoka Murmu accompanied by some Santal people rushed to the spot and a clash took place between the two parties. Murshidul Alam, a nephew of the Bangali claimant died on the spot and many others from both groups were injured.

Mahbubul Alam, deceased's elder brother filed a murder case with Ghoraghat police station (no. 3 dated 06-06-13) against seven including Nicolas Murmu. Alam claims that Murshidul was hit in his chest and testicles. When contacted on 21 July, a month and half after the alleged murder, the sub-inspector Jahidul Islam, the investigating officer of the case told this reporter that the postmortem report was yet to come.

As the news of Murshidul's death spread, hundreds of Bangalis from neighboring Veline village gathered and attacked the Santal houses in Bagjapara, Tibhipara and Dighipara in Raghunathpur village. They looted 80 livestock and hundreds of Kilograms of rice and other produces from the villages. The mob also trespassed Bulakipur Mission centre and threatened the church seminarians as the later sheltered some victims.

Seven adivasi men have been sent behind the bars in connection with the alleged murder. However, none have been arrested for attacking the Santal houses and the mission although two separate cases were

filed by Shanti Kisku of Tibhipara (case no. 7 dated 11-06-13) and Father Anselmo Mardy (no. 6 dated 08-06-13 under penal code).

Deployment of 30-member armed police battalion has brought some relief for the Santal. From a temporary camp inside the mission occupying its dormitory, the police continue to patrol the village. The police was still there as of as of 21 July. However, many of the looted livestock have been returned to the owners after the local representatives intervened. Meanwhile, unidentified miscreants set Nicolas Murmu's house on fire on 9 June; 3 days after the clash had taken place, despite the presence of police in the area.

The Santal neighborhoods consisting of at least 70 households have been living in constant fear as the attackers continue to threaten that they would burn the adivasi village as soon as the police are gone. "We cannot go to the market in fear of being attack," said Mistri Murmu (65) of Tibhipara. "They may attack our houses again," feared Rajni Hasda (35) of the same village.

Meanwhile, Jatiyo Adivasi Parishad arranged a human chain in Dinajpur town and submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner (DC) and superintendent of police (SP), seeking punishment of the attackers and protection of the adivasi and their land.



Santal house burned. © Md. Ashraful Haque