

VOLUME XXVI, Nos. 1-4, 2015 BACKWARD CLASSES WELFARE DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

BULLEIN

OF THE CULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Sanskrit Remnents in Lepcha Language

Birhor of West Bengal: An Overview on a Tribe in transition

Economic development in a tribal village of Bankura, West Bengal

Diseases, healthcare facilities and health rights among the tribes of Malda district, West Bengal

Syncretism in olabibi cult in Bengal

Socio-economic status of scheduled castes in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal

Conservation Values of a Sacred Grove in Midnapore

The Nagesias of North Bengal a study on their socio-economic situation and educational status

The changing dimension of Political System among the Meches

Contents

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CONTENTS

1.	Sanskrit Remnents in Lepcha Language	ssonS K B	1
2.	Birhor of West Bengal: An Overview on a Tribe in transition Dr. Prasenjit Debbarman	esenjir Deo Isla Basu	4
3.	Economic development in a tribal village of Bankura, West Bengal Dr. Sukla Basu	risene), sila	12
4.	Diseases, healthcare facilities and health rights among the tribes of Malda district, West Bengal Dr. Arpita Ghosh	nta Basu	20
5.	Syncretism in <i>olabibi</i> cult in Bengal Dr. Binita Basu and Srija Mondal	Mondai in Chandra	31
6.	Socio-economic status of scheduled castes in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal Bhajan Chandra Barman	Ehaket ,	36
7.	Conservation Values of a Sacred Grove in Midnapore R. K. Bhakat and U.K. Sen	1 01 (Semi-density)	44
8.	The Nagesias of North Bengal a study on their socio-economic situation and educational status Dr. Suchismita Sen Chowdhury	ocidentia S	47
9.	The changing dimension of Political System among the Meches Kailash Naskar and Dr. Biswanath Gan	O dispays	61

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SANSKRIT REMNENTS IN LEPCHA LANGUAGE

S. K. BHOWMICK

K.P. Tamsang, in his "Lepcha-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary tells" The Lepchas themselves think that, their language is the 'Language of God'— the language of Fodong Thing and Nazaong Nyn — the first creation of God and the primogenitor of Lepcha race and therefore, it is the sweetest and oldest language of the world." Having known this respectful sentiment of my Lepcha friends, I shall present this paper basing on some previous writers' experience. There is a proverb in Santali language (strongest tribal language in India) "Janam nor do jānām āyo—" that means "your mother tongue is your own mother — root of your identity."

Long before when I met a group of my Lepcha friends, I could not imagine that this people with their language and culture is an important and integral part of greater Indian civilisation from prehistoric period. Here I shall bring out the relationship of Lepcha language with Sanskrit.

"The Lepchas are considered to be oldest inhabitants of Sikkim. They are also found in Western Bhutan, Eastern Nepal and in Darjeeling. They call themselves, Rong and are known to be Tibetan as Rong-pa or Munpa." (Sir Grierson)

"Lepcha is a nickname given to them by the Nepalees. According to the Sikkim gazetteer,—the local

pronunciation of the word is Lapcha or Lapchhe. Dr. Waddell thinks that it is composed of *Lap*-speech and chāz-vite; and that it consequently means 'vile speakers'.

Mono syllabic word $l\bar{a}p$ is a root word from which a good number of Sanskrit words has been formed. For example:– 'bi-lap, (वि लाप) – lamentation, pra-lap (प्रलाप) raving or deliriam, sometimes it means incoherent utterence, song-lap (संलाप) meaning dialogue etc.

Chhā is a very common expression to mean bad – not good. So Lāpchā meaning vile speech or the speakers of this language. But the history of the lepcha people does not lie with the meaning of the word which has been given to them by the foreigners. Any unknown language and culture may seem bad as it remains beyond our knowledge.

Lepchas are the original inhabitants of the land of Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Karsiang and the interpretation of the place-names claims that Lepchas are the 'son of the soil'.

Famous Tibetologist Sarat Chandra Das the famous explorer of forbidden Tibet, and he had been in Tibet for several times. He has explained the place-names how they were formed according to language of the original inhabitants.

Kanchanjunga — the name of the snowy mountain seen from Darjeeling is formed of four words.

- (i) Kang = snow
- (ii) Chan = full
- (iii) ju = repository
- (iv) nga = five. "and it means the five snowful repositories."

According to him 'Sikkim' — the name of the mountanious tract lying between Nepal and Bhutan and over hung by the snowy ranges that skirt Tibet. It is derived from the Tibetan word Sikyong (Srid kyong) signifying ruler — the Maharaja of Sikkim is a Tibetan prince.

The Tibetans call him Danjong Sikyong or the Raja of the rice growing country. No rice grows in Tibet, the attitude of which is 10 to 15 thousand feet above the sea level. Sikkim was a dependency of Tibet till the year 1888 when it was brought under British protection. Sikkim is the land of *Guhyakas*.

Bhutia — the Indian name of Tibet was Bhote; a native of Bhote was called *Bhotea; Bhote* has come from the root-word *Ti-bet*. The phonetic character of the first syllable of the word Tibet loses its stress and bet became prominent.

Bhutan has come from bhotanang Disam – meaning the country of the Bhote people. Bhotanang is the plural form of Bhote in genetive sense. For Example:—Bhotosya (single) bhotoyo (dual) bhotanang (plural) Bhotan is the land of Lamas or Siddhas.

To find out the relation of Lepcha language with Sanskrit we shall recollect a few lines from the autobiography of Sarat Chandra Das who was the first and greatest explorer of Tibet.

— "when I began to enter in the study of the written language, I was struck with the richness of its literature and the regularity of its structure which was wholly based upon Sanskrit."

From his account we come to know that, the Tibetans in early times had translated almost all the Mahajana Sanskrit works in their language those that attributed to the Buddha and called *Buddha Bachana* were collected together in 108 volumes which formed the Scriptural Cyclopaedia of Buddhist Literature.

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The language of the Tibetan people was in oral form and after embracing Buddhism they started translating Sanskrit books. With translating their written literature started to be formed. That time they followed Sanskrit grammer and also took a good number of Sanskrit words. In Lepcha or Rong language – there are three numbers. Single, dual and plural. The suffix of the dual number is nyam and the plural number is expressed by adding a suffix sang.

How the Tibetan literature started to be enriched, has a beautiful history. As we know Tibetans are Bhutanees and then Rong and Lepcha, we shall see the beginning of Tibetan literature which is directly linked with the Rong or Lepcha.

Tibetan was already a literary language in the early part of the 7th century. The Rev. H. Jasckhe, in the introduction to his Tibetan. English Dictionary, sums up the history of Tibetan literature as follows:—

'There are two chief periods of literary activity to be noticed in studying the origin and growth of Tibetan Literature and the landmarks in the history of the language. The first is the Period of Translations which, however, might also be entitled the classical period, for the sanctity of the Religious message conferred a corresponding reputation and Tradition of excellence upon the form in which it was conveyed. This period begins in the first half of the seventh century, when Thomi Sambhota, the minister of Srougtsangampo, was sent to the wisdom of India and the ingenuity of Tibet laboured in unison and with the greatest industry and enthusiasm at the work of translation. The tribute due to real genius must be awarded to these early pioneers of the Tibetan grammar. They had to grapple with the infinite wealth and refinement of Sanskrit; they had to

save the independence of their own tongue, while they strove to subject it to the rule of scientific priciples, and it is most remarkable how they managed to produce translations at once literal and faithful to the spirit of the original. The first masters had made for their later disciples a comparatively easy road, for the style and typical patterns had been furnished, it was possible for the literacy manufacture to be extended by a sort of mechanical process.

A considerable time elapsed before natives of Tibet began to indulge in compositions of their own. When they did so, the subject matter chosen by them to operate upon was either of an historical or a legendary kind. In this second period the language shows much resemblance to the modern tongue, approaching most closely the present idiom of Central Tibet."

According to Sarat Chandra Das the second period begins about the year 1025 A.D. It is the age of Milaraspa and Atisa etc. Sarat Chandra reckons a new stage from 1205 A.D.

"When Pandit Sakya Sri of Kashmir had returned to Tibet after witnessing the phender and destruction of the great Buddhist monasteries of Odantapuri and Vikrama Sila in Magadha and the conquest of Bengal and Behar by the Mahomedans under Baktyar Ghiji (gie) in 1203 A.D. Among the most noted writers of the time were Sakya Pandit Kungah Gyal-tsham, Dogon Phag-pa, the spiritual tutor of Emperor Khubli Khan, and shongton lotsawa who translated the kavyadarsa of Dandin and Kshemendra's Avadana Kalpalata in metrical Tibetan."

"With the opening of the 15th century Buton Rinchen Diib introduced a new era in the literature of Tibet, and Buddhism received tresh impusle under the rule of the phagmodu chiefs, when Tibetan scholars took largely to the study of Chinese literature - under the auspices of the Ming Emperors of China."

In this way we can imagine how Tibetan became rich in Buddhistic philosophy and for the study of Lepcha language it should be roomed in our mind.

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BIRHOR OF WEST BENGAL: AN OVERVIEW ON A TRIBE IN TRANSITION

Prasenjit Debbarman

Introduction

Birhor derives from two words -'Bir' and 'Hor'. In Mundari language 'Bir' means jungle and 'Hor' qualifies a man. Hence, Birhor denotes 'Man of Jungle'. As the men of jungle Birhors have a habit of wandering from one place to another in and around forests. Racially they belong to Proto-Australoid group. They have their own language known as 'Birhori' that falls under Mundari group of the Austro-Asiatic Family of Languages. They have some similarities in culture with the Santal, Munda, and Ho. Birhors are mainly found in the States of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chattisgarh and West Bengal. Because of planed development this Primitive Tribe Group is in a transition phase from nomadic hunting gathering to settled agricultural economy.

Status in West Bengal

Birhor is a Scheduled Tribe in West Bengal like Santal, Oraon, Munda, Ho, Garo etc. They have also been considered as one of the three Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTG) of West Bengal. Characteristics for considering a Scheduled Tribe as PTG are i) pre-agriculture level of technology, ii) stagnant or declining population, iii) extremely low literacy and iv) subsistence level of economy.

Studies on Birhor

Regarding Socio-economic and Cultural life of Birhor a number of studies have been made in India. Detailed description on Birhor is available in the writings of Dalton (1872), Fobers (1872), Hunter (1877), and Risley (1891) in the second half of 19th Century. S. C. Roy as the first Indian Anthropologist provides a vivid description of the Birhors in 1925. In the 20th Century notable works on Birhor have been made by A.Bhattacharva (1953), B.K.Sen (1955), N.K.Bose (1956), L.P.Vidyarthi (1956), D.P.Sinha (1958,1959&1967), S.P.Malhotra (1963), B.RoyChowdhury (1964), Sachchidananda (1965), J.Sen(1965), A.K.Adhikary (1974 & 1984), B.B. Verma (1975), B. Chakraborty (1978, 1981 & 1987), U.K.Roy(1981), R.M.Sarkar(1986), P.K.Mohanty(1986), and A.K.Mukherjee (1991). Most of these studies have highlighted the problems of the Nomadic/Semi-nomadic tribe. In the 21st Century changing life of the Birhors of West Bengal have been observed by S.K.Chaudhuri (2004), S.Das and others (2013) and S.Panda (2015). Constraints of development and growth have been emphasized in these studies.

Objective

Based on the writings of the above mentioned scholars and personal experience through field visits of the author in Birhor Settlement Colonies present

discourse aims at providing a general idea about the Birhors of West Bengal who are being developed through Conservation-Cum-Development Plan.

Population

According to 2011 Census there are 891 households of Birhor found in West Bengal. Total population is 2241 comprising of 1176 males and 1065 females. District

wise distribution of Birhor population shows that the Birhors are highly concentrated in Barddhaman District. It has a population of 398 Birhors. Next in order comes Birbhum district with a population size of 289 Birhor only. Purulia District occupies the third position in regard to population concentration of Birhor in West Bengal. Following table depicts district wise population distribution:

TABLE - 1
District wise population of the Birhor (2011 Census)

Districts	Male No.	Female No.	Total No.	%
Darjiling	31	24	55	2.45
Jalpaiguri	137	135	272	12.14
Koch Bihar	12	33	45	2.01
Uttar Dinajpur	35	42	77	3.44
Dakshin Dinajpur	5	6	11	0.49
Maldah	8	7	15	0.67
Murshidabad	20	20	40	1.78
Birbhum Simple Control of the Contro	146	143	289	12.90
Barddhaman	198	200	398	17.76
Nadia	84	59	143	6.38
North Twenty Four Parganas	37	24	61	2.72
Hugli	112	124	236	10.53
Bankura	52	45	97	4.33
Puruliya	145	143	288	12.85
Haora	23	19	42	1.87
Kolkata	85	1	86	3.84
South Twenty Four Parganas	6	8	, 14	0.62
Paschim Medinipur	40	32	72	3.21
West Bengal	1,176	1,065	2,241	100

Population of Birhor in 2001 Census was 1017. Birhors show a steady population growth for last 3

decades. Their population in 1981 and 1991 were 659 and 855 respectively.

Education

Literate population of the Birhors in West Bengal is 1,120 (58.21%). Among them 696 male and 424 female

are considered literate. Detailed information on literacy is given below with a table:

TABLE - 2 Literacy of Birhor in West Bengal (2011 Census)

Category	Total	Male	Female
Total Population	2241	1176	1065
0-6 yrs Population	317	171	146
Effective Population (Total minus 0- 6yrs)	1924	1005	919 entire
Literate	1120	696	424
Literacy	58.21%	69.25%	46.13%

Birhor literacy in 2001 Census was only 35.75%

Economy

Traditionally the Birhors live on hunting and gathering but now-a-days they are involved in various economic pursuits. As per 2011 Census about 50% of total population of Birhors are engaged in different types

of work. Total number of workers including marginal workforce is 1056. Nearly 10% of Birhors are considered as Cultivator. In agricultural labourer category number of worker is 250 whereas 320 persons of Birhor tribe in West Bengal are engaged in other work.

TABLE - 3
Classification of Birhor Workers (2011 Census)

Category	· [2]	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
Total Workers		1,056	47.12	710	60.37	346	32.49
Main Workers		675	63.92	518	72.96	157	45.38
Walli Workers	Cultivators	65	9.63	54	10.42	11	7.01
Industrial category	Agricultural labourers	250	37.04	182	35.14	68	43.31
of Main Workers	Household industry	40	5.93	29	5.59	11	7.01
OF WAIT VYORKETS	Other Work	320	47.41	253	48.84	67	42.68

Total Birhor Workers in 2001 were 507.

Socio-cultural Li

The Birhors has basis of nature of settled in a particular (settlers) a (wanderer). Both a number of exototemistic. Muruu, Murmu, Taro, Mamong the Birhor

According to methods of acqu rituals in their life Napam Bapla, Ba Sanga Bapla, Ki Bapla are the typ Society. Marriag tinged with bloo the bride and th bride's Saree a vermilion/blood the bride by the food and home b in two phases. observance of b phase naming ce as separation of bury the dead bo are not allowed kind of creeper), of old net etc ar observed for a p after death, in p

> The Birhor k and spirits and forests as anim-Singbonga. Oth Debimai, Mah Bonlumai (godd Kundri bonga (l

> (Naya), a vegeta the bereaved fa

They observ Sohrai, Jitia etc. tubers strike the

Socio-cultural Life

The Birhors have a division among themselves on basis of nature of settlement. Those who are permanently settled in a particular area outside forests are known as laghi (settlers) and the other group is called *Uthlu* wanderer). Both of these groups are further divided into a number of exogamous clans. These clans are mainly totemistic. *Murum, Induar, Jagsaria, Souria, Hembrom, Murmu, Taro, Mahali* etc. are the clan names found among the Birhors.

According to their beliefs the Birhors follow some methods of acquiring mates (Bapla) and perform some rituals in their life cycle. Udra-Udri Bapla, Sadar Bapla, Napam Bapla, Balo Bapla, Sipondur Bapla, Hirum Bapla, Sanga Bapla, Kiring Joa Bapla, Gua Bapla, Bengkhari Bapla are the types of getting mates recognized in Birhor Society. Marriage rituals include exchange of clothes tinged with blood coming out from small finger of both the bride and the groom, tying of knot (Lukandi) with bride's Saree and groom's bath towel, smearing vermilion/blood on the forehead and bi-parted hair of the bride by the groom and offerings of non-vegetarian food and home brewed liquor. Birth rituals are observed in two phases. Firstly cutting of umbilical cord and observance of birth pollution are done. In the second phase naming ceremony performed. Death is considered as separation of soul from body. The Birhors are used to bury the dead body after putting fire on its mouth. Ladies are not allowed to put fire. A bundle Chiharlata (one kind of creeper), a little amount of lime, tobacco, a piece of old net etc are placed on the pit. Death pollution is observed for a period of ten days. On the eleventh day after death, in presence of their own community priest Naya), a vegetarian feast is offered by the members of the bereaved family to mark the end of pollution.

The Birhor believe in various supernatural objects and spirits and perceive their surrounding hills and forests as animate objects. Main god of the Birhor is Singbonga. Other god and goddess include Burimai, Debimai, Mahamai, Lorha bonga (Riverside spirit), Bonlumai (goddess of forest), Lugumai (goddess of earth), Kundri bonga (River spirit), Bir bonga, Hanuman etc.

They observe the festivals of Sarhul, Fagua, Karam, Sohrai, Jitia etc. Before they begin digging for yams and tubers strike the ground three times with their axes and

invoke Hill god (Buru bonga or Marangburu), Haser bonga (the yam spirit) in imitation of the crowing of a cock by uttering the queer cry of kok-ro-cho and pray for plenty of yams and tubers. Participation in the Festival of Hunting is considered a pious activity by Birhor males.

Planned Development

Though the Birhors of West Bengal are spread over all the districts, Conservation-Cum-Development Plan has been implemented among the Birhors of Purulia District only. In Purulia District, Birhor population is found in three Blocks namely, Baghmundi, Balarampur and Jhalda-I. Out of these three Blocks they have been residing in majority at Baghmundi Block (78.30%) followed by Jhalda-I (12.61%) and Balarampur (9.09%) Blocks. In Baghmundi Block they have been residing in two villages, namely, Bhupatipally and Bareriya villages. In Bhupatipally under the Matiyala Mouza (J.L.No.99) 60 families have been residing with a population of 188 comprising of 88 males and 100 females. Bhupatipally, the first Settlement Colony of Birhors set up in 1958, has the highest number of Birhor population with a percentage of 55.13%. In Bareriya village under the Bareriya Mouza (J.L. No.101) 19 families have been residing with a population of 79 comprising of 40 males and 39 females. Bareriya is the village next to Bhupatipally village where 23.17% Birhor population have been residing out of total Birhor population of Purulia. Bersa village under the Bersa Mouza (J. L. No.21) of Balarampur Block of Purulia District 10 Birhor families with 31 population comprising of 16 males and 15 females have been residing with a 9.09% of Birhor population out of total Birhor population of the studied District. Two Birhor villages under Jhalda-I Block, namely, Mahultanr and Dekai are concentrated by Birhor population in Purulia District. Mahultanr village under Icchatu Chotobhakat Mouza (J.L. No.12) 9 Birhor families with a total 32 population comprising of 16 males and 16 females have been residing in the village. Dekai village under the Khamar Mouza (J.L. No.108) of Jhalda-I Block 7 families with 11 Birhor population comprising of 9 males and 2 females have been residing in the Dekai village.

Following table shows the distribution of the Birhors in Purulia District as per a Survey conducted by the Cultural Research Institute, Government of West Bengal in the year 2013:

Total

Rope Maker

Driver

Rearer

Goat

Block

TABLE - 4
Distribution of Birhors in Purulia District

Name of	Name of the	Name of the	JL No.	No. of Families	Popula	tion	fall Make	s pr heli
the Block	Village	Mouza	Lawyisla	a divided	Male	Female	Total	(%)
IQN	Bhupatipally	Matiyala	99	60	88	100	188	55.13
BAGHMUNDI	Bareriya	Bareriya	101	19	40	39	79	23.17
	SUB-TOTAL	whola with while and had	in Labor Italiana	79	128	139	267	78.30
BALARAM PUR	Bersa	Bersa	21	10	16	15	31	9.09
BAL	SUB-TOTAL			10	16	15	31	9.09
JA-I	Mahultanr	Icchatu Chhotobhakat	12	9 layr to tegati	16	16	32	9.38
JHALDA-I	Dekai	Khamar	108	7 la mai bene 7	9	2	11000	3.23
	SUB-TOTAL	e († 16. cenér) January – programa services	erendi an direa	16	25	18	43	12.61
GRAND TO	DTAL	on terror A agailte ghan	Villens. Bourte	105	169	172	341	100

Total number of workforce among the Birhor community of Purulia district is about 191 which are 56.01% out of the total Birhor population (341) of Purulia district, comprising of 107 males and 84 females. The major occupation among the Birhor community of Purulia district is day labourer comprising of 96 individuals (50.26%) out of total workers. The second highest population next to day labourer is 51 comprising of 3 males and 48 females involve in forest wood collection. Other occupational categories are goatary husbandry, car driving, rope making and service. The involvement of Birhor population in respective occupational categories are 1 female in goatary work, 3 males in car driving, 11 males and 27 females in rope making and 2(1 Male And 1 Female) are engaged in service. Rope making is very popular occupational category among the Birhor villages at Purulia. Six cases have been found where Birhor people of 60 years and

above age are enjoying Old-age Pension. Distribution of Birhors according to their occupation is shown in the following table:

Observations

The traditional conical structure of Birhor's leaf house known as *Kumba* is not found in West Bengal. The houses in which they live now are mainly of semi-pucca or Pucca type – wall constructed with brick and the roof is made up of either Tiles or Asbestos. Concrete roof is also found in the recent built houses. All these houses have been provided to the Birhors of Purulia district in order to facilitate the Birhors for leading a sedentary life. Most of the Birhor families have been provided with dwelling houses. Left out families are also being considered. Link roads and culverts as required have also been constructed.

	IstoT	109	43	4	16	6	191
	10401				7 ,	Si sin	
	Female	51	20	3	8	2	84
Total	Male	28	23	1	8	7	107
0 <u>r</u>	Female	-	0	0	0	0	-
Service Holder	Male	-	0	0	0	0	-
Rope Maker	Female	8	9	3	8	2	27
Rope A	Male	-	4	0	0	9	1
20 at 1	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goat Rearer Driver	Male	3	0	0	0	0	3
earer	Female	-	0	0	0	0	-
Goat R	Male	0	0	0	0	0	0
rers	Female	7	0	0	0	0	7
Day Labourers	Male	52	17	11	8	901	89
tor	Female	34	14	0	0	0	48
Forest Wood Collector	Male	1	2	0	0	0	3
Name of the Villages	2 2	Shupatipally	Bareriya	Sersa	Mahultanr	Dekai	
Block		Baghmundi Bhupatipally	_	Balarampur Bersa	Jhalda-I	nsi logi	Total

(Source: CRI Survey, 2013)

Birhors traditionally follow the patrilineal descent system. A Birhor boy is always expected to get married with a Birhor girl only, but the clans of the boy and the girl must be different. At the time of marriage, the blood relationship is always considered by the families. The marriage between a boy and a girl is only possible when both are not related up to three generations from the father's and the mother's side. The system of bride price is still followed. As per traditional custom the father of the male approaches the father of the female for marriage.

Purulia district as a whole falls under Drought Prone Area. The average rainfall is below normal. The ground water potentiality is also minimum The Birhors in their five villages were provided with Dug Wells and Tube Wells as their source of drinking water. The water level in the wells goes down and ultimately dries up during summer season. Only the tube-wells provide drinking water in all seasons. The land-holdings of the Birhors are devoid of any irrigational facility. There are some ponds in and around the Birhor localities which need immediate re-excavation and proper maintenance so that the water resource may be used both for irrigational purposes as well as for pisciculture. Water from the natural springs may be stored in reservoirs and may be used for irrigational purposes by using diesel pump-sets. The deserving beneficiaries may be provided with Pumpsets for use by forming a farmers' co-operative. All the lands owned by the Birhors are devoid of any irrigational facility. There exists some scope for irrigation in the lands owned by the Birhors. A number of ponds need re-excavation, a reservoir may be made to store-up the run-away water of a natural spring, diesel pump-sets with Mini-deep Tube Wells will facilitate the Birhors to utilize their lands for multiple cropping.

The Birhors are in a state of transition from preagricultural stage of economy to settled agriculture but their economic condition is deplorable. Most of them eat stale rice with a vegetable prepared from the leaves of *Kantiara* plant once or twice a day. Occasionally wild mushroom and yams are consumed. Flesh of Monkey, Rabbit and Porcupine are condred highly delicious food items but they seldom get these. Prevalence of undernutrition is, therefore, high even among adult Birhors. For economic development they need additional agricultural land which is available near the Birhor localities. In those lands where wet-cultivation is marginal, creation of orchards and vegetable cultivation are encouraged. For group farming on co-operative basis provision of a power tiller may help the Birhors for tilling the hard laterite soil.

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They love to trap Monkey, Rabbit, Porcupines and other wild animals and birds in the forest but these are rarely available by the side of their localities. They are expert in collecting honey. Collected honey, wood and creepers are sold by them in the nearby markets.

They have settled permanently in a villages by the encouragement of the government but they still have a passion for their nomadic life. For permanent settlement of Birhors Government facilities like distribution of free land, bullock, milch cow, Goat, Pig, agricultural implements, seeds, school, rope making center, honey collection training and establishment of community hall are extended to them. Despite all the incentives socioeconomic conditions of the Birhors have not been elevated. Many of them have been provided with job cards for 100 DAYS WORK programme but they are not very interested in doing works. They do not have the habit and scope of savings. Many of the Birhors residing in the settlement colonies of Purulia district have developed a mindset of total dependence on the government for their development.

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Economic Development in a Tribal Village of Bankura, West Bengal

SUKLA BASU

Abstract

Studying the agricultural conditions of the past and present in Javi, a tribal village of Bankura, West Bengal have led to gauging of the food and livelihood security issues of the tribal dwellers. The nature of government interventions has been scrutinized through the lens of the affected people and the gaps identified based on their needs. For the holistic study qualitative and quantitative means of data collection through multiple methods of Focus Group Discussion, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participant Observation, Questionnaire instrumentation, with relevant and appropriate case studies have been applied and analysed. The study reveals that in 1971 almost half of the village area was forested. With degradation of the forests its dependency has been reduced and the tribal economy which was mostly hand to mouth economy is changing. Strands of development with shift to agro based economy are perceived here. Green revolution took place in India in the late sixties and early seventies also have an impact here. Farm inputs like chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides have recently been put into use but mechanization is still a distant dream. Rural development programmes and incorporation of the Tribal Sub Plan is slowly having an impact. Increasing literacy and awareness, albeit slow, with the improvement in infra structure, could be felt. The reduction in migration in search of temporary bread earning means, thanks to MGNREGA, has been reported by more than 90% of the residents. This has lessened the burden of the women who otherwise have to shoulder the responsibility of collecting fuel wood as well as cultivating on their little plots for their own sustenance besides their household chores. Yet additional income needs to be generated through creation of more community assets and provisions at the individual-household level to come out of poverty. Incorporating more of these villagers into the mainstream of development is the need of the hour.

.Key Words: poverty, vulnerability, inclusive, tribals, rural livelihood programmes.

Introduction

More than two-thirds of India's population is rural of which about one-third is below the national poverty line. Hence rural development accounts for a large sectoral outlay in the Government of India budget including agricultural and animal husbandry schemes. This development expenditure is channelled through a large number of centrally sponsored schemes and additional programmes sponsored by state governments. The ministries are implementing a wide range of programmes to address different dimensions of poverty and deprivation. The stated vision of the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) document is "of India moving forward in a way that would ensure a broad-based improvement in living standards of all sections of the people through a growth process which is faster than in the past, more inclusive and also more sustainable". Particular attention needs to be paid to the needs of the SC/ST and OBC population it said. Literature across several countries and disciplines identified some of the vulnerability indicators in several communities. These include: food and nutrition insecurity; social category, chronic illness, old,

infirm or disable conditions; num cost indebtedne households are include women disability, land parcels of lan households in isolated commu and households most common labour, small a leasing, tenant weaving, fishing through access Reducing pov growth strateg had already programmes inclusiveness a multidimen

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in the family; literacy status, housing are an aread earners; landlessness, high The most vulnerable sections/ the food insecure households. They mem headed households, persons with marginal farmers owning tiny most farming and non-farming dry land areas, migrant labour, and those living in disturbed areas memorial engaged in declining occupations. The and the shood activities of the poor are wage and marginal holding cultivation, land cultivation, cattle rearing, forest produce, etc. Vulnerability reduction can be safety nets and entitlements. s a key element in our inclusive The earlier (Eleventh) Five Year Plan special impetus to several with the objective of increasing and reducing poverty as inclusiveness is mensional concept.

security have moved to the forefront memational discussions in recent years. Within the rain-fed agriculture is a major constraint agricultural growth and bridging megualities. Some 200 million hectares 62% of the total geographical area of India spanning several agro-ecological Some of the most important programmes mesant to food and nutrition security are the management ingredient in the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Programme MEGA), the Targeted Public Distribution System the Integrated Child Development Services programme, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) The Annapurna scheme; the Mid Day Meal (MDM) meramme and the National Old Age Pension Scheme The provision of food subsidy in the union based on allocation of food grains to different ections of the population, i e, Antyodaya Anna Yojana BPL (Below Poverty Line) and APL(Above Poverty The launching of National Rural Livelihood (NRLM) in 2011 needs also to be mentioned as mas an impact.

In West Bengal different rural livelihood programmes have adopted administrative units, rather than physical units, as the basis for planning. Here the focus on decentralised governance and capacity building is stronger and planning is focused on gram panchayat and subordinate village assemblies that are able to access an untied poverty fund to support livelihood enhancement activities. The village of **Javi** was selected on the basis of three criteria - less than 1,000 population, proportion of Scheduled Tribes or adivasis over 50% (i.e. high concentration of scheduled tribe) and female literacy rates of less than 33% (i.e. with poor social indicators) as against the national average of 64.6 % in 2011.

Research Objectives & Methodology of the Study

Study of an identity-based group, notably, tribe and women have been ventured upon in a village in close proximity to the forest. The design of the study is based on intensive field work. Participation with respect to whether households got work or did not get work and if they did get it then the number of days of work, the days of work received, total person days of employment provided under the flagship programme of MGNREGS and its coverage across the neighbourhoods is the focus of this paper. The nature of other government interventions has been scrutinized through the lens of the affected people to know about their physical and economic access to food. The gaps have been identified based on their needs.

Several government reports were consulted in context to this study: being accessed through the concerned websites. Objectives and nature of relevant schemes such as that of MGNREGS and NRLM were studied before framing the questionnaire. Views expressed by authors of several published peer reviewed articles were taken into consideration. Background information of the area and status of the tribal people of their socio economic lives was obtained from the decadal Census reports and Statistical Handbook of Bankura district. The Topographical Sheet (73 J/9) published by Survey of India in 1979 was also studied. For the holistic study qualitative and quantitative means of data collection through multiple methods of Focus

Group Discussion, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participant Observation and Questionnaire instrumentation, with relevant and appropriate case studies have been applied with the assistance of the students who were pursuing their masters' degree in the department of Geography, West Bengal State University in February 2014. Detailed and intensive micro level survey at the household level of each *para* (neighbourhood) was done in March 2014 by Asim Kisku, a then pursuing PG student of the department who belongs to this village. The data was then compiled and analyzed by the author.

Background information

The state of West Bengal had 5.08% of the total ST population of India in 2011 as per the Census of India. The scheduled tribes comprised of 5.80% of the total population of the state. The district of Bankura had recorded 10.25 % of its total population belonging to this category which was above the state average. The literates of the district comprised of 62.08 % of the total population which is below the state average. Bankura happened to be one of the 200 backward districts of the country identified for implementation of the MGNREGA in its first schedule. This district had, as per WBHDR 2004, been in the eleventh position amongst the 18 districts of West Bengal with regard to HDI: the health index being 0.67, income index 0.26, education index 0.62 and the human development index being 0.52. Regarding per capita income district wise ranking of the state, the position as in 2000-01 was seventh. The rural poverty figure was alarmingly high as learnt from the report.

Natural resources, such as water, land and forests are fundamental to the livelihoods of the rural poor. The district has the severe problem of soil erosion. Forest resources provide part of the subsistence and cash livelihoods to several millions of rural poor in the country. The gradual depletion of forest cover and increasing dependence of rural folk has given rise to conflict of interest among diverse user groups and associated management problems. The primary stakeholders happen to be the forest communities or people living in and on the forest fringe areas earning

substantial part of livelihood in the form of fuel wood, fodder, fruits, flowers, fencing materials, etc. The secondary stakeholders happen to be state/district forest department, NGOs, plantation companies etc. The traditional right and interest of forest communities, and their livelihood and primary stakeholder concern were hardly addressed to in the forest management policy before and immediately after independence. In developing countries degradation of common property resources (CPR) has often been associated with high rate attached by the poor in discounting future flow of benefits, improper property right, economic insecurity. regulation failure and relative ability of local institutions that shape the degree of collective action. The problem gets added importance when studied in respect of a CPR region inhabited mostly by backward community who are usually supposed to be highly dependent on nature for their survival. West Bengal is the pioneer state in India in initiating Joint Forest Management (JFM). Thanks to the Forest Protection Committee (FPC) the district of Bankura had recorded a gradual increase in forest cover. Since the enunciation of Forest Protection Act (1990), the traditional community access and control has been substantially wrested by the forest department in West Bengal with only specific duties and functions reserved for the FPC formed of the villagers. However this has hardly reduced the poor people's dependence for collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) or minor forest products (MFPs) that provide a substantial part of their livelihood in the regions that are less agriculturally intensified. Prior to the enactment of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the easiest way to procure land for different non-forestry activities viz.: creation of human settlements, agriculture, construction of dams, bridges, roads etc. was through diversion of forest land. In order to check further depletion of the forest cover and protect the forests, the Govt. of India enacted the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and amended it from time to time with insertions of stringent stipulations. As per the Act, any such diversion requires prior approval of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India. As a result, the quantum of diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes has dwindled appreciably. The National Afforestation Programme (NAP) has been formulated by merger of four centrally sponsored whenes of the I

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Integrated Afforestation and Eco-development Project (IAEDP), Area Oriented Fuel wood and Fodder Project (IAEDP), Conservation and development of Non-Timber Forest Produce Scheme (NTFP) including medicinal plants scheme and Association of Scheduled Tribes and Rural Poor in Regeneration of Degraded Forest ASERP). The objectives of this scheme includes employment generation for the disadvantaged section of the society, particularly women, SCs/STs and landless rural labourers and conservation and improvement of NTFP.

Equity & inclusiveness is crucial for the most mulnerable and marginalized sections of the society to we the opportunities of well-being along with the mainstream society. (Basu 2014). The process of land redistribution which has disappeared from the national policy agenda still continued in this state. Regarding the land reforms programme of West Bengal the pattern and distribution weighted in the favour of the SC and STs either as pattadars or bargadars. The land mesorms were effective in terms of redressing certain inequalities; the programme is estimated to have conversed 41.3% of rural population of the state by 2002. **Describution** of homestead land to agricultural labourers also included. The programme had a significant meet on reducing poverty and lesser incidence of oppression and conflicts are reported here pared to other parts of rural India (WBHDR, 2004). manuscript small size of the holdings can't bring about sufficiency from agricultural activity alone and so sor seeking of alternate sources of income.

Act also known as the "Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act", and abbreviated to EGA, is an Indian labour law and social security e, a workfare scheme that aims to guarantee the work' and ensure livelihood security in rural providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage ment in a financial year to every household adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual the statute is hailed by the government as "the and most ambitious social security and public

works programme in the world". The main objectives of the Scheme include besides supplementing wage employment opportunities, creating of sustainable rural livelihoods. Targeting poverty through employment generation using rural works has had a long history in India that began in the 1960s. After the first three decades of experimentation, the government launched major schemes like Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Employment Assurance Scheme, Food for Work Programme, Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana and Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana that were forerunners to MGNREGA. The MGNREGA has been highly inclusive, as is evident from the fact that the share of SC/ST families amongst beneficiaries has ranged between 51.0-56.0% and 41.0-50.0 % of workers have been women. It has also promoted financial inclusion since over 100 million bank/post office accounts have been opened for the poorest segments of our population who comprise of the MGNREGA workforce. There has been much public debate about India's MGNREGS ever since its introduction. Poorer states tend to have a higher percentage of households who want work (i.e. demand) on MGNREGS, as one would expect the poverty rate will fall with higher participation. This reflects the scheme's built-in "self-targeting" mechanism, whereby non-poor people find work on the scheme less attractive than do poor people. Targeting performance improves as the programme expands. The targeting of disadvantaged castes improves with programme expansion. Based on evidence from the National Sample Survey for 2009-10 it is evident that participation rates on the scheme are higher for poor people than others; the scheme being more pro-poor and reaching STs and OBCs more effectively in states with higher overall participation rates. Nationally, almost half (48%) of the employment as registered in the administrative data for 2009-10 go to women. The female share in MGNREGS work is greater than their share of the work in the casual wage labour market in all states, but the gap tends to be larger in states where women participate less in the casual labour market. The scheme is clearly bringing women into the paid workforce, but more so in less poor states and continues to reach out to the poor and vulnerable people.

It is against this backdrop I have chosen a village which is ST dominated, is near the forest with many being marginal workers having little land or are landless who have been seeking job opportunities from neighbouring districts.

Findings on the village

Javi village is under the jurisdiction of Rudra Gram Panchayat, Khatra Subdivision of Bankura District, West Bengal. It is 7 K.M from Ranibandh Block Headquarters and 4 k.m. from the gram panchayat. Ranibandh is considered to be one of the major forest produce growing areas of the district. The total area of this village is 513 acres of which almost half (43.86%), was forested in 1971. The total population of Javi as in 2011 Census records was 442 of which 224 were male (50.68%), the rest 49.32% being female. The male female population is thus almost balanced. The STs were 294 in number (66.52% of total population), 196 were literates (44.34% of total population) of which only 62 were female literates (31.63% of total literates), 164 were workers (37.10% of total population): hence there is a high dependency ratio. There is one primary school and two ICDS centres in the village. All the children depend upon other villages for their secondary education. There is no primary health centre, and for health facilities they are to venture out of the village. In this area electricity is available since 2005 and majority of the houses (80%) are having it. Wood is used as the main type of fuel by all which is collected from the nearest forest. The source of drinking water is mainly tube well and well. There are at present 5 tube wells and 3 wells of which two are no longer being used. All the people in this village follow the open privy system. There is no septic tank or community toilet.

The village can be divided into five paras or neighbourhoods: Sabar Para, Pal Para, Kumar Para, Parasia Para and the Batdanga Para. The oldest para is the Batdanga para, happens to be located on the higher lands occupied by the Santhals, the number of households being more (39) and the diversion of economic activities also happens to be more. About 15% of the residents are with the service sector, the level of literacy being higher. There is larger retention of youth

in education here. The Santhals also have a larger share of the agricultural land with variety of agricultural lands as well. On the other extreme is the *Sabar Para* with 26 households, with only one family owning agricultural land (*gora*) of less than 1 acre obtaining it from vested land -given by the government.

Regarding livestock farming it is the general opinion that there is shortage of grazing lands, lack of herder, less requirement of natural manure application with rising consumption of chemical fertilizers. All these are responsible for a fall in domesticating of animals and birds and hence fall in supply of diet with no additional source of income generated from it. Earlier they were part of the assets besides the land. Milk (from cow) was for personal consumption; goats and ducks were reared for household consumption and buffalo served as draught animal. Rearing of goats was through animal husbandry schemes availed of by some.

The nearest forest is 'Baro mile forest' which is only 1 kilometer away from the village. The villagers reported of declining dependency on the forests with the changing time, yet minor forest products (MFPs) do play a significant role. The MFPs consists of nuts, fruits, flowers, leaves, stems, roots, tubers, babui grass, etc. The villagers turn to the forest for food which adds to their nutritional requirement, more so in the bad agricultural years. Mainly women collect sal leaves from the forest. With twenty leaves they make one tari, by selling 100 such taris they earn 75 rupees. In normal season 1 bundle of 'sia patas' rate is 10-12 rupees and in the marriage season this rate is 16 rupees. This information was extracted through the FGD carried out with the members of the Javi Bono Committee. The MFPs are available to the tribesmen at the cost of labour hours put in. Hence the economic value is the value of labour time involved in searching, plucking, weeding and collecting from the forest and carrying the same to the market or home (Thakur &Thakur, 2009) Even if it is for own consumption it does have some linkage with the issue of food security.

Almost three-fourth of the households (74%) of the study area are residing in kucchha houses, all the families have been enlisted as being below the poverty line.

Some aged persone are still agricultural land variety and quarters on their MGNREGA schwithout any agreeighbouring mearby districts during the harverm migration

A majority employment MGNREGA S household var 85. All the 26 the employm scheme. The worked for 4-45; ten betwe man days; the two househo out of which 2 There is one 10 days and a man-days of days. All the f days of 10, households in benefitted by as teachers. for 15 days a had man-day the highest h households the scheme. worked for than 20 day were above MGNREGA Winistry has securing t employme Scheduled So there is

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some aged persons are enjoying old age pension while some are still working as labourers/farmers in the agricultural lands. It was seen that those with greater ariety and quantity of agricultural land worked as armers on their own land and also as labourers under MCNREGA scheme to supplement their income. Those whout any agricultural land worked as labourers in eighbouring fields, some said that they migrated to earby districts particularly to Barddhaman and Howrah they migration was a fixed trend for them.

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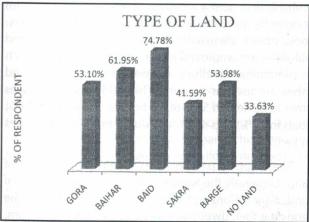
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A majority of the households are enjoying the employment opportunities provided under the MGNREGA scheme, the number of days worked/ mousehold varied from less than 10 to a maximum of 55. All the 26 households in Sabar Para are enjoying me employment opportunities provided under this scheme. There are three families whose members worked for 4-20 days; six families with man days of 30ten between 51-75 man days and seven with > 75 man days; the highest being 85 man days availed by households. In Pal Para there are 25 households of which 24 are beneficiaries of this flagship scheme. mere is one family whose adult members worked for and another for 49 days; rest of the families had mar-days of 50 and above, the highest being 85 man All the four households of Kumar Para earned manof 10, 40, 57 & 61 respectively. There are 19 museholds in the Parasia Para out of which 17 are being by the scheme the other two are employed There is one family whose members worked 15 days and another for 25 days; six of the families man-days between 26-50 and nine were above 50. me highest being 80 man days. Batdanga Para has 39 seconds out of which 33 are reaping the benefits of There were three families whose members for less than 10 days and another five for less 20 days, rest enjoyed 35-45 days and only two above 70, the highest being 75. The joint secretary SEGA had announced (in January 2014) that the has decided to increase the central funding for programmer with the second sec majorment beyond the stipulated 100 days per meduled Tribe households living in the forest areas. make is scope for further pulling them out of their

Rainfall, which occurs mainly within the short monsoon season, is of high temporal and spatial variability that makes rain-fed agriculture risky. Javi is having little of irrigation facility thus increasing the risk. Here food crops are still mainly cultivated for their own sustenance. Agriculture is a labour based enterprise in which most of the agricultural operations like ploughing, levelling, sowing, weeding, spraying, sprinkling, harvesting and threshing are carried on mainly by human hands. The machinery such as tractors is still not used here. Both men and women take part in agricultural operations. However, there is a division of labour on the basis of sex. The heavier work such as cleaning forests or ploughing or constructing a bundh (i.e. an embankment across a natural depression for irrigation) is done by men; while collection of wild plants, fruits, roots, tubers, are usually done by women. Bullocks and buffaloes are employed in agricultural operations such as ploughing, levelling and weeding; cow-dung and ashes are used as manure. The field survey indicates cows to be kept in 52% of the houses, buffaloes in 14%, goats in 42%, pigs in 4% and ducks in 3% of the houses in Javi.

The cropping pattern varies according to the type of land. Generally the Santals cultivate on three classes of land: Barge, Gora and Khet. On the barge which is the land near their dwelling, especially in the rear sorghum, maize, certain winter legumes, beans and vegetables of different kinds are cultivated. More than half of the households in Javi have this type of land on which is now cultivated maize, raher and other seasonal vegetables the production being about 20 kg/acre. Gora the second category is on a higher land located at a little distance away from their dwelling, where different varieties of millet, several varieties of pulses are cultivated. More than half of the households (53%) have gora land. Khet comprises of rice fields and in Javi three kinds of rice fields are distinguished by three different names: (i) baid- at the upper level, (ii) Sakra -the middle level & (iii) baihar -lowest level. About one-fourth (24.78%) of the households have baid land. On this land is now cultivated rice viz khandagiri, bankura-1, and vegetables viz bringin and tomato etc. This land produces rice of 250-300 kg/acre. High yield variety (HYV) rice viz *lalat*, 64, *kalakandhi* etc are grown in addition to seasonal vegetables on the *sakra* owned by about 40% of the households. High yield variety of paddy such as *sarna* is now being cultivated on the *baihar* land, the yield being 200 -250 kg / acre. The classification is thus based on their relative positions on an inclined land surface. Of these, the plots lying on the lowest level i.e., the *baihar* land are regarded as the best and more than 60% are having this type of land. Rice is evidently the staple crop. Several of the indigenous breeds have become extinct mentioned the senior farmers. From the figure given below it is clear that almost one-third are landless and hence more vulnerable.



Source: Based on Field survey

The villagers are enjoying some rural development schemes like MGNREGS under which pond construction and its renovation, construction of embankment (bundh), fruit plantation, land levelling etc. is being done. Other facilities provided by the government include seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, agriculture related machinery like pump set, supplying goats for rearing; Indira Aawas Yojana (IAY) for housing facilities, Annapurna Yojana, Old Age Pension for these rural tribal people. The MGNREG scheme is being enjoyed by a majority (92%) of the households. This has increased the income and reduced seasonal migration to a great extent.

Challenges

baTribals are in the early stage of economic development compared to other communities in the

country. They depend on forest for food, fuel, house building material, agricultural implements and with degenerating of such forests they are to cope up with the situation. There is lack of sanitation facilities and hence the people are prone to diseases. Lack of secondary education in spite of several schemes/opportunities of availing from the nearby villages, leads to drop outs.

Scope for improvement

Many workers are engaged in more than one occupation. Many tribal groups as elsewhere in the country have got transferred into agricultural communities and with modernization (which has started to show up here) if irrigation facilities are provided the yield will increase. Rising literacy, greater number of days of wage employment beyond the stipulated 100 days, and other schemes implemented based on local potentiality and needs will definitely improve the lives of these marginalized sections of the society. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) among the members of FPC in some areas have been formed to take up various vocational and income generation activities utilizing fund from their own savings as well as bank loans where necessary and available. This can be done in the village especially among the women. "Javi Bono Committee" comprises of all adult members of the village and from each para one or two members join the village meeting & after the discussion take the collective decisions relating to forests. So vocational trainings for income generation activities such as mushroom cultivation, sal leaves plate making, pisciculture, sericulture, bee-keeping, etc depending on the natural local resources can benefit the community.

Conclusion

Studying the agricultural conditions of the past and present in Javi, a tribal village of Bankura, West Bengal have led to gauging of the food and livelihood security issues of the tribal dwellers. The study reveals that in 1971 almost half of the village area was forested. With degradation of the forests its dependency has been reduced and the tribal economy which was mostly hand to mouth economy is changing. Now dependence on forests for food, fuel, fodder and medicines has been forcefully reduced. Their economy has become commercialised: depending on agriculture. Strands of

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Developmen environment for Tives. In India la me poor hou Public Distribut social insurance capabilities, cre anysical infrast can strengthen additional inco in increased programmes, slowly having awareness, a mirastructure (in search of te MIGNREGS, h the residents. 7 who otherwis collecting fue plots for their chores. It is my m casual labo force, their h to men molemented Bankura happ this scheme of The number includes the abour emplo corained from activities alo MGNREGA with with s and ck of mes/ leads

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een me s of development with shift to agro based economy are perceived here. Green revolution took place in India in the late sixties and early seventies. In agriculture and animal husbandry, it popularized the use of conventional hybridization to increase yield by creating "high-yielding varieties". Farm inputs like chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides have recently been put into use but mechanization is still a distant dream. Javi is having little of irrigation and so rain water harvesting is required. Shortage of common grazing land has limited the raising of livestock.

Development aims at creating a suitable and enabling environment for promoting long, healthy and creative lives. In India large resources flow from the Government to the poor households in the form of entitlements like Public Distribution System (PDS), pensions, MGNREGS, social insurance, health services; and by enhancing capabilities, creating livelihood opportunities along with physical infrastructure schemes. Together these services can strengthen the household economy in the form of additional incomes and savings on expenditure, resulting in increased consumption. Rural development programmes, incorporation of the Tribal Sub Plan is slowly having an impact. Increasing literacy and awareness, albeit slow, with the improvement in infrastructure could be felt. The reduction in migration in search of temporary bread earning means, thanks to MGNREGS, has been reported by more than 90% of the residents. This has lessened the burden of the women who otherwise have to shoulder the responsibility of collecting fuel wood as well as cultivating on their little plots for their own sustenance besides their household chores. It is my view that since tribal women are engaged in casual labour, etc even before MGNREGA came into force, their high work participation is seen here. It is vital to mention that when the scheme was first implemented on 200 backward districts of the country Bankura happened to be one of them. The impact of this scheme can hence be strongly felt in the positive. The number of employment days have increased as it includes the own agricultural employment days, wage labour employment on a daily basis, economic value obtained from labour input in relation to the forest related activities along with the employment days from the MGNREGA. Yet additional income needs to be

generated through creation of more community assets and provisions at the individual-household level to come out of poverty. Incorporating more of these villagers into the mainstream of development is the need of the hour. For development of the area, community oriented development schemes can benefit maximum number of people, lead to infrastructure development, and help in creation of assets for sustained income generation and lead to all round development of the village.

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DISEASES, HEALTHCARE FACILITIES AND HEALTH RIGHTS AMONG THE TRIBES OF MALDA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

Arpita Ghosh

Abstract

Health and well-being are the great concern of our contemporary era. While studying with the health situation of the tribals it has been observed that with regard to access to and benefits from the public health system the tribals have always remained at the receiving end of the system. The public health system has remained largely uneven and concentrated among the better endowed sections of the society. So the socially disadvantaged sections of the society have always lagged in this respect and the tribals have remained excluded. Health rights have never been accredited from a rights approach and more so for the tribals. The developmental projects meant for tribal development have not been holistically treated to include health rights. Even after so many decades of Independence, access to health institutions and civic amenities have had very poor turnouts in the rural areas and especially the tribal dominated belts. The present paper deals with the disease? pattern and the access of the tribal families to civic amenities and healthcare facilities in Malda district of West Bengal.

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined health as a 'state of complete, physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief,

economic or social condition' (WHO; 1997). The Constitution of WHO which came into force on 7 April 1948 became the first international legal document to contain an explicit right to the 'enjoyment of highest attainable standard of health'. The definition provided by WHO also implies 'health' to be a holistic issue that also includes accessibility to health institutions and healthcare facilities. There is an inextricable link between health and human rights. Respect, protect and fulfillment bound human rights obligations can be achieved by promotion and protection of health and access to healthcare facilities is a necessary precondition for this.

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The prevailing health and medical system, the western system has unfortunately failed to meet the need of the world's majority. The failure of the Alma Ata Declaration (1978) in fulfilling its objectives of achieving 'Health for All' by the year 2000 gives more urgency to look for an alternative.

Health as a component of human rights has been recognized internationally in a number of United Nations instruments which include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), Beijing Platform For Action (1995) and so on.

The Constitution of India does not accord health and healthcare the status of rights, yet in a number of judgements of the Apex Court Right to Health has been used as an extension of the Right to Life of Article 21 and references have been made to the international instruments. Our Constitution has also made special provisions for the Scheduled Tribes in Part XVI in Articles 330, 332, 335, 338, 339, 340 and 342. To effectively implement the various safeguards built into the Constitution and other legislations, the Constitution, under Articles 338 and 338A, provides for two statutory commissions - the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

Despite these provisions the condition of the tribals in our country has remained unchanged and they have been leading a life of seclusion in terms of enjoying the benefits of development from the main stream for senerations. In developing countries, the major causes of death are infections and parasitic diseases and most of these deaths are linked with poor nutrition and an unsafe environment, particularly polluted water. In both developing and industrial countries, the threats to health security are usually greater among the poorest people in the rural areas and the indigenous people.

TRIBAL HEALTH SCENARIO IN INDIA

The health situation of the tribals in India shows that with regard to access to and benefits from the public health system, the tribals have always remained at the receiving end of the system. The public health system has remained largely uneven and concentrated among the better endowed sections of the society. So the socially disadvantaged sections of the society have always lagged in this respect and the tribals have remained excluded. This is particularly true for tribal women and children. The health indicators from National Family Health Survey-2 (NFHS- 2) indicate high alarming figures for the scheduled tribes in all respects. The table given below reflects the same.

TABLE - 1
Showing the variation in health status among different socio-economic groups

Health Indicators	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Others
Infant Mortality/1000	83.0	84.2	61.8
Under-5 Mortality/1000	119.3	126.6	82.6
Children Underweight (%)	53.5	55.9	41.4
Children with diarrohea (%)	19.8	21.1	19.1
Women with anaemia (%)	56	64.9	47.6

Source: NFHS - 2 (1998 - 1999), M/O Health and Family Welfare, Govt, of India.

The tribal communities in general and the primitive bal groups in particular are highly disease prone. The bals in India have distinctive health problems epending on their habitat, difficult terrains and cological conditions (Basu; 1993). In our country the lissues of the tribals have not been given timely which has been further compounded by their verty, illiteracy, ignorance about causes of diseases, stile environment, blind beliefs, poor sanitation, lack

of safe drinking water, lack of personal hygiene and health education. The chief causes of their diseases are chronic and poor nutritional status (Basu; 2000). Maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates are also high among the tribes due to their poor nutritional status and traditional practices of child birth. Nutritional anaemia is a serious matter of concern among women of rural and tribal areas. Some of the common diseases that affect the Indian tribes are tuberculosis, malaria,

filarial, gastroenteritis, respiratory diseases, tetanus, measles, whooping cough, night blindness, skin diseases especially scabies. Moreover, tribal diets are also grossly deficient in iron, calcium, vitamin A and vitamin C, riboflavin and animal protein (Basu; 2000). The tribals generally consume liquor which is another reason for their health problems.

Another significant problem has been persistent lack in health and medical care services in the tribal inhabited areas (Bhatt; 2008). The tribals are mostly afflicted by the inadequate access to health services and poor health delivery system and this in many cases prevent the tribals in availing western health facilities which also further influence their already poor health seeking behaviour. Much of the health problems and dismal health conditions among tribals are responsible for their habitat, poverty, ignorance, malnutrition, absence of safe drinking water, insanitary living conditions, lack of personal hygiene, health education and poor maternal and child health (Basu; 2000).

Since Independence, many developmental projects have been implemented in and around tribal dominated areas. As a result of the implementation of such developmental projects massive forest degradation have taken place which in turn has curbed the tradition and cultural ethos of the tribals. Tribals were primarily dependent on forest. In many ways they are now not getting the required forest resources which have a negative impact on their health. The medicine men among them used to get medicinal herbs and plants to cure the local people are not getting them easily. In this context, such a study would reveal the general impact of environmental and loss of vegetation on their overall life style, their health particularly tribal women's health.

Conceptually, human security emphasizes the protection of people from grave threats to their lives and empowerment against such social threats which include prevention and freedom from the threat of diseases. The simplest definition of security is absence of insecurity and threats. Precisely, it means to be free from both fear and want. The lives of the tribals are also not free from both fear and want given their socio-economic status. Due to this want they are deprived of many bare necessities that affect their human security including health. Human insecurity coupled with ignorance, lack of awareness, backwardness, remoteness in habitation, superstitions, lack of interaction with other communities

and traditional ways of life among the tribals lead to gross human rights violation among them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several researchers and authors have also contributed substantially towards the state of tribal health in India. Prominent among them are Hasan (1967) who pointed out that various social and cultural factors control the health situation and practices of the tribal communities. Basu (2000) indicated that the health problems among the tribals are mainly because of lack of health facilities, sanitation and access to safe drinking water. Singh (1981) pointed out that the tribal development programmes are largely plan based and target oriented and lesser attention is paid on the local felt needs of different eco-systems and communities and therefore, they are often not successful.

Menon (1985) noted that deforestation has a severe social and economic impact on the life of the tribal women. It has manifested into additional workload, reduced fuel and food supply, deterioration of their health condition and introduction of external values that result in their lower status.

Akram (2007) pointed out the long standing commitment to "Health for All" and the enormous health anomalies that continue to prevail among masses. He pointed out the problems related to judicious distribution of healthcare facilities as well as the limitation in choices in maintaining sustainable health conditions in which the marginalized tribal communities are the worst victims.

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It has been discussed earlier that the infant mortality rates among the scheduled tribes is more than other communities in India, it is nothing exception in West Bengal. Similarly, like the national trends maternal mortality, child and maternal malnutrition is rampant in West Bengal also. Although health intervention from both the Central and State government are carried out in the tribal areas yet those are not enough to meet the deficiencies and proper access to health institutions and facilities still remains a distant dream. The tribal health in the state is also affected by their poor educational and socio economic background of the tribals.

In this context, the present study is important to assess the state of the tribal's access to health facilities in the tribal dominated villages of one of the backward districts in West Bengal. s lead to

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OBJECTIVES

- To study the access to healthcare facilities among the tribals.
- To study the access to basic civic amenities that enhances the quality of health.
- To specifically study the threat of diseases among the tribals.

STUDY AREA

The present research has been undertaken towards understanding diseases pattern, access to the healthcare facilities among the tribals in Malda district of West Bengal. The study was conducted in thirty one tribal villages in four tribal dominated blocks of the district covering seven hundred and eighty seven (787) families from five tribal communities namely Santals, Malpaharis, Mundas, Koras and Oraons.

SAMPLE

The present study constitutes of population from Kora, Malpahari, Munda, Oraon and Santal communities. A total of 787 families from the studied blocks (viz. Old Malda, Gazole, Habibpur and Bamongola) and communities were included in the study. Of the total families there were 590 Santal families, 48 Malpahari families, 50 Munda families, 35 Kora families and 64 Oraon families. Among the families

under the present study there were 3567 individuals of which 1797 were males and 1770 were females.

METHODS

The village people were the major source of primary data. The secondary data were collected from the Block Development Offices and educational institutions. For collecting the primary data general observation of the villages was made and household information in Preliminary Schedule Form was collected. The Preliminary Schedule was used for the purpose of the household census. Data analysis was done with the help of statistical software namely, SPSS V 16. In some cases Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word was also used. The tabulated data were then analyzed with various correlates to highlight the thematic issues of the study and represented in the form of tables.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Universal access to healthcare is a prerequisite for achievement of health and human rights. Access to health facilities is a matter of serious concern in the rural areas across the country and more particularly in the tribal belts. In the present study, in order to understand the accessibility of the tribal families to health institutions, the distance of the sub-centres and the primary health centres were taken into account.

The table below shows the community wise variation while accessing the sub-centres in the studied areas:

TABLE - 2
Showing the distance of the sub-centres (Community wise) from the studied families

		Number of Families												
Distance (in km)	Santal Sa		Malpahari		Kora		Munda		Oraon		Total			
(III KIII)	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Within 1	223	37.8	0	0.0	18	51.4	21	42.0	0	0.0	262	33.3		
1-3	328	55.6	48	100.0	17	48.6	von 8	16.0	49	76.6	450	57.2		
Above 3	39	6.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	21	42.0	15	23.4	75	9.5		
Total	590	100.0	48	100.0	35	100.0	50	100.0	64	100.0	787	100.0		

It is still a matter of concern as it is evidenced from the above table that a total of 9.5% families among the studied communities have to access sub-centres above 3 km distance and 57.2% have access to sub-centres within 1-3 kms while 33.3% have access within 1 km. The table below shows the distance covered by the studied communities while accessing the first referral health units:

TABLE - 3
Showing the distance of the primary health centres (PHC) among the studied communities

	Laur (Steam	Number of Families														
Distance	Santal		Malpahari		Kora		Munda		Oraon		Total					
(in km)	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%				
Within 3	180	30.5	0	0.0	18	51.4	7	14.0	0	0.0	205	26.0				
3-5	102	17.3	21	43.8	0	0.0	8	16.0	28	43.8	159	20.2				
Above 5	308	52.2	27	56.3	17	48.6	35	70.0	36	56.3	423	53.7				
Total	590	100.0	48	100.0	35	100.0	50	100.0	64	100.0	787	100.0				

It is clear from the table above that among all the communities under study only 26% had access to primary health institutions within 3 km distance while 20.2% families had access to PHCs between 3-5 kms and large section i.e. 53.7% families had PHCs above 5 km distance.

The tribals reported during the field study that they do not get regular medicines from the sub-centres and rural hospitals, the OPD (Outdoor Patient Department) and Emergency services are irregular as the doctors remain absent most of the times, the behaviour of the health personnels towards the patients and their relatives are not gentle. The sub-centres in most of the villages were run in rented houses which remained in dilapidated condition. The sub-centres remained closed for most of the times and the staffs were either absent or even if they were present, it was only once or twice a week.

The ward beds and toilets for in-house admitted patients in health centres were unhealthy, unhygienic. The villagers complained that due to lack of infrastructure, absence of doctors and nurses in the Emergency section of the hospital and due to the referral tendency of the doctors they have to shift their patients at odd hours of night to the District Medical College Hospital at Malda Town located very far away from the studied blocks like Gazole, Bamongola and Habibpur, where communication facilities are unavailable.

It was learnt from interviewing the villagers that the cost of diagnosis and treatment is another reason that pervades the villagers from accessing western medicines as they do not get free medicines from the hospitals. Hence it is difficult for them to bear the cost of medicines required for treatment due to their low socio-economic status. Moreover, there are huge amount of fake medicines in the medicine shops which cost higher than the original medicines. The ignorant villagers often fall easy prey to this unscrupulous practice.

The family welfare services provided to the mothers, children and family planning programmes have failed to reach the anticipated level of success as the staffs in the sub-centre remain absent mostly.

Drinking water and sanitation are the two most significant indicators that shape the quality of health. In most tribal villages, safe drinking water was inaccessible and as a result, the tribal families had to depend on unhygienic water sources. It was a very common picture in the tribal villages for the women to fetch drinking water from sources that were even upto one kilometre away from their homes. Water scarcity was a common problem of the study area. Water lavels remained low in these parts due to the topographic set up. The problem of water was severe in the summer months when the

water tables go deep down and the deep wells and ponds dry up. Sources of drinking water were not sufficient enough to meet the crisis. Another problem was that if a village tube well failed to work due to some mechanical fault, the concerned personnel from the local panchayats did not turn up timely to repair it and the villagers faced tremendous problem.

The table below shows the drinking water sources of the studied communities:

TABLE - 4
Showing the community wise drinking water facility

Sources of		Number of Families of the Community													
Drinking Water	Santal		Malpahari		Kora		Munda		Oraon		Total				
water	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%			
Well	293	49.7	4	8.3	19	54.3	0	0.0	18	28.1	334	42.4			
Tube Well	252	42.7	44	91.7	3	8.6	49	98.0	43	67.2	391	49.7			
Water Supply	45	7.6	0	0.0	13	37.1	1	2.0	3	4.7	62	7.9			
Total	590	100.0	48	100.0	35	100.0	50	100.0	64	100.0	787	100.0			

The above table shows that among the studied communities the Koras (54.3%), Santals (49.7%), Oraons 28.1%), Malpaharis (8.3%) and Mundas (0%) used well ater for drinking and other purposes. Mundas (98%), Malpaharis (91.7%), Oraons (67.2%), Koras (8.6%) and 3antals (42.7%) used water from tube wells while Malpaharis (37.1%), Santals (7.6%), Oraons (4.7%), Mundas (2%) and Malpaharis (0%) used pipeline water supply.

The use of tube well for drinking water purposes was most among the Mundas followed by the Malpaharis, Ozons, Santals and Koras. Well water for drinking water

purpose was mostly used by the Koras followed by the Santals, Oraons and Malpaharis. Pipeline water supply use was only limited to few families which included mostly Koras followed by Santals, Oraons and Mundas.

Most of the tribal families are reluctant to use sanitary toilets because of their traditional beliefs that regard these amenities as impure. In some tribal areas some sanitary programmes were undertaken but they were unsuccessful.

The table below shows the sanitation facilities among the studied communities:

TABLE - 5
Showing community wise sanitation facility

		Number of Families of the Community														
Sanitation	Santal		Malpahari		Kora		Munda		Oraon		Total					
Facility	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%				
Field	494	83.7	48	100.0	19	54.3	46	92.0	56	87.5	663	84.2				
Non-Sanitary	38	6.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	4.0	4	6.3	44	5.6				
Sanitary	58	9.8	0	0.0	16	45.7	2	4.0	4	6.3	80	10.2				
Total	590	100.0	48	100.0	35	100.0	50	100.0	64	100.0	787	100.0				

The above table shows that among the studied communities the Malpaharis (100%), Mundas (92%), Oraons (87.5%), Santals (83.7%) and Koras (54.3%) used field while the use of sanitary toilets was maximum among Koras (45.7%) followed by Santals (9.8%), Oraons (6.3%), Mundas (4%) and Malpaharis (0%). The rest i.e. Santals (6.4%), Oraons (6.3%), Mundas (4%), Koras (0%) and Malpaharis (0%) used non-sanitary toilets.

It is seen that the use of sanitary toilets was most among the Koras followed by the Santals, Oraons and Mundas. The Malpaharis had no sanitary toilet facilities and all the families used the surrounding field or bushes as their natural toilet. The use of non-sanitary toilet facilities existed only among the Santal, Oraons and Mundas.

Thus it is clear that the poor civic amenities in the tribal villages were another reason that compelled the tribal villagers to live an unhealthy lifestyle and fall prey to a number of diseases. The foremost among these been the lack of safe drinking water sources that makes them susceptible to seasonal and water borne diseases. The poor tribals depend on the tube wells and wells mainly under the supervision and maintenance of the local

panchayats and block level offices for their primary source of drinking water and the villagers in some of the studied villages reportedly told that there is a substantial lack in the number of tube wells or wells in their villages and the ratio of tube wells to the number of families remain poor. As a result the pressure is high on the village tube wells. In such situation they depend on the water of nearby ponds and ditches for drinking bathing and washing which is extremely unhygienic The problem aggravates when the tube wells goes out of order and the maintenance staff does not turn up for weeks or even months for repair. The crisis becomes acute in summer months when the water label goes down. Most of the wells and water bodies get dried up. The women and young tribal girls have to travel long distances to neighboring villages to fetch water. This compels them do depend on unhygienic water sources for daily uses and drinking purposes

which affect their health badly. Also there were seasonal variations in diseases among the tribal communities in the studied blocks and the type of diseases and their varying threat across seasons is reflected from their unhealthy lifestyle and inadequate civic amenities that affect health.

TABLE - 6 showing the seasonal variations in diseases in the studied blocks

Blocks	add a second and a second and a	Seasonal diseases	contlox colored and grow
	Summer	Rainy and 1915	Winter
Old Malda	Chicken pox, dysentery, jaundice, stomach problems, fever	Filaria, typhoid, diarrohea, dysentery, skin disease, fever	Cold and cough, respiratory problem, pain in joints, fever pain in throat and chest
Gazole	Malaria, chicken pox, dysentery, jaundice, stomach problems, fever	Filaria, malaria, kala azar, typhoid, diarrohea, dysentery, skin disease, fever	Cold and cough, respiratory problem, pain in joints, fever, pain in throat and chest
Habibpur	Malaria, chicken pox, dysentery, jaundice, stomach problems, fever	Filaria, typhoid, kala azar, diarrohea, dysentery, skin disease, fever	Cold and cough, respiratory problem, pain in joints, fever, pain in throat and chest
Bamongola	Malaria, chicken pox, dysentery, jaundice, stomach problems, fever	Filaria, kala azar, typhoid, diarrohea, dysentery, skin disease, fever	Cold and cough, respiratory problem, pain in joints, fever, pain in throat and chest

The above table shows that the most common seasonal diseases among the tribal communities were chicken pox, dysentery, jaundice, stomach problems, sever and malaria during summer, filaria, kala azar, typhoid, diarrohea, dysentery, skin disease and fever during rainy season and cold and cough, respiratory problem, pain in joints, fever, pain in throat and chest during winter.

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Malaria and kala azar were most common during summer and rainy season respectively in the blocks of Cazole, Habibpur and Bamongola while cold and cough, respiratory problems, fever, pain in joints, throat and chest were common among the tribals during winter half the blocks under study.

It is also well known that diseases are of basically of two types - communicable and non-communicable. The main carriers of communicable diseases are air, water and vector. Among the diseases that existed among the tribals arthritis, asthma, diabetes, hypertension, diarrohea, dysentery, jaundice, kala azar, sex specific problems, malaria, filarial, old age diseases, physical weakness, paralysis, rickets, skin diseases, stomach pain are all non-communicable diseases while fever and leprosy can be both communicable and non-communicable. Pox and tuberculosis are both communicable diseases.

The table below shows the attack of communicable and non-communicable diseases among the studied communities:

TABLE - 7 showing the attack of communicable and non-communicable diseases among the studied communities

Communities	Commu	nicable	Non-Com	description ANA	
	No.	%	No.	(30 % a) %	Total
Santal	511	49.6	520	50.4	1031
Walpahari	10	27.0	27	73.0	37
Kora	esensai 610 te	16.7	mone 30 serios	83.3	36
Munda	26	83.9	5	16.1	31
Oracn	70	45.8	83	54.2	153
Total	623	48.4	665	51.6	1288

The above table shows that 51.6% among the studied munities suffered from non-communicable diseases 48.4% suffered from communicable diseases. The communicable diseases were mostly among mundas (83.9%) followed by the Santals (49.6%), (45.8%), Malpaharis (27%) and Koras (16.7%).

Non-communicable diseases were existent mostly among the Koras (83.3%) followed by the Malpaharis (73%), Oraons (54.2%), Santals (50.4%) and Mundas (16.1%).

The table below shows the carriers of communicable diseases among the studied communities:

TABLE - 8 showing the carriers of communicable diseases among the studied communities

Communitie	Wate	er Borne	Air B	orne	Vector	Borne	Other		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	vos alemana
Sintal	564	54.7	90	8.7	16	1.6	361	35.0	1031
Valgahari	7	18.9	8	21.6	tibunt 2 i s	5.4	20	54.1	37

TABLE - 8 Continued.

Communitie	Water Borne		Air Borne		Vector Borne		Other		Total
	No. % No. % No.	No.	%	· No.	%	ls Junder			
Kora	6	16.7	4	11.1	7	19.4	19	52.8	36
Munda	20	64.5	5 6 5	16.1	2	6.5	4	12.9	31
Oraon	81	52.9	10	6.5	0	0.0	62	40.5	153
Total	678	52.6	117	9.1	27	2.1	466	36.2	1288

The above table shows that 52.6% diseases among the tribals were water borne, 9.1% were air borne, 2.1% were vector borne and 36.2% were carried by other mediums. The threats from water borne diseases were most common among the Mundas (64.5%) followed by the Santals (54.7%), Oraons (52.9%), Malpaharis (18.9%) and Koras (16.7%). The spread of air borne diseases were most common among the Malpaharis (21.6%) followed by Mundas (16.1%),

Koras (11.1%), Santals (8.7%) and Oraons (6.5%). Vector borne diseases were most common among the

Koras (19.4%), Mundas (6.5%), Malpaharis (5.4%), Santals (1.6%) and Oraons (0%). Other mediums of disease carriers were most common among the Malpaharis (54.1%) followed by Koras (52.8%), Oraons (40.5%), Santals (35%) and Mundas (12.9%).

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As we all know that there is a close relation between educational achievements, health practices and the threat of diseases, so in the present study an attempt was made to understand it. The table below shows the relation between the educational level and the threat of diseases:

TABLE - 9 showing educational level and the threat of diseases

		Having Diseases						
Education Level	No.	%	Yes	%				
Pre-literate Pre-literate	1093	60.3	721	39.7				
Upto Primary	434	64.4	240	35.6				
Upto H.S	540	75.3	177	24.7				
Graduate +	28	96.6	feredtrom.com	3.4				
Total	2095	64.8	1139	35.2				

(The present table has been prepared excluding 'not applicable' category)

The above table shows that among the studied population a total of 64.8% did not suffer from diseases while 35.2% suffered from diseases. The threat from diseases was maximum among those tribals who could sign or could not sign (39.7%) followed by those having primary level education 35.6%, higher secondary level 24.7% and graduation and above level of education only 3.4%).

It is well known that the tribals believe in traditional

medicine. They have their traditional healers upon whom they have considerable faith and confidence. Their perception of health and diseases is mostly attributed to wrath of god, mischief of evil spirits and magic of human beings. Treatment is done by appeasing gods and controlling of evil spirits through counter magic and of course, herbal medicines. The role of quacks, *Ojhas/Gunins* or traditional medicinemen in healing practices is prominent among the tribal

mmunities under study. They perform *pujas* to get dof diseases. *Sitala Puja* during the Bengali month of *Baisakh* is a common practice. They also offer animals birds during *pujas* if they get cured and their wishes tellfilled to show honour to the goddess.

Loss of appetite and reluctance in taking food was commonly observed among infants and children. They also more prone to seasonal illnesses that are minor nature. There were also few instances of mental liness, fits and epilepsy among the studied families. Discontinuation of polio drops and irregularity in the costnatal immunization coverage due to ignorance, arelessness and lethargy was also another feature observed in their attitude towards health and illness. They considered minor diseases as normal and they do not go for early detection, prevention, treatment and cure. They treated minor diseases normally with raditional medicines. It was only when diseases turn critical that they went for western treatment.

It will be worthy to mention here that it was observed curing field study that there was a growing inclination adopt western medicines and healthcare facilities mong the young generation tribal members. They referred adopting western healthcare facilities and edicine because they were easy to follow, effective, me saving and provided quicker relief in times of crisis. The yester generation tribals preferred traditional ethods of treatment. Even a mixed view and faith wards both the systems were observed to be held by the provided provided to be held by the system in case of serious illness. Thus, it is evident from the study that the tribals availed estern healthcare system but they were also deeply there-wined with traditional practices of healthcare.

CONCLUSION

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Tribal scenario of health is basically different from eir counterpart in the non-tribal fold. Tribal suffers ore than the non-tribal areas in respect of health and ealth services. Generally, access to healthcare among e tribals is limited due to many factors which include overty and lack of awareness among them.

Communication problems still remain in the remote lages which always hamper the timely accessibility modern healthcare. Irregular attendance of medical

staffs at village level health services is an impediment to the availability of healthcare which is badly needed by this poor tribal population.

Health personnels are not adequate to cater to the service of tribals who mostly live in relatively remote areas. Lack of goodwill and insensitivity on the part of a section of health staffs and doctors alongwith poor and inadequate health service remain as a major barrier in the proper outreach of health rights among the public in general and the studied communities in particular. It was noticed during visits to the rural hospitals that some doctors were busy with their private practice and devoted major time and effort for that rather than attending patients in the hospitals. Some doctors also remained absent in the hospital during duty hours and remained busy attending private patients in staff quarters and charged high fees from the patients which included patients from poor tribal families. During such situation if the villagers opt for private nursing homes going beyond their capacity, the private nursing homes refuse treatment or admission for critical patients and patients with low socio-economic backgrounds thinking that they would not be able to pay off medical charges. These creates delay in proper treatment at right time for critical patients and have to accept harsh realities in the delivery of health services and the health conditions either worsen or they have to go untreated.

It was also learnt from the patients and the villagers that while getting admission in Malda Medical College and Hospital they have to pay heavy amount to the local agents/brokers. Moreover, beds can be booked by special recommendations and influence of political leaders and the general public have to suffer for this. Reportedly, the behavior of the nurses at duty in the wards, emergency department and outdoor services are inhuman and negligent in their duties and responsibilities. Since the nurses are permanent employees of the State Government, they are not committed in their work and keep themselves busy in gossip while behaving rudely with the families of the patients. They do not even care for any higher instructions and live under the protective umbrella of their employees' union. The only work they does is that of maintaining official records of the patient while untrained and unrecognized sweepers and other Group

D staffs carry out duties at the operation theatre, stitching, giving injections and other duties. Patients' parties have to engage special private caretakers for the patients. Even the hospital authorities are well aware about this practice and some of the officials who wanted to keep their name and designation confidential also admitted about the malpractices going around.

As they are very poor they expect the medicine from primary health centre at nominal prices or free of cost which is neither provided nor available in the health centre. Inadequate supply of medicine and infrastructure is very much absent and it aggravates the situation of healthcare in proper time of needs. Tribals on the one side are illiterate and non-aware about the health problems but at the same time apathy of the local governmental support cannot also be ruled out.

After analysis of the above situation it can be pointed out that to improve the accessibility of the tribals to healthcare facilities the actual medical services in the rural areas need to be improved alongwith the infrastructural development. The referral systems at all the levels should be thoroughly revamped and properly developed so that the tribals receive proper treatment

at the proper time. Basic amenities like safe drinking water and sanitation facilities also need to be improved for better health.

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SYNCRETISM IN OLABIBI IN BENGAL

BINITA BASU AND SRIJA MANDAL

Abstract

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Syncretism is the process by which two or more mesendent cultural systems, or elements thereof, conjoin meether at a given time and space to form altogether a new and distinct system. Olabibi, the Bengali Goddess also known Claichandi, Oladevi and Bibima is worshipped primarily make southern part of South 24 Parganas. As the name moles, the Bengali word 'Ola' meaning 'cholera' and 'otha' meaning 'appearance, that further suggests Goddess Olabibi sworshipped to ward off cholera. Although, according to me myth Goddess Olabibi is patronized by Muslim thinkers, me has been worshipped both by the Hindus and Muslims their different cultures with full faith and reverence mough the purpose of worship has changed. What was Olaand for the Hindus was Ola-Bibi for the Muslims. This pager is an attempt to analyse the process of syncretism mough the folk cult Olabibi in Bengal

India is incredible for its cultural and religious diversity.

People belonging to different cultures and traditions from the people belonging to different cultures and traditions from the people without end in the people without ethnic and sectarian the people without ethnic and sectarian the people without of Indian civilization.

Syncretism denotes the combination or alliance of cooposing religious or philosophical doctrines, often with

political undertones that results in public and private rituals and commonly accepted local practices which appear to the observer to link orientations that are normally disparate, if not disjunctive [Peter J. Claus and Margaret A. Mills, 2003] .The process of syncretism occurs largely due to long time and continued interaction of different cultural systems; howsoever they may be opposed to each other, theoretically and conceptually.

ed 'bel' is a Muslim term meaning 'dignified, actic

Religious syncretism exhibits blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions. Behra [2000 cited in Bera, Mukhopadhyay and Sarkar, 2003] defines 'Religious syncretism refers to a situation where religious miscegenation or fusion is believed to have taken place'.

The varied ecological systems in West Bengal had tremendous impact upon human existential factors. These factors shaped the way of living and social practices. The interaction between environment and human existence are often reflected through belief systems. Hinduism and Islam have been closely connected in Bengal and given rise to a very important tradition of religious syncretism manifested through literature and mixed cult to *Bonbibi*, *Olabibi*, *Satya Pir* and to the shrines of Sufi saints.

Olabibi, the Bengali Goddess is worshipped primarily in the southern part of South 24 Parganas. The term 'Ola' has been taken from Bengali dictionary meaning 'cholera' and 'bibi' is a Muslim term meaning 'dignified, aristocrat lady'. The Goddess is also known as Olaichandi, Oladevi and Bibima. Goddess Olabibi derives her name from 'Olaotha McNamara (1870) reported the genesis of the term 'Ola- ota', used by the natives to describe cholera. We know the Bengali word 'Ola' meaning 'cholera' and 'otha' meaning 'appearance', that further suggests Goddess Olabibi is worshipped to ward off cholera by Bengalis, both Hindus and Muslims at the grassroots. Thus Goddess Olabibi may be seen as a creation of Bengali's encounter with the diseases arising out of environmental conditions. Although, due to the development of modern day medical sciences, cholera is not considered as that much fatal or epidemic type like past. The interesting part is that still today also this 'Olabibi' deity is worshipped both by the Hindus and Muslims with their different cultures with full faith and reverence though the purpose of worship has changed.

This paper is an attempt to analyse the process of syncretism through the folk cult *Olabibi* in Bengal.

Ralph W. Nicholas portrayed two versions of the 'Olabibi Gan' (song of Olabibi) in his book 'Fruits of Worship: Practical Religion in Bengal' (2003). Song of Olabibi recounts the story of how Goddess Olabibi was venerated by the devotees. Nicholas described the first version of the 'Olabibi Gan' which was performed by a group under the leadership of Sri Kunja Bihari Nandi, an Utkal shreni Brahmin of Amgechya village.

Ralph W. Nicholas (2003: 202-204) narrates:

"Narayan decided that he should have worshipers among Muslims as he did among Hindus and decided that the best way to manage this was to be born a Muslim. The Badshah's daughter lived a secluded life, as became a Muslim woman of high birth. She saw only her mother and a few courtiers, the sixteen serving women who constantly attended her, and her religious teacher who came regularly to read kitab and Koran to her. One day the teacher told her that she had heard all of the Muslim scriptures and that it would benefit her more to have a bath in a river. She asked her mother's permission to leave the palace for a bath. The mother consented with the provision that the entire path from the houses to the banks of the Yamuna be enclosed in cloth and that the sixteen serving women go with her.

The arrangements were made and the girls were playing in the water when a lotus came floating past. The lotus was Narayan himself, transformed by his Maya or power of illusion. The princess sniffed the lotus and unknown to anyone, the seed of *Narayan* entered her body as the perfume of flower. Later they returned to the palace and as the days went by, it became increasingly clear to the princess that she was pregnant. First the serving women learned of this; then her mother found her crying and discovered her secret. Her mother questioned her closely but could find no connection with a man through which the girl might have become pregnant. The serving women urged the queen to arrange the girl's marriage as quickly as possible. The queen said that she had long been requesting the Badshah to arrange her marriage but he thought that there was no groom suitable for his daughter.

The gueen went to the Badshah and told him of their fortune. He was shocked. She asked him again to arrange for the girl's marriage and criticized him for not having done it long ago. The Badshah summoned his chief minister (ujir) to discuss the problem. He proposed to the minister that he have the girl killed outright but the minister warned him of the great sin of killing women, Brahmans and cows. The minister went to the princess and again questioned her closely. She told him the story of the lotus and also suggested that there might have been a man watching from a distance as she bathed. The minister discounted these possibilities and returned to the Badshah without any explanation of the mysterious pregnancy. The minister suggested that the princess be confined to the prison with sentries and with thirty-two serving women to be with her constantly. When the child is born, we can examine his face and determine which man it resembles; the father shall be punished with death', the minister concluded.

The scene is shifted to the prison. Narayan spoke to the princess from within her womb. He requested that she give him a tiny piece of cloth with a small hole in it so that he might not be born naked. The princess was understandably astounded to hear a voice coming from her belly and told him of her unhappiness. He said, Well, I know everything, but for the time being I need a small piece of cloth'. She tore a piece from the end of her sari. Immediately,- the labour pain began; the child was born

the illusory power of a deity], this is the maya of this is the maya of Narayan). Only a flower lay on at the place of delivery.

me serving women immediately reported to the king and strange disappearance of the princess's child. metarious kings summoned his minister, upbraided him proposed the unsuccessful plan, and ordered take the princess into a jungle filled with wild where she would be killed. The minister did as ordered and abandoned the princess in the jungle standard food or shelter. She began to lament, 'Hai Allah. raised in the seclusion of the zenana. Now I am the jungle surrounded by wild animals. Yet, I that I am free from sin.' Immediately Olabibi and addressed her as 'Dear mother.' [Here, again, s maya, the male God Narayan appearing as emale Olabibi]. Olabibi described herself as the child and told her that she could suffer no harm, maso dangerous place, because she was under the of Olabibi.

down his son with cholera. Olabibi reappeared down his son's life if he would worship her with an of sirani He quickly did this and the son was do life. The minister took to the Badshah some down the source of the sirani and the minister down of his meeting with Olabibi and his down to life. The Badshah was contemptuous dolabibi is a goddess of the Bengalis and the

Colabibi presented herself to the Badshah; she to worship her. He told her that he did not her and demanded proof that she was the goddess she claimed to be. 'There is a jagaddal mmovably heavy stone that weights down the in our pilgrimage place at Mecca. That stone is ded with no support. I would like you to show the me here,' the Badshah challenged her.

instantly produced the stone. The *Badshah* acknowledged *Olabib* Vs divine status, then asked her who she was and how she came there. She described herself as the child of his unmarried daughter. The Badshah then realised the significance of the earlier events and worshipped *Olabibi*. 'From that time,' the performers concluded, 'the puja of *Olabibi* became prevalent in the *Kaliyuga*'."

The myth of *Olabibi* is transmitted through the oral medium, handwritten manuscripts and printed material. Oral transmission takes place in the context of teacher-pupil relationship and sometimes between the leader of one artistic group and the group members. The leader determines which parts of the myth are to be sung, which recited or enacted in the village and which part deleted entirely.

Handwritten manuscripts are generally transmitted either through the guru-shishya relationship or through the family. In eighteenth century, the manuscripts of Olabibi gan was written on country-made paper and in twentieth century was written with blotting fountain pens in school notebooks.

It is found that Goddess Olabibi was worshipped alone or in association with six or eight other deities. This group of deities are called Nai bibi or Sat bibi. The seven or nine bibis are sisters and are held to be responsible for cure of different diseases prevalent primarily in tropical zone. The names of nine bibis are: Asan bibi, Ola bibi, Tola bibi, Jhola bibi, Kuroni bibi, Mari bibi, Jhari bibi, Darbari bibi and Jhentuney bibi Some scholars consider that the seven deities are Saptamatrikas. Some people believe the goddess is similar to South Indian Goddess Meenakshi and her sisters. Bera, Mukhopadhyay and Sarkar (2003) cite a striking observation. They found that at Muslim dominated area the personal attire and faces of the icon are looked like Muslim girl. She is portrayed wearing a cap, scarf and ornaments. On her feet she wore nagra shoes and sometimes also socks. In one hand she held a staff to remove the difficulties of those who prayed for her help. While to Hindus Olabibi resembles the Goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati, portrayed as a lady with deep yellow skin wearing a blue sari and adorned with ornaments. She is portrayed with extended arms and seated with a child in her lap. __narblinb to assubbog and

As cholera is usually outbreak at summer season, Goddess Olabibi is worshipped during the month of the Magh and Falgun (month of February and March). However, outbreaks of cholera have been reduced considerably by advancements in medicine people come from far-off places to pray to the Goddess for cure of their loved ones. Usually priesthood is done by a Muslim fakir. Daily pujas are simple and involves lighting of lamp, incense etc. Sweets and flowers are offered to the goddess. Though Goddess Olabibi is worshipped both by the Hindus and Muslims, there are some differences among the communities regarding how she was worshipped. Hindu devotees offer fruits, sweetmeats, sugar puffs, betel leaves, betel nuts and flowers to the goddess. Chadars are spread over Olabibi's mound by only Muslim devotees, whose wishes have been granted, whereas Hindu devotees offer clay horses to the goddess.

David Arnold cites the early nineteenth century report of J. Jameson (1820, 27, 170 - 175.) in identifying especially lower Bengal as the "homeland" of cholera. (Arnold 1986. 121). McNamara (1870, pp.45-98) had traced the history of cholera in Calcutta before 1817. The story goes that at an early period of eighteenth century, one day an old woman was wandering in the woods and stumbled over a large stone which turned out to be the symbol of cholera and worship of this stone was the only true prophylactic against the contraction of cholera. Probably around 1720, an English merchant, Mr. Duncan gave Rs 4000/- for a temple to the goddess 'Ola-bibi' In 1750, Mr. Duncan again donated Rs 6000/- for the erection of a second temple to the goddess 'Ola-bibi' in Calcutta. The old rude stone was transferred to the new abode and a somewhat elaborate idol was constructed. R.S. Bray (1996, p. 159) described that the new idol was of a carcass on which a vulture is feeding, on the back of the vulture sits the goddess with four hands. On her right sits Goddess Mansha, the goddess of snakes and next to her sits Shiva, the destroyer. Next to it was a suppliant woman praying to Shiva for the life of her husband who is depicted as dying of cholera. On the other side of the goddess are the idols of Shitala, the goddess of smallpox and then Shasthi, the goddess of children.

Another instance on syncretistic tradition of *Olabibi* is found in Sunderban. Bera, Mukhopadhyay and Sarkar (2003) conducted field investigation at Raidighi Dakshinpara, Mathurapur II block in Sunderban. They noticed that in one side of the *Ateshwartala* than there are Hindu deity like *Ateshwar*, *Narayani*, *Panchananda thakur* and others who are officiated by a Brahman priest while on the other side of the same than there is the place of Muslim deities like *Nai bibi* which is worshipped by a Muslim *fakir* and Shri Srimanta Sau, a Hindu sing the song of *bibima*.

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A shrine of *Olabibi* is also situated at Shibpur in Howrah district. This temple is over 250 years old. Earlier there was a mound with a makeshift temple made of bamboo cane that served as the temple of *Olabibi*. The present structure came up about 45 years ago. The temple is built with bricks and cement. The roof of this temple is made of brick-tiles. In this temple, priesthood is done by a Muslim family.

The family members visit the temple twice a week (Thursday and Sunday) to clean and offer prayers. 4lt has become a family tradition. Our grandfather was the sevait of the temple and my father also maintained the tradition. We would often get to hear stories of the deity from our grandmother', said Ajmira Khatun, one of the member of this family. She also said, 'there is no discrimination between male and female. As a daughter of this family, we can also serve the goddess 'Olabibi'. There is no particular hymn for the worship. Local people lights the lamp and incense at the temple. The devotees offer flowers, fruits and sweets to the goddess. Hindu devotees also take a vow in front of the Goddess Olabibi and they offer clay horses to the goddess if their wishes have been granted.

From above discussion it clearly reveals that early nineteenth century especially lower Bengal is the homeland of cholera. Naturally, this is the locale where the *Olabibi* cult evolved and was related to indigenous healing practices. This folk deity got wide acceptance through the preaching of *fakirs*, *pirs* and *darbes* where religious faith and belief played no bar at all. The cultural environment of syncretism is too important as it indicates the broad based foundation of this cult.

Firstly, in the Hindu majority areas goddess Olabibi is known as Olaichandi or Oladevi. In the Muslim

dominated areas she was called *Olabibi* or *bibima* where the term 'bibi' suggesting the Muslim influence and 'ma' signifying the Hindu influence. So, syncretism can be seen in the name.

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bi m Secondly, according to the myth, Goddess Olabibi is worshipped as the incarnation of God Narayan. So, the acceptance of a Muslim girl, daughter of a Muslim parenthood by also Hindus comes under the purview of the process of syncretism. Some experts also said that epidemics and natural disasters brought Islam to imbibe the cultic Saktism of Hinduism. Goddess Olabibi is considered as a super imposition of the Hindu concept of the Mother divine with the monotheistic Islamic deity, Allah.

Thirdly, the story-of goddess *Olabibi* as narrated by Nicholas also justify that scribing the episode of *Olabibi* was positively patronized by Muslim thinkers. The story of this folk deity got wide acceptance through the preaching of *fakirs* and *pirs* where religious faith and belief played no bar at all.

It has been observed that in Muslim dominated areas in Sunderban, a very few idols of *Olabibi* wear *nagra* shoe which is typical Muslim type. But now all the idols are shoeless which indicates the impact of Hinduization, as most of the idol makers of the Sunderban region belong to Hindu background.

Again, the veiy term Worship' of an idol does not fit in the normative pattern of Islamic mode of religious sacrament. So, as per faith in Islam there is no place for idol worship while Hindus believe in idol worship. The case study of Sunderban portrays Muslim fakir officiates the ritual of Olabibi in front of idols of Naibibi where Hindu, Christian offer puja without any hesitation. Unlike other Hindu Gods and Goddesses Naibibi sits facing the east and the priest obviously faces the west while worshipping her, a tradition that is prescribed in Hindu faith. Similarly, in the temple of Olabibi, which is situated at Shibpur, the mound of Olabibi faces towards the south which is also maintained the Hindu belief.

These two instances certainly indicate a harmonious coexistence between people of various religious faiths.

Lastly, Muslim devotees offer hajat which consists of fruits, sweet cakes (batasa), parched rice and puffed rice to goddess Olabibi. Both Hindus and Muslims accept the offerings as prasad which is linguistically Hindu origin. Moreover, Hindu married women offer vermillion to the goddess which also indicates Hindu influence.

From the above note it is apparent that the people of lower Bengal are struggling over epidemics and there is Goddess *Olabibi*- the cure deity of cholera is deeply enmeshed with the local people. *Olabibi* is worshipped in all over Bengal irrespective of religious distinctions. Aliments removed discriminations among the people. What was *Ola-Chandi* for the Hindus was *Ola-Bibi* for the Muslims. Race and religion was never an obstacle in the joint prayer of so vast a people in Bengal. The amalgamation of people's belief system forms a system that was originally different as of two cases of religion, has laid the stage for the process of formation of syncretism in lower Bengal.

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

Bhajan Chandra Barman

Abstract

One of the weaker sections in our society is Scheduled Caste community and their position is the worst in Indian society. The caste system separated them from the rest of the society in such a way that they were denied even the basic human rights that one must enjoy in order to ensure one's bare existence. The Scheduled Castes (SC) remained socially outcaste, economically dependent politically powerless, and culturally backward (Mungeker, 1999).

The present study aims to study the socio-economic condition of SC population of Cooch Behar district in West Bengal. The study is mainly based on secondary sources of data. The latest data have been collected from the Census of India 2011, Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. Data have been analyzed into simple percentage base.

As per Census 2011, it is found that among total population in the district, 50.17% population belongs to Scheduled Castes. Cooch Behar district occupies 6th position in terms of absolute number of Scheduled Castes population in the state. The sex ratio in case of SC population of the district is 941 (No. of female per 1000 males). Literacy rate among the SC population is 49.45%, whereas the total literacy rate in the district is 74.78%. The work participation rate among SC is 52.13% in the district. Scheduled Caste cultivator is highest (60.50%) in

this district. In this district 48.86% SC population are non-workers. Regarding housing condition, it is found that 53.84% SC households use plastic as the roof material. 72% SC households use tube well as the main source of drinking water and 11% households have no any source of drinking water facility in the premises. It is observed that around 81% SC households have electricity as main sources of lighting. Till now around 37% SC households have no lighting. It is found that 58.13% SC households have no latrine facility and the evacuate in the open field. 49.34% SC households have no own latrine facility but they only use public latrine.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the weaker sections in Indian society is Scheduled Caste community and the position of the people is the worst in society. The caste system separated them from the rest of the society in such a way that the were denied even the basic human rights that one must enjoy in order to ensure one's bare existence. It prove to be a divine privilege to the upper castes enjoying the virtual monopoly of education, industry, trade commerce and so on; on the other hand, it spelt disaster for the lower castes. This is because the latter were assigned the tasks involving only manual labour. The were, thus prevented from earning/ accumulating wealth, which restricted their needs to bare existence

They came to be wholly dependent on the upper castes of their bare existence. As a result, the Scheduled Castes SC) remained socially outcaste, economically dependent, politically powerless, and culturally ackward (Mungeker, 1999).

They suffer from chronic inadequacy of housing, dothing and even primary medical facilities. The incidence of poverty and unemployment is much more pronounced among Scheduled Castes in comparison to mer backward sections of the society. Majority of them landless and below poverty line, possess meager assets and are exclusively dependent upon wage labour, subsistence farming and low income generating activities. They are the victims and exploited by and arge, of per-nicious practices such as untouchability, monded labour, child labour and so on. It has been rightly and that 'no nation can progress without the progress stall the sections of the society. Thus, there is an urgent med for their upliftment and protection from social, economic and educational injustices and all forms of exploitation in right earnest. Different types of policies or the development of SC population have been taken the Government of India. However, these policies not been implemented effectively and hence it is not surprising that SC still remain far away from mainstream development in the country.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the study is to analyze the scio-economic background or situation of Scheduled stes population in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal terms of demography, sex ratio, education, health, participation rate and some social amenities such shousing condition, sanitation, household size, sources water, sanitation etc. Such an analysis, indeed, is very pful in building the socio-economic background of scheduled caste people.

WETHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based on secondary sources of The latest data have been collected from the Census India 2011, for Cooch Behar district of West Bengal

State published from the Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi. In this study a comparison is made between district total population and Scheduled Castes population in terms of household, population, sex ratio, work participation rate etc. Data have been analyzed into simple percentage base.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cooch Behar district occupies 6th position in terms of absolute number of Scheduled Castes population in the state. However, in terms of proportion of population under SC category with respect of total population of the district Cooch Behar has recorded the maximum proportion in the state at 50.1%. The sex ratio of the district is 942 (No. of female per 1000 males) which is lower than the state's sex ratio (950) and it ranks 12th in the State. In case of SCs population it ranks 13th (941). Thus we see that sex ratio for SC population is low as compared to the sex ratio of the district. Literacy rate of the district is 74.8% where in the state it is 76.3%. In respect of literacy, Cooch Behar district occupies 11th rank in the State.

According to 2011 census, there are 665720 households in Cooch Behar district of which 337085 households (50.63%) belong to SC (Table-1). As far as the total population is concerned, it is found that among total population in the district 50.17 % population belong to SC. As per 2011 census, literacy rate among the SC population is 49.45%, whereas the total literacy rate in the district is 74.78%. So, the literacy gap is 25.33%. If we look out at gender wise, SC male and SC female literacy rates are 56.50 % and 43.50% respectively. Again, literacy among Scheduled Castes was 64.35% in 2001. Thus, we see that literacy rate among the SC population reduces. Work participation rate among SC is 52.13% in the district (Table 1). Different types of SC workers and their participation rate are shown in the following Table. From the Table it is very clear that the participation rate among the SC cultivators is highest (60.50%). In this district 48.86% SC population are non-workers.

TABLE: 1

Socio-economic factors		In the District	SCs	% of SCs to Tota
Households	Total	665,720	337,085	50.63
	Total	2,819,086	1414336	50.17
Population	Male	1,451,542	728,506	They suffer from
	Female	1,367,544	685,830	othing sand ever p
	Total	1,850,504	915,034	49.45
Literacy	Male	1,028,733	517,002	56.50
	Female	821771	398,032	43.50
Sex Ratio(Number of females per 10	000 males)	942	941	oted bna zzelbnal e
The Market In a Control of the	Total	1,127,977	588,061	52.13
Total Workers	Male	845,308	430,097	enimus enmisisdi
	Female	282,669	157,964	dt en. vedT-zarikit
	Total	886,357	453,083	51.12
Main Workers	Male	749,848	378,859	stilytids arradi Ukahari
	Female	136,509	74,224	on resolution from Total that
	Total	241,620	134,978	55.86
Marginal Workers	Male	95,460	51,238	- Milesia ataut 7 - 63 da e
	Female	146,160	83,740	-
and the state of t	Total	1,691,109	826,275	48.86
Non-Workers	Male	606,234	298,409	and the second second
	Female	1,084,875	527,866	- presidentale and 1
	Total	364,797	220,699	60.50
Cultivators	Male	302,745	180891	neight read torrow
	Female	62,052	39808	DEED SOUSSIGNES DE
	Total	391,875	218,996	55.88
Agricultural Labourers	Male	257,425	140,019	20117319
7	Female	134,450	78,977	-
	Total	40,593	18,482	45.53
Workers in household industry	Male	19,269	8,368	Giorrice Tombre Backs
	Female	21,324	10,114	istes postulation in C
	Total	330,712	129,884	39.27
Other Workers	Male	265,869	100,819	onic participation and
	Female	64,843	29,065	A tottlenes enizuadi

Source: Census of India, 2011.

BASIC AMENITIES

The basic amenities such as household condition, access to safe water, sanitation, availability of electricity and type of fuel used for cooking, etc are the important pointers that considerably impact the health of the family and its socio-economic position. In order to know the extent of disparity in case of basic amenities across the

SC households, availability of these amenities are studied and presented in the following Tables. We discuss them one by one:

HOUSEING CONDITION

Housing condition is one of the basic amenities. Housing condition refers to materials which are used for making roof, wall and floor. Table 2 shows the population in Coo signal that differe and, bamboo, woo making roof. We make their house ro

1.	KOOI	1
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Grass/Thatch/Ban Plastic/Polythene Handmade tiles Machine made ti

Brick Stone/slate

Metal/ Asbestos

Any other mater

2. Wal

Plastic/Polythen Mud/ Brick

Wood

Stone
Metal/ Asbestos

Burnt Brick

Concrete

Any other mate

Mud

Wood/Bamboo

Stone Stone

Cement

wiosaic/Floor

Any other mat

Source: Censu

bamboo, wood, mud, plastic, brick etc. are used making roof. We see that 56.56 % SC households their house roof by plastic. Only 19.40% SC scholds have concrete roof material.

In case of wall materials it is found that (Table2) the materials which are used for roof material are also used for wall. Around 57.20% SC households in the district use plastic as wall material. Regarding floor material, it is found that 55.49% households use mud for floor.

TABLE: 2
Households condition of the total population as well as SC population

1. Roof Materials	Total Households					
	In the District	SCs	% of SCs			
Thatch/Bamboo/ Wood/Mud	22479	12715	56.56			
Plastic/Polythene	11091	5971	53.84			
Handmade tiles	2054	827	40.26			
Machine made tiles	556	266	47.84			
Brick	440	173	39.32			
Stone/slate	5812	2718	46.77			
Metal/ Asbestos sheet	614003	321142	52.30			
Concrete	16069	3117	19.40			
Any other material	1427	618	43.31			
2. Wall Material	32	20919-	outre. Celsus of India.			
Grass/Thatch/Bamboo/ Wood/Mud	382,757	227,234	57.37			
Plastic/Polythene	6,704	3,835	57.20			
Mud/ Brick	2,374	of House 620, L by Size of	noisudi: 44.48			
Wood	5,859	2,747	46.89			
Stone	2,418	836	34.57			
Metal/ Asbestos sheet	183,459	83,383	45.45			
Burnt Brick	74,118	22,082	29.79			
Concrete	7,381	2,668	36.15			
Any other material	4,308	2,304	53.48			
3. Floor Material	3-1-x	101712 11000	2008			
Mud	572,920	317,620	55.49			
Wood/Bamboo	2,550	1,285	50.39			
Burnt Brick	4,727	1,746	36.94			
Stone	2,778	1,016	36.57			
Cement	89,355	25,544	28.59			
Mosaic/Floor tiles	1,259	225	17.87			
Any other material	342	111	32.46			

Source: Census of India, 2011

SIZE OF THE HOUSEHOLD AND NUMBER OF DWELLING ROOM

Table 3 shows the distribution of households by size of the household and number of dwelling rooms for

total population as well as SC population in the district. From the Table it is seen that there are 26614 households in the district where only one person lives in the house. For SC population, the number of households is 14133 where only one person lives in the house.

TABLE: 3

Distribution of Households by Size of the Household and number of Dwelling Rooms for Total Population in the District

Households	Households Size nothing a short as well as SC population						Total	
having number of Dwelling Rooms	zb1oo	uari 2	3	4	5	6-8	9+10	Households
No exclusive room	1375	2564	3766	5256	3302	21 11	219	18593
One room	22652	51350	82128	120562	75189	44881	2446	399208
Two rooms	2003	10461	26644	49980	46189	48715	3526	187518
Three rooms	393	2057	6087	11156	10747	15614	3026	49080
Four rooms	109	516	1564	3037	2853	4732	1471	14282
Five rooms	25	123	320	545	479	848	499	2839
Six rooms & above	57	152	319	484	385	581	433	2411
Total Households	26614	67223	120828	191020	139144	117482	11620	673931

Source: Census of India, 2011.

TABLE: 4

Distribution of Households by Size of the Household and number of Dwelling Rooms for SCs Population in the District

Households	Households Size							Total
having number of Dwelling Rooms	1 dustro	2	3	78 4 92 2	5	6-8	9+	Households
No exclusive room	686°	1 182	1730	2516	1542	886	53	8595
One room	12321	27110	41917	66760	40060	21428	1079	210675
Two rooms	946	5097	12931	26801	24978	24705	1523	96981
Three rooms	127	829	2437	5424	5457	7630-	1331	23235
Four rooms	27	188	604	1358	1406	2289	592	6464
Five rooms	5	25	75	166	152	271	158	852
Six rooms & above	21	56	112	178	147	150	81	745
Total Households	14133	34487	59806	103203	73742	57359	4817	347547

Source: Census of India, 2011.

SOURCES OF DRINKING WATER

Drinking water supply is one of the basic needs of people. Distribution of households by main source drinking water and location are shown in Tables 5 and 6. From These two tables we see that people in the strict use different sources of drinking water such as water, well, tube well, spring, river etc. Not only

that, the location of source of drinking water has also been shown with the help of Tables 5 and 6. From Table 5 it is observed that around 69% households use tube well as the main source of drinking water. For SC households this figure is around 72%. Again it is found that even now around 11% total households as well as SC households have no any sources of drinking water with in the premises.

TABLE: 5

Distribution of Households by Main Source of Drinking Water and Location for Total Population in the District

	Location	Total No. of		
Main Source of Drinking Water	Within the premises (No.) premises (No.)		Away (No.)	Households
Tap Water	24994	11744	6619	43357
Well	2125	668	513	3306
Tube well	109236	14441	6428	130105
Spring	BICYCIC .	ability 28 type of	ousel8olds by avail	10 nonud 43
River/Canal	313/310 <u>10</u> 1V	641	559	1200
Tank/Pond	160	205	v the 27 ople. These	bszu en. 277
Other Sources	None or the	4543	6268	10811
Total Households	136355	32277	20467	189099

Source: Census of India, 2011.

TABLE: 6

Distribution of Households by Main Source of Drinking Water and Location for SCs Population in the District

Main Source of Drinking	Location	Total No. of		
Water	Within the premises (No.)	Near the premises (No.)	Away (No.)	Households
Tap Water	10089	4258	2558	16905
Well	net part to gaz 1251	487	oH_ablo 360	2098
Tube well	W 9/1 54905 A	7403	3026	65334
Spring	concerned, it is tour	15 02 15 00000	003406	project sig 21
River/Canal	-pop ext political	065 868.34 E	07/250	586 Service Limi
Tank/Pond	housing condition.	97.7 105 AAY 2	40	145
Other Sources	households use pla-	2387	3294	5681
Total Households	66245	14991	9534	90770

Eurce: Census of India, 2011.

MAIN SOURCE OF LIGHTING

Table 7 shows the distribution of households by main source of lighting. In Cooch Behar district, the main sources of lighting are electricity, kerosene and solar energy. It is observed that around 81% SC households have electricity as main sources of lighting. Till now around 37% SC households have no electricity.

TABLE: 7

Distribution of Households by Main Source of Lighting

Main Source of Lighting	No. of Households in the District	No. of Households for SCs	% of SCs to Total
Electricity	86195	69805	80.98
Kerosene	479677	273968	57.12
Solar energy	4809	2323	48.31
Any other	242	90	37.19
No Lighting	1426	522	36.61

Source: Census of India, 2011.

SANITATION

Distribution of households by availability of type of latrine facility is shown in the following Table 9. From the table it is found that in Cooch Behar district six types of latrines are used by the people. These are flush latrine, pit latrine and service latrine. From the table it is seen that 58.13% SC households have no latrine facility and they evacuate in the open field. 49.34% SC households have no own latrine facility but they only use public latrine. In this connection, it can be noted that though a large fund is available for making low cost toilet, but people are reluctant to access such benefits. So the problem cannot be solved by allocating more funds only, but other measures, such as awareness generation and campaigning at the level of households are very important.

TABLE: 9

Distribution of Households by Availability of Type of Latrine Facility

Within the premises	Type of latrine	No. of Households in the District	No. of Households for SCs	% of SCs to Total
	Flush latrine	161802	69811	43.15
	Pit latrine	224570	112990	50.31
	Service Latrine	8410	4065	48.34
Latrine Fac	ility	274707	158744	57.79
Public Latr		10711	5285	49.34
Open		263996	153459	58.13

Source: Census of India, 2011

ASSET POSITION STAW 1 S

Distribution of households having each of the specific assets is shown in Table 10. There are different types of assets such as radio, television, computer, mobile, bicycle, motorcycle, and car in the SC households. From the Table it is seen that around 52% SC households have no specific assets mentioned above.

TABLE: 10

Number of Households having each of the Specified Assets

Availability of assets	No. of Household in the District	No. of Households for SCs	% of SCs to Total
Radio	35736	18944	53.01
Television	110969	39655	35.74
Computer	34438	15029	43.64
Mobile	215363	95452	44.32
Bicycle	368564	196876	53.42
Motorcycle	32771	12070	36.83
Car	8121	3119	38.41
None of the assets specified above	226903	117737	51.89

Source: Census of India, 2011

CONCLUSION

We have discussed the socio-economic status of Scheduled Caste people in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal in respect of some indicators such as work participation rate, literacy rate and some basic amenities. From the discussion it can be said that even after sixtynine years of Independence, the socio-economic status of SC population in Cooch Behar District of West Bengal has been unsatisfactory. It is found that still there is literacy gap of more than 25% in case of SCs population. As far as the work participation rate among the SC is concerned, it is found that still now more than 60% of them are cultivators. Still now more than 48% SC population are non-workers. In this district regarding housing condition, it is found that more than 53% SC households use plastic as the roof material. Regarding access to safe drinking water it is found that 72% SC households use tube well as the main source of drinking water and 11% households have no any source of drinking w 37% SC I sanitation f have no la field. 49.34 but they or

There is the peop Scheduled drinking w and local awareness SC households have no lighting. In case of santation facilities it is found that 58.13% SC households are no latrine facility and they evacuate in the open ted. 49.34% SC households have no own latrine facility and they only use public latrine.

There is a need to educate the people, specifically people belonging to Scheduled Castes and cheduled Tribes about the importance of hygiene, safe triking water and basic sanitation facilities. Panchayats local NGOs can be involved in this process of make it a mass campaign.

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CONSERVATION VALUES OF A SACRED GROVE IN MEDINIPUR

R.K.BHAKAT AND U.K. SEN

Abstract

Sacred groves are community-protected forest patches dedicated to deities. They are also institutions of social and conservation values. This paper highlights the protective roles of ethnic culture and biodiversity of a sacred grove in a tribal area of West Midnapore district in West Bengal.

Introduction

India is a country with the strongest traditions of nature conservation in the world. Since time immemorial, conservation of natural resources has been an integral aspect of many indigenous communities all over the world in general and India in particular.

It is true that India have suffered an almost unabated devastation of its natural biological heritage, and much of what remains has been preserved through the ages because of a host of conservation-oriented socio-cultural and religious traditions. One such significant tradition of nature conservation is that of dedicating patches of forests or groves to some deities and spirits by the local people, both tribal and non-tribal. These forest pockets, referred to as sacred groves, are socially protected near-virgin forests/tree groves maintained through people's participation. And folklores play a significant role in confirming the beliefs associated with the sacred groves. Though most of the indigenous people are illiterate, they have scrupulously nurtured their traditional customs, rituals, ceremonies and a way of forest life through folk beliefs with great fervor (Bhakat, 2003; Malhotra et al., 2007; Chandrashekara, 2011).

Although named differently in different states of India and managed by local people for various reasons, all sacred forests are islands of biodiversity protecting a good number of plant and animal species including some rare and threatened taxa. Sacred groves, in general, are repositories and nurseries of many of the local ayurvedic, unani, tribal and other folk medicines which are the original sources that slowly entered into the modern medicines after careful screening (Lebbie and Guries, 1995; Negi, 2005; Bhakat and Sen, 2015). With this background, this article provides a glimpse into the phenomenon of sacred grove highlighting how human values, norms, social practices to and ethics help to preserve plants down the centuries in a tribal area of West Midnapore district in West Bengal.

The sacred grove

The present sacred grove, known popularly as 'Kankabati Sitabala than' (named after its presiding folk deity 'Sitabala' or 'Sitala'), and adjacent village Kankabati is located 7 km away from the West Midnapore District headquarters town of Midnapore along the east-west running Midnapore- Jhargram road (via Dherua) under the Kotwali police station. The grove is spread over an area of 4 acres on a public land at the common outskirts of Kankabati and Lo terrestrial grove sta crop fields. The fore old relict vegetation trees. The deity is an stained termite mou horses and elephan to daily worship of people, both triba villages visit the fo Sankranti (middle o two days (Fig. 1). people neither cut serenity of the area and ethics (Bhakat

Cultural value

All sacred grove are institutions of true for the presen that worshipping prosperity of the cultural space to th resource. It acts identity and grou tribals (Lodhas, Sai form new alliand grove-based ritua every Tuesday, Sa auspicious by the the grove has ed rainfall, prospero domestic animals etc. during scarcit and ceremonies sacred grove recommon pheno every year in worshipping the do not enter into forest produces locally importan goes that worshi against small po being and prospe provides mor communities.

of Kankabati and Lodhasai villages. This part-marshy part-terrestrial grove stands as an island of forest amidst the crop fields. The forest represents approximately 800-year old relict vegetation consisting of evergreen and deciduous trees. The deity is aniconic and represented with vermillion stained termite mound along votive offerings of clay made horses and elephants located inside a bush. In addition to daily worship offered to the deity of the grove, local people, both tribal and non-tribal of the surrounding villages visit the forest en masse during annual Makar Sankranti (middle of January) when village fair is held for two days (Fig. 1). Since the grove is abode of goddess, people neither cut any plant of the grove nor foul the serenity of the area, thus strictly adhering to the taboos and ethics (Bhakat et al., 2008).

Cultural value

All sacred groves, irrespective of their size and origin, are institutions of socio-cultural practices. And this is true for the present sacred grove also. The folklore goes that worshipping the deity begets well-being and prosperity of the villagers. The grove also provides cultural space to the communities as a common property resource. It acts as a platform for assertion of group identity and group solidarity. The local people, both tribals (Lodhas, Santals) and non-tribal high-caste Hindus, form new alliances while participating in the sacred grove-based rituals and festivals held annually or on every Tuesday, Saturday or any day deemed sacred and auspicious by the participants. Propitiation of deity inside the grove has economic relevance in terms of good rainfall, prosperous agricultural production, welfare of domestic animals and source of medicine, timber, fruits etc. during scarcity. This kind of local village based rituals and ceremonies performed to appease and respect the sacred grove residing folk (forest) deities are a very common phenomenon during the month of January every year in West Midnapore district. Before worshipping these deities, the forest dwelling people do not enter into the forest areas to collect non-timber forest produces like firewood, fruit, honey, leaf and ocally important medicinal plant etc. The folk belief goes that worshipping the deity gives people immunity against small pox and chicken pox, and heralds' wellbeing and prosperity of the villages. Moreover, the grove provides moral support and guidance to the communities.

Conservation value

Floristic survey of the Sitabala sacred grove reveals a total of 80 species of angiosperms covering 72 genera under 45 families. While dicots represent 65 species belonging to 59 genera under 34 families, monocots cover 15 species representing 13 genera under 11 families. Among the total angiosperms, herbs, shrubs, trees and climbers are 42, 10, 16 and 12 species respectively. It supports 30 species of ethnomedicinal plants which are 1. Abrus precatorius (Kunch), 2. Achyranthes aspera (Apang), 3. Amaranthus spinosus (Kantanotey), 4. Andrographis - paniculata (Kalmegh), 5. Aristolochia indica (Iswarmul), 6. Azadirachta indica (Neem), 7. Bacopa monnieri (Brahmi), 8. Barleria cristata (Swetjhanti), 9. Boerhavia diffusa (Punarnaba), 10. Celastrus paniculatus (Kujri), 11. Centella asiatica (Thankuni), 12. Commelina benghalensis (Kanshira), 13. Crateva nurvala (Barun), 14. Curculigo orchioides (Talmuli), 15. Dioscorea bulbifera (Khamalu), Dioscorea-pentaphylla (Chuprialu), 17. Eclipta prostrata (Keshute), 18. Enydra fluctuans (Hinche), 19. Ficus infectoria (Pakur), 20. Ficus racemosa (Jaggya Dumur), 21. Gymnema sylvestre (Gurmar), 22. Hygrophila auriculata (Kulekhara), 23. Ipomoea aquatica (Kalmi), 24. Leonurus sibiricus (Raktadrone), 25. Phyllanthus fraternus (Bhuiamla), 26. Rauvolfia tetraphylla L. (Gokul), 27. Strychnos nux-vomica (Kuchila), 28. Terminalia arjuna (Arjun), 29. Tinospora sinensis (Gulancha) and 30. Vanda tessellata (Rasna). The populations of these ethnomedicinal plants are shrinking in the nearby forest areas but grow abundantly in sacred groves of south West Bengal (Bhakat and Sen, 2008). The local people collect these forests based medicinal plants as and when required for domestic uses and that too in a sustainable basis.

Owing to continued social protection, the sacred grove provides optimum conditions suitable for the growth of plants. As a result, some of the floristic elements attain maximum dimensions in terms of shape and size. A botanist is often confronted here with the unbelievable phenomenon of growth patterns of some plant associations. Some of the lofty trees showing grandeur and thus becoming a fascinating sight are *Melia azedarach* (GBH 1.25 m; Height 22.86 m; Age 60 yrs.), *Neolamarckia cadamba* (GBH 3.5 m; Height 21.33 m; Age 90 yrs.) and *Terminalia arjuna* (GBH 6.5 m; Height

25.90 m; Age 360 yrs.). These trees along with the surrounding sylvan environs provide safe sanctuary for a good number of birds.

Apart from angiosperms, the grove also houses few fungi (*Ascobolus* sp., *Agaricus* sp. and *Polyporus* sp.) and few ferns (*Adiantum* sp., *Marsilea* sp. and *Pteris* sp.).

The sacred grove in essence represents the traditional Indian way of in-situ conservation of plant resources. It is also indicator of the rich vegetation that had existed here in the past. The Sitabala sacred grove, through fairly protected, is facing some threats due to agricultural encroachment, dying of old trees and exotic weed invasion. Therefore, there is an urgent need to protect the grove.

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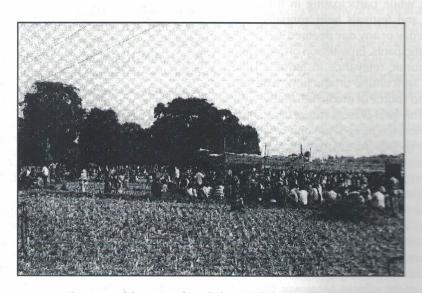


Fig. 1: Local fair around Kankabati Sitabala sacred grove.

The Nagesias of North Bengal A Study on their Socio-economic Situation and Educational Status

SUCHISMITA SEN CHOWDHURY

Abstract

The Nagesias are one of the marginal tribe of West Bengal as they constitute less than 1% of the tribal population of the state. They have migrated from Chotanagpur region to North Bengal during British period for working as Tea Garden labours. The Nagesias are also regarded as Nagesia Kisan. In North Bengal they are found to have settled in Tea Gardens or in forest bustee areas of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts. Due to weakening of the tea industry in North Bengal they are shifting towards labour work. They are migrating to other state or in Bhutan for work in other sectors. Land is the main resource of the Nagesias of the forest areas. They still depend on the forest for economic purposes, instead of restrictions imposed on them. Due to economic insecurity their income remains low. Economic problem often leads to dropout from school. The paper is based on the present socio-economic situation and educational status of the tribe Nagesia living in Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal.

Introduction:

The term Nagesia has been derived from 'Nag' meaning snake. Risley (1891) stated that the Nagesia were referred to as Nageswar, Nagesar and Nagasia Kisan in Chotanagpur. In West Bengal, the Nagesia are also called Nagasia Kisan. The Nagesia tribe was notified as synonyms of Kisan in (Scheduled Tribe) ST list of 3

neighbouring states viz. Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa [SC & ST Orders (Amendment) Act, 2002]. The Nagesia people are distributed in Eastern and Central states of India. In Bihar and Jharkhand they are listed as Kisan, Nagesia, while in Orissa they have been listed as Kisan, Nageswar, Nagesia. In Chattisgarh they are also called Nagesia. In West Bengal Nagesia and Kisan are enlisted separately. Since the Nagesia tribe was traditionally agriculturists, they have been regarded as Kisan.

There are two groups among the Nagesias; Sindria Nagesia and Telia Nagesia. The Sindria Nagesias use Sindur (vermillion) during marriage and Telia Nagesias use oil instead of Sindur. Russel and Lal (1916) identified one more group among the Nagesia of Central province i.e. Dhuria. They use dust (dhur) during marriage taken from the sole of the bridegroom's foot. Telia and Dhurias were intermarrying groups. Sindria Nagesia regarded them as higher in position than the other two groups and so the marriage alliance with them and other two groups were restricted.

In West Bengal the Nagesias are very few in number. They constitute only 0.31% of the State's total ST population. Their population in West Bengal was 16378 including 8241 male and 8137 females. The sex ratio of the Nagesias was 987, lesser than State's ST sex ratio

(999) as per 2011 Census. The highest population of the Nagesia people was in Nadia district (4775) followed by Jalpaiguri district (4102). The decadal growth of the Nagesia people was positive as the growth rate was 9.56 during 2001 to 2011, but the growth rate was negative (-1.68) in the decade 1999 to 2001. In the 1981 Census the population of the Nagesia tribe in West Bengal was recorded to be 7745. In the later Census periods the population increased. They were brought as tea plantation labours during colonial period and settled in the districts of North Bengal. 1981 Census also suggested that more than 50% of the workers were involved in tea plantation works (Singh, 1994). Still they could be found in the Tea Gardens of North Bengal. The Nagesia people mostly live in scattered hamlets of either Tea Garden or in forest bustees of Jalpaiguri district. They are very small in number and generally reside with the other Scheduled Tribe population. In a broad sense they are marginal because their population is very small and they face problem of identity. Due to long co-habitance with the other communities they are forgetting their own cultural traditions.

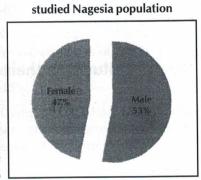
Objective: To find out the socio-economic situation and the status of education among the Nagesias living in North Bengal.

Studied area and population

Though the Census data showed their major concentration at Nadia district, but during the study they were only found in North Bengal. At present Jalpaiguri district is divided into two districts; Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri. After a rigorous search they were found scattered in Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri districts. The study on the Nagesia community was done in Kalchini block of Alipurduar district and in Matiali block of Jalpaiguri district. Their concentration has been found under different Gram Panchayats (GP) in Kalchini Block viz. Satali GP, Miron GP, Budhman Lama GP, Jaigaon-I, Mangla Bari GP. The studied areas include Ramgaon village, Torsa TG - Khoar line, Chota and Bara Mechia bustee, Godamdabri, Nimtijhora TG Dalmore line and Goram bustee. In Matiali block their distribution was

found in Nagaisuri Tea Garden. Only four families were found here. In Alipurduar 105 families were found dispersedly settled in eight locations. The highest concentration of the Nagesia families was recorded from Ramgaon village(25 families).

The study is based on the 109 Nagesia households of undivided Jalpaiguri district. These households were inhabited by 506 individuals including 269 males and 237 females (Table No. 1). The sex ratio was 881 which



Sex composition of the

were lower than the sex ratio of the state's Nagesia population.

History and Migration

According to their belief the Nagesia people have originated from Nag or Cobra. As per the story of their origin 'somebody left an infant in the forest Setambu and a cobra came and spread its hood over the child to protect him from the rays of sun. Some Mundas happened to pass by and on seeing this curious sight they thought the child must be destined to greatness, so they took him home and made him their king, calling him Nagesia, and from him the tribe are descended'. This story indicates that they are the offshoot of the Mundas. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the Mundas are often called Nagesia, meaning the original settlers of Nag i.e. Chotanagpur (Russel and Lai, 1916). One of their clans is Nag and snake is their totem. Risley mentioned of several septs present among the Nagasia, Nagesar, Kisan tribe, viz. Amba (mango), Barla (Ficusindica), Dhanki, Induar&Mahto (a kind of eel), Sonwani (can't wear gold), Taitia, Tirki (bull) and Nag (cobra). Majority of the studied population belong to the clan 'Nag', but few other clans were also found, viz. Bagoar, Biluar, Goi, Induar, Musa/ Mucha, Palkotia,

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Kisan. Killing or eating snake is tabooed among them. They believe that bad dreams come if they hurt a snake. The Nagesia people of the studied areas use three types of Surname, viz. Nagesia, Nag and Nagashiya. Even some of them have got certificate as Nagashiya.

Living condition of the Nagesias in the studied areas

In Tea Garden areas the settlement pattern was linear, while in Bustee areas it was scattered. Different materials were used for construction of houses. Depending on economic condition they built their house. But in North Bengal wooden houses were common with tin or asbestos roof. Cemented houses were rare. The families who received financial support under Indira Awas Yojna built cemented houses. A number of Nagesia families received financial benefit under Indira Awas Yojna. Twenty eight (28) houses were built under this scheme covering 25.69% of the total household (109). Dillu Nagesia of Nimti Jhora Tea Garden received Rs. 19000/- in 2003 for the same.

In Garam bustee the forest department provided support to build houses which in most cases were concrete with tin roof. Most of the houses in the studied area were pucca (47.71%) mainly because of the elevating economic condition of the population getting daily jobs in the surrounding and distant areas. Those who couldn't build pucca houses, at least, built semi-pucca houses (35.78%). The population in Tea Garden areas had semi-pucca houses built by the Tea Garden authority. Only 16.51% of the studied population had kachha houses (Table No. 2).

In bustee areas the houses were found to be clean. They clean the courtyard regularly. The Nagesias often plant flower plants on the courtyard. The women of the house polish the courtyard with mud and cow dung. Every house has one or two rooms. Most of the houses have separate kitchen and they keep it clean. There is separate place for keeping cattle. But most of the houses lack latrine facility. Though the coverage of toilet could not succeed properly, the studied Nagesia population had chosen electricity as one of their basic needs and

hence 72.48% of the total studied population had access to electricity. It had been inquired and known that almost all the houses applied for electrification as soon as it was made available to them. The recent 'Swachh Bharat Mission' is showing some potential and some of the houses were found to build new toilets (Table No.3).

Everyone had access to water and tube well and boring were mainly used for procuring drinking water. For getting water from boring one had to spend Rs. 150 per month. Some govt. tube wells (18) were found in some points of the studied area where water was scarce. Other tube wells were personal (Table No. 4).

Land resources

Land is the main economic resource of the Nagasias. Most of the families in the studied areas did not have agricultural land. In bustee areas the Nagesia people got forest land in patta for settlement as well as for cultivation. Some of them also got valid papers of patta recently. The land was mainly rain fed and they cultivated paddy in the monsoon. In most cases they cultivated twice in a year. Apart from rice, they also cultivated maize. In Garam bustee they got forest (Adhara Mile-Buxa range) land for cultivation. The cultivated paddy was used for consumption. In a family two members gets the forest land. It is called forest land under occupation. Tea Garden labours got land from Tea Gardens. Among them majority of the families possessed land deed (66.67%). This makes them cultivators, although they practice seasonal cultivation. Since they have ownership of a very small amount of land, the unit of land ownership is kept in decimal and it is seen that most of them possess above 15 decimal of land (69.05%). In Ramgaon and Garam bustee a number of families got patta from forest land. Generally they got 0.35 acre to 1 acre of land. In Garam bustee a man received 4 bighas of cultivable land in patta and he cultivated once in a year (Table No. 5 and 6).

In the studied areas 61% of the total studied families had no agricultural land of their own. The land owners either cultivated by themselves or indulge in share cropping. Under Rajabhatkhawa forest range Nagesia people were cultivating land without patta. A man in Garam bustee had 5 bighas of land where he cultivated twice in a year. He cultivated paddy and wheat alternatively. He also had kitchen garden attached to his house. Most of the agricultural land were non-irrigated and were cultivated on rain water. Five families have non irrigated land, but they cultivate different crops at different times. This is because irrigational facilities cost a fortune and the studied families could not afford it (Table No. 7).

Like agricultural land homestead land was also distributed in patta to the Nagesia people. Most of the patta distribution took place in 2010 in Alipurduar district. The average amount of land per family was mostly found to be 3-6 decimal that is enough to hold a family of four or two with a proper house and a small kitchen garden. The Nagesia people living in Tea Garden area got household land from the Tea Garden. But in forest area Nagesia people were living since many generations. Some of them got patta and some did not (Table No. 8). The Nagesia families living in the forest bustee areas claim land to be their own and majority of the families had land deed (54.13%). Some of the Nagesia households were built on other's land. Four families were living in forest land without receiving patta, but they applied for the same (Table No. 9).

Economic life of the Nagesias

The Nagesia people were mostly dependent on agriculture. They were also dependent on the forest. As per 2011 Census 72.85% of the workers in the state were main workers and 27.15% of them were marginal workers. Census data shows that majority of the main workers were agricultural labourers (18.17%). The land holding families primarily depend on agriculture. Both men and women were found to be economically active. The children were also found to be engaged in different types of works.

Among the labour force more female workers (84.47%) were found than the male workers (80.90%). The children below 14 years hardly engage themselves

in economic activities, but people above 60 years engaged themselves in different works. The Nagesia women were economically very much active and they also engaged themselves in household works (Table No. 10). Most of the males within the studied population were engaged as day labour for a living whereas females were found to be engaged in household chores. Dependence on agriculture was found as there was land holding families in the studied areas. Some of the men and women were also doing small scale business like running grocery shop or fast food center at the village. Although most of the families among the Nagesias owned livestock, but there was hardly any economic dependence on them. Both men and women in Tea Garden worked as labours, some were permanent and some were temporary. Those who did not work as Tea Garden labour, mostly found to work as day labours and their income was very low. The Nagaisuri Tea Garden is closed since March, 2015. Many Tea Garden labours became jobless. Many of them were now working at Jhuranti and Chalouni Tea Gardens. As they were lacking all of the facilities that should be provided by the company, now their economic condition is poor. Eight persons were getting Indira Gandhi Old Age Pension. One man was also getting Tea Garden pension. An integral part of the population is found to be studying in schools and colleges (Table No. 11).

Case study

Churki Nagasia aged 45 years was an illiterate woman living in Chota Mechia bustee under Kalchini Block. She worked in their family land during cultivation season. They cultivated rice during monsoon and maize during summer. Apart from working in the agricultural land she also worked as stone crusher under the contractor. A box full of stone was called Septik. The size of the box was 14"/14". For one Septik a person got Rs. 30. Churki could hardly work for 1-2 hours in a day and she could not even fill up a box in a day. She got money only after completing the assignment. After working throughout the month she could complete 10 boxes and thus earned Rs. 300 in a month. She generally worked in summer and in winter. During rainy season the river Torsa remained full of water giving a pause to stone

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The forest dependent people bring fuel wood from the forest and sale a bundle carrying 10 pc @ Rs. 15/-. A bundle of 50-60 logs were sold at Rs. 100/-. The men and women depending on forest spent 3-5 hours in the forest. Generally the females spend more time in the forest. The Nagesia people living near forest areas also go for hunting in the forest. Eleven men and women in the studied areas were found to be primarily dependent on the forest. They mostly get wild boar in the forest. They collect fuel wood from the forest in spite of restriction. Some of the men and women depended on the forest for secondary source of income. They got information from the forest guard regarding Forest Right Acts and accordingly they applied for patta. They used to cultivate in the jungle without any valid document, but since 1990s they stopped cultivating without permission (Table No. 11 and 12).

Case Study

Mohan Nagesia (55 years) lived in Goram bustee. Five years ago he was shot on his right foot by a forest guard, while he was cutting wood illegally in the forest close by. The other fellow wood cutter ran away. He lied there alone and then

Due to his imprisonment, the family members faced economic crisis. His son had to leave school. He is presently physically disabled and unable to work. His wife runs the whole family by working as Tea Garden labour.

A number of males were work as labourer in Bhutan. Men working in Delhi, Chennai and other cities of India have been found. The migrational labour earn better than those working in Alipurduar or Jalpaiguri as labour. Moreover non availability of work is a problem for the day labours.

Case study

Lepa Nagesia is 55 years old day labour living in Chota Mechia bustee in Jaigaon, Alipurduar. He and his wife Ethuari Nagesia both work as migrational labour at Bhutan. They worked there for 6 months in a year as contractual mason. They were informed by the contractor. On intimation they renew the permission from the Panchayat for working in Bhutan. They used to stay with other Indian labours in Thimpu. Each month he earned Rs. 5000/- to Rs. 6000/-. The other 6 months they worked as day labourer at Jaigaon. There was no fixed income as labourer. Generally they got Rs. 120/- per head per day. Lepa Nagesia got 14 day's work via Job Card this year, but he did not receive payment. Though they earned sufficient money, but still they failed to save a penny.

Job card is provided under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), but the Nagesia men and women were not getting wedge in time. The reason behind it was non availability of bank account of the beneficiaries as the system of transferring the wage directly to the account of the beneficiaries has been introduced recently. Under MGNREGA the job card holder should be provided at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.In the studied areas Job card was available with 53 people covering 17.34% of the total workers (302). Among males more job card holders was found in comparison to the female workers (37 males and 16 females).

Case Study

Anita Nagashiya, a 44 years old woman lived in Ramgaon village and worked as day labourer. In 2012 she got Job card from Panchayat. After receiving the card she got work for 42 days in the financial year 2012-2013. She worked in three phases for road construction. According to the job card book Rs. 5922/- should be paid to her in respect of her work. But she received Rs. 1904/- as the payment of first 14 days. Rest was pending.

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Like her Dilu Nagesia of Nimti Jhora Tea Garden got Rs. 1950/- in 2012 when he worked for the last time under job card for 28 days in total.

Even the secondary occupation, if any, was found mainly to be daily labour works in case of males (55%) and household work in case of females (85.06%). Agriculture is a secondary occupation for 5 people. The jobs like driver, stone crusher, maid servant, electrician have been included in others category (Table No. 12).

Case study

Rojesh Nagashiya, a 40 years old married man was an inhabitant of Paschim Goram bustee. The total family member of his family was 5 where he and his wife Basanti Nagashiya (35 years) were the earning members. Both of them worked as contractual day labours alternatively. Each of them got Rs. 150/- per day. During his off days Rajesh worked as agricultural labour and there he was paid Rs. 120/- per day. Rajesh received 0.45 acres forest land as Title land. During rainy session he with his wife cultivated paddy. The cultivated crop was utilized for their family purpose. According to the informant; they also harnessed Atthara Mile Jungle to collect logs and firewood everyday early morning or sometimes in the evening. These collected logs were tied in a bundle where each bundle includes 10 pieces of wood. Each bundle is sold at Rs. 20/- in nearby hotels. In a day they earned Rs. 150/-. They sold the logs three days in a week. The total monthly income of them was approximately Rs. 5000/-.

The garden authority also has not provided salary and ration to the labours. Income and expenditure below Rs. 1000 was negligible, while 41.28 % of the studied families show their income between Rs. 1000 - Rs. 3000 and 44.04% showed the same category as their expenditure. This shows the overall economic status of the studied Nagesia population (Table No. 13). There were 48 families which possess **BPL Card.**

Even after a meager income 88 individuals have been found to save money under different institution. Most of the studied population who saves money were found to have bank account in Nationalized banks (77.27%). They saved money in SBI, UCO bank and Central Grameen Bank. This is also because of the government policies that provide money from different schemes only by wiring money to individual beneficiaries. Some of them kept money in Chit fund. Kisan Nagasia who was cheated by a Chit fund company said he will never save in such agency (Table No. 14).

Case study

Kisan Nagasia, a 47 year old farmer cultivated forest land received through Patta. He also had job card. In the year 2014 he worked for 14 days through job card. Sometimes he worked as day labourer in Jaigaon. He was a primary level drop out. He used to save money in some popular Chit funds. He kept Rs. 10,000/- in two such agencies during 2010-2011. One of these Chit fund agencies were supposed to give principal with interest in 2014, but it failed. Both the cheat funds collapsed and he lost all his money. Recent he opened an account in SBI through Pradhan Mantrilan Dhan Yojna.

Though a small amount loan intake was noticed among the Nagesia families, most of them were taken by females from Bandhan Co-operative society, now full fledge Bank. The impact of Self Help Group insignificant here (Table No. 15). The money taken loan from different sources was mainly used expansion of business or for making houses. Many them purchased domestic animals for business purpose Loan also helped in other household needs like many or medical expenses (Table No. 16).

Education among the Nagesia people

As per 2011 Census, the literacy rate among the Napeople of West Bengal was 61.83%, higher than ST literacy rate (57%). Literacy rate of the males is than the females. In the studied areas literacy rate of Nagesia people was 40.04% which is lower than literacy rate. Among male 45.96% were literate among female 33.78% were literate in the studied

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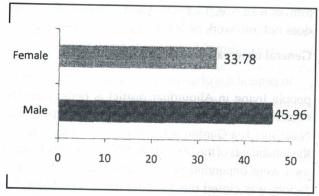
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Literacy rate of the studied Nagesia population



There were many first generation learners among the Nagesia. The illiterate parents often did not know in which class their children were studying. Economic problem was the main reason behind illiteracy of older generation. Another reason for backwardness in education was distance of the high schools from the village. Many of the Nagesia girls and boys could not continue education after primary level. In some cases ICDS were not working properly to facilitate the children. The part of the population belonging to older age was primarily found not able to sign, but due to different developmental as well as awareness programs by the government and NGOs, the minimum qualification of any individuals was raised to primary level. It is interesting to find that two women have completed graduation and seven women have passed Higher Secondary (Table No. 17). of vid behaviore

High dropout rate could be observed among the studied population. The main reason for this was distance of High School from the villages. Although primary level drop out was much higher than any other levels. Tertiary level drop out was also observed. The level of education attended and the rate of drop out at higher level indicated growing interest in education among the Nagesia youths (Table No. 18). There were several causes of individuals not continuing school and the reasons were found mainly to be lack of awareness regarding the benefits of education, lack of interest from the individual as well as family and off course poverty.

Due to absence of school in the village or nearby areas, the students have to travel a long distance to continue their study. The expenditure of study including the travelling expenses seemed so costly to them and thus a high percentage (48.80%) of drop out due to economic crises was observed (Table No. 19).

The constraint of education was not only the distance of school from the village, but also economic backwardness. Large families and meager income push men and women to get into work at early age and leaving school at the middle of study. Early marriage of the girls is also a reason drop out. It can clearly be stated that there were several cases of female child marriages, though most of these took place a long time ago. Nowadays, the marriages were held at the age of 21 years or above among the males and 18 years or above among the females as reflected by the table no. 20. The scheme Kanyasree aimed at preventing child marriage, but it was not being circulated to the Nagesia people. So the number of beneficiary was negligible.

At present several programmes were being implemented for development of education among the tribal people like Sikshasree, Kanyashree, Sabuj Sathi etc. Post-Matric scholarship was received by 7 students including 5 males and 2 females covering 53.85% of the total students studying at Higher Secondary level among the Nagesias. Only one student received Higher Secondary Level scholarship. Kanyashree was received by one girl only. Sikshasree was received by 6 males and 3 females covering 16.07% of the students. For betterment of education some other facilities were provided to the Nagesia people like books, uniform under the scheme Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. Example of students receiving bicycle under Sobuj Sathi Scheme for continuing education were also found. Four students received bicycle. Susila Nagesia and Bijli Nagesia (16 years) were among them who got bicycle at class IX. Many boys and girls from the Nagesia community applied for caste certificate, but they were not getting the certificate. Many of them were not aware about ST certificate and others did not know the exact

procedure of application. It was found that only 5.14% of the Nagesia population (506) got Caste Certificate. Number of females (5.91%) getting caste certificate is higher than the males (4.46%).

Material Culture

The Nagesia people wear dresses like Bengali residents of the studied areas. The males wear shirt pant and females wear Sari and Salwar. A form of apron called *Karra* is also used by the Nagesia women. The women working in the Tea Garden often cover their head with a cloth. Wearing ornament is unnatural. The women wear imitation ornaments and beads wreath. A few married women have been found to wear *Gona*, a thick silver bangle.

The Nagesia people use implements like Sickle (Koste) for cutting paddy and grass, Axe (Dawla) for cutting wood, Spade (Kodal) and Khurpi for tilling soil, Plough (Hauda) for agriculture, Bow and Arrow (Tir Dhonuk) for hunting and Koch, a net for fishing. For cooking and eating they use aluminum vessels. Earthen vessel is used for keeping Haria. A still pot called Ghora is also used by them.

Food habits

Some of the studied areas of Kalchini block were close to cities and is devoid of agricultural lands and hence the food ingredients were bought from the market. Fish, meat and local liquor were also bought from the market. Some amount of ration including rice, wheat, kerosene oil and sugar were provided by govt. to every BPL family at low cost but that does not suffice the need of the studied Nagesia families. In bustee areas some houses had kitchen garden attached to their house. They cultivated vegetables like chili, bottle gourd, bitter guard, tomatoes, bringal, leafy vegetables etc. Cultivation of Supari (Beatle nut) was found. They also grew fruits like Litchi, Mango and Jackfruit. The Nagesia people collect edible herbs and fruits like Hartaki, Amloki, Kitar, Kasia and Ghoogi from the forest. Some of the herbs were also used as medicinal plants. In the Tea Garden of Nimtijhora the Tea Garden workers get ration in the form of 6 kg rice, 1 kg wheat and 2 kg fuel. If a person does not join work he loses 1 kg rice for each day.

General observation and Conclusion

In general it is observed that the situation of Nagesia people living in Alipurduar district is better than the Nagesias living in Nagaisuri Tea Garden of Jalpaiguri as Nagaisuri Tea Garden was closed since long. Most of the inhabitants of the lines living in Nagaisuri Tea Garden area were depended on the garden and factory. The factory was closed due to some internal problem. For this, the Tea Garden labours did not receive their payments for three months. Due to this reason, most of them suffered from economic problem. Many children dropped from school and some parents failed to enroll their children to school as they could not able to arrange the admission fees. The garden hospital does not provide any medicines and treatment for their worker since then. So, many aged persons and children died without treatment, especially in Malaria. Both the permanent and contractual workers of Tea Garden are now working in Jhuranti Tea Garden as contractual labours and some of them migrated to other places like Gantok, Darjiling for working in hotels and lodges. The absence of Government school near Nagesia colonies in forest areas is responsible for illiteracy of the children around these areas. So, they are not able to receive any schemes that are provided by the Government. Some children also migrated to other places to earn and to continue their education by working. Those who received electric connection via Tea Garden they had to pay large amount of electric bill (Rs. 1150/-) per month. In Tea Gardens they face problem of drinking water. Most of the carry water from boring service and they have to pay Rs. 150/per month for brining water from boring.

The residents of forest bustee areas who still depend on forest for livelihood knows about the restrictions imposed on them regarding encroachment into the forest. At Garam bustee the villagers faced the problem of elephant's attack. In case of destruction of the grains or cuthe (compute to the worm many and E was compute to the word as agreement a measure agence agence).

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or cultivated paddy they received compensation from the Government. Generally Rs. 500/- was paid in compensation for 15 bighas of land, which according to the villagers was not enough. A number of men and women were involved in manual labour works and many of them work as migrational labours in other state and Bhutan. Dependence on agriculture for livelihood was common. Getting land right for habitation as well as agriculture in the forest areas was a happy moment for the Nagesias of North Bengal. Even after living with a meager income, they tried to save money. But sometimes they were misguided by some Chit fund agencies. They also took loan from Bank for various family requirements.

Economic and social dependence on other neighbouring ST communities was found. At present the Nagesia were found to get married with the Oraons and other communities. The Nagesia people were living in Tea Gardens since long along with other ST communities like Oraons, Asur, Lohra, Munda, Chik Baraik and some non - ST communities. Inter-community marriage is common among them. Due to admixture of different cultures in the Tea Gardens the Nagesias often fail to recall their own cultural practices.

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Annexure

Table No.1:Age and sex wise distribution of the Nagesia people

Age Grou	ips	Male	F	emale		Γotal
(In years)	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0-4	20	7.43	15	6.33	35	6.92
5-9	31	11.52	16	6.75	47	9.29
10-14	24	8.92	26	10.97	50	9.88
15-19	44	16.36	32	13.50	76	15.02
20-24	32	11.90	28	11.81	60	11.86
25-29	26	9.67	24	10.13	50	9.88
30-34	12	4.46	14	5.91	26	5.14
35-39	15	5.58	13	5.49	28	5.53
40-44	8	2.97	15	6.33	23	4.55
45-49	14	5.20	15	6.33	29	5.73
50-54	15	5.58	13	5.49	28	5.53
55-59	12	4.46	7	2.95	19	3.75
60+	16	5.95	19	8.02	35	6.92
Total :	269	100.00	237	100.00	506	100.00

Table No. 2: House Types of the studied population

House Type	Number of Family	Percentage
Kachha	8918	16.51
Pucca	52	47.71
Semi-pucca	39	35.78
Total	109	100.00

Table No. 3: Distribution of the Nagesia houses having different amenities

Amenities	ties Number of families						
4.59	Yes	- [%]	No.	% M	Total	%	
Electricity	79	72.48	30	27.52	109	100.00	
Toilet	25	22.94	84	77.06	109	100.00	

Table No. 4: Sources of drinking water in the studied areas

Type of Source	Number of families	Percentage
Boring pipe line	55	50.46
Tap water	1	0.92
Tube well	49	44.95
Well	4	3.67
Total	109	100.00

Table No. 5 : Agricultural land holding pattern of the Nagesias

Amount of land	Number of family	Percentage
3-6 decimal	2	4.76
7-10 decimal	9	21.43
11-14 decimal	2	4.76
Above 15 decimal	29	69.05
Total	42	100.00

Table No. 6 : Ownership of agricultural land among the Nagesias

Ownership Pattern	Number of Family	Percentage of Family
Deed	28	66.67
Patta	13	30.95
Lease	1	2.38
Total	42	100.00

Table No. 7: Type of Land owned by the Nagesias

Type of land	Number of family	Percentage of Family
Irrigated & one-crop		0.92
Non irrigated & Multi crop	5	4.59
Non irrigated (Rain fed)	36	29.36
Total	42	34.86

Table No. 8: Area of homestead land in the studied areas

Amount of land	Number of family	Percentage of family
Below 3	16	14.68
decimal		
3-6 decimal	59	54.13
7-10 decimal	an boat 3	2.75
11-14 decimal	19	17.43
Above 15	12	11.01
decimal	BBiff yart area	neager rec
Total	109	100.00

Table No. 9: Ownership pattern of homestead land

	AND THE PROPERTY OF THE PROPER				
Ownership	Number of family	Percentage of family			
Own	59	54.13			
Patta	6	5.50			
Others'	3	2.75			
Forest Land	MEGGO TO 4	3.67			
Tea Garden 1 Land	37	33.94			
Total sizes Medianel	109	100.00			

Table No. 10: Workers and non-workers within labour force and non labour force among the studied population

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0-14 (NLF)	gg 75	57	132
Workers	3	1	4
Percentage of workers	4.00	1.75	3.03
15-59 (LF)	178	161	,339
Workers	144	136	280
Percentage of workers	80.90	84.47	82.60
Non workers	34	25	59
Percentage of Non-workers	19.10	15.53	17.40
60 & above (NLF)	16	19	35
Workers	7	11	18
Percentage of workers	25.33	57.89	51.43
Non workers	9	8	17
Percentage of Non-workers	56.25	42.11	48.57

Table No. 11: Primary occupation of the studied population

Occupation	Male		Female		Total	
7(31) y (3)	No.	%	No.	to redmi	No.	%
Agriculture	17	6.83	8	3.60	25	5.31
Agricultural labour	8	3.21	3	1.35	11,	2.34
Day labour	88	35.34	33	14.86	121	25.69
Business	2	0.80	4	1.80	6	00001 - 1.27
Forest dependent	001 5	2.01	6	2.70	11	2.34
Animal husbandry	0	0.00	1.	0.45	1	0.21
Student	61	24.50	51	22.97	112	23.78
Tea Garden labour	20	8.03	35	15.77	55	11.68
Household Work	(O.8) 3	1.20	46	20.72	49	10.40
Occupation less	(15) 14 32	12.85	23	10.36	55	11.68
Service	1 1	0.40	82.88 3	1.35	4	0.85
Pension holders	2	0.80	3.15	3.15	2	0.42
Other	10	4.02	0.90	0.90	19	4.03
Total	249	100.00	222	100.00	471	100.00

Table No. 12 : Secondary occupation of the studied population

Secondary occupation	Mal	e oktoes of	Fema	le made	Total	
	Table No	. %	No.	%	No.	% had 600
Agriculture	3.	15.00	42.86	2.30	5	4.67
Agricultural labour	1	5.00	14,29	1.15	2	1.87
Day labour	100.00	55.00	3 00.00 3	3.45	14	13.08
Business	1	5.00	1	1.15	2	1.87
Forest product collection	ppulation	5.00	ge of loan an	2.30	3	2.80
Household Work	1	5.00	74	85.06	nsel gri 75	70.09
Mason	- o ^(c) 1	5.00	0	0.00	1	0.93
Tea Garden Contractual Lab	our 1	5.00	2	2.30	3	2.80
Other	0	0.00	2	2.30	2	1.87
Total	20	100.00	87	100.00	107	100.00

Table No. 13: Family wise income and expenditure of the studied population

Income Group (in Rs.)	Incor	ne	Expenditure	
meome Group (m. 1887)	Number of Family	%	Number of family	%
Below Rs.1000	10	9.17	10	9.17
Rs.1000-Rs.3000	45	41.28	48	44.04
Rs.3001-Rs.5000	37	33.94	35	32.11
Rs.5001-Rs.10000	15	13.76	14	12.84
Above 10000	2	1.83	2	1.83
Total	109	100.00	109	100.00

Can No Can Sig Below Primary Middle Matrico

Gradua Not att (0 - 4 y **Total**

Table No. 14: Savings habit of the Nagesias

Place of Saving	1	Male	Fer	male	To	tal
Trace of Saving	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Cheat fund	4	5.97	4	19.05	8	9.09
Gramin Bank	88.017	10.45	3 3	14.29	10	11.36
Nationalized Bank	56	83.58	12	57.14	68	77.27
Others	0	0.00	1	4.76	ders	or no. 1.14
SHG	0	0.00	1	4.76	1	1.14
Total	67	100.00	21	100.00	88	100.00

Table No. 15: Source of loan among the studied population

Place of Saving	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	% % MAN %	No.	% 10	No.)MO 132 %
Bandhan - Cooperative Bank	3	42.86	6	66.67	9	56.25
Nationalized Bank	3	42.86	1	11.11	popula 4	25.00
Others	1	14.29	0	0.00	opads)	6.25
SHG	0	0.00	2	22.22	2	12.50
Total	7	100.00	9	100.00	16	100.00

Table No. 16: Source of loan among the studied population

Reasons of taking loan	u6.28	Male		Female		Total	
	No.		%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture	0		0.00	2	22.22	Confractual	12.50
Business	3		42.86	2	22.22	5	31.25
House making	2		28.57	2	22.22	4	25.00
Livestock	0		0.00	2	22.22	2	12.50
Medical	0		0.00	1	11.11	25.1	6.25
Marriage	2		28.57	0	0.00	2	12.50
Total	7		100.00	9	100.00	16	100.00

Table No. 17: Education level wise distribution of the studied population

Education level	Male		Female		To	otal
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Can Not sign	76	28.25	100	42.19	176	34.78
Can Sign only	17	6.32	18	7.59	35	6.92
Below Primary	5	1.86	4	1.69	9	1.78
Primary (Class I-IV)	94	34.94	62	26.16	156	30.83
Middle School (Class V-VIII)	34	12.64	22	9.28	56	11.07
Matriculation (Class IX-X)	18	6.69	11	4.64	29	5.73
Higher Secondary (Class XI-XII)	6	2.23	7	2.95	13	2.57
Graduate and above	1	0.37	2	0.84	3	0.60
Not attending school	18	6.69	11	4.64	29	5.73
(0 - 4 years age group)			A CONTRACTOR			
Total	269	100.00	237	100.00	506	100.00

Table No. 18: Nature of dropout at the different levels among the Nagesias

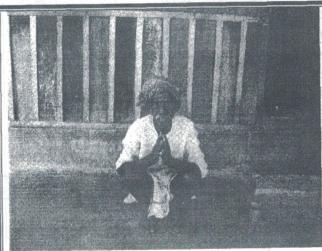
Levels		Male		Female		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Primary		57	53.27	33	55.93	90	54.22
Secondary		37	34.58	20	33.90	57	34.34
Tertiary		13	12.15	6	10.17	19	11.45
Total	14 150	107	100.00	59	100.00	166	100.00

Table No. 19: Causes of dropout among the Nagesias

Cause	Male		ogran Fei	male	Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Marriage	2	1.87	6	10.34	8	4.82
Economic problem	53	49.53	28	48.28	81	48.8
Illness	1	0.93	3	5.17	4	2.41
Not interested	48	44.86	21	36.21	69	41.57
Not passed	3	2.80	0	0.00	3	1.81
Total	107	100.00	58	100.00	165	100.00

Table No. 20: Age at first marriage among the studied population

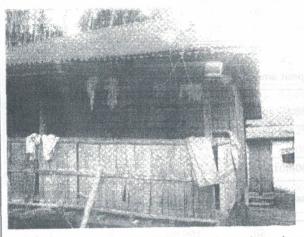
Age group	Male		Age group		Female		
	No.	%		No.		%	
Up to 14+years	3	2.70	Up to 14 + years	33	1 1	25.19	
15-20 + years	47	42.34	15-17 + years	50		38.17	
21 + years above	61	54.95	18 + years above	48		36.64	
Total	111	100.00	Total	131		100.00	



An old man - Nagesia ST, Alipurduar



A Nagesia woman, Alipurduar



A Nagesia house at Nimti Tea Garden, Alipurduar



Nagesia settlement in Torsa TG

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Changing Dimension of Political System among the Meches

Kailash Naskar And Biswanath Gan

Abstract

All cultures are in a continuous state of change. The Meches are a little known scheduled tribe in West Bengal. Political system may be defined as the arrangement of various political institutions, associations and organizations which helps to maintain integration of society by determining norms. The prevalence of traditional political system can mostly be observed very distinctly among the tribal societies. In the contemporary tribal societies the traditional political system is in the way of losing its function and utility mainly owing to influence of modern political system and the same is taking place in the present-day Mech society. The concerned issue has been examined among the Meches of Ballalguri village in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal.

Introduction

Human groups have developed ways in which public decision-making, leadership, maintenance of social cohesion and order, protection of group rights, and safety from external threats are handled. Anthropologists identify these as political systems or political organizations. Anthropologists use a typological system when discussing political organization. Introduced by Elman Service in 1962, the system uses "...types of leadership, societal integration and cohesion, decision-making mechanisms, and degree of control over people" (Bonvillain 2010: 303) to categorize a group's political organization. Service identified four types of political organizations: bands, tribes, chiefdoms,

and states that are closely related to subsistence strategies. As with any typological system, these types are ideals and there is variation within groups. Political organization can be thought of as a continuum with groups falling in between the ideals. It is important to note that today the various types of political organizations operate within the modern nation-state system (http://wikieducator.org/Cultural Anthropology/ Social Institutions/Political Org). The system of political institutions in a society organized as a state. The organization of society takes on a political character with the emergence of classes and the state. The political organization of society is bound into a single system by political traditions, norms, and standards that ensure its functioning. The activity of the institutions included in the political organization of society encompasses all the social relations that emerge as political power is exercised. The phrase "political system of society" is a synonym for the "political organization of society" (http:/ /encvclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/ Political + Organization + of + Society).

All societies have political systems that function to manage public affairs, maintain social order, and resolve conflict. Yet the forms of these political systems are diverse, sometimes embedded in other social structures. Political organization involves issues like allocation of political roles, levels of political integration, concentrations of power and authority, mechanisms of

social control and resolving conflicts. Anthropologists recognize four types of political organization based on levels of political integration, concentration, specialization. Nowadays, non-state forms of political organization have state systems superimposed on them (http://www.zeepedia.com/read.php?political_organizations_chiefdoms_cultural_anthropology&b=98&c=25).

Political organization refers to the way through which the power is distributed and embedded in societies. A political organization is any entity that is involved in the political process. In the context of political system the tribals have their own traditional political system to control their society and it is most important in India because India is a complex society. At present India has the second largest tribal population in the world, next only to Africa. The various tribal communities are found to live in India. The mentionable matter is that in spite of traditional political system they are also introduced with the statutory political system i.e. three-tier Panchayati Raj which was adopted with Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at block or tehsil level and Zila Parishad at the district level was constituted.

Tribal Political System

Many tribal societies have a form of government in which the unilinear descent groups play an important part. Radcluiffe-Brown told that a political organization is concerned with "the maintenance or establishment of social order within a territorial frame work, by the organised exercise of coercive authority through the use, or possibility of use of physical force", and Evans-Pritchard observes that "the political system is an equilibrium between opposed tendencies towards fission and fusion, between the tendency of all groups to combine with segments of the same order". In both these definitions the approaches seem to be concerned with synchronic, homoeostatic constructs which demonstrate the inter-relationship between structures as they function to maintain social solidarity and order. Political field refers to those individuals and groups which participate in a political activity and the values, meaning, symbols and resources they employ in carrying out the activity (Panda, 2005:13).

The political life of the tribals of India reflects a paradoxical situation in which democracy and monarchy co-exist. Every head of a community at different levels like clan, village and territory is generally honoured, obeyed and accepted as the head of the group. His office is hereditary. The supreme and final authority is in the hands of a single person. Tribal political associations are of various kinds and incorporate individuals, elders, families, a clan group, a village and a tribal territory. Still they are micro-political in nature. The simple tribal communities of India have their own political influences which may spread quite beyond the conflicts of the small territory. The political characteristics of tribals may broadly be looked at through their social organization. They are: (i) Political association based on lineage; (ii) Political association based on the village as unit; and (iii) Political association of a group of villagers of a territory. The first and foremost characteristic is the clan and lineage. Clanship is politically more significant. The living groups of clansmen claim to know with some certainty the genealogical links between themselves and the founding ancestor. Here the clan has a systematic genealogical structure, with numerous branches called "lineages". These lineages stand in known genealogical relationship to one another. Tribes and their sections, then, are the political communities, composed of groups of people of different lines of ancestry occupying a common territory. The tribal village works actively as a political unit. Most of the tribes have a judicial machinery to deal with disputes, branches of peace and social offences at the village level. It is usually a village council or assembly of elders known as Panchayat. Among the Mundas, Santals, Hos, Oraons, Gonds, Bhils, etc. each village has a panchayat. Sexual offences among them are dealt with by their clan elders. In villages having only one clan, the clan elders coincide with the village elders. In a village consisting of many clans, the population of several villages would be organized into clan units for purposes of trial of sexual offences. Furthermore, the village community has some social control over its people. Among all the tribes there are a number of negative sanctions that follow on misconduct or misdemeanor. In a tribal village the behavior of every tribesmen is a matter of public concern and a man or a woman can gauge the effect of his or her behavior by watching the reactions of the village community. Thus even with the villag public be

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even without the direct exercise of the social prerogative, the village community exercises a limited control over public behavior.

The tribal political life is characterized by the following important features –

- i. The tribal law depends on the agnatic relation-like clan and lineage.
- ii. The local group relation and territorial relations like co-villager and co-territorials take part in political affairs.
- iii. Moral principles and public opinion are matters of consideration which are reflected in the mode of social control which the tribals have over their people. The laws have their origin in social customs.
- iv. The tribal laws do not make any distinction between public crime and private crime, viz., social matters are also brought before the Panchayats.
- v. Oath and Ordeal are main modes of evidence.
- vi. Punishment is given in the shape of fine, compensation to the aggrieved, offer of communal feasts, and offering or puja to the Supreme Being.
- vii. A breach of norms is likely to affect the whole society, for instance, the case of incest causes concern to the whole community.
- viii. It is believed that punishment is also given by the supernatural powers.

And these characteristics go a long way to form the entire tribal political life on a pivot of Nature-Man-Spirit-complex where all the three function actively (Vidyardia & Rai, 1985: 196-200).

The tribal political pattern in India may be viewed along with their political institution. The political structure focuses certain individuals too. Thus institution and the political individuals exercise political control over the members of the community of the political field of activities is broadly of two with further sub-types, i.e., (a) Traditional Political Field and (b) Contemporary Political Field. The first type is the product of their traditional political life which a the same time combines political affairs with social and along the political affairs.

religious affairs. The second type has come out as the precipitate of culture change, culture contact and alien way of life, the mode of electing the Mukhia, Pramukh, Adhyaksh, Vidhayak and Sansad Sadasya is the present democratic set-up.

The traditional political field of the tribals is confined to the institutions like the council of village elders, village headman, village panchayat and so on. All these institutions consisting of a single person or a group of persons have inter related, crosscutting fields where one surpasses the other varying from situation to situation. These institutions are mainly of five kinds, viz. the council of elders, the village headman, the village panchayat, the union of villages and the tribal chief (Vidyarthi & Rai, 1985: 201-202).

The Meches and their Political System

The Meches are one of the tribal communities which enumerated in 'West Bengal Schedule Tribe' list. The Meches are popularly called Mechia that is inhabitants on the banks of the river Mechi. They are a Tibeto-Burman speaking Indo-Mongoloid tribe who migrated into India through Patkoi Hills between India and Burma and gradually spread themselves into the whole of Assam, North Bengal and parts of East Bengal. They ruled over these tracts of land for many years. The Meches went towards the west along the foot of the Himalayas up to the river Medhi between India and Nepal and settled on the north bank of the said river as Mech or Mechia. They crossed the river and established themselves in the deep forests of Darjeeling Terai and Baikunthapur of Jalpaiguri. Again thay manched east-wands, crossed the Tista and scread themselves in the Duars, Jalpaiguri (Sanyal, 1973). Risely says that there had been considerable intermixture of blood between the inhabitants of hills and the plains. For this there must be some historical truth in these traditions and stones (Risley, 1891). According to Census 2011 If the Wech population of West Bengal is 41242 out of which Male 20851, Female 20391 (Census, 2011). The Weiches belong to patrilineal society. In their society sons only inherit the father's property and the daughters have no ment to the property. But in the contemporary Mech society the women often have decision making power in many respects related to their livelihood and also in some cases they are also allowed to take part in will be meeting in order to know their opinion. With the

changes of habitat many socio-cultural changes have taken place in their society and the changing dimension of political system is one of them which has a great impact on their living. The present paper mainly highlights the present scenario of political system among the Meches of Ballalguri village in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal.

The simplest political systems are mainly found in tribal society. But their socio-cultural life is being affected due to continuous contact with the large-scale societies. There no longer are any tribes that have been able to maintain their traditional political systems unaltered by outside influences. Like all other tribal communities the Meches have their own traditional political system to control their society. The political organization of the Meches in the studied village is locally known as committee. This committee is composed of seven members and the chief of this committee is known as Mukhia who has a great power to control over the community members and he is the most respected person to the villagers. Among them the Mukhia is generally selected on the basis of certain criteria which are given below -

- He must be a person who has the capacity to take appropriate decision at the village meeting as well as to lead the other members of the committee.
- ii. He must be a respected person to the villagers as well as to other committee members.
- He must have more experience as compare to other committee members.

Among them the other members of the committee are generally selected on the basis of certain criteria which are mentioned below -

- i. They must belong to the age group of 22 years and above.
- ii. They must have experience regarding activities of village committee.
 - iii. They must have the quality of better way of talking.
 - iv. They must be a respected person to the villagers.
 - v. They should be co-operative.

It is necessary to mention here that a Mukhia or a member of the committee can retain his position as long as he wants. The headmanship or membership is not hereditary. In the studied village the traditional panchayat system plays an important role to control over the community members. Various activities of traditional panchayat in the studied village are mentioned below —

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- i. Finding possible solutions to the problem of familial or interfamilial conflicts.
- ii. Taking necessary steps against any illegal activities.
- iii. Taking proper initiatives against theft of any useful things, crops, domestic animals etc.
- iv. Maintaining peaceful environment.
- v. Providing a financial help to the poor families for treatment, marriage etc.
- vi. Providing a financial support to the meritorious students.
- vii. Making an arrangement of ambulance for serious patients.
- viii. Making an arrangement of loan for poor farmers.
- ix. Rewarding people for good performance.

The meeting is usually held at the house of any of the committee members, which is generally selected near by the offender's house. Both male and female members are allowed to take part in the meeting but must be belonged to the age group of 15 years and above. The most aged and experienced persons in the village are invited to attend the meeting. But it is mandatory for the members of offenders' family to attend the meeting. The village headman who is locally known as Mukhia is the most respected person in the village and he is the spokesman of the villagers in any matters. No function of public character can properly be performed without his presence or at least without his consent. The Mukhia is reported regarding any problem or dispute within the village territory and after being reported he gathers the village council through other committee members on a fixed date where witness of both parties are heard and cross examined and finally he declares the decision with full consent. There are various types of punishment given by the traditional panchayat to the offenders. If a person makes nuisance after consuming alcohol, he is scolded bitterly and even sometimes beaten up by the committee members in the presence of other villagers and they have a belief that if they do so then the offenders would not do the same anymore in their life. Apart from these, the money compensation is a popular kind of punishment given by the traditional panchayat through proper judgment in the village meeting. The amount of money is generally varied according to type of offences. In case of cow theft Rs. 15000/- to 20000/- has been fixed as compensation and incase of goat theft it is Rs. 10000/-. In case of fowl theft around Rs. 1000/- is claimed from the offender. Generally Rs. 500/- to Rs. 6000/- has been fixed as compensation for betel nut theft but in such case the offenders are usually exempted from paying this fine if he returns the same to the owner. The problem of inter familial conflict is generally solved through a village meeting and in such case the accused family has to pay around Rs. 200/- to Rs. 300/- to the committee as punishment. The problem regarding eve teasing, rape or physical harassment are generally solved through a meeting where both the parties of victimized and victimizer are to present and as a punishment the victimizer is to marry her but in case of underage the victimizer has to pay around Rs. 25000/- to Rs. 30000/- as a fine, otherwise he is handed over to the police through modern panchayat. But now their traditional way of social control is in the way of changing owing to the influence of modern three-tier panchayat or statutory panchayat system. But the dependency on judgment of traditional village panchayat regarding social ceremonies, illegal activities, familial conflicts etc. is still common to notice among them. The noticeable matter is that generally they prefer to solve their problems within themselves without any interference of police or court or any other kind of administrative jurisdiction. It is necessary to mention here that if the traditional panchayat is failed to solve their problem then the case is handed over to the modern panchayat. In case of serious offence like murder the case is handed over to the police with the help of modern panchayat. The traditional panchayat usually looks after all the developmental works in the village conducted by the modern panchyat like Indira Awas Yojna, construction of toilet, road construction and repairing, canal for irrigation and so on and in this connection the list of beneficiaries is generally made by the members of traditional panchayat. Though the influence of modern panchayat system is noticed in the studied village but their traditional political system held an important position in maintaining the village social system.

General Observation

The Meches are one of the tribal communities which enumerated in 'West Bengal Schedule Tribe' list. They are a Tibeto-Burman speaking Indo-Mongoloid tribe. The Meches belong to patrilineal society and in their society sons only inherit the father's property. But in the presentday Mech society the women often have decision making power in many respects and also in some cases they are also found to attend the village meeting to share their consent. With the changes of habitat from the high altitude to the plain land of Assam and West Bengal a number of socio-cultural changes have taken place among them and the changing dimension of political system is one of them which has a great impact on their social life. Like all other tribal communities the Meches have their own traditional political system to control over the community members. The political organization among the Meches of the studied village is known as Committee which is composed of seven members and the chief of this committee is popularly known as Mukhia. But presently their traditional way of social control is in the way of breaking mainly due to the influence of modern threetier panchayat system. But they are still found to rely on the judgment of their traditional village panchayat in many respects such as social ceremonies like marriage, ceremonial occasions, religious festivals etc.; illegal activities; familial conflicts etc. is still common to notice among them. They mostly prefer to solve their problems within their own territories without any interfere of police or court or any other kind of administrative jurisdiction. Sometimes it is seen that if their committee is failed to solve their problem then the case is handed over to the modern panchayat and the same is taking place in case of serious offence as well. Apart from these, the traditional panchayat generally looks after all the developmental works within the village territory conducted by the modern panchayat and a beautiful collaboration between traditional and modern panchayat system has been noticed in such cases.

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