ASSESSMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF TRIBAL HOUSEHOLDS IN JALPAIGURI DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Socio Economic Status is a widely used concept in Sociology. It is a measure of the social standing of an individual or a family in the society. Socio Economic Status (SES) is very important characteristics to categorise an individual, group, family or others for a certain period of time based on education, occupation and income. With the help of SES social and economic position is determined. It also helps to assess the health condition, mortality and nutrition status, occupancy of wealth, accessibility of resources and affordability of an individual. 70 percent of the total population of India lives in the rural area. The said percentage is slightly high in West Bengal (72%). Below Poverty level (BPL) population of West Bengal (27.5%) is slightly lower than that of the national scenario (29.5%). Central government as well as the state government have introduced various schemes for the development of the rural area since independence. The present study is an attempt to evaluate the Social and Economic status of rural people in the district of Jalpaiguri where majority of the tribal people exists from various tribal communities like Oraon, Munda, Santal, Mech and Rabha. B.G. Prasad Scale for measuring SES is more applicable to rural area and has been considered for this study. Both primary and secondary data have been used to reach the desire objectives. The study reveals that the SES of the selected tribal communities is not satisfactory enough. Their lifestyle is governed by their income and

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shows that their purchasing power is very meagre. It reflects the scenario of rural Indian society as a whole as money plays an important role for determining social status, accessibility to resources, possession of properties and agricultural land etc.

Key Words: socio-economic status, income, affordability, below poverty level, B.G. Prasad scale

1.   Introduction

Assessment of Socio-Economic Status (SES) is very significant measuring tool in community based studies. SES categorised the family in respect of education, occupation, income status, physical assets, social position etc because it affects the education status, health condition, possession of physical properties of an individual or a family. Several methods or scales have been propounded for assessing socio-economic status of a family. Some important scales are: Rahudkar Scale (1960), Udai Pareek Scale (1964), Jalota Scale (1970), Kulshrestha Scale (1972), Kuppuswamy Scale (1976), Shrivastav Scale (1978), Bharadwaj Scale 2001 (1-7). However, social transformation and fast growing economy have rendered these scales ineffective in measuring the SES over the years. Further, steady inflation and consequent fall in the value of currency make the economic criteria in the scale less relevant. The most widely accepted scale for urban area has been proposed by Kuppuswamy in India in 1976. Presently there is no standardised questionnaire to assess the SES. It has two main components namely, the social status and the economic status. They are clubbed together, as these are linked to each other directly. There is no direct measurement procedure to find out the social status of an individual. Therefore, so many attempts had been made by many eminent researchers and social scientists in the past to formulate a composite index to measure it. Although, Kuppuswamy Scale and Uday Pareek Scale are used for both urban and rural areas but the most commonly used scale for measuring Socio Economic Status (SES) is modified B.G. Prasad Scale for the rural area.

Wilson (1985) defines Socio Economic Status (SES) as a classification of individual, household or family according to occupation, income, education or some other indicators of social status. Tiwari (2005) describes SES as an important measuring technique of a household or a family in respect of societal status. It plays a significant role in planning and execution of development

programmes especially in developing countries. Worall (2003) opined that in most developing countries, the process of measurement of SES is changing. In developing countries like Nigeria, social science researchers are been confronted with diverse problems in the measurement of certain characteristics of rural dwellers such as standard of living, wealth, state of affluence and social status (Adewale, 1999). The concept SES could be defined as the position that an individual or family occupied with respect to the prevailing average standards of cultural possessions, effective income, material possessions as well as participation in the group activities of the communities (Akinbile, 2007). In India, several studies were made on the SES of the people residing in urban areas as well as rural. Some systematic studies were made especially in rural areas. Various initiatives have been taken time to time for the socio-economic upliftment of rural people of India. Several plans and programmes were introduced in the rural area by forming several Commissions in the recent years. Number of people living Below Poverty Line (BPL) in India varies from 42 percent and 26 percent in rural and urban area. B.G. Prasad Scale of measuring SES of the people residing at the rural area has been taken into consideration to assess the status of selected tribal communities of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal.

2.   Research Method

The present study is confined within the districts of Jalpaiguri of the Northern part of West Bengal. The geographical area of the study area is 6227 sq km. between $26°16'$ to $27°0'$ N and $88°8'$ to $89°53'$ E of the north-eastern district of West Bengal. Seven community development blocks namely Mal, Matiali, Nagrakata, Kalchini, Kumargram, Dhupguri and Madarihat among 13 C.D. blocks of undivided Jalpaiguri district are dominated by various Indo- Mongoloids and Proto-Austroloides group of tribes. Five tribal communities mainly, Mech and Rabha of Indo-Mongoloid group and Oraon, Munda, and Santals of Proto-Austroloides have been selected from this district. Fifteen villages from seven C.D. Blocks have been randomly selected to analyse the SES of the tribal communities.

Both primary and secondary data has been used to assess the SES of selected tribal communities. Primary data have been collected with the help of structured questionnaire by means of interview and personal interaction. The questionnaire had been administered among 200 households on the basis of simple random sampling technique. Santals from Kalaigaity and Odlabari Tea Garden of

Mal, Oraons from Nagaisuri and Indong Tea Garden of Matiali and also from Lakshmikantapur Tea Garden of Dhupguri, Mundas from Bamandanga and Kalabari Tea Garden of Nagrakata C.D. Block, Gopalpur Tea Garden from Madarihat and Chuniajhora Tea Garden of Kumargram, Mech from Uttar and Dakshin Mendabari of Kalchini C.D. block have been surveyed. Rabhas from Dakshin Mendabari and Rabhabasti of North Poro, South Poro and Bhatkhawa Tea Garden of Kalchini C.D. block have been selected for collection of primary data. Secondary data have been collected from various documents, Government reports, Block Level and Panchayet Level documents and other available literatures.

The present study is based on the following objectives:

❖ To assess the Socio Economic Status (SES) of selected tribal communities of Jalpaiguri district using B.G Prasad Scale.

❖ To identify the impact of income over the standard of living of the selected tribal people.

❖ To identify the problem associated with the economic development of the tribal community.

Modified B.G. Prasad scale is a commonly used scale to measure the socio economic status of a family. Due to its ease of application it is one of the most widely used scales for determining the socio economic status. B.G. Prasad scale was originally derived in 1961 considering the base of Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 1960 as 100 and was later modified by the author himself in 1968 and 1970. This was revised in 1982 by introducing a linking factor of 4.93 to convert CPI (1982) from the new base of 100 to the old base CPI (1960). Again a need was felt in 2001 to revise the base, which was done by introducing the linking factor of 4.63. These linking factors have been given by the Labour Bureau of India. Therefore, it is important to continuously update the income categories of the scale. To calculate the new income values, first to find out the current All India Consumer Price Index (AICPI) for Industrial Workers (IW; base 2001= 100), then calculate the Multiplication Factor by the following equation.

Multiplication Factor = Current Index Value/ Base Index Value in 2001 (i.e., 100).
The New Income Value can be calculated using the following equation.

New Income Value = Multiplication Factor X Old Income Value X 4.63 X 4.93 (where 4.63 and 4.93 are the Linking Factors given by the Labour Bureau of India).
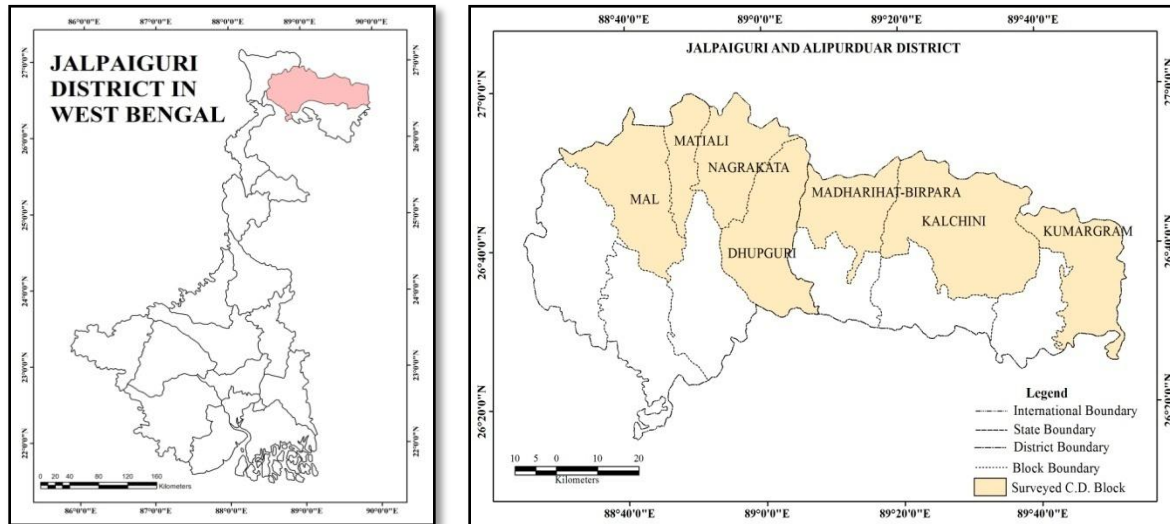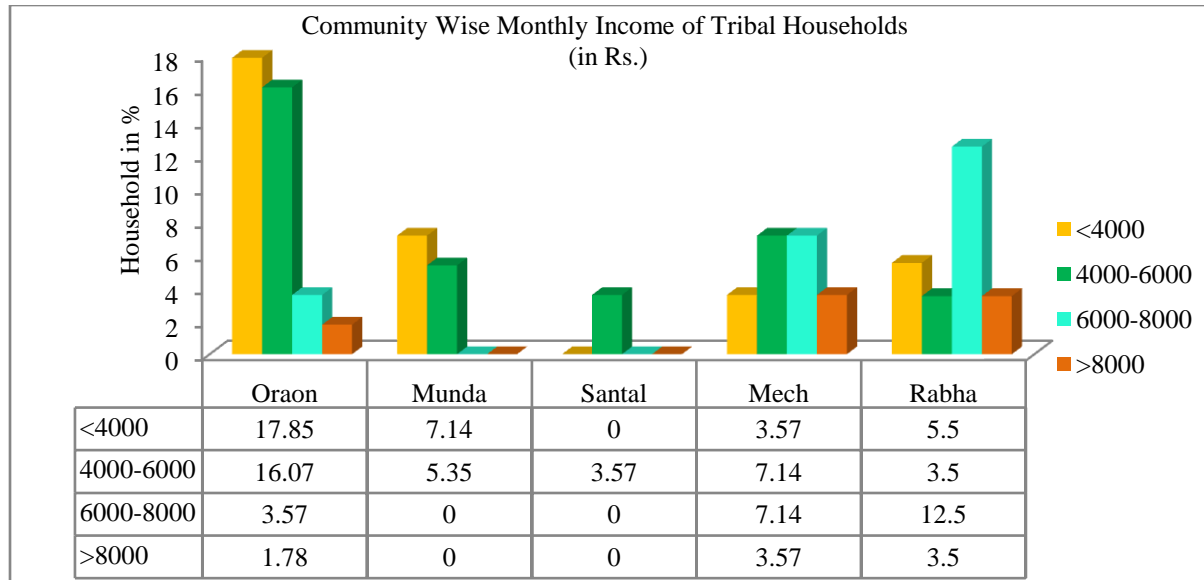

Source: DPMS of Jalpaiguri, NATMO, Kolkata

Figure 1. Location of the Study Area

3. **Results and Analysis**

The entire analysis is divided into two sections: Section-I and Section-II. The initial part of the Section-I deals with the per capita monthly income of the selected households based on revised modified B.G. Prasad Socio Economic Scale (1961). The second part of this section contemplates with the income level of individual tribal communities. The Section-II of the analysis deals with various socio- economic factors like level of education, occupation, possession of agricultural land, toilet facilities, house type etc. as the indicator of social status which are governed by the family income.

Community Wise Monthly Income of Tribal Households (in Rs.)

	Oraon	Munda	Santal	Mech	Rabha
<4000	17.85	7.14	0	3.57	5.5
4000-6000	16.07	5.35	3.57	7.14	3.5
6000-8000	3.57	0	0	7.14	12.5
>8000	1.78	0	0	3.57	3.5

Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 2. Community Wise Monthly Income of Tribal Households

Section-I

The monthly income of the tribal families had been tabulated from primary data collected from field survey. The income level of the tribal community had been divided into four groups. Figure no. 2 shows community wise monthly income of selected tribal households. From this diagram it is clear that a very few tribal family earns more than ₹ 8000/- per month where as majority of them earns less than ₹4000/- monthly.

On the basis of monthly income of a family, the per capita income had been calculated. Then with the help of Multiplication Factor, the New Income Values of selected households as well as individual tribal communities have been calculated by using the following equation. The entire data have been classified into five Socio-Economic Classes namely, Upper Class, Upper Middle Class, Middle Class, Lower Middle Class and Lower Class on the basis of per capita income using the formula developed by B.G. Prasad.

Multiplication Factor = Current Index Value / Base Index Value in 2001 (i.e., 100).
Calculation of the New Income Value = Multiplication Factor X Old Income Value X 4.63 X 4.93 (where 4.63 and 4.93 are the Linking Factors given by the Labour Bureau). After

determining the revised income categories for Jalpaiguri, the frequency of tribal households regarding Socio-Economic Classification Scale had been find out.

Table no.1 shows the revised income of the tribal families under selected socio economic classes. It is evident that large number of tribal families exists within the group of Lower Income Class (53%) even in 21st Century. Unfortunately there are no tribal families of the district categorised in Upper and Upper Middle Income Classes. Results show that 43 percent households are categorised as Lower Middle Income Class and only four percent of the entire surveyed households are the part of Middle Income Class and their per capita monthly income lies between ₹ 1795 and ₹ 3031.

Table 1. Socio-Economic Classification by Revised Modified B.G. Prasad Scale

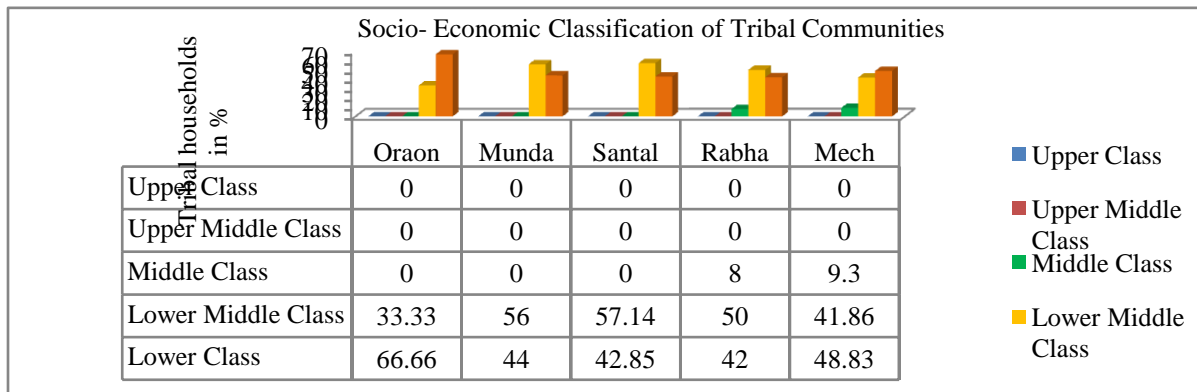| Socio-Economic Classes	Per capita monthly income		Number of Household	% of Tribal Household
	Modified B.G. Prasad SES (1961)	Revised income categories for Jalpaiguri (IW) 2016		
Upper Class (> ₹ 6125)	> 100	> ₹ 6125	0	0
Upper Middle Class (₹ 3032 - ₹ 6124)	50 - 99	₹ 3032 - ₹ 6124	0	0
Middle Class (₹ 1795 - ₹ 3031)	30 - 49	₹ 1795 - ₹ 3031	8	4
Lower Middle Class (₹ 929 - ₹ 1794)	15 - 29	₹ 929 - ₹ 1794	86	43
Lower Class (< ₹ 928)	< 15	< ₹ 928	106	53

Source: Computed by the Authors
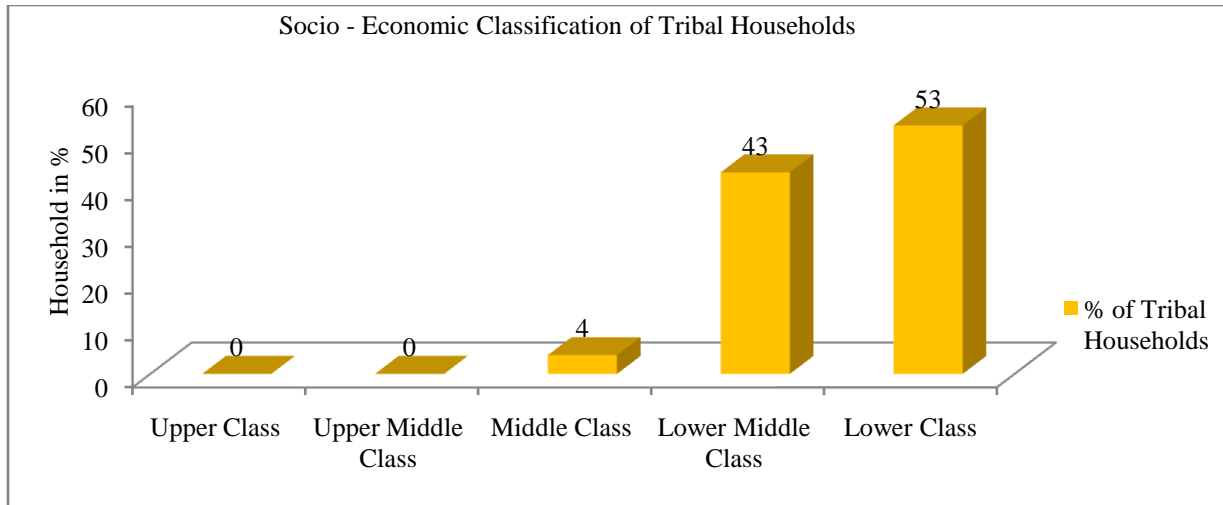
Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 3. Socio-Economic Classification of Tribal Households

Figure no. 3 shows the Socio- Economic Classification of selected tribal households. In this figure total number of household have been categorised considering B.G. Prasad scale of SES.

In the second part of the Section-I, the community wise distribution of Socio- Economic Status of tribal household have been analysed. The figure shows that 66.67 percent of Oraon and 48.84 percent of the Mech communities belongs to lower class. Only 8 percent and 9.3 percent of the Rabha and Mech family belongs to middle class category. Again there are no Upper and Middle Class households found in the district. It is also found that 56 percent of the Munda, 57.14 percent of Santal and 50 percent of the Rabha families are categorised as Lower Middle Class.

Socio- Economic Classification of Tribal Communities

	Oraon	Munda	Santal	Rabha	Mech
Upper Class	0	0	0	0	0
Upper Middle Class	0	0	0	0	0
Middle Class	0	0	0	8	9.3
Lower Middle Class	33.33	56	57.14	50	41.86
Lower Class	66.66	44	42.85	42	48.83

Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 4. Socio- Economic Classification of Tribal Communities

Section – II deals with the accessibility of essential facilities by the tribal households which are considered as the basic parameters for assessing the SES. Income status and education status have also been considered as a part of the component of SES. Some of the basic facilities which are considered as the indicators of Socio Economic Status are briefly discussed to determine the impact of monthly income on the lifestyle of the tribal families.

3.2   Effects of income on the lifestyle of the tribal people

3.2.1 Level of Education among selected Tribal Communities:

The literacy rate of Rabha (80%) and Mech (65%) community is comparatively higher than all other community. Majority of Oraon (69%) are illiterate followed by Munda (56%) and Santal (43%) as compare to their own individual community.

Again, comparison was made in between inter community to bring out the real scenario of rural area. In that case the picture is slightly changed but overall status of education remains unchanged. Percentage of Illiterate population among Santal (43%) community is much higher than all other tribal community followed by Oraon (26%), Mech (7.5%), Munda (7%), and Rabha (5%). The detail of the education level is shown in figure no. 5 and 6.
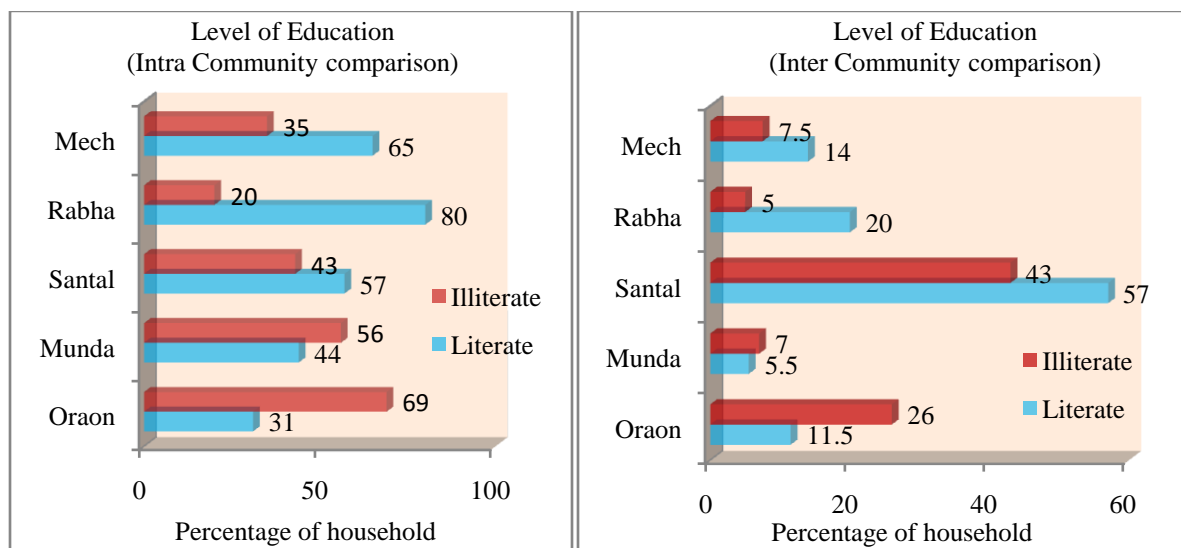
Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 5. Level of Education (Intra Community Comparison)

Figure 6. Level of Education (Inter Community Comparison)

The convenient lifestyle of a person is depends on the educational status in today's society. It has diverse positive effects on the human lifestyle as well as on the society. The literacy rate of the selected tribal communities of Jalpaiguri district is very poor even in the modern age. The study shows that the people of selected tribal communities are suffering from various problems like poverty and ill health due to poor educational standard. They are unable to share their skill and traditional knowledge in the field of development. They are not capable to take part in the decision making and execution of policy and programmes.

3.2.2   Engagement in various primary economic activities:

It is observed that most of the Oraon (97%) are engaged with the tea garden as a labourer. On the other hand Rabha and Mech are exclusively engaged with the primary activities mainly agriculture. Majority of the Santal people are engaged with the tea garden. Very minimum percentage of Oraon, Munda and Santal are engaged with the cultivation.

In comparison with the connection of economic activities among the tribal community, it is seen that no Rabha and Mech people are employed themselves in tea garden activity. Very insignificant percentage of Oraon, Munda and Santal people are attached with cultivation. 36.5 percent of the Oraon worked in the tea garden. Details of the occupation of five communities within their group and among communities are shown in figure no. 7 and 8.
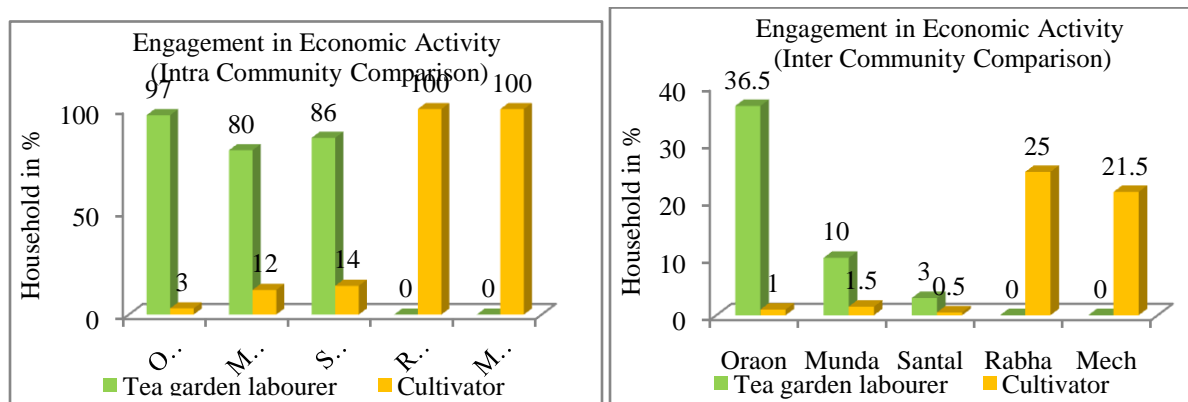
Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 7. Engagement in Economic Activity (Intra Community Comparison)

Figure 8. Engagement in Economic Activity (Inter Community Comparison)

It is observed that none of them are engaged in the service sector or other kind of secondary activities except tea garden and they also do not posses sufficient agricultural land. Therefore the monthly income of the tribal people is not adequate to carry on household expenses. Income from tea garden is also very low and creates unmanageable situation for the tea garden labourer to sustain their family life.
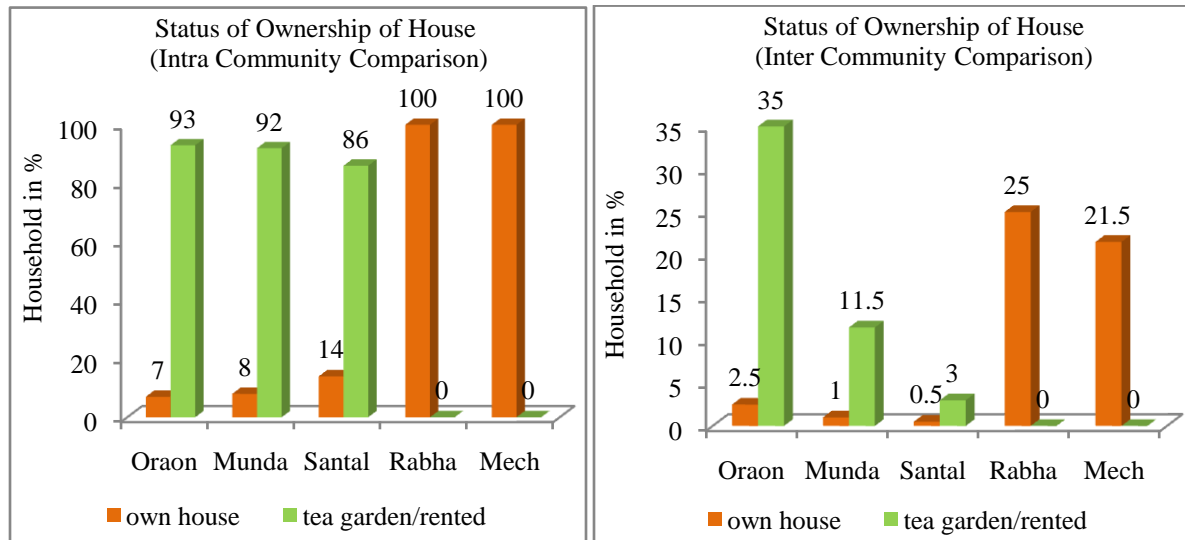
3.2.3   Ownership of House

Rabha and Mech tribal people stay in their own houses which is very remarkable. On the other hand more than 90 percent of Oraon and Munda are living in rented house provided by tea garden authority. The maximum percentage of tribal people belongs to Oraon, Munda and Santal community stay in the house provided by the owner of the garden compare to other tribal community.

While analysing the condition of house of the tribal community in comparison with others, it is observed that Rabha and Mech are staying in their own well maintained houses whereas Oraon and others lives in tea garden shanties. The scenario is changed in case of Santal people. Only 0.5 percent of them have their own house. The same is 1 percent and 5 percent in case of Munda and Oraon community.

Majority of the tribal people from Oraon, Munda and Santal community are attached with the tea garden activities. The younger generation of most of the tea garden workers are also worked in the tea garden as casual worker at very lower rate. The rate of labour per day is ₹125.50 of eight hours back breaking work. Company generally provides ration at a cheaper rate to the permanent tea garden workers. But the problem is that most of the tea garden of Jalpaiguri district is become sick or stopped their production so the workers have lost their job. For this reason they are not getting ration from the company. The employees are also going to the government health centre for treatment purpose. As a result they do not have sufficient savings to

construct their own house or to maintain them properly. As their income level is very low, they are unable to purchase a piece of land and construct their own house. The poorer section could not enjoy a decent life whereas an affluent family is privileged by that.

Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure no. 9 Status of Ownership of House (Intra Community Comparison)
Figure no. 10 Status of Ownership of House (Intra Community Comparison)
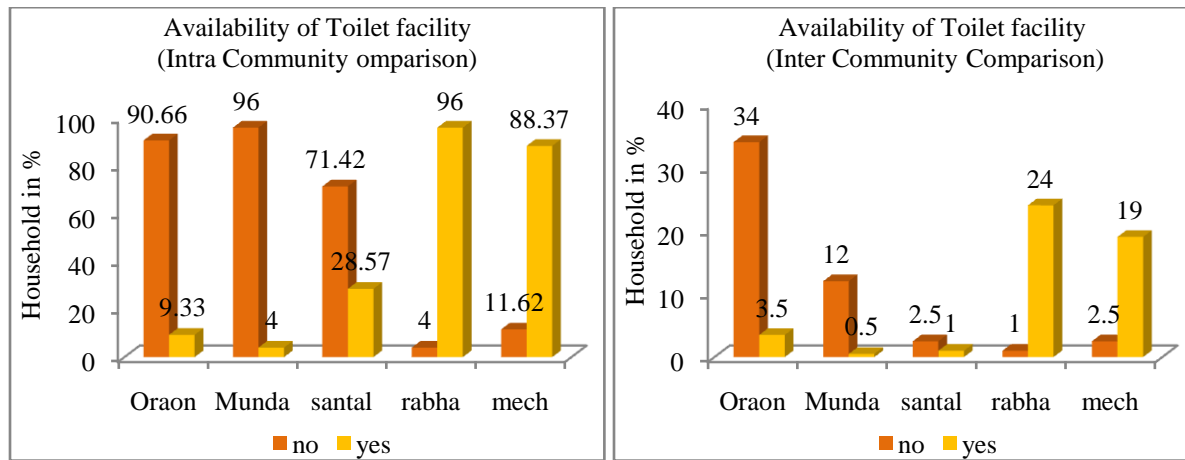
3.2.4 Toilet Facilities

The present scenario regarding the toilet facilities available to the tribal are very pathetic. In the context of toilet facility within the house, it is observed that Santals are in better position than Oraon, Munda is concern. 28.57 percent of the Santal have toilet facilities followed by Oraon (9.33%). On the other hand almost all the Rabha (96%) families have the toilet facilities within their house. 88.37 percent Munda community uses their own toilet.

If the toilet facility is compared on overall basis, then the scenario does not show any positive indication. Only 3.5 percent of the Oraon have toilet facility followed by Santal (1%) and Munda (0.5%). Again, highest percentage of Rabha (24%) followed by Mech (19%) use toilet as a part of sanitation.

It is observed that most of the rented houses provided by the tea garden authority have no formal toilet attached with the house or outside the house. The income level of Rabha and Mech

community is comparatively better than others. They depend on their own income generated from agriculture and small business. On the other hand, the people from Oraon, Munda and Santal community depends on the monthly salary offered by the garden authority. As it is very much low, they are unable to share their income for purpose nutritious food. Standard of living of these tribal people is also very low. They generally pay no attention to maintain the social status and are not aware of health and hygiene.
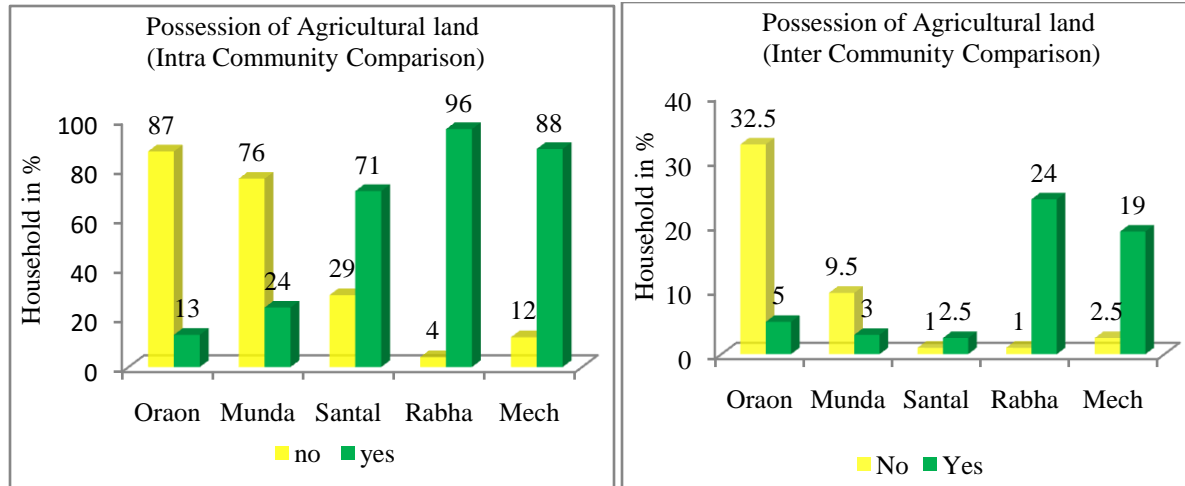

Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 11. Availability of Toilet Facility (Intra Community Comparison)

Figure 12. Availability of Toilet Facility (Inter Community Comparison)

3.2.5 Possession of Agricultural Land

From the study it is observed that most of tribal communities are landless tea garden labourer. Few of them posses a small amount of agricultural land given by the tea garden. Rabha community are very good cultivators and 96 percent of them possessed own land. Maximum percent of Oraon community is possessed negligible amount of agricultural land than Santal and Munda community. Only 13 percent of the Oraon community have agricultural land. 88 percent of the Mech, 71 percent of the Santal and 24 percent of Munda possessed agricultural land (Figure no.13).

Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 13. Possession of Agricultural Land (Intra Community Comparison)

Figure 14. Possession of Agricultural Land (Inter Community Comparison)

Inter community comparison shows that majority of the Rabha (24%) community possessed their own agricultural land followed by Mech (19%), Munda (5%), Oraon (3%) and Santal (2.5%) which is shown in Figure no. 14.

Income from agriculture is an important source of income for a family. A large number of tribal people of Oraon, Munda and Santal community do not possess a piece of land. As a result there is a very little scope to generation income from other sources apart from their remuneration from tea garden.

4.   Conclusion

The Socio Economic Status (SES) of the selected tribal communities of Jalpaiguri district indicates that different factors actively influenced the lifestyle of the rural tribal people. Education, occupation, toilet facilities, income level etc. significantly influence the SES of the rural tribal people and not restricted to any particular age group. The study reveals that a high percentage of rural tribal people have no toilet facilities. It is clear from the study that majority of the respondent are carrying their life with a minimum income. It can be stated that rural tribal people have not enough educational background. Regarding family education it is found that most of the tribal people are illiterate except Rabha, Mech and Munda but at the same time Santals are more educated than other tribal communities. The overall analysis of the study

established that the SES of the selected tribal rural tribal people of Jalpaiguri district is below average which is the indication of pitiable financial base of the people with low prospect of economic growth. From the above results and discussion, it may be stated that the tribal people are unable to maintain a healthy lifestyle even at the present era of developing India. The findings of the present study after careful consideration of some of the socio-economic component of the selected tribal people are:

1.   Tribal people usually have a survival lifestyle predominantly dependent on the forest resources. They sustainably manage the use of forest resources, gathering of food, making of handicrafts goods without destroying the ecosystem and biodiversity. It is observed that they are isolated from so called main stream of human society.

2.   Education level is an invaluable tool to enhancing the income. An education diminishes poverty, promotes health facilities, closes the gender gap, minimise malnutrition and accelerates economic growth. The tribal people living in below poverty level cannot obtain an education; they try to put themselves out from present modern society. They cannot become self-sufficient which is a key part of ending poverty.

3.   They only depend on the income from agriculture and income as a worker of the tea garden to meet their basic needs and to maintain their lifestyle. The characteristics of the tribal people revealed that the majority of them have not enough agricultural land. Either they work in the tea garden or worked as agricultural labourer. Most of them are living in the isolated family.

4.   They are suffering from financial problem or social problems as they are socially neglected. Poor economic status, social deprivation and inappropriate dietary intact are the results of their poor economic status.

5.   Tribal development policies, programmes and government sponsored schemes in India assume that all the tribal people will develop and will integrate themselves in the mainstream society. It is observed that a small section of tribal people have availed that opportunities. A lack of inefficiency is seen in the implementation of financial assistant or other developmental schemes in this area. Therefore the poor people become poorer.

6.   The facilities of the government hospitals, health centre and hospital run by the tea garden owner are not providing satisfactory health services and do not make available the facilities for old aged people and children. Special aids and equipments are not functional here.

Due to poor economic condition the tribal people are unable to access the services from private hospital or doctors.

7.

At the end, it may be stated that the rural tribal people of the selected villages of the Jalpaiguri district are economically poor. According to B.G. Prasad Scale their income level is also very pathetic. Most of the household lies in lower income group. They are not getting sufficient support from the government of other financial institutions. Therefore there is a need to assist rural tribal people in improving their SES through proper implementation of government scheme and intensifying the poverty alleviation programme in the rural areas. The present SES results the lack of innovation, restriction of knowledge, increase corruption, plundering of natural resources etc among tribes.

Special policies and programme may reduce the difference of the lifestyle of the tribal people and the people of the mainstream society. Outsiders cannot lead the developmental activities among the tribal communities. The tribes have to participate in all developmental activities and decision making bodies. Their outlooks on development of their own society have to be properly executed in the practical field by the execution of development programmes accurately.

5.   References

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