

Socio Economic Status of The Tribals Of Purulia District In the Post colonial Period

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Abstract

India is home to 10.2 crore tribal people who are also known as Adivasi and the constitution of India has designated “tribes” as Scheduled Tribes (Art 366). These adivasi people basically inhabit forest and hilly areas. Tribals are considered to be the most backward and deprived section of the Indian society. Socio-economic development of these tribal people has been neglected from British period to the present age of globalization. These aboriginals have a unique life style of their own, are untouched by the modernity. In the era of development and globalization they still face the problems of illiteracy, vicious poverty, ill health, poor livelihood and low income which force them to live in primitive conditions. Purulia is one of the most backward tribal district in the country. Tribals of this district have distinct age old social system, cultural tradition, customs, values, life style and languages. But in terms of economic condition of these people, they can be considered to be the poorest of the poor in the country. Tribals of this district use the forest as a means of their sustenance. The present study aims to focus on the socio-economic status and problems faced by this community to sustain their livelihood.

Key Words: Tribal, socio-economy, culture, literacy

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Introduction

According to the census of 2001, India is the home to the largest tribal population in the world, total 10,42,81,034 tribal people live in India. In India indigenous people are known as “Tribal people” or “Tribals”, they are at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. They are the poorest and

the most marginalized, oppressed and deprived people in the country (Nathan and Kekar, 2004; Rath, 2006). Tribes of this land are heterogeneous and diversified in respect of size of the population, life style, culture and language. National Tribal Policy (Govt. Of India)2006, identifies 698 tribal communities in India. Scheduled Tribe communities in India are found in different parts of the country. They occupy nearly 15% of the total land of the country and basically they live in the forest and hilly areas, though some of them also live in the plains . On the basis of ecological, social, economical, administrative and ethnic factors they are divided into five regional categories (Tribal Community Report 2014) such as 1. Himalayan Region. 2. Middle Region. 3. Southern Region. 4. Western Region. 5. Island Region. According to the census of 2011, 5.79% of the total population of West Bengal is Scheduled Tribes and 40 different types of tribal community reside in West Bengal. Most of them are found in the Southern, Western and Northern part of the state. Purulia is the most backward and deprived tribal populated district in West Bengal. 540652 people belonging to the tribal community, which consists of 18.45% of the total population of the district as well as the 10.52% of the total S.T population of West Bengal (census 2011). Most of the tribes of Purulia belong to Proto-Australoid race with dark skin, sunken nose and lower forehead. Tribes of this area basically speak in santhali, gond and kheria.

Study Area

Purulia came into being as a district under West Bengal in 1st September 1956 under the State Recognition Act and Bihar and West Bengal Act(transfer of territory)1956. Purulia is located in the western most part of the state of West Bengal and part of Chhota Nagpur plateau. The northern, southern and western part of the district is bound by the districts of Burdwan,,Bankuraand Paschim Medinipur. The district lies between 22°4' and 23°45' North latitude and 85°55' and 86°55' East longitude.Total area of the district is 6259 sq km. The district has 28 urban units with municipalities and consists of 170 gram panchayats covering 2667 villages (census 2011).

Objective of the study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To study the total scheduled tribe population in the district.
2. To study literacy rate of the tribals of the district.

3. To study the sex ratio of tribes of the district
4. To study economic condition of ST of the district
5. To study the cultural activities of tribals
6. To study the mother tongues of tribal people of Purulia

Brief profile of the indigenous people of Purulia

According to the census of 2011, 40 types of S.T reside in West Bengal and Purulia is the second highest tribal populated district in the state after Jalpaiguri. Tribal societies in Purulia have unique characteristics of their own. They basically live in forested mountaineous areas and plateau areas of the district. They have distinct culture, tradition, religion, festivals, language and strong ethnic identity. Most of the tribals of Purulia district being of Proto-Australoid group, speak in Santhali, Gond, and Kheria language. 5 major tribal communities in Purulia are Santhal (60%), Bhumij (18%), Sabar (7%), Munda (6%), Bihor (1%). On the basis of the ecology, occupational pattern and life style, tribes of this district can be classified into four categories as follows:-

1. Primitive tribe: these tribal groups completely depend on nature for their survival, main occupation of these groups being hunting, fishing, gathering, collecting woods from forest etc. These tribal groups prefer to keep themselves isolated from modern civilized world.
2. Semi Tribal: this tribal community has settled down in small villages and agriculture is their main occupation to sustain.
3. Semi- Integrated: this group is found in rural and semi urban areas and is engaged in small and cottage industries.
4. Completely Integrated: this group of tribal people live in urban areas and have adopted the modern culture and values in their life.

Purulia is the most backward and underdeveloped district in West Bengal. Basic feature of the tribal people of this district is poverty. They live in a situation of “vicious Circle of Poverty” (Nurkse 1953) and “Low Level Equilibrium Trap” (Nelson 1956). Poverty is not the sole enemy of the tribal people, they are exploited in various ways by the non-tribals. They always live under a constant threat of violence, torture, oppression, molestation,

atrocities and aggression. More over they are exploited by money lenders, contractors, and government officials.

Table -1
Comparison of total population with S.T population in rural urban areas

Year	Total population	Rural	Urban	S.T population	Rural	Urban
1961	1360016	1267538 93.2%	92478 6.8%	262858	261559 99.50%	1299 .50%
1971	1602875	14705058 91.7%	132367 8.3%	313793	311448 99.25%	2345 .75%
1981	1853801	1687039 91%	166762 9%	348375	345442 99.15%	2933 .85%
1991	2224577	2014571 90.6%	210006 9.4%	427766	423415 98.98%	4351 1.02%
2001	2536516	2281090 89.8%	255426 12.7%	463452	456573 98.51%	6879 1.49%
2011	2930115	2556801 87.3%	373314 12.7%	540652	531822 98.36%	8833 1.64

Source census 2001 (Govt. Of India)

From the table- 1, it can be seen that the percentage of urban population has increased with the increase of total population from 1961 to 2011. In the year 1961, total urban population was 6.8% of the total population of the district and it has gone up to 12.7% in the year 2011 which means that there has been an increase of 5.9% in the last 50 years. On the reverse, percentage of rural population has decreased from 91.7% in 1961 to 87.3% in 2011. In the year 1961, total tribal population in the district was 19.32% of the total population of the district and the share of tribal population in rural and urban area was 99.5% and .50% respectively. Tribal population in urban area increased from .50% in 1961 to 1.64% in 2011, that means only 1.14% has increased in last 50 years. Whereas the total tribal population in the last 50 years has increased from 262858 to 540625. It can be easily analysed that almost 99% of the tribal people live in the peripheral areas of the district. In the age of technology and rapid urbanization, tribals of this district still remain untouched by civilized society and are unable to avail the facilities of development and fruits of modernization. I find some fundamental reason for reluctance of the tribes to settle down in urban areas. These are as follows

1. Forested hilly areas are the natural inhabitation of the tribals of Purulia district, which are relatively isolated from main stream non-tribal world, so they find it difficult to get accustomed to non-tribal people outside their own region.
2. Tribes of this district have their own culture, traditional values and belief system which are different from the non-tribals, so they find it difficult to manage themselves in non-tribal societies.

3. One of the basic characteristics of tribes of this area is that they don't believe in future savings. That's why, they don't prefer migrating from their natural habitat as they could manage their daily want from their natural habitat by means of hunting, fishing, weaving, cultivation etc.
4. Language is one of the main constraints. They speak in their own language which is not understood by non-tribals.
5. Tribals of this district are known for their social bond which is primarily based on family and kinship. Sense of belongingness to their community restricts them to detach themselves from their roots.

Table :2**Population by Mother Tongue**

year	Bengali	Santhali	Mundari	Kharia	Munda
1961	1132376 83.3%	136003 10%	1086 0.1%	00	- -
1971	1329674 83%	198857 12.4%	533	243	122
1981	1496123 80.7%	210893 11.4%	172	73	259
1991	17312119 77.8%	238120 10.7%	1969 0.1%	- -	369
2001	1943822 76.6%	289741 11.4%	1765 0.1%	1011	809

Source census 2001 (Govt. of India)

Mother tongue, as defined in census, is the language spoken in childhood by a person's mother to the person. Language and mother tongue are the most important identity of a community. In Purulia district 4 different types of language are spoken by the tribes such as Santhali, Mundari, kharia, Munda. Santhali is the mother tongue of 11.4% people of Purulia. Santhali is spoken by highest number of people after Bengali (76.8%). Mundari is the mother tongue of 1765 tribal person and kharia and Munda is the mother tongue of 1011 and 809 person respectively. Study reveals that the impact of modern culture has influenced the tribals of this district to some extent. It is found that majority of the tribal people avoid speaking their mother tongue in a group meeting or a place where non-tribals are present. They interact in Bengali language in their work place, educational institution, market and in group gathering. It is also seen that some educated and well established tribal parents of present generation, who basically live in semi-town or township areas, do not speak in their mother tongue at home and don't want their children to speak in their mother tongue. It is also observed that the new generation tribal youth of this district avoid speaking in their tongue as they find that would hamper their reputation and lower their standard among others. In this situation one could imagine that the next generation of the tribal community would not learn their mother tongue.

Educational status

Literacy rate is one of the most popular and effective method of measuring the percentage of literates among the population. Here we analyse the tribal literacy rate of Purulia district in C.D. Block (rural) along with gender disparity .

Table :3**Percentage of S.T literacy rate by sex in C.D. Block (Rural)**

Name of the sub district	Total S.T literacy rate	Male	Female	Differences
Jaipur	48.02%	61.27%	34.01%	25.09%
Purulia-ii	51.50%	63.95%	38.86%	25.09%
Para	60.60%	75.51%	44.78%	30.73%
Raghunathpur –ii	56.73%	71.45%	41.50%	29.95%
Raghunathpur-I	50.32%	63.06%	37.44%	25.62%
Neturia	52.32%	65.80%	38.48%	27.32%
Santuri	54.95%	68.26%	41.68%	26.58%
Kashipur	60.88%	72.92%	47.73%	26.40%
Hura	60.21%	59.22%	46.37%	27.95%
Purulia-I	54.87%	71.13%	41.02%	27.21%
Puncha	58.81%	60.07%	44.85%	28.07%
Arsha	45.48%	61.23%	31.80%	27.42%
Jhalda -i	57.43%	61.18%	43.22%	27.91%
Jhalda-ii	45.83%	60.07%	31.12%	28.95%
Bagmundi	47.18%	61.23%	32.82%	28.41%
Balarampur	47.08%	61.18%	32.62%	28.56%
Barabazar	52.59%	68.04%	36.86%	31.18%
Manbazar-I	56.72%	71.71%	41.58%	30.13
Manbazar-ii	54.51%	69.59%	39.46%	30.13%
Bundwan	53.17%	67.44%	40.23%	27.21%
Total district	53.68%	67.71%	39.54%	28.17%

Source census 2001 (Govt. of India)

Table -2 shows the literacy rate of S.T in rural areas (C.D. Block wise) of Purulia district along with the tribal male and female literacy rate and the differences. Educational status of the tribal people in the district is really a matter of concern. Total literacy rate of the district is 65.38% whereas tribal literacy rate is only 53.68%. Tribal male literacy rate is 67.71% and female literacy rate is 39.54. Therefore the differences between S.T male and female literacy rate is as high as 28.71%. Study reveals that in rural areas Kashipur has the highest tribal literacy rate of 60.88% and lowest S.T literacy rate is recorded in Arsha C.D.Block which is only 45.48%. Para C.D.Block has the highest ST male literacy rate of 75.51% and Arsha Block has the lowest S.T male literacy rate of 59.22%. Kashipur can boast of having the highest S.T female literacy rate (47.73%) and lowest female literacy rate is observed in Jhalda (31.12%). So we can see that literacy rate of the tribal people of this district is very low especially the situation of tribal women in terms of educational status is more vulnerable. This low literacy rate may be one of the major causes of their unemployment and poverty. It is true that the government has taken many initiatives of educational development among tribal people but the outcomes are not satisfactory. I find some basic reason of educational backwardness among the tribals of Purulia district. These are as follows.

1. Poverty is a common feature of this dry land. Agricultural production is very low in Purulia because of the shortage of rain fall and industries do not flourish properly. The socio-cultural ignorant attitudes have burdened the people with poverty which proves to be a great hindrance to the development of education in this district.
2. It is considered to be luxurious for the parents to send their children to school rather they send their children to work, so they can support their family to counter poverty.
3. Maoist insurgency is one of the most important factors for under development of this region. For more than a decade, Maoist activities were extremely in operation in this region and severely affected the investment in this region, and due to this, the entire district of Purulia still suffers the deprivation of economic and educational initiatives.
4. Lack of adequate schools in tribal areas affect educational enhancement in Purulia.
5. Absence of basic infrastructural amenities in the school is one of the important reason for sluggish growth of literacy among the tribals.

6. Reluctance of the teachers to work in remote areas of the district is also an obstacle in the way of development of education in this area.
7. Lack of awareness of the parents about education, is one of the reasons of educational backwardness.
8. Some parents hesitate to send their daughters to co-educational institution.

Cultural activities of the tribal

Purulia district is known for its festivals. Many fairs, festivals are observed in the district throughout the year. Tribal communities of this district observe various cultural activities based on their belief, religious practice, custom and tradition. Some of the festivals and fairs observed by the tribal community of Purulia district are as follows.

Disum – sendra : Disum-Sendra, also known as Shikar Parab (hunting festival), is one of most popular festival of the tribals of the district. It is a hunting festival celebrated in every year in the month of April and May. Due to deforestation and various government rules and regulations on killing animal, the popularity of this festival is on the wane.

Erokh Sim : Erokh Sim is a popular festival celebrated by the santhal community of this district in mid-June to mid-July to mark the sowing of seeds for agricultural activities. The same festival is celebrated by the Mundas known as Batauli.

Karam Parab : Karam parab is celebrated in the month of August. This festival starts with Jhumur song and Pata dance.

Jathela Utsav : Jathela Utsav is celebrated by santhal community in mid-November to mid-December in every year

Tusu : Tusu is the most popular festival of Purulia district. It is celebrated by all sections of people. It is performed in mid-December to mid-January .

Magh Sim : Magh Sim is the popular Santhal festival celebrated in Bengali month of Magh.

Baha : Baha is spring festival of the Santhals. Night long dance and song are associated with this festival.

Charm of these century old festivals is declining. Present tribal generation is not interested in celebrating their traditional festivals, rather they participate and celebrate in non-tribal festivals. Age old rich cultural heritage of the tribal people is declining. A social and cultural change is being seen in the tribal community with the wake of modernization and technological advancement. This cultural diffusion is observed among the tribal population who has frequent contact with non-tribal people of the outside communities. The pace of diffusion is faster among the Santhals. Dependence on external economy and settlement with non-tribal people is one of the major reasons for cultural erosion among the tribal population.

Economic condition

Tribal economy is very simple based on cooperation and collective efforts. Tribals completely depend on natural resources for their survival. Originally tribals of Purulia district are hunters and gatherers. Forest is the sole means of their economic activities. Non Timber Forest Product (NTFP) is the life line of their daily economic activities. They directly use NTFP in the form of fruits, roots, flowers, seeds, honey, mushroom, and small animal like pigs, hen, cock, pigeon etc to satisfy their daily want. They not only use NTFP to satisfy their physical needs but also use it to earn money by using various raw materials from the jungle. They build up their own small cottage industries such as basket making, spinning and weaving etc. Some tribes are also engaged in agricultural activities. Forest is the part of tribal life and is associated with their culture, tradition, values, religious belief. They are emotionally attached to nature. They use the natural resources according to their need, never exploit nature for future savings. The imperialist intervention in peripheral zone of the tribals has made a drastic change in self reliance tribal economic system. In the name of development, thousands of trees are being cut down, rapid urbanization and industrialization resulting in deforestation. The indigenous people have not benefited from the developmental projects, while mainstream societies have prospered at their expense, pushing them deeper in poverty trap (Mahapatra 1991). Deforestation, rapid urbanisation and over exploitation of nature have greatly influenced tribal socio-economic life

and compelled them to find out other sources of employment other than their traditional forest based economy. The study has observed that presently many tribal people are coming out from their inhabitation to engage in some sort of professional work in non tribal areas. They are engaged in construction industries, daily workers, domestic workers in households, driver, daily labourer, cook for mid-day meal etc. Now with the introduction of the project of MGNREGA they have got an opportunity to get guaranteed work with good remuneration. Now it is quite evident that neo imperial intervention has slowly but steadily not only influenced the tribal socio-economic status but forced them to adapt modern culture and technology and depend on capitalism.

Social stratification

Some sociological and Anthropological schools have identified the existence of some sort of social stratification in traditional so called homogeneous tribal societies. Though a small privileged tribal population having property and education, has emerged as middle class tribal community still the rest of the tribal population belong to the lower stratum of society, the exploited class of contemporary Indian society (Desai 1977). Class formation among the tribals started in colonial period but it got momentum in post colonial period of rapid capital development. After independence, a huge change has taken place in political and economical sphere which has accentuated social inequality in tribal society (Sachchidananda 1990). Post colonial period is marked by educational acceleration. In few tribal communities inclination towards modern education was noticed. As Xaxa(2003) has observed entry of tribals into white collared jobs has been possible because of their exposure to the modern education. Educated tribals employed themselves in various government offices and enterprise by using reservation facilities guaranteed by the constitution for S.T. Therefore enhancement of social status of certain tribal population has led to the split in egalitarian tribal society thereby forming a new tribal elite class. Pradip Kumar Bose (1985) has identified six major classes among the tribals of West Bengal on the basis of ownership of means of production and production relations. It shows five different peasant classes, whose economic interest are antagonistic, these peasant classes are the land lords, the the rich peasant, the middle peasant, the poor peasant, and agricultural labourer. Bose shows that poor peasants are exploited by by the rich tribal peasant by usurious

loan. Tribal labourer is also the subject of exploitation of the imperialist tribals as well as of the non tribals. The study has observed that contemporary tribal society has split into two social strata viz. 'haves' and 'have nots' tribal. The tribal population having land, capital and education form an elite tribal class and the 'have not' class still fails to fulfill their primary needs. This 'have not' class is the most deprived and backward section of the society and even exploited by the new tribal imperialist "by the one kind of power" (Basu 1986). This new tribal capitalist utilizes the fruits of all developmental activities. This tribal imperialist exploits the weaker section of their own community by enjoying entire benefits of development and create "moral hazard" (Hayami and Godo 2006).

Conclusion

Traditional tribal culture and heritage is not only fast declining but is also on the verge of extinction. From the preceding discussion, it is clear that the tribals of Purulia district are going through a crisis period in post colonial period. Imperialistic intervention in the life of the tribals have brought about drastic changes in social, cultural, ecological and economical sphere. Capitalist intervention in this area in name of development, industrialization and urbanization is breaking down the subsistent economic system of the tribals resulting in alienation of tribals from land and forcing them to live under the vicious cycle of poverty. Influence of modern western culture through the process of Sankritisation is quite evident among the tribals of Purulia district. Adoption of modernization is definitely the requirement of the time but not at the cost of this rich culture.

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