

Problems of Tribal Development in West Bengal: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Tribal people are the most ancient people. Tribal people live in different regions of India. Although, tribal groups of India are identified as a socio-politically and economically backward communities. At present, tribal groups are facing various problems. West Bengal has a small tribal population compared to other states. Besides, they are lagging behind in terms of education, health and awareness. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to take some special measures by the government to improve their condition. Especially it helps them to increase their participation in politics and make them capable to take their own decisions.

Introduction:

The word tribal is a very familiar word. Although the concept of *adivasi* has existed since ancient times, there was no coherent knowledge about it. Since the origin of the human race, indigenous peoples have been living sporadically in different parts of the world. Although the indigenous peoples are socially homogenous, cultural differences can be observed among them. India is known to have the second largest tribal population in the world. According to the 2011 census, 8.6 percent of India's total

population belongs to the tribal population. However, theorists have offered different views on the concept of tribal meditation. But tribal basically refers to those peoples who are confined to a particular region and share similar culture and thought. They are generally more comfortable being isolated from mainstream society. The word tribal is derived from the Latin word 'tribus', which means technologically underdeveloped communities. Indigenous communities have often been exploited and neglected by other general communities. Even their introduction in the society was not properly acceptable. They were recognized by the British rule in the early 20th century. In the Government of India Act of 1935, Tribal people are known as Backward Tribes. The standard of living of the tribal people has not improved as much as other communities. They are not only economically backward but also socially and politically backward.

Tribal (*Adivasi*) communities have their own unique characteristics. i) Indigenous peoples live in a particular region. They build their settlements mainly around forests. However, some tribal groups also live in a nomadic manner. Many tribal groups also feel comfortable living in hilly areas. ii) Living in a particular region they are more inclined to use the same language. They give more importance to their own language. But nowadays other languages have developed among them. iii) Although tribal populations are contemporary in origin, different class divisions can be observed among them, Such as Santal, Bhil, Munda, Ho, Garo, Khasi and Bhumij etc. iv) Inter-marriage relationships are observed among the tribal population. Each tribe is bound by matrimonial relations with their own tribe. However, in modern times there have been some changes in the rules and principles of their marital relationship. v) Tribal population is still stuck in illiteracy. The education rate in their society is low compared to other societies. But nowadays all these peoples are changing the standard of living in the light of education. vi) Each every tribal group has its own religion and culture they are more respectful towards their religion. They consider nature as their God. vii) They are limited to limited needs only. Taking advantage of their simplicity, many societies have exploited and deprived them. viii) Different types of culture can be observed among different tribal groups with the help of this culture it becomes possible to easily distinguish different groups from other groups. ix) Traditional values are more prevalent in tribal public life. Each tribal group is bound to follow its own set of rules, customs, traditions, customs and principles. x) *Adivasis* have been lead a simple way of life. They hunt animals and in some cases also earn their living by doing agricultural work. Although, there farming process are not advanced and unscientific in many respects.

Year Wise Population in India

Years	Total Population of India	ST Population in India	% of ST rest of the total Population
1961	438,936,918	30,120,184	6.86 %
1971	547,949,809	38,015,162	6.94 %
1981	685,184,692	51,628,638	7.53 %
1991	838,583,988	67,758,380	8.08 %
2001	1,028,737,436	84,326,978	8.20 %
2011	1,210,854,977	102,481,034	8.60 %

(Source: Census of India.)

Research Methodology:

This paper has been prepared on the basis of qualitative analysis of the data gathered from different sources. Mainly, secondary data sources i.e. books, journals, government documents and reports had been use in this purpose.

Objective:

The key objective of this paper is to find out the problems of tribal development in West Bengal. Still now they are going through the process of institutionalized exploitation and socio-economic and political marginalization.

Classification of Tribal Communities in India:

The indigenous people live within the confines of a particular region. Tribal communities can be divided not only socially but also economically. The various tribal groups living in India live in different marginal areas. Tribal communities are also often divided on the basis of livelihood. The tribal groups living in India are mainly divided into four categories.

- a) Regional Classification.
- b) Linguistic Classification.
- c) Physical Structural Classification.
- d) Occupational or Economical Classification.

Regional Classification: Tribal people living in India are geographically divided into several categories. a) North and North Eastern Zone. b) The Central or Middle Zone. c) The Southern zone. Mainly in the north and north-east are inhabited by various tribal groups. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland etc. Akka, Miri, Dafla, Sema-naga, Khasi, Garo etc. are inhabited by Tribal people. In addition, the tribal groups living in the Central or Middle Zone live on the south side of the Krishna River. The Santal, Orao, Ho, Birhar, Kol, Vil and Munda tribal groups live in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Prakriti, region. In addition, tribal groups like Kadar, Kanikkar, Malvadan, Malakuravan live in South India, especially in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, etc. They usually live in deep forests.

Linguistics Classification: Linguistically, Tribal people can be divided into several groups. Adivasis of the Dravidian language group generally live in South India. The indigenous language groups like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam belong to the Dravidian language group. Apart from this, the aboriginal groups of Astro-Asiatic languages live in different parts of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. Tibato-Chinese Aborigines live in Assam, Meghalaya and North-East region.

Physical Structure Classification: The morphological division of the Tribal people living in India is one of the issues. These tribal groups can be divided physically into three groups - a) Mongoloid: Mongoloid tribal groups live in the foothills of the Himalayas. They are usually of medium size. They are divided into two groups- (i) Palaeo-Mongoloid and (ii) Tibeto-Mongoloid. b) Proto-Australoid: They are of medium size but have long and wide heads and broad noses. Their are usually black or brown in color. c) Nigro-batu: Nigro-batu are believed to be the most ancient primitive people of India. However, these indigenous peoples live in large numbers in Africa today. They are usually black in color. Their nose and lips are thick.

Occupational or Economical Classification: Economically, Tribal people can be divided into different groups. Different tribal groups have different lifestyles and means of livelihood. Some tribal groups engage in agriculture and animal husbandry. Also some tribal groups make a living through industry. But today the development of modern industry has changed the standard of living of the Tribal people to some extent. Today, tribal people work as laborers in many industries. Some tribal groups like - Raji, Garo, Birhor, Korwa, Juang etc. people earn their livelihood through animal husbandry and agriculture. Also, Tribal people in Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura are engaged in agriculture.

Problems of Tribal in India:

Tribal public life differs from other social public life. Their social life, political life and economic life are governed by their own system as there are many rules in their social system. As tribal groups have developed separate lifestyles, their social norms, customs, practices, religion and beliefs bear distinct characteristics. Even the greatest improvement in their economic life is very little noticeable. Their economic basis is hunting and food gathering. Mainly the tribal groups living in the forest take this type of livelihood. Besides, farming is one of the means of their livelihood. Although they emphasize shifting agriculture rather than permanent agriculture. But the main aim of this type of farming is only to meet their minimum needs. Many choose fishing as a means of livelihood. These Tribal people are mostly skilled in handicrafts. Although these industries are currently facing destruction. Because of the lack of preservation of these handicrafts. Again, in modern times, industry has developed in different parts of India. As a result these tribal groups are participating as laborers in various industries. They also work in many mining areas and dangerous areas. Their economic decline has led to a lack of political consciousness, with Tribal people increasingly believing in self-governing systems in the areas they inhabit. In their self-governing system, chieftains play the main role. However, self does not believe in the principles of democratic decentralization in governance. They are bound to accept the decision taken by the Sardar or Chief.

However, tribal people face many problems. Tribal people living in India face various problems. These are discussed below-

- i) Most of the tribal groups live within the confines of a particular area. As a result they are separated from modern civilization. Besides, discrimination against them has kept them apart from the rest of the society.
- ii) Tribal groups are comfortable living with their own customs. They are in many cases superstitious and refuse to come under advanced public life. Their extreme religious beliefs turn into superstition in many cases. As a result, various anti-social practices are prevalent in their society, such as child marriage.
- iii) Most of the tribal people live below the poverty line. They usually live in the fringes of society. Unemployment is the main problem in their life. They are usually landless or have very little land. Their economic impoverishment has been the main obstacle to social establishment.
- iv) As their lifestyle is based on nature, they try to get the essential nutrients from the forest itself. Many tribal groups are isolated from the outside world as they confine themselves to deep forests. As a result, their development has remained almost limited.
- v) Another biggest problem of the tribal groups living in India is lack of education. Compared to other general castes, the education rate of the Tribal people is quite low, besides their reluctance towards education can be observed in many cases.

As a result, they are still unable to get out of superstition. And those who come to school also drop out midway. Besides, their enrollment in higher education is also very low. vi) Tribal groups living in India have different livelihoods in different regions of India. Many Tribal people are still underdeveloped and have chosen either education or food collection as a means of livelihood. On the other hand Tribal people living in hilly areas like Naga, Garo, Khasi etc. choose Jhum farming as a means of livelihood. This method also results in less production and is an unscientific method. Sometimes they have to migrate for livelihood. vii) Lack of awareness about the health of the Tribal people is almost a signature. The root cause is lack of education and belief in superstitions. They often face malnutrition related problems. Besides, they are also affected by water borne diseases. But modern methods of treatment find ancient methods more useful and reliable instead. viii) Drinking alcohol is a widely practiced practice among tribal people. Adivasi people consider drinking alcohol as an absolute necessity in almost any ritual ceremony. As a result, the entire species is more likely to become addicted to alcohol. Apart from this, it is being observed that they are attracted to other addictions at present. Especially the tribal youth are the most affected. As a result, their society is moving towards destruction. Due to the development of industrialization and urbanization, tribal society is suffering. Due to the development of many industrial centers and cities in various regions, a large amount of forest is being destroyed. The Tribal people are losing their homes. Again, due to the presence of mining resources in various parts of India, such as Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, etc., a large amount of forest land is being destroyed. As a result they have to leave their homes. Very quickly their lives and livelihoods are changing. Even though they have been evicted from all these areas, proper rehabilitation is not being done properly. x) Another problem of Tribal people is the problem of migration. Although some of these migrations are voluntary, most of them are forced. The main reason for such migration may be unemployment or eviction. Again this migration takes place through two special methods. Firstly Pushed Out Factors and Pulled Into Factors. The first method refers to migration through socio-economic, exploitation, starvation, disease and natural disasters, drought, floods, epidemics etc. Another way is better employment opportunities, higher income and better standard of living etc. All these facilities are forcing them to migrate. As a result, they continue to migrate from small to large cities. (Hasnain, 2019, pp- 254-255).

Life and Their Problems in West Bengal:

West Bengal is one of the states that were formed after the independence of India in 1947. Currently, West Bengal is one of the most populous states. West Bengal occupies an important place in India not

only in terms of population but also politically and administratively. West Bengal plays an important role not only in the national but also in the international field. On the other hand, the longitude of West Bengal is from 85 degrees 49 minutes to 89 degrees 50 minutes east longitude. Although West Bengal is not the largest state in India in terms of area, West Bengal is the fourth largest state in terms of population. The area of West Bengal is about 88752 square kilometers. According to the 2011 census, the population of West Bengal is close to 9.13 million. The total population of West Bengal in 2011 was 46809027 males and 44467088 females. West Bengal has a population density of 1028 people per square kilometer. According to the 2011 census, 956 females per 1,000 males are found in the total population. 76.26 percent of the total population of West Bengal is literate. The male literacy rate of the total population is 81.69 percent and the female literacy rate is 70.54 percent. 31.87% of the total population of West Bengal lives in various urban areas. The population living in this city is 29093002 people. 14964082 males and 14128920 females of this total population. In urban areas there are 944 females for every 1000 males. People living in urban areas have livelihoods other than agriculture. The population living in rural areas is 62183113 people. In rural areas the number of males is 31844945 and the number of females is 30338168. The gender disparity here is 953 women out of 1,000 men. The education rate in rural areas is 72.13 percent. Male literacy rate is 78.44 percent and female education rate is 61.98 percent. According to the 2011 census, there were 19 districts in West Bengal. Currently West Bengal is divided into 23 districts. West Bengal being a populous state, people of different castes and religions live here together. The population of Scheduled Tribes is less than other communities in West Bengal.

District Wise Population in West Bengal 2011

Name of the District	Total Population	ST Population
Bankura	3596674	368690
Birbhum	3502404	242484
Bardhaman	7717563	489447
Cooch Behar	2819086	18125
Dakshin Dinajpur	1676276	275366
Dakshin 24 Parganas	8161961	96976
Darjeeling	1846823	397389
Hooghly	5519145	229243

Howrah	4850029	15094
Jalpaiguri	3872846	731704
Kolkata	4496694	10684
Maldha	3988845	313984
Murshidabad	7103807	91035
Nadia	5167600	140700
Paschim Medinipur	5913457	880015
Purba Medinipur	5095875	27952
Purulia	2930115	540652
Uttar 24 Parganas	10009781	264597
Uttar Dinajpur	3007134	162816

Source: Census Data West Bengal, 2011.

5.8 percent of the total population of West Bengal belongs to Scheduled Tribes. That is, 5296963 of the total population are scheduled tribe people. The population of this scheduled tribe is 2855115 males and 2441838 females. Out of total tribal population 655861 people live

Compare between Total Population with ST Population and their Literacy rate in West Bengal

Year	Total Population of West Bengal	Total Population of ST in West Bengal	% of ST population	Urban Population	Rural population	Literacy rate of West Bengal	ST literacy rate in West Bengal (%)
1991	68077955	3808760	5.59 %	196312	3612448	57.70%	32.04%
2001	80176197	4406794	5.5 %	244835	4161959	68.6%	44.2%
2011	91276115	5296953	5.8 %	655861	4641092	76.30%	57.9%

Source: West Bengal Census Data

in urban areas and 4641092 people live in rural areas. The education rate of Schedule Tribes in West Bengal is 57.9 percent. Among them, male literacy rate is 68.2 percent and female literacy rate is 47.7 percent. That is, compared to the education rate of women living in West Bengal, the education rate of

Scheduled Tribe women is much lower (Census, 2011). Among the scheduled tribes living in West Bengal, the Santals are the main ones. Santals constitute more than 50 percent of the population living in West Bengal. These Santals are scattered in various places in West Bengal. Santals mainly use Astro-Asiatic languages. These Santals are divided into twelve clans. The tribes located among them are - Murmu, Hasda, Kisku, Hembram, Mandi, Tudu, Besra, Baske, Chore, Soren, Pauria and Bedia etc. Also inhabited by various tribal groups like Oraons, Munda, Bhumij, Koras, Birhor, Lodha, Ho, etc. (Pal, 2016).

Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal face various problems. These are following;

- i) The tribal population in West Bengal is much smaller than the general population. The number of Scheduled Tribes is very high in various states of India especially Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and most of the states. In other words, Tribal people are geographically limited in West Bengal and the level of development is likely to be much lower than others.
- ii) ii) Poverty is an important problem among tribal groups living in West Bengal. Most of the Tribal people here live in rural or marginal areas. As a result, they lack proper livelihood. In particular, the tribal groups living in hilly regions i.e. North Bengal and the Tribal people living in remote rural areas especially Birbhum, Bankura and Purulia are economically backward, as a result their position is mostly below the poverty line.
- iii) The education rate of the Tribal people living in West Bengal is much lower than that of the population. According to the 2011 census, the lack of education among Tribal people in West Bengal is 57.9 percent while the male education rate is relatively high while the female education rate is below 50 percent. In addition, there are very few suitable educational institutions for the education of Tribal people in West Bengal. Hence their level of adequate education is also very less.
- iv) Health problems are one of the problems faced by Tribal people living in West Bengal. Due to the low level of education among the tribal groups of West Bengal, they are mostly superstitious. In the field of medicine, they consider their own ancient methods more credible than the modern day methods of treatment. As a result, they are often infected with incurable diseases.
- v) At present there has been development of industries and cities in various regions of West Bengal. As a result, many forests are being destroyed to solve land problems. In this case,

due to the destruction of most of the forests, the tribal groups living in those areas are losing their habitats. Such problems have affected both their lives and livelihoods.

- vi) Tribal people living in West Bengal are not used to better living than other social groups. In most cases they live in mud houses. Their social life is very ordinary. As a result, their participation in social and political spheres is less than others. Especially politically they are not aware and their participation in administrative field is less. At the present time, their participation is seen at the lower level of politics, but their participation is not seen at the higher level.
- vii) One of the biggest problems of the tribal groups living in West Bengal is unemployment. At present, the participation of Tribal people in various government institutions is very little. Besides, they are not seen working in private institutions. Even the amount of land owned by tribal people is very small. And in many cases they do not have their own land. As a result, they work as laborers in other people's land. But nowadays they are becoming unemployed due to the competition for livelihood and reduction in agricultural work.

Recommendations and Suggestion:

While discussing the public life of tribal people, it is seen that their lifestyle is different from the life of other common people. Although they carry a distinct culture. However, the current environment and conditions have made the life of these people miserable. The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized on Push factors and Pull factors for the development of indigenous people in India after independence. Making arrangements to keep Tribal people in their own position through Push factor and pulling them out of traditional position through Pull factor. According to the Constitution of India, Tribal people have been given constitutional safeguards. Articles 15 (4), 16, 338, 339 (1), 340 and 342 of the Constitution provide for the reservation of Scheduled Tribes and formation of commissions for them if necessary. Also, special measures have been taken in Second Five Year Plan and Third Five Year Plan for the development of Scheduled Tribes through Tribal Development Strategy. There is talk of setting up residential schools to improve education. Furthermore, arrangements have been made to expand their education by providing monthly scholarships and other facilities. Aklvya Model Residential School (EMRS) was established by Government of India in 1997-98 for this purpose. Again Self Help Groups have been formed for the upliftment of Scheduled Tribe women so that they can become economically self-reliant.

Efforts should be made to bring the Tribal people living in West Bengal back to normal life. There should be measures to eliminate prejudice among them. Also their culture should be given due respect so that they feel comfortable. Their livelihood should also be looked after. Government schemes should also be looked into so that they can enjoy them. Financial reserves should be built for them if needed. From there, these tribal people should be provided with low-cost loans so that they can become self-reliant. They should be provided with suitable food for proper nutrition. In order to improve the social system, the development of the Tribal people must take place, only then the whole society can improve.

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