

## The Impact of Different Development Programmes on the Scheduled Tribe People in the Drought Prone Areas of West Bengal – A Case Study

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### Abstract

India have the second largest concentration of tribal population, after that of African continent. The Scheduled Tribes people have been an important part of the total population of West Bengal. As per 2001 Census there are 38 tribal groups living in the state of West Bengal. The present study attempts to find out the impact of different government programmes on the living of people belonging to scheduled tribes in general and Santal and Munda community in particular. Study results show that the proportion of tribal attending school is very low. It is also found that people from Santal and Munda community are engaging themselves in secondary and tertiary sector much more than what the other communities like Lodhas or Birhors are doing.

**Key words:** Investors, Investment, Rate of return, Real investment.

### Introduction

India have the second largest concentration of tribal population. The Indian tribes belong to over 550 communities (though only 427 are officially recognized). About 87% Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in the central belt covering 8 states in the form of Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattishgarh), Orissa, Bihar (Including Jharkhand), Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

The Scheduled Tribes people have been grasping an important proportion to the total population of West Bengal since few decades. There are 38 tribal groups as recorded in the 2001 Census of the state. Among them the Santhal (19,97,222), Oraon (5,36,919), Bhumij (2,91,808), Munda (2,89,091), Kora (1,13,564), Lodha (68,095), Mahali (69,542), Bhutia (48,196), Savar (46,216), Bedia (44,875), Mech (29,904) etc. are important. If we concentrate on the population distribution of the Scheduled Tribes throughout the state, we found that in Medinipur (before division), Jalpaiguri, Purulia Bankura, Bardhaman, Dakshin Dinajpur they are largely concentrated.

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The economy of the scheduled Tribe people has been greatly influenced by the variable ecological environment. Despite, the tribal population of W.B. are engaged themselves in various sectors in economy, yet 80.44% are engaged in agricultural sectors of which 29.47% are cultivators and 50.70 % are agricultural labourers. Another important source of livelihood of the tribal people is forests. They collect minor forest products along with various plants, roots, tubers, small animals for their own consumption and also for medical use. Very often they collect fire-woods and sale it to the nearby market or to the people in other communities of the locality.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The major objectives of the present study are -

- To study the impact of different government programmes for the development of scheduled tribes.
- To evaluate the performance of non-government organization in respect of development of the scheduled tribes.
- To identify the factors accounting for the difference in socio-economic status among different tribal groups viz Santal, Munda, Lodha, Savar and Birhor.
- To identify the factors that account for the backwardness of two Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) namely Birhor and Lodha as well as that of more advanced tribal groups like Santal and Munda.

### **Research Gap**

- Very few articles have been published that measure the changes of socio economic status due to different governmental and non-governmental developmental programmes.
- Very few articles have identified the proper reasons of backwardness of these tribal communities, particularly Primitive Tribal Groups like Birhor, Lodha.
- Few articles have put emphasis on the educational development as a tool to the socio – economic upliftment of the tribal communities.
- Articles have ignored the role of institution on the socio – economic development of tribal communities.
- No specific comparative study on socio-economic status of two Primitive Tribal Groups viz. Lodha and Birhor communities' vis-à-vis that of the relatively more advanced tribal groups like Santhal and Munda is found.

### **Data Base and Methodology**

The study has been conducted on the five particular tribal groups viz. Santhal, Munda, Lodha, Savar and Birhor within the block areas of Jhargram and Sankrail in West Midnapore district and Bagmundi, Jhalda -I and Balarampur in Purulia district. The Lodha and Birhor are the primitive tribal groups (PTGs) and their socio-economic status is not so advanced in comparison to that of the Santhal community in two blocks in Jhargram sub-division of West Midnapore District, namely, Jhargram and Sankrail whereas the Birhor are only concentrated in three blocks in Purulia district viz. Balarampur, Bagmundi and Jhalda-I. The study uses data taken from three censuses, namely, Census - 1971, Census - 1991 and Census - 2001.

Two stage sampling procedure has been followed for identifying the sample households in rural areas of Jhargram and Sankrail blocks of Paschim Medinipur district and Balarampur, Bagmundi and Jhalda-I blocks of Purulia district. Selecting sample village is the first stage of sampling and selecting sample households is the second stage of sampling. For the study,

four villages have been randomly selected for the Santhals from Jhargram block and one village from each block out of two blocks, namely, Bagmundi and Balarampur of Purulia district on the basis of random sampling.

For the study, two villages have been selected randomly for the Mundas from Jhargram block and one village in each block of Jhargram subdivision viz. Jhargram and Sankrail has been selected randomly for Lodha tribe in Paschim Medinipur district.

Again, two villages have been selected at random for Savar Community from Jhargram block. Similarly, three villages from three blocks of Purulia district viz. Bagmundi, Balarampur and Jhalda-1 have been selected for the present study for Birhor tribal community, and these three villages have high concentration of Birhor community.

From each village requisite number of households has been selected randomly which constitute the sample for study of the socio-economic condition

### **Findings**

We found that, in West Bengal, the scheduled tribe people had been developing since last decade. Most of the children of the tribal communities tread on the campus of the schools. Various Government initiatives are, definitely, attracting tribal youths towards educational institutions. Nevertheless, a good proportion of tribal people remain outside the periphery of educational institution. It is observed that a significant proportion tribal children particularly those belonging to Lodha, Birhor and Savar communities were not continuing their education beyond primary level or at the middle stage of secondary level education. Generally, they engaged themselves in traditional economic activities or domestic work at home after leaving schools.

The Government had taken initiatives via various development programmes to boost up the socio-economic status of the scheduled tribe people inhabiting in the state. It was observed that literacy rates in the Scheduled Tribe people in West Bengal had increased remarkably during last few decades. But, the literacy rate among the tribal people in the state is far below the national average. Another important point to be noted here is that whatever success is achieved in the matter of improving literacy, that rate is far from being distributed evenly. Comparison of literacy rates in terms of gender suggests that female tribal people are way-to-less literate than their male counterpart.

It was also found from the field study that the proportion of illiteracy among Savar, Lodha and Birhor communities were quite good in the working age group (16 - 55) in comparison with Santal and Munda tribal groups. A significant portion of Scheduled tribe children particularly in Santal and Munda community have not yet gone for schooling. But, the proportion of tribals who had entered college level education (i.e. post madhyamik stage) in Santal and Munda communities were higher than those in Lodha, Birhor and Savar communities. Nevertheless, the proportion of tribal attending colleges in all scheduled tribes within the study areas was very low.

From the study, it was also found that people of Santal and Munda communities were able to engage themselves in secondary and tertiary sectors to earn their livelihood. But, the comparatively weak tribal groups viz. Lodha and Birhor were still depending heavily on forest produces and livestock for subsistence. It was observed from the field study that a very high proportion of tribal people were daily-wage labourers.

The employment scenario for the tribal people was observed to be bleak. A very high proportion of people belonging to those scheduled tribes were unemployed or under-employed. Whatever employment opportunities were created, these were only in primary sector and that too at the subsistence level. The proportion of male unemployed tribal people in working age group (16 - 55), particularly in Munda and Lodha communities, was significantly high in comparison to their female counterpart. Least to say, all the selected tribal people were belonging to below poverty line (BPL). Only a small proportion of Munda and Savar people were doing well in terms of economic activities and earning. Their main sources of earning were different government services.

The Government had been initiating various common developmental programmes for all the scheduled tribes. But, the different scheduled tribes occupy different births in the socio-economic strata. Besides, the same tribal group inhabiting in varied ecological zones in West Bengal are also within the different level of socio-economic status. Whereas the Government initiates same developmental programmes for all scheduled tribes it had some special programmes for the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs). Yet, most of the developmental programmes were for all scheduled tribes irrespective of their variedly- inhabiting ecology and the present socio-economic status. During study it was found that the development programmes in connection with the economic status of the tribal people were not properly followed up. After the government organizations stretched their assistance through the developmental programmes to the beneficiaries in tribal communities, they were not properly following these programmes up. It was quite evident that monitoring and management policy of the government agencies regarding the implementation of developmental programmes was not up to the mark and also was not efficient enough to achieve the stated objectives of the programmes. In addition to that, the government agencies seemed to be reluctant in making the people aware of the benefits to be derived from these programmes.

The non –governmental organizations had taken various initiatives on basic education for the children and higher education for the adult, housing, medical facilities, drinking water, supply of cloth and food, launching vocational training, rural entrepreneurship development, agricultural assistance, education for girl child and formation of women club, etc for the socio-economic development of the scheduled tribe communities . They were campaigning the benefits of different schemes available for scheduled tribe people and the ways of getting the benefits of these schemes.

The NGO's were successfully reaching to the scheduled-tribe communities by giving different assistance like supply of books, stipend for education, hostel facilities either at free of cost or on subsidized mode for the students specifically girl-students; free medical facilities; subsidized loan for housing, cottage industries and agricultural activities; supply of cloth and food at free of cost etc.

In comparison with governmental organizations, NGOs were able to reach to the scheduled tribe communities in a better way. But the major stumbling blocks in the way of implementation of the schemes were that general schemes might not be suitable for all scheduled tribe communities. Specific schemes should be launched for specific communities. Their educational, cultural and awareness level should be developed so that they might think beyond traditional forestry and embrace agricultural and\ or service related activities. The effort put in by the NGOs in the matter of socio-economic development of the tribal people is, no doubt, praise-worthy but a lot more is to be done so as to really change the socio-economic status of the these people.

The main occupation for the sample tribal people is found to be wage-labour. A good proportion of Santals and Mundas were engaged in agricultural activities during season for cultivation and rest of the time they were involved in economic activities as daily-wage labourers. It was found that comparatively backward scheduled tribes like Lodha, Birhor and Savar were still depending on pre-agricultural economy. Till date, a large number of Savar, Lodha and Birhor are depending on forest-based economy. On the other hand, the comparatively advanced scheduled tribe like Santal and Munda were able to scatter their economic activities to various sources of livelihoods. A significant proportion of them were engaged in government services also.

A significant proportion of scheduled tribe people, particularly in two Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs), were within the clutches of poverty due to their heavy dependence on forest-based economy. Presently the accessibility to the forest areas of these forest-fringe tribal was restricted due to stringent government rules and regulations. On the other hand, forest areas were also steadily depleting in some areas. Consequently, the tribal who were still depending on forest-based economy were facing a lot of economic crisis.

### **Suggestions**

To boost up the development of the Schedule tribe people in tribal-based areas of West Bengal some initiatives may be taken —

- At first, the present socio-economic status of each tribal group in every different socio-economic environment must be identified before implementation of any developmental programme.
- The developmental programmes should be framed separately for each tribe and the programmes should be implemented in different ways due to inhabitation in different socio-economic environment. 'One-size-fit-all' strategy is not going to work.
- To control drop-outs from school level education, education orientation camp for the parents must be organized. Besides, some more attention is to be given to the scheduled tribe children. It is found that in many cases parents motivated scheduled tribe children to leave the school and to engage in economic activities so that the earnings of the family could be increased. They are to be made aware that for long-term gains short-term sacrifices are to be accepted.
- Monitoring and management system of the implementing agencies, particularly the government agencies, is to be bolstered for efficient implementation of the different developmental programmes.
- Social audit system may be introduced in every developmental programme separately to prevent the fund from being siphoned off unscrupulously.
- The amount of assistance to aged scheduled tribe people must be increased so that they can meet their basic needs smoothly.
- The Government and Non-government organisations should initiate more economic development oriented programmes in the areas dominated by schedule tribe people so as to make the growth of our state and country a really inclusive one.
- Imparting proper knowledge and presenting a transparent system for every development programme has become all the more important. That issue is to be looked into seriously.
- Different developmental programmes should be clarified to the tribal people in an easiest way through the local people. A proper assessment of their problems should act as a prerequisite for success of any developmental programmes to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people.

### Limitations of the Study

The study had been conducted on only five tribal communities, but if the sample size can be enlarged then the impact of the developmental programmes could be more vividly reflected. Again the impact of different developmental programmes on different tribal communities should be studied in respect of different ecological environment. a more recent scenario could be drawn if we add the census data for 2011.

### Scope of Further Study

With reference to this study the impact of different development programmes on the health of the tribes could be done by checking death rate, life span, physical weight, diseases etc. Further with this study their attitudinal, cultural and professional development could be measured.

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