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### PROBLEMS OF TRIBAL PEOPLE

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#### 7.1 Introduction

Tribes are generally backward, economically as well as educationally. The situation is not uniform in all the parts of India. In the north-east, the situation has been disturbed for several years, whereas in the mainland (central India) problems related to poverty, unemployment, indebtedness, backwardness and ignorance are acute. The tribes of the north-east have a high level of politicisation, literacy and a high standard of living compared to their counterparts in other parts. The tribes were alienated from their own lands. The landlords and moneylenders of the plains gradually replaced the tribal landowners. The survey done by B. K. Roy Burman (1972) shows that the tribals are the most backward as because of their low literacy and primitive economy.

Since tribal people are at different social, political, economic and ecological levels, their problems also differ in degree from each other. These differences can be seen in terms of hill tribes and plainsmen; between those who are engaged in forest-based economic pursuits and the ones who are employed as settled agriculturists; or between those who are Hinduised or converted to Christianity; and those who are adhering to an unadulterated tribal way of life (Sharma, 2008). Despite these distinctions, some common problems of the tribal people are:

- 1) Poverty and exploitation.
- 2) Economic and technological backwardness.
- 3) Socio-cultural handicaps.
- 4) Problems of assimilation with the non-tribal population.

S.M. Dube's five-fold classification of the Indian tribes provides a clear picture of the problem of tribes in India. Dube (1982) mentions: (1) aboriginals living in seclusion; (2) tribal groups having an association with the neighbouring non-tribal society and also maintaining their distinctiveness; (3) tribals living in village along with caste groups, sects and religious groups and maintaining their identity; (4) tribals who have been degraded to the status of untouchables; (5) tribals who enjoy high social, economic and political status. Such a classification is based on the nature of cultural contacts of tribals with non tribals.

With the establishment of the Kamta-koch kingdom in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Indo-Mongoloid group of people began to pour in North Bengal. Lepcha, Bhutia, Rabha, Garo and

Mech who belong to tribal community are mainly found in the Dooars of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts. From the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century immigration of Nepalese started in the Dooars with that a large number of people in-migrated from Chhotonagpur plateau for the plantation works. Thus gradually the region became densely populated by the tribal communities. The Britishers introduced a kind of ‘enclave economy’ in the tea industries (Debnath, 2013). The tribals of the aboriginals as well as the immigrants face social and economic problems in daily life and long run.

## **7.2 Social Problems**

Tribes in India differ from one another in racial traits, language, social organisation, cultural patterns, etc. The dominant racial type among tribes is the proto-Australoid. In the sub-Himalayan belt, the Mongoloid type is preponderant. Several anthropologists have observed social stratification among the members of a specific tribe. However, today, a paradoxical situation exists. Protective discrimination isolates the tribal people from the non-tribesmen, but in course of time this very policy would bring the tribals at par with the non-tribals. The dominant thinking today is in favour of assimilation of the tribal people into the national mainstream without any disruption. It is not easy to have both dissolution and assimilation at the same time (Roy, 1970).

In the Mal subdivision of Jalpaiguri district, the problems are sometimes general in nature of all Indian phenomenon and some are unique. Following are the social problems found in the study region:

### **7.2.1 High Incidence of Illiteracy and Gender Gap**

Early participation of children into work, abject poverty, lack of supportive education culture at home and in the community have contributed to the high incidence of illiteracy and very high rate of early dropout among the tribal population in the region. The reservation in educational institutions and in government jobs and the provision for education stipend for the tribal children remain under utilized. In very recent years, the spread of primary schools and Sarva Siksha Kendras (SSKs) down to the villages, and the introduction of mid-day meals have contributed to the increase of enrolment of children enormously. The catholic missions too have set up schools in remote areas and have been encouraging the tribal children to go for higher education with economic and other infrastructure support. Some positive results are being noticed in recent years, yet the tribal communities in the region are way behind the students of upper caste groups in the field of education.

From the primary household survey data, it is found that in Mal subdivision 42% tribals are illiterate. Only 4% tribals' possess the degree of undergraduate or post graduate. These graduates are the new generation learners. Among the literates, most of the people have formal primary education. The old aged people are either illiterate or have only primary education. Those who have completed 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> standard in schools hardly can write or read a simple sentence.

There are 22 GPs in three blocks of Mal subdivision. The GPs can be categorised as Tea garden based GPs and non-tea garden based GPs. The 12 GPs fully are tea garden based while the 10 GPs are non-tea garden based or tea gardens are in little amount. In tea garden based GPs, tribals are maximum in number while in non-tea garden based GPs the tribals are minorities and assimilated with the non-tribals. In a study in the literacy and dropout rates of the GPs following information were observed.

**Table 7.1** Illiteracy, Dropout, and Gender Gap in literacy (%)

Group	GPs	Illiteracy rate	Dropout rate	Gender Gap in Literacy
Tea garden based GPs	Bagrakot, Odlabari, Rangamatee, Rajadanga, Damdim, Tesimla, Kumlai, Matiali Hat, Indong Matiali, Sulkapara, Champaguri, Looksan	34.50	35.00	9.50
Non-tea garden based GPs	Changmari, Kranti, Chapadanga, Moulani, Lataguri, Matiali Batabari-I, Matiali Batabari-II, Bidhannagar, Angrabhasa-I, Angrabhasa-II	43.50	38.50	12.50

*Source: Field survey, 2015*

The above table shows that in tea garden based GPs, illiteracy rate, dropout rate and gender gap in literacy are lower than the Non-tea garden based GPs. The influence of Christian missionaries in spreading education in the former group is noteworthy. In the non-tea garden based GPs the tribals are engaged in agricultural activities with the non-tribes. The persistence of gender discrimination as reflected in the engagement of girls in the domestic chores, particularly in families where the mothers go out for work, is the prime reason for the gender gap in the field of education, which is higher in non-tea garden based GPs. As the tribal population is generally living in abject poverty, primarily surviving by selling their physical labour, working in agriculture or in the tea gardens, the children can hardly cross the

boundary of school. The rate of enrolment has increased significantly in recent years but there are drop out in large numbers first after passing out of primary school, and then at the junior high school level. Those few who find entry into the high schools cannot cope with the pressure of Madhyamik examination and drop out before the commencement of the examination. With illiterate parents struggling to earn a living, it is very difficult for the children to sustain their interest in education for long, particularly when the pressure of subsistence economy demands early introduction of children to labour. In the non-tea garden based GPs, girls and boys of the Munda, Santal, Mahali families are engaged as agricultural labourer or construction worker to support their education and family. The presence of the missionary schools in tea garden based GPs has some significant difference. The missionary schools take special care of the children of their faith; they motivate them to enrol in schools, arrange for hostel accommodation and put them under the direct supervisions of the nuns, subsidize their cost on education. The tribal boys and girls work alongside their education- the girls as agricultural labourers and boys mostly as construction labour, particularly on week-ends, holidays, and vacations. The mission too employs wage labourers from amongst its followers in construction work and in other services.

### **7.2.2 Problems of Assimilation with the Non-tribal Population**

The tribals have largely come under the impact of the dominant cultural streams of India. New divisions have been created among the tribals due to cultural change in their ranks. Stratification in tribal society in India has its roots in British policy, unevenness due to the impact of economic development, and varied cultural contact with the wider society. Modernisation and industrialisation has apparently reduced the gap between the tribals and the non-tribals, but it has also created new problems. The tribals, who have been uprooted from their lands, have not been absorbed in the new system. Hence, they are facing a new form of pauperisation without a traditional support base. The indigenous people of the Dooars were the Koch-Rajbanshis, the Mech, the Rabhas and the Lepchas. They were well dependent on their traditional village economy of agriculture, hunting, fishing, and forest based economy. After the introduction of tea plantation in Dooars, the planters encouraged the immigration of the Nepalese in order to populate the sparsely inhabited zones of Dooars down the Bhutan hills. The intention of the Government was towards off the Bhutanese by the settlement of a mountainous people like the Nepalese in Dooars and Darjeeling. As a result the Nepalese are populated in the GPs of Odlabari, Bagrakot, Damdim, Indong Matiali, Matiali Hat, Champaguri, and Looksan. But as the Nepalese were not enough to man the

demand of labourers in the tea industry in Dooars, the tea planters decided to bring labourers from the Santal Parganas and Chhotonagpur plateau. In the second part of nineteenth century, a large number of tribals mainly of Oraons, Santals, Mundas and Malpaharis in-migrated to the Dooars. Again after the partition of the country in 1947, and emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, streams of immigration or infiltration from East Pakistan and Bangladesh occurred in the areas. The immigrated Bangladeshi people occupied a vast areas in almost everywhere specially the GPs of Kranti, Lataguri, Moulani, Matiali Batabari-I & II, Bidhannagar, Angrabhasa-I & II. Thus the Dooars grew into a new hub of multi-racial and multi-lingual people, and of course, this led the demographic and cultural environment to be too complex for the future. The Santals and the Oraons were, of course, not much in preference to the Nepalese. The indigenous people of the Dooars were reluctant to work in the tea industry, the government as well as the tea planters too were not instrumental in recruiting them in fear of the capability of local labourers in protesting against exploitation as would be entailed with the industry.

Sahlin (1966) writes that the term 'tribal society' should be restricted to 'segmentary systems'. The segmentary systems have relations on a small scale. They enjoy autonomy, and are independent of each other in a given region. We may observe this about the Santals, Oraons and Mundas of Jharkhand. But same tribal groups in Dooars behave in different way due to assimilation with other tribes and non-tribes. So, the conditions of tribal people in respect of demography and ethnicity are not unique throughout the Dooars. Continuous assimilation has resulted different problems in the area. The rich culture of the different communities has been demolished. Rituals relating to marriage, worshiping to God and nature gradually were lost. Marriage outside his or her own community was restricted in most of the tribal communities, now this has been in the verge of demolishing. Social bonding has been loosened. Impact of modernisation and impact of multi-cultures affected the tribal culture and heritage in the region. Tribals themselves have started a number of social movements to bring about socio-cultural, economic and political change. Tribal identity has been asserted for revival of tribal cultures, scripts and languages. Demands for the formation of states for tribal people, and for exclusion of non-tribals from tribal areas are some of the issues taken up by leaders of various tribal movements.

### **7.2.3 Erosion of Identity**

Most of the Indian tribes have been in contact with other populations since time immemorial. In some cases, the contact has been very intimate. As a consequence identity of

tribal communities in respect of society and culture has been eroded gradually. It is practically not possible to specify the zero point of culture change. It is also not easy to say definitely which culture traits were taken by the tribals from non-tribals and vice-versa (Majumder, 1937). In Indian context, the impact of Hindu society on tribal culture has immensely been observed. As Hindus are dominant in larger society except for North-Eastern region, emulation of lifestyles and thinking process carried with it great amount of prestige. Consciously or unconsciously, tribal people began to imbibe Hindu ideas and observe festivals and worship some Hindu Gods. In certain areas, a social stratification system resembling those of Hindu caste system evolved. Srinivas (1966) conceptualised this process and gave the name 'Sanskritization'.

Due to influx of non-tribal people and continuous mixing of different tribal communities, each individual community has lost their own identity. The indigenous people of the Dooars, the Mech, the Rabha, the Garo and Totos were originated from Indo-mongoloid race. They were simple in habit, habituated with shifting cultivation treating the lands and natural resources as the property of God which was not saleable or transferable. These communities lived out of the ambit of civic society, governed by their own leaders called 'Morol' or 'Mondals'. They would never go out of their own ethnic society for any kind of necessity. They had their own culture, own system for treatment; own system of judgment or solution of any kind of problem among them. It was the ethnic culture. But after increasing of population the indigenous tribes face an identity crisis because they had been losing their rights and liberty in the Dooars. Now, they had been transferred to settled cultivation from shifting cultivation. They had to pay revenue to the government which they did not pay earlier.

Apart from this socio-economic crisis, they also faced a cultural crisis because of losing their ethnicity for entering into the civic society. Many of them had been converted into Hindus, some converted into Islam and many tribes had been converted to Christian. Spread of Christianity is continuing among the tribals in Dooars areas by the catholic missionaries. While the missionaries have been pioneers in education and opened hospitals in tribal areas, they have also been responsible for alienating tribals from their culture. These tribal communities having their ethno-cultural identity crisis because of their conversion into other religions, now-a-days, many of them are going to forget their mother tongue and their traditional customs, usages etc. By entering into global world and global culture the young generations are going to forget many things of their own traditional culture. So, lot of discontents and grievances have been accumulated in the minds of the tribal people as a result

of which socio-political tensions are going on in the soil of Dooars, sometime it has been bringing violence and destroying the environment of peace and integrity.

During the field survey among the tribal people, a few questions were asked about their identity, origin and culture. But in most of the cases the respondents were not able to answer such questions. Seven such questions were asked, and statistics of such answers are tabulated below.

**Table 7.2** Statistics of Identity Crisis in the Tribal Society in Mal subdivision

	Questions asked	Answered by the respondents (%)		
		Unknown	Wrong	Right
1	Which was your predecessor's place of origin?	63	22	15
2	What is your mother tongue?	75	10	15
3	What are the main festivals of your community?	46	20	34
4	What are the names of your community God?	47	30	23
5	What is the name of your clan?	80	14	06
6	What is the name of your community totem?	60	30	10
7	Which religious system do you follow?	30	20	50

*Source: Field survey, 2015*

It is surprising that on an average more than 60% respondents do not know the answers, 15% answered wrong and about 20% has rightly answered. Regarding their predecessors' original place, 63% have no ideas, 22% respondents think that they are native, 15% has rightly answered that their original place was in Jharkhand. Regarding their language of mother tongue only 15% know the right answer. Every tribal group have their own festivals and God or Goddesses. When questions were asked most of them either did not answer or wrongly answered. Those who answer wrong mentioned the name of Hindu Gods/ Goddesses and Hindu festivals. In tribal society clan and totem are two important considerations. These are the symbol of identities. Most of the respondents do not know these two. However 50% respondents know their religion. So, from the above survey data, it is very much clear that tribals in Dooars are gradually eroding their identities.

#### **7.2.4 Drug Addiction**

Consumption of alcohol is a part of social rituals among the tribal communities. At the national level it is noted that about half of Scheduled tribe men (51%) consume some form of alcohol. The prevalence of alcohol consumption was found to be much lower among non-Scheduled Tribe men (30%). Therefore, such a pattern of drinking alcohol among Scheduled

Tribe men has negative effect on their health. The estimated prevalence among Scheduled Tribes is found to be higher in the eastern states like Assam (70%), West Bengal (70%), Orissa (69%), and Jharkhand (67%). In a few exceptional cases like Sikkim, Manipur, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Goa, a higher proportion of urban Scheduled Tribe men drink alcohol as compared to their rural counterparts (Indigenous Women's Network, India, 2017).

The tea garden labourers enjoy themselves with their folk songs, dances after taking *hariya* (local wine or rice beer made of decomposed rice) and *chulai* and observe different festivals forgetting the intensive life of sorrow and pain. Diet is inadequate to them, both qualitatively and quantitatively observed among them. They spend a lot of money on alcohol. *Hariya* or rice wine is a type of alcoholic beverage substitute to alcohol. Their earning money mostly goes for buying *hariya* (Sengupta, 2009). Traditionally, wine is made through the process of fermentation made from grapes or other organic fruits. Rice wine, when compare to other regular wine, contains a higher level of alcohol content. Regular wine usually contains 10%-20% alcohol but rice wine contains 18%-25%. Unsurprisingly, it has way more alcohol content than beer which only contains about 4% -8% of alcohol. The tribal people are very much addicted with the decomposed rice *hariya*, made in the house too. The *hariya* is available in every rural local market during afternoon. The tea garden labourers are collectively drowned in *hariya* in everyday. Guests in the houses are welcomed by *hariya*. Few people also run their livelihood by selling this drug. After addiction, they behave like mad, unable to do work for a while. Rice wine has the side effects such as nausea, hangover, blurry vision, lost balance, and lost muscle control.

The young and new generations of the Dooars are being now addicted to other country and foreign liquor. The areas which are familiar with the tourism activities, the local young people of tribal community who perform as guides or other ways, now use to take such liquors. Chewing of tobacco is another form. In the primary survey it is noted that nearly 80% tribal male people of the Mal subdivision are addicted to drinking habits. In the GPs of Bagrakot, Damdim, Indong Matiali, Matiali Batabari-I, the problems of rice beer is more, while, in Tesimla, Kumlai and Bidhannagar the problem is less. In Moulani, Angrabhasa-I & II, young people are familiar with the foreign liquors.

### **7.3 Economic Problems**

The tribal people had strong sense of community life before the British rulers and Hindu zamindars and moneylenders intruded into their lives. Exchange of goods and transactions at weekly markets and fairs was the basic mode of economic relations. However,

the British took over the forests on which they depended for their livelihood. The money lenders brought them under their control by extending loans at exorbitant interest rates and then by mortgaging their lands, alienating them from land they cultivated. Indebtedness led to exploitation and pauperisation of the tribal people. Hinduisation has also contributed to indebtedness and exploitation, as the tribals adopted Hindu ways of life and rituals which forced them to spend life as the Hindus did. Tribals occupied a very low rank in Hindu society after they copied Hinduism.

### **7.3.1 Loss of Control over Natural Resources**

Before the coming of the British, the tribals enjoyed unhindered rights of ownership and management over natural resources like land, forests, wildlife water, soil, fishes etc. Collection of forest based products and living with forests; dependent on nature were the basic features of tribal resources. Indigenous peoples have an intuitive relationship with nature, a wealth of traditional knowledge, and have used natural resources for their livelihood. They have their own knowledge about management practices for centuries to preserve their lands. But, after the introduction of plantation farming in the Dooars, livelihood has been changed. Jungles were cut, forests disappeared in large amount, and control over natural resources has shifted from tribal people to the Government. Once, the primitive tribes of the Dooars were used to practice shifting cultivation, which is stopped today. With the concept of protected forests and national forests, the tribals felt themselves uprooted from their property of forests. Even the concept of earlier forest village is abolished recently by the notification of the government. The forest villages of Apalachand forest under Mal block, namely, Gajoldoba, Mech Basti, Magurmari and Sologharia etc have been converted to revenue mouza. Same fate of conversion also occurred at Nima Tandu forest village under Matiali block, namely, Baradighi, Bamni, South Indong, Bicha Bhanga, Saraswati, Murti, and Uttar Dhupjhora (Kolkata Gazette, 29/09/2014). Hence the right of forest is abolished today.

### **7.3.2 Poverty and Exploitation**

Poverty refers to the condition of not having the means to afford basic human needs such as clean water, nutrition, health care, clothing and shelter. This is also referred to as absolute poverty. Relative poverty is the condition of having fewer resources or less income than others within a society or country, or compared to worldwide averages. Generally poverty is measured by Below Poverty Line (BPL) indices in rural areas. Below Poverty Line is an economic benchmark and poverty threshold used by the government of India to indicate

economic disadvantage and to identify individuals and households in need of government assistance and aid. It is determined using various parameters which vary from state to state and within states. In tenth five-year plan (2002-2007) survey, BPL for rural areas were based on the degree of deprivation in respect of 13 parameters, with scores from 0-4: landholding, type of house, clothing, food security, sanitation, consumer durables, literacy status, labour force, means of livelihood, status of children, type of indebtedness, reasons for migrations, etc. The nature of poverty in rural areas of Mal subdivision can be viewed from the following table:

**Table 7.3** Block Level Poverty Ratio in Mal Subdivision (2006-2007)

Blocks	No. of total household	No. of BPL Families	Poverty Ratio (%)
Mal	57451	27030	47.04
Matiali	21987	8536	38.82
Nagrakata	22791	8578	37.63

*Source: Annual Employment Report- 2006 - 2007, Jalpaiguri*

From the starting of the plantation in the Dooars, there was no legal time-table for working of the labourer. Sunder wrote, "In the cold weather and rains plucking work was done from 7 am till about 6 pm with two hours leave. The wages of the labourer was very miserable. That was not more than 4 *annas* a day or Rs. 7-8 a month, the garden-coolies earned double of this." Official report shows that in the years between 1893 and 1908 there was a 66 percent rise in the price of rice, food of the tea garden labourers and more than that of wheat, but the wage rates remained unchanged (Dasgupta, 1992). There are many evidences of the oppressions of the labourers. Traders and shopkeepers used to cheat them during buying something. There were many seasonal hats in the Dooars which held in one or two days in a week near the garden where no rules and regulations were practically, no price control policy, as a result, the labourers were cheated by purchasing essential things by double or re-double rate than the original rate. The local political leaders took the role of agent for oppression of the labourers. Public health and education of the labourers were not satisfactory. The life of the labourer always had on risk fighting against the ferocious animals, on the other hand, they had to suffer dangerous diseases like Malaria, Kalazar, Disentry etc, in addition with these they had to tolerate the intensive oppression of the Manager and the officials without any protest or objection. They had no way to flee from the confined life in the garden as they were always guarded by Chaukidar. If anybody tried to flee, he had been caught and

given punishment. Besides the mental and physical torture, the tendency among the sahib to sexual enjoyment with the tribal women had also been occurred (Tirki, 2001).

Presently, the tribal people in Mal, Matiali and Nagrakata are generally involved in tea garden and their salary is earned every fortnight at a rate of Rs. 128.50 per day. A family consisting of 5 to 6 members with that sum amount is very negligible. No work, no pay system is prevailed in the tea gardens. One employee is engaged from a household. The temporary workers are employed during the plucking season. Chronologically one after another member is employed in the tea garden. Permanent workers are hereditarily engaged in the garden. Sometimes, the tea gardens remain closed for a long time and then there is no income of the members. During the survey in 2015 such closed or abandoned tea gardens were noticed in Bagrakot, Damdim and Matiali Batabari-II GPs. Absolute misery, malnutrition, starvation, ill health and death were recorded in the area mentioned above. Rests of the workers are either agricultural labourers or work outside the state. A considerable number of workers are engaged in construction works in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Gujarat state.

Starvation and death are very common in the tea gardens when the gardens remain closed for long periods. There are frequent locks out problems of tea gardens in North Bengal. One of the important tea garden in Mal block is Bagrakot tea garden run by Duncan group. From April, 2015 to November, 2015, the Bagrakot estate has seen 25 deaths. The management owes workers salary since March, 114 weeks of ration and over Rs 3 lakh in provident funds. Half of Bagrakot's 2,976 workers have left for other states; electricity and water supply was disconnected" (Roy, 2015).

The tea labourers had been accommodated as serfs long before the independence. Only a small room was their dwelling place. There was no right of any trade union leaders or political leaders to enter into the line of labourers dwelling place. The manager of the tea garden was all in all (Sarkar, 1970). Housing conditions of the tribal people were very pathetic. From the primary household survey it is found that on an average in Mal subdivision, 13% tribal families live in one room house, 29% in two rooms, 42% in three rooms, 11% has four rooms and 6% has more than four rooms. In some tea gardens, the tea garden labourers live in garden quarter. There, the numbers of rooms are like 2 bed rooms and one kitchen or corridor. Most of such quarters are semi *pacca*. Besides, the tea garden labourers are in *kachha* building prepared by them. In the GPs of Bagrakot, Odlabari, Tesimla two rooms' houses are more in number.

### 7.3.3 Land Alienation

Under the reign of Koch kings, there were two kinds of lands in accordance with revenue systems, namely – (1) Revenue free land and (2) revenue paying land. Revenue free lands were given some special cases to the tenures namely *Brahmattor*, *Devottor*, *Pirpal*, *Lakheraj* and *Petbhata*. *Brahmattar* lands were those which would be given to the Brahmans for their livelihood so that they could pursue knowledge and were hereditary from generation to generation. *Devottor* tenure was granted for religious purpose such as worship of idols etc. *Pirpal* tenure was same as *Devottor* but it would have been granted for the Muslims. *Lekhraj* tenure was granted as a satisfactory service to the royal kings, *Petbhata* tenure was granted to the members of the royal family or relatives only for their maintenance of livelihood. Huge amounts of such revenue free lands were converted to revenue paying holdings by the Britishers. There were five kinds of revenue paying land namely, *Khalsa*, *Khangir*, *Khasbas*, *Sairati* and *Baje Mahal*. Government possessions' lands were *khalsa*. *Khangir* was a demesne land of the king. *Khasbash* and *Bajemahal* were two distinct parts of *khangir*. *Sairati* lands were those which were covered by tanks (Sutradhar, 2013).

During the time of Bhutanese rule in the Dooars, no uniform system or law was introduced in the field of land and land revenue; they mainly collected revenue by their officials with the help of local leaders of different communities. Out of their systematic collection of revenue, the Bhutanese attacked at any time on the people of the Dooars and for that aggressive attitude of the Bhutanese, the people of the Dooars had been living in intolerable and panic circumstance (Rennie, 1866).

After possession of the Dooars in 1865 by the treaty of Sinchula, the Britishers cast their commercial eyes on the whole areas of Dooars, because it was full of natural resources with forests and others. The British Government declared the eleven Bengal Dooars as a non-regulated area for the purpose of using the land in accordance with the design of colonial economy. For that purpose land settlement was started in 1871 under the supervision of Mr. Becket. The purpose of this settlement was to divide the lands of Dooars into three categories viz. (1) Land for agricultural purpose which could be given on lease to willing *jotdars* and *Chukanidars*, (2) Land for reserve forest and (3) Land for tea cultivation. Somewhere the soil was appropriate for tea-cultivation and somewhere it was appropriate for agrarian purpose. Grunning (1911) pointed out that as the soil and climate of the western Dooars was suitable to the growth of tea; Government offered land to the investors on favourable terms and the industry developed rapidly. As lands for tea estates were being demarcated and land

acquisition for tea plantation continued, the Mech people of Dooars faced the trouble of being evicted from their land which they inhabited for generations.

For tea gardens entrepreneurs could get land on lease on the basis of certain rules framed by the Government and all such rules initially were published in the Calcutta Gazette on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1894 (Sunder, 1895). Under the lease rules for tea gardens, lands were granted to any capable entrepreneur for a term of five years, after expiry of that if the conditions of lease fulfilled all terms and conditions be renewed for a period of thirty years and so on for similar periods in continuity. Areas covered by houses of the tea garden would be charged as homestead land, good land as '*rupit*' and fallow land as '*faringati*'.

The Indians were not silent regarding the tea cultivation in the Dooars region; rather they came forward beside the European proprietors of the tea estates and invested in the tea cultivation. In 1877, Dam Dim, Kumlai, Washerbari, tea estates were started by the Indian entrepreneurs. Later on Gurjanjhora and Diana tea estates were established in Mal subdivision by the Indian entrepreneurs. As a result of immigration, the population of different castes and classes had been increasing gradually in Dooars but the population of Mech, Rabha and Garos who were indigenous and lived independently, decreasing gradually. Separate colonies were established for the protection of the Mech, Garo and Santals. But due to identity crisis, they left the place and moved towards east. Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal (1973) writes, "Analysis figures of the census report it appears that there was a large exodus of the Mech from Bengal towards Assam and then further eastwards". A number of Garo tribe still remain in the forest village, but none in the colony, because they never patronized the colony to any extent (Miligan, 1919).

This is the history of land alienation in Dooars. After independence, in the present time, tribal lands are gradually transforming to tea gardens due to the ignorance of the tribal people. During our field survey it is learnt, that for the tea gardens different private entrepreneurs have borrowed land from the farmers in a condition that one or two members of each family would be permanently employed in the tea garden. But after agreement, they were cheated, no one is employed in the garden, or the garden is abandoned after few years. Hence there is no production as well as no employment. Land of tribal people is forfeited in such a way. A large section of contingent of tribal workforce, comprising of men and women, was brought to construct rail lines in different parts of Bengal. After the laying of lines was over, many of these migrant labourers preferred to stay back; they loved their new role as cultivators. The cleverer non-tribal neighbours took their land away following the market rules and by manipulating rules the provisions of the land laws. Refugees coming from

Bangladesh have also contributed to alienation of tribal land. The inheritance related land division has largely contributed to marginalisation of family holdings; many of the tribal families are actually becoming landless in the process.

#### **7.3.4 Lack of Awareness about Government Schemes**

In the Indian context, scheduled tribes have the special provisions, constitutional rights for their social, economic and educational promotion. Recent tribal welfare schemes are: a) Pre-metric and post-metric scholarship for scheduled tribes students, b) Boys' and girls' hostel for tribal students in tribal dominated areas, c) Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Scheme for tribal students in higher studies, d) Establishment of Ashram school in tribal sub-plan area, e) Vocational training in tribal areas, f) Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana g) Tribal forest Dwellers Empowerment Scheme, h) National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) self employment scheme, i) Eklavya Model Residential School for tribal students, j) Sikshashree for tribal day scholars, k) Old age pension scheme for tribal people from BPL families with age of 60 years or above l) Development of particularly primitive vulnerable tribal groups etc. Besides, there are other general social and economic developmental schemes.

In the field survey in different Gram Panchayat areas of Mal subdivision, it is found that most of the tribal people are very much poor, but they could not manage BPL ration card, job cards for 100 day works etc. Most of them hardly know the name of BPL ration card. As a consequence, they remain deprived from such benefits. Due to illiteracy and lack of awareness many families remain in dark about the assistance laid down for them by the Government. Government officers and supporting staff misbehave with them. More than 70% tribal households have no any banking facilities simply having no bank account.

#### **7.3.5 Subsistence Economy**

Tribal economy is characterised as subsistence oriented. The popular forms of subsistence economy are that of collecting, hunting and fishing or a combination of hunting and collecting with shifting cultivation. Even the so-called plough using agricultural tribes do often, wherever scope is available, supplement their economy with hunting and collecting. Subsistence economy is characterised by simple technology, simple division of labour, small scale units of production and no investment of capital.

The tribal labour force in Dooars area, engages itself predominantly as small cultivators, agricultural labourers, and plantation labourers which require minimum education

and skill and produce minimal returns. Overwhelming participation in the agricultural sector, mostly as labour, and in the tea gardens as permanent and casual workers, where income or wages are invariably low prevented the tribal population from causing any noticeable economic and social mobility. The work participation rate is generally higher among the tribal population compared to other communities in the region because the tribal groups have to cope with the pressure of subsistence economy.

The main problems of subsistence economy is that if the system fails, and it can no longer meet the needs of those who exist within the economy, then it is difficult to obtain resources from elsewhere. A subsistence economy is wholly reliant on nature to provide for their needs, if a crop fails, or their resources be damaged in some way, then they do not have access to alternatives. A subsistence way of earning cannot afford good livelihood as profit or earning is limited. The tribes in Mal subdivision depending on tea gardens or in agriculture are of no savings, so, hardly can survive without job in the tea gardens or low productions in agricultural field accordingly.

### **7.3.6 Unemployment**

Tea gardens are the main employment source of tribal workers in Mal subdivision. A few people are dependent on agriculture. One most critical period happens during the closing of tea gardens. Incident of closing of tea gardens are nothing new in this region and it happens suddenly. The tribal labourers loose their job during the closing of the gardens. There are two types of workers in tea gardens permanent and temporary (locally termed '*bigha*'). The permanent workers work in the garden throughout the year while the seasonal employees are engaged during plucking period. Both the workers loose their jobs if tea gardens remain closed for longer periods. There are many abandoned tea gardens from which the labourers shifted to another profession after a long waiting. Abandoned tea gardens are those in which yields start to decline when bushes become more than 100 years old. There was no arrangement made by the management to replace old bushes and plant new bushes. Kathalguri, Bamandanga and Samsing tea estates are the example of such abandoned gardens. The gardens which remain frequently closed are Samsing, Nagiasuree, kilcott and Bagrakot Tea estates run by Duncan Company; Bawandanga- Tondu tea garden run by S.P. Agarwala Company; Aibhil Tea Garden of C.A. Goodricke Company etc. From the closed tea gardens a few male labourer force to migrate to the different western states of the country, the women and young age workers are employed in different construction works such as lifting and breaking stones from the river beds etc.

Due to unemployment in tea gardens every year, hundreds of tribal girls mostly teenagers have gone missing over the past few years from the poverty-stricken dying tea estate areas of the Dooars. Driven out of home by poverty and because of the dream of a better life, these girls have fallen prey to human trafficking. They have been trapped by local agents promising lucrative jobs in big cities of the country. After leaving home, however, these girls have become untraceable (Sumati, 2013).

### **7.3.7 Health and Nutrition**

Public health and nutrition of the tribal people were not satisfactory during the colonial rule. It was in the year 1912 the Dooars labour act was passed but it was concerned with government inspection only in the matters of sanitation and public health. The enactment was promoted by the high incidence of sickness resulting in absenteeism and heavy death toll among the workers due to various diseases, particularly malaria and black water fever. Even after the independence the labourers had not been provided modern facility of the treatment. In most of the diseases were concerned, they had to depend on the local process of treatment by *ojha* or *kabiraj*, apart from this they had to depend on charlatan or quack, as because there was no qualified doctor, as a result, the patients had to expire for the wrong treatment.

The infant mortality rate in Mal subdivision is as high as 66.3 per 1000 children in 2015 as per the collected sample data. Highest infant mortality rate of 85 is recorded in Bagrakot TG followed by Odlabari, Rangamatee, and Tesimla. Malnutrition of foetus and mother, lack of medicines, poor custom of child delivery in home cause high infant mortality rates among the tribal people.

According to the sample data collected from the field, institutional delivery rate for the tribal people is only 40%. Rest 60% people depend on local '*dhai*' or old women in their own houses. The maternal mortality ratio is 11.7 per 10,000 live births. In Mal subdivision, the ratio is 17. However the highest MMR is found in Bagrakot GP followed by Changmari, Champaguri, Rajadanga and Sulkapara. The tea gardens of Bagrakot, Gurjanjhora, Ranichera, Aibhil, Kilkote faces acute problems of malnutrition and healthcare problems. There is lack of sources of drinking water in almost all tea gardens, proper sanitation problems are there. Among epidemics, cholera is most prevalent. Labourers contacted it in insanitary detention depots in Dooars.

Regarding health and sanitation, primary data were collected from some selected mouzas of 9 gram panchayat areas. The result or outcome of the data obtained from the field is tabulated below.

**Table 7.4** Health and Nutrition Status on some Selected Mouzas

Name of Mouzas	Health Indices (Figure in percentage)									
	Separate Latrine	Separate Kitchen	Safe Drink- ing Water	Water facility within Premise	Treatment by Doctor	Sufficient Nu - trient foods	Institutional child Delivery	Sleeping Mos quito net	Without Drinking Habits	Average
Bagrakot TG	50	30	19	8	25	10	38	32	8	24
Targhera TG	45	25	21	9	27	11	39	43	7	25
Tesimla TG	44	25	20	14	28	15	39	36	10	26
Jogesh Ch TG	40	27	21	20	25	12	39	29	12	25
Lataguri	60	32	25	40	42	25	48	36	11	35
Aibhil TG	60	28	25	20	21	14	37	37	9	28
Jiti TG	45	21	22	10	28	15	39	33	8	25
Indong TG	55	27	21	10	29	23	41	37	11	28
Looksan TG	45	29	29	7	27	19	36	32	8	26
Average	49	27	23	15	28	16	40	35	9	27

*Source: Compiled from Primary data*

From the above table it is found that on an average 27% of all summed up indices of Mal subdivision fulfilled the good health and sanitation criteria. So, there are 73% lacks of health and sanitation indices. Health and sanitations are suffering in very worst way in the study area.

#### **7.4 Environmental Problems**

The study area Mal subdivision faces different environmental constraints consisting with rough topography, dense forests, and wildlife. Once, the area was breeding ground of mosquitoes. Malaria, black water fever and Kalazar were very common among the tribal people. Presently two important problems faced by the tribal and non-tribal people in Mal subdivision are Man-animal conflicts and physical constraints of the region.

##### **7.4.1 Man-Animal conflicts**

Man-animal conflicts are very common in the Dooars. Earlier entire Dooars area was covered by forest and all forests were connected, population were very poor in number. Wild animals were very common to wander through the thick jungles. But after thinning of jungles, the wild animals' habitat has been degraded rapidly. In recent years man-animal conflict has gone up steeply owing to the increase in human population; land use transformations,

developmental activities; species habitat degradation and fragmentation; growth of ecotourism and also increasing wildlife population as a result of conservation strategies. Human population and its growing demands for land and biological resources affected this landscape to great extent. Fragmentation of habitat has primarily occurred as a result of infrastructure development, widening of road, conversion of railway line to broad gauge including heavy traffic, river training works through large scale construction of embankments, deposition of dolomite in rivers in the foothills bordering Bhutan and particle containing dolomite in the flowing river coming from Bhutan hills. Tea plantations have taken heavy toll on adjoining grasslands and also the industry has produced huge amount of unplanned human settlements. Decrease in appreciation and increase in negative attitude towards wildlife has serious detrimental potential to impact the natural system of coexistence. All these factors led to an increased level of human-animal conflict.

In Mal subdivision of Jalpaiguri district, there are Wild life sanctuaries and national parks that include Chapramari Wild life Sanctuary and Gorumara National park. Elephant is the main wildlife in the Dooars which harms the people's life and property. Habitat fragmentation or obstruction to migration path brings about human-elephant conflicts resulting in damage to agricultural crops, property, household and injury and mortality to both humans and elephants. Cultivated crops are easy forage source for elephants and more easy accessible as well. On an average, they annually destroy crops over an area of 0.8 to 1 million hectares which in turn affect the livelihood of at least 5,00,000 cultivators (Sukumar & Murali, 2010). The Dooars region perhaps experiences one of the highest levels of human-elephant conflicts in Asia. They not only damage large areas of agricultural crops but also kill on an average 50 people each year.

Elephants being animals with wide range of movement have biological requirement of migration from one forest to another. This process has been carried out for hundreds of years through tracks passed down the generations through hereditary system. However, fragmentation of these time-tested corridors took place after establishment of tea estates, forest villages, and other human settlements, commercial harvesting of woods etc. During field survey in Nipuchapur Tea Garden, I came to know from the local residents that elephants frequently attack their habitat. Anu Kharia, a 45 years old garden worker of Nipuchapur Tea garden of Kumlai GP informed, "In the winter season the attack of 30-40 elephants in a group towards the village is not very rare incident. We never go outside after sun sets. Leopards are there in the tea garden which frequently attacks the garden labour early

in the morning times.” Similar incidents are common in many forest attached tea gardens e.g. Gajoldoba TG, Targhera TG, Baradighi TG, Changmari Forest etc.

Another ferocious animal of the Dooars is Bison which has a steady growth in north Bengal forests. In the Dooars, during November to April, Bison come out of forests and tend to graze in adjacent crop fields where they are surrounded by people and stoned or driven. Then the animals violently attack the people. In most cases the animals are so excited and exhausted due to continuous disturbance by people that they are prone to cardio-respiratory failure soon after immobilization.

The Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is a subspecies of leopard, widely distributed on the Indian subcontinent. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN) has declared the Indian leopard as near threatened animals. Leopard is highly protected species in India as it is included in schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. Leopard’s natural traits e.g. high adaptability and ability to live in wide range of habitats bring it close to the human settlements, mostly in search of prey, resulting in human-animal conflicts. Tea garden act as chief place for conflicts as Leopards can prey upon cattle reared by tea garden workers (Chakraborty, 2015). Leopards consume boars, deer, birds and rodents mostly. They enter into village to attack the domestic animals like cow, goat, dogs, cats etc. Sometimes they attack human beings.

#### **7.4.2 Physical Constraints**

Traditionally, tribal people are interested to live in remote places of jungles and mountains. In Mal subdivision, there are forest areas, tea gardens, remote hilly tracts etc. Transportation and way of communications are very hard with the civilised society. Climate is not healthy mainly during rainy season in many tea garden areas. There are many such villages in Mal subdivision where population density is very low, road connectivity is nil. At night, it seems that this is another world of habitations. The forest and tea garden areas of Apalachand, Tandul, Targhera, Aibhil, Totgaon, Menglass, Nipuchapur, Khasjungle, Changmari, Kilkote, Chaophaoli, Jiti, Bhagatpur and Grassmore are very remote villages. The people in these villages are isolated in many aspects from the rest of the world. There are many old aged people who never had a visit to the district headquarters once in their lifetime.

#### **7.5 Conclusion**

The tribals of Dooars are carrying so many problems from the colonial period to the present era. Many discontents and grievances have grown up in the minds of neglected and

depressed people. They have been feeling cries of losing their lands, ethnicity, cultural heritage and freedom of identity for centuries. Economic oppression, subjugation and deprivation threatens the people every time. A considerable amount of tribal people steps in western provinces of the country to earn more money. Several times, the tribes are cheated by the middle man, civilized people. The tradition is going on and there is no positive sign of development. Different political leaders in different regimes use them as vote banks, even the tribal political leaders are there for their ethnic origin and identity, but not known among the tea garden workers. The tea garden workers expend their time in very pathetic conditions when the tea garden remains closed for several months to several years. No single article is sufficient to discuss their miserable conditions.

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