

**TRIBAL WOMEN IN THE DEMOCRATIC  
POLITICAL PROCESS  
A STUDY OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN THE DOOARS AND  
TERAI REGIONS OF NORTH BENGAL**

A Thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal

For the Award of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

In

**Department of Political Science**

By

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Supervisor

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August, 2018

*Dedicated To My Son  
Srīnjoy (Kutush)*

## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “**Tribal Women in the Democratic Political Process: A Study of Tribal Women in the Dooars and Terai Regions of North Bengal**” has been prepared by me under the supervision of Professor Manas Chakrabarty, Professor of Department of Political Science, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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## ABSTRACT

Active participation in the democratic bodies (like the local self-government) and the democratic political processes of the marginalized section of society like the tribal women can help their empowerment and integration into the socio-political order and reduces the scope for social unrest. The present study is about the nature of political participation of tribal women in the democratic political processes in two distinctive areas of North Bengal, in the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district (where economy is based on tea plantation) and the Terai of Darjeeling district (with agriculture-based economy). The study would explore the political social and economic changes that political participation can bring about in the life of the tribal women and tribal communities in the tea gardens and in the agriculture-based economy.

The region known as North Bengal consists of six northern districts of West Bengal, namely, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Cooch Behar. There is more than 14.5 lakh tribal population in this region (which constitutes 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total tribal population of the State), of which 49.6 per cent are women. Jalpaiguri district has the highest concentration of tribal population as 14.56 per cent of its population is tribal population whereas Darjeeling has 4.60 per cent of its population as tribal population. The tribal women of these two districts are predominantly engaged as agricultural labourers and tea workers and their economy could largely be termed as subsistence economy. The tribal population in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts has mostly migrated from the central India (popularly known as Chotanagpur) in different historical periods.

After the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act in 1993 the scope for participation of the members of the backward communities, particularly the women of these communities, has significantly risen. In North Bengal there are 717 Gram Panchayats, 61 Panchayat Samities, 6 Zilla Parisads and a Mahakuma Parisad. So far as the representation of the tribal women is concerned, in the GPs there are 479 members, in the Panchayat Samities 72 members, and in the Zilla Parisads and Mahakuma Parisad together there are 21 members. Thus all the *panchayat* bodies taken together there are as many as 556 tribal women members in North Bengal who would constitute the universe of the present study.

Primary data for the study would be collected through an extensive study of (a) the tribal women representatives of various bodies of the local self-governments and of the State legislature, (b) women providing leadership to political organizations and trade unions in tea gardens, and (c) the average tribal women who constitute the voters. The study would be conducted with the help of an exhaustive questionnaire-cum-schedule. We will substantiate the interview method with observation and case study methods. Available data from the secondary sources would also be taken into consideration.

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Dated:

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(Renuca Rajni Beck)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

(i)	ST	=	Scheduled Tribe
(ii)	SC	=	Scheduled Caste
(iii)	OBC	=	Other Backward Class
(iv)	NB	=	North Bengal
(v)	WB	=	West Bengal
(vi)	LR	=	Literacy Rate
(vii)	MP	=	Member of Parliament
(viii)	MLA	=	Member of Legislative Assembly
(ix)	PRI	=	Panchayati Raj Institution
(x)	CPI(M)	=	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
(xi)	IAY	=	Indira Awas Yojona
(xii)	CDP	=	Community Development Programme
(xiii)	NES	=	National Extension Service
(xiv)	BDO	=	Block Development Officer
(xv)	NDC	=	National Development Council
(xvi)	LWO	=	Labour Welfare Officer
(xvii)	NGO	=	Non-Governmental Organization
(xviii)	IRDP	=	Integrated Rural Development Programme
(xix)	NREP	=	National Rural Employment Programme
(xx)	INTUC	=	Indian National Trade Union Congress
(xxi)	BMS	=	Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh
(xxii)	AVP	=	Adivasi Vikash Parishad

# DARJEELING DISTRICT BLOCK MAP



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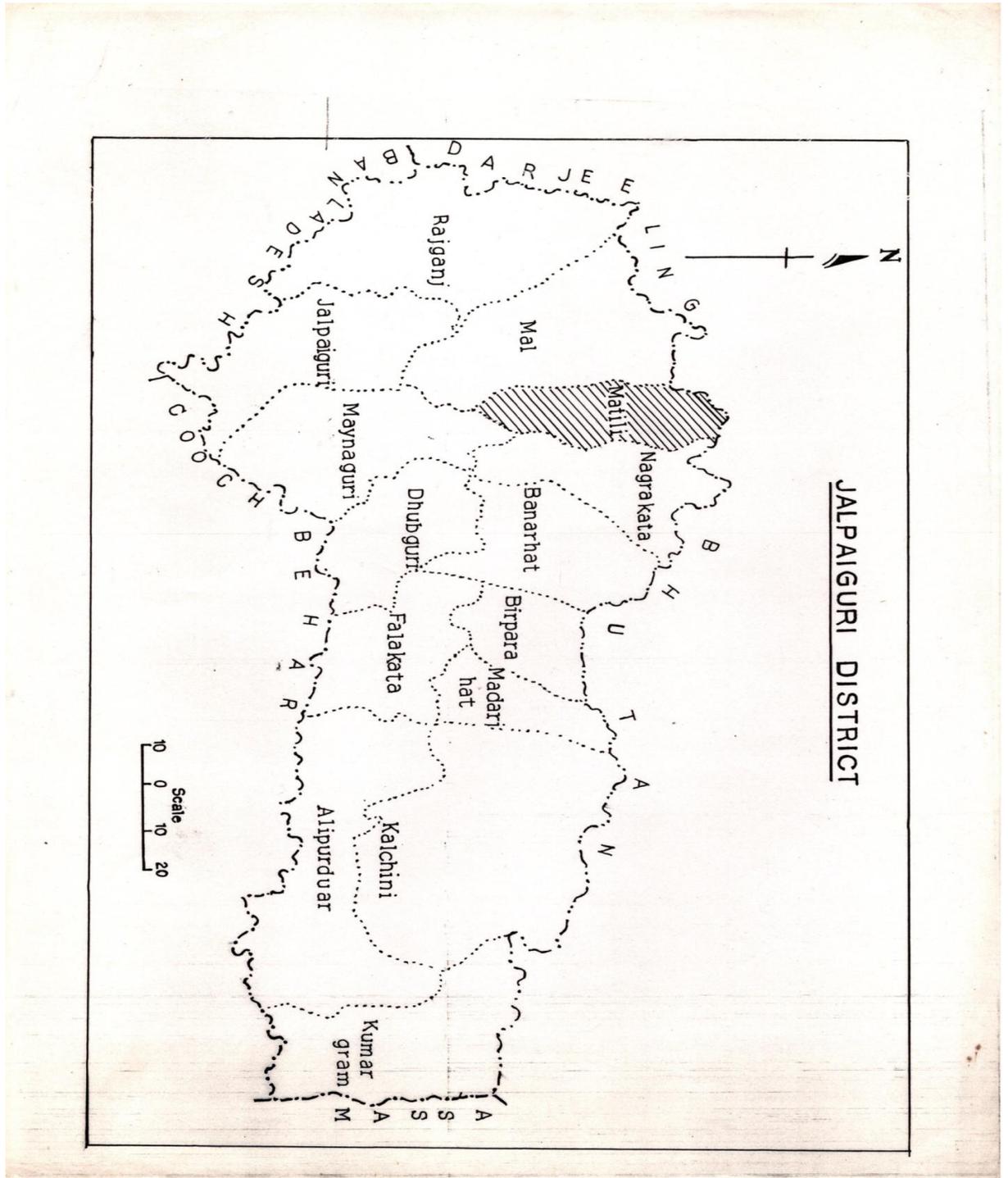
**Block Map of Darjeeling District showing Phansidewa Block: The Area of Study**

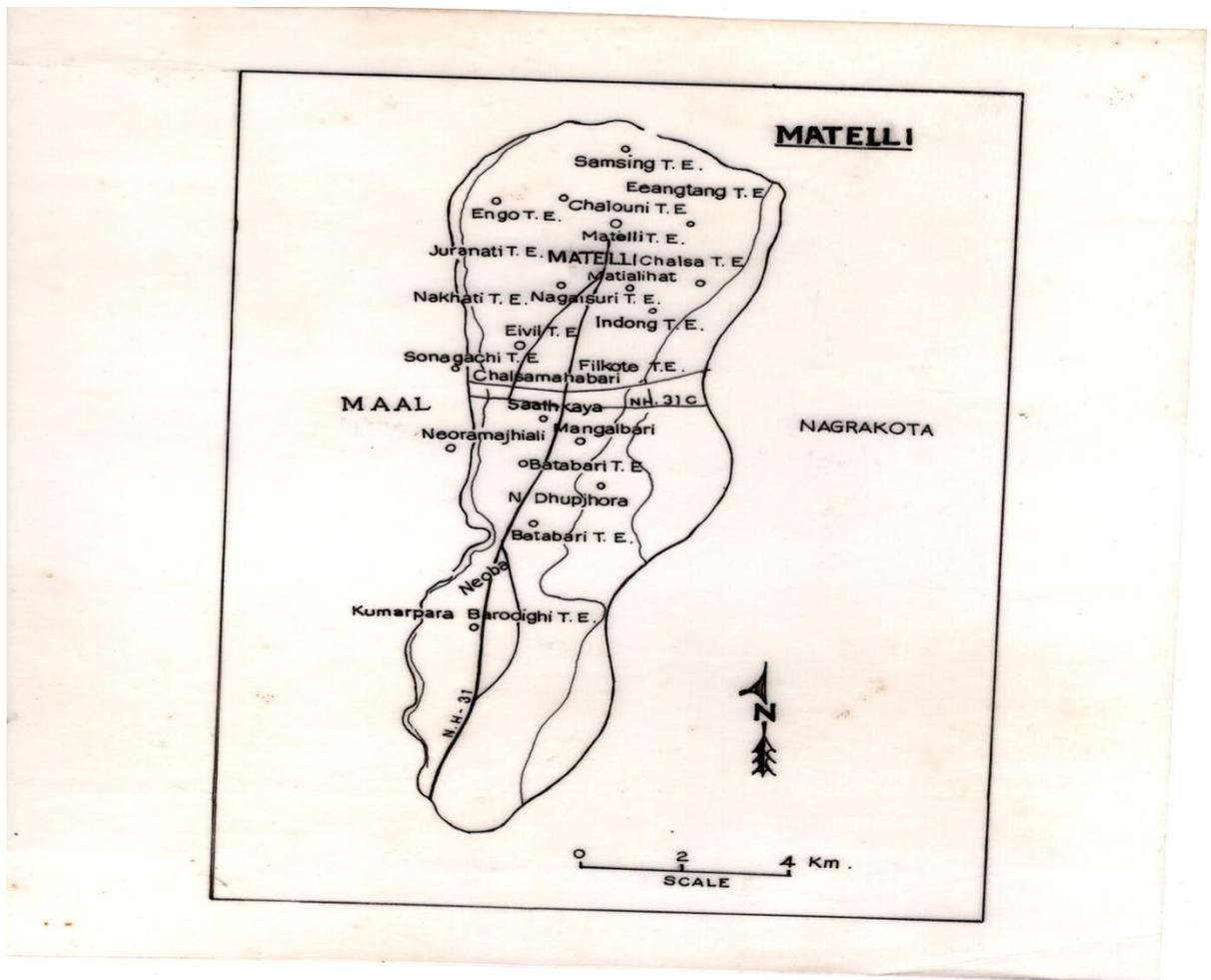


## Block Map of Jalpaiguri District showing Matiali Block: The Area of Study



**Block Map of Jalpaiguri District showing Matiali Block: The Area of Study**





**Matialli Block: The Area of Study**

# **CHAPTER- I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Active participation into democratic politics is considered one of the most important means to empowerment of women. It is all the more significant when it comes to empowerment of women belonging to tribal communities that constitute one of the most backward segments of Indian society. The tribal people in general and tribal women in particular could draw immensely in terms of capacity building if they come forward to take active part in democratic politics and take over political leadership at different levels of local self-government or trade union movements, or in other forms of political mobilization. Active participation of the downtrodden, the hitherto neglected segments of society, again, can go a long way to consolidate the foundation of the liberal democratic order that India as a society is trying to consolidate. Active political participation of the marginalized section of society can help their integration into the social order and can help reduce the scope for social unrest, if these people are convinced about its benefits. An iniquitous social order that promotes competition among the social groups for power and resources needs special protective measures for its weaker sections to sustain them at a healthy level of the social, economic and political order.

Panchayati Raj system is an effective means of decentralization of powers, whereby power is supposed to be delegated to lowest strata of society. However, this system has not been able to immune itself from the evils of corruption that is rampant in higher echelons of governance in India. Starting from the members of gram-sabhas to those of zilla parishads have quickly amalgamated themselves to the corrupt political scenario. Under these circumstances, checks and balances that are supposed to come from the general population are of extreme value. Members inculcated into the political system based on panchayati raj are either prone to corruption or have a general apathetic attitude towards the whole system.

The Panchayati Raj is the cornerstone of the entire scheme of democratic decentralisation in India initiated through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution. The success or failure of the Panchayati Raj system largely depends on effectiveness and powerful working of

Gram Sabha at the decentralised level to fulfil the desires and inspirations of the people. Recognizing the critical role of the Gram Sabha in village economy Gandhiji had said that true democracy could not be worked by some persons sitting at the top. It had to be worked from below by the people of every village. Later on, endorsing the view of Gandhiji, Jay Prakash Narain had said: "To me Gram Sabha signified village democracy. Let us not have only representative government from the village upto Delhi. In one place, at least let there be direct government, direct democracy. The relationship between Panchayat and Gram Sabha should be that of Cabinet and Assembly". It is due to the importance of this institution at local level that the Year 1999-2000 has been declared as 'Year of Gram Sabha' by the Government of India.

Article 243(B) of the Constitution defines the GS as a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of the Panchayat at the village level. With regard to its powers and authority, Article 243 (A) of the Constitution says that the GS may exercise such powers and perform such functions of the village level as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide. It is in the light of this that State legislatures have endowed certain powers to this corporate body relating to the development of the village.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution gives the power to the masses to decide their destiny. This aims to further the process of democratic decentralization of power. Impediments at socio-economic and political levels are many fold for true realization of democratic decentralization. Participation of the masses at grass root level can still be termed as pseudo participation as there is a general lack of awareness and apathy towards political system as a whole. Need of the hour has to be in form of concerted efforts aimed towards modernization of the rural society whereby people become more aware. An aware and progressive rural India can hold the powers that be accountable, thus, ushering an era of good governance based on active participation of the rural population and accountability to the masses.

The initiatives for democratic decentralization undertaken in free and democratic India until early 1990s could enthuse the women to participate in the local self-governments and other democratic institutions in any massive scale. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act, which came into effect in 1993, has reserved at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of seats at all levels of

local self-governments for the women. Women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will now have a share of seats in proportion to their population in an area. This Act has generated tremendous enthusiasm among the tribal women to come forward and explore this hitherto male-dominated political sphere and assume leadership in different walks of life. While a significant number of tribal women are now participating in different bodies of local self-government and in trade unions (in case of tea gardens), it is premature to suggest that the women have made a significant inroad into the village level or community level leadership. It would, however, be worth exploring the nature of their participation and its impact on various walks of the life of the participating women in particular and the tribal communities in general.

The lifeline of any democratic order lies in the active participation of all sections of the citizens, and particularly the weaker and otherwise marginalized sections of the society. In order to be more participative Indian democracy has always been taking new steps in line with the ideal of devolution of power down to the grassroots. The regular elections to the national and state legislatures, election to local self-governments, strengthening of organs of civil society like political parties and trade unions provide ample scope for the otherwise neglected sections to participate in political processes. Reservation of seats for the weaker sections and women following the principle of protective discrimination has widened the scope for political participation of a marginalized section like the tribal women.

Apart from political means the other means of empowerment could be to improve their educational status, economic status, health status, to grant them property rights, raise their social awareness, and to transform them into an active, confident, and **critical agency** of social transformation. In reality, all these means of empowerment are closely interrelated. Spread of education can enhance the 'life chances of the people', can get them jobs in the organized sector of economy and can significantly raise the standard of their living. Again, an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and realization of the usefulness of organized political and social movements, like the literacy movement, health movement, movements for the rights of the workers can help them develop a critical approach to traditional modes of life and to the established hierarchies and help them draw a new approach to life. The local self-governments are not merely the means of distribution of public resources; if used properly and consciously by the **active citizens**

these institutions could be transformed into the means of social transformation. By taking active part in the *panchayats* the tribal women can create new opportunities (from developmental perspective) for themselves and for the fellow members of the village communities and can transform them into active agencies to fight against the perpetual male domination and practices like witch hunting, liquor consumption, or polygamy.

Democracy and decentralization have meant a renewed emphasis on decentralization, but not all forms of decentralization are democratic. Even non-democratic systems can, and have had, well-worked-out schemes of decentralization. Advocacy for decentralization has been a part of the liberal political tradition. Decentralization is also advocated with reference to the size and socio-economic complexity of the country. A large territory is not easy to administer from one centre, which perhaps explains why states with large territories like Canada, China, USA, Australia and India have adopted federal forms of government.

Along with size, the complexity of the territory in terms of religion, language, economic development and cultural enclaves calls for decentralization. With such complexities it becomes necessary to recognize the special needs and demands of the regions and groups of people which get reflected in political institutions as well as in administrative process. While the polity finds it advisable to pay attention to the needs of diversities, the regions and social groups themselves become assertive about their identities, resisting uniformities and demanding effective voice 'from below'. Decentralization is thus affected by pressures both from above and from below.

The process of construction of a democratic social order cannot be successful unless the issues of mass poverty, landlessness, unemployment, widespread illiteracy, malnutrition, gender discrimination, superstitions, feudal and capitalist exploitation and political apathy among the masses are adequately addressed. The political empowerment of the people is possible only by ensuring economic development, spreading education and by making people conscious about their rights and responsibilities. A development of critical faculty in the average citizens would also sharpen public monitoring of the functioning of the system. In brief, the future of democracy in India will largely depend on the all-round economic, social and cultural development of the common people. Although Indian

women have a tradition of rich contribution to various walks of life and to the freedom struggle the arena of politics has predominantly been a male domain.

The level of political participation of women and its effectiveness would largely depend on their position or the status, and the patriarchal arrangement in the community they belong to or in the immediate social setup. An understanding of the economic, social, educational, and cultural position of the women under study is therefore absolutely essential to understand the nature of patriarchal arrangement the women have been subjected to and to understand what kind of freedom of free space they would be allowed in the otherwise male domain of politics. Apart from studying the nature of participation in the democratic institutions it would therefore be necessary to do a thorough study of the economic, social and cultural background of the tribal women and see what kind of linkages prevail between their background (including their self and social perceptions) and the nature of their political participation. There is a perception among a section of sociologists and social anthropologists that the women belonging to low-caste, low-class, and tribes enjoy relatively higher status than their upper-caste upper-class counterparts. However, a large number of empirical studies suggest that the tribal communities have all the elements of patriarchal arrangement as the women are forced into the low-paid or unpaid form of labour, deprived of property rights, deprived of formal education, sexually exploited, deprived of religious rights, often deserted by their husbands, made to suffer from mal-nutrition and kept out of the traditional or modern power structure (for details see Roy, 2005; Omvedt, 1990).

While the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal has a large concentration of tribesmen and women from central India who are engaged as tea labourers in the Terai region of Darjeeling district we find the concentration of tribal population from the same place of origin who are engaged in the agricultural sector as well as in tea gardens. In the present study we have done a comparative study of the nature of political participation of tribal women working in the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri Dooars and the women living in agriculture-based villages in Terai region of Darjeeling district. The comparison is meaningful in the sense that the two regions provide two significantly different economic, social, cultural and political contexts.

## **THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME**

The phrase “political participation” generally refers to those voluntary activities of the members of a society, in the selection of ruler and in the formation of public policy. Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important element of democratic government. Political participation is also the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. Different scholars have defined political participation differently. To Ghosh (2000), political participation is a ‘process of growth of individual’. It is also the ‘index of democracy.’ The higher the form of participation healthier is the democratic system. Jha (2005) opines that political participation is the hallmark of a democratic set up. Success and effectiveness of democracy, according to her, largely depends upon the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is ensured by the system to all its citizens. Citizens’ participation is necessary because it assures the legitimacy of democratic systems.

The citizens in a liberal-democratic order like India do not constitute a homogenous mass; they are unequally placed in the economic, social and power hierarchy. Generally, people placed in the upper echelon of the social and economic hierarchy control power in a liberal democracy. The “bourgeoisie” (to use the Marxist terminology) or the “elite” (to use the terminology of Pareto, Mosca, Michel or C Wright Mills) constitute the ruling force in a democratic or otherwise political order (Mills, 1956). Liberal democracies all over the world have progressed a long way from the middle of nineteenth century to become much more broad-based (not always rigidly controlled by the bourgeois for furthering its narrow interest), “strategic”, “mass-based” and “integrative”. The social democrats in the West and the mainstream left parties in most countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia have drifted from the conventional Marxist critique of “bourgeois democracies”, which was dismissive of the system, and have discovered many positive aspects in the modern liberal democratic orders. They largely believe in participating in the multi-party (plural) democracies, and believe in giving a socialist or leftist twist to the bourgeois order or to create a social democratic order. The mainstream Indian Left parties in India perfectly fit into this scheme.

The neo-Left critique of the liberal democratic order could be drawn from the writings of Gramsci, the German Critical School, Poulantzas, Althusser, Miliband, and Foucault,

among many others. Gramsci explained how the bourgeois ruling classes take the ideological, social and cultural route and resort to coercive means in order to establish its totalitarian control or hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). The German Critical School, Habermas in particular, spelt out how the system world, of which state and the power structure constitute a major component, colonizes the lifeworld of the citizens by means of transforming the “critical rationality” into “instrumental rationality” (Habermas, 1971; 1976). The French Marxist Althusser put across the concept of “ideological state apparatus”. In construction of his thesis Althusser explains how the modern bourgeois ruling classes have resorted to peaceful, democratic and ideological routes to sustain its rule. Althusser has shown how the modern ruling classes have acquired mastery over the art of integrating the mass mind into the bourgeois ideological order by controlling education, socialization and cultural processes (Althusser, 1971). They thus depend less upon coercion as a means of political control. Another French structuralist Poulantzas emphasized that the modern capitalist state is more than a combination of repression and ideological false consciousness. For him the state is more complex:

A strategic field and process of intersecting power networks, which both articulate and exhibit mutual contradictions and displacements.... This strategic field is traversed by tactics which are often highly explicit at the restricted level of their inscription in the State: they intersect and conflict with one another, finding their targets in some apparatuses or being shortcircuited by others, and eventually map out that general line of force, the State’s “policy”, which traverses confrontations within the State (1978: 136)

Poulantzas further elaborates the character of the modern state by observing that the state apparatus includes more than state power; it includes everything from postal service to the road system. Such services are not independent of power, because those in power need such mechanisms for themselves and for maintaining their support-base (1978: 14). The French post-structuralist thinker Foucault has been highly dismissive of the modern liberal orders by branding them “demonic”. According to his the modern liberal orders combine the city-citizen game, elements of pastoral power (or folk-shepherd game), and bio-power (or the politics of welfarism) to dupe and discipline the masses and integrate them into the order (Foucault, 2000: 8-25).

Gram Swaraj and Panchayati Raj system according to Gandhi's ideas can become the vehicles for ushering in the much-needed social and political change by including all the participants in the process of decision-making and public policy formulation. As Gandhi said, "Panchayat Raj represents true democracy realized. We would regard the humblest and the lowest Indians as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land." For a participatory democracy intensive, organized, and continued endeavors are needed on the part of gram swaraj for the empowerment of people.

Thus while addressing the question of political participation of the common, impoverished and hapless masses into the democratic order we find three theoretical positions of relevance. *One extreme view* is that the liberal democratic order has many things to offer to all classes of people, and that it can adequately address the concerns of the downtrodden. This view further propels the belief that by active participation into the system the common masses would make active citizens and thus gain much more in terms of empowerment, besides adding strength to the order. *The other extreme view* is that the liberal democratic order is demonic from the point of view of the liberational perspective of the marginal and exploited. Any participation in the system would therefore end in further "colonization" of the exploited common people. In-between these two extreme views there is a *third view* which believes that if give a Leftist or social democratic twist the liberal democratic order to be put to better use for the significant gain of the hitherto deprived classes, although it might not end exploitation altogether. Miliband (1969) is one who has suggested that the capitalist states of the West do not fit into the orthodox frame of Marxist class analysis. The state can at times go to the extent of serving the downtrodden even by contradicting the interests of the bourgeoisie in order to realize the objectives of a liberal, democratic, welfare social order.

The politics of decentralization, democratization, welfarism capture the spirit of the changeover of liberal democracy. Despite this change there is unequal participation of different classes and segments of citizens to the democratic order. The general pattern is that the segments, which are economically, historically and socially marginalized, are given a marginal place and a small role to play in the system. The social scientists in India are unanimous in identifying the 80.2 million tribal population (who represent nearly 700 Scheduled Tribes) as people living on the margin of social, economic and political order of our society. This is a reality despite nearly 60 years of nation building, development,

welfarism and the policy of protective discrimination. Taking advantages of the policy of protective discrimination and other opportunities thrown open by the liberal democratic order only a small minority of the tribal population has been able to cause some kind of social mobility and in the tribal dominated states of North East and central India a section of neo-elite has emerged from amongst the tribal population. Yet, the living standard of the average tribal population has largely remained unchanged, if not deteriorated. The tribal population in general and tribal women in particular thus occupy a very marginal place in the power sharing arrangement offered by Indian democracy.

Apart from theorizing the character of the liberal democratic order and the place of the “marginal” in it we have to examine the relevant feminist perspectives to locate the tribal women in the socio-economic-cultural locales of which they are a part. A comprehensive work on this part would take some time, as it will proceed alongside the field studies. For the moment, however, we can make some passing reference to the fact that in the agricultural set-up the tribal women are almost universally engaged as agricultural labourers. They are engaged as unorganized, low paid labourers, which involves high level of irregularity and insecurity. In the absence of education and skill they are constrained to accept whatever the agricultural economy can offer and they accept this without much of a grudge as a requirement of the subsistence economy. While extending their labour outside to add to the family income the tribal women are not relieved from their domestic activities, sexual activities and reproductive activities.

The value of the women in tribal societies is judged from this perspective, from the *perspective of their labour value* and their role and status in the society are determined accordingly. This is largely true of the tribal communities in the tea garden locales as well. There are, however, some significant differences in the two contexts: (1) the tea gardens have a heterogeneous social composition in contrast to the agricultural setup, (2) the tea garden labourers work in more capitalist-industrial arrangement while the tribes in the agricultural setup are still in pre-capitalist or semi-feudal arrangement, and (3) the labourers, including the women labourers, in the tea gardens are now part of organized trade union movements, while their counterparts in the agricultural setup do not have any such experience. Apart from this “rational” and utilitarian judgment, the predominant perceptions, institutional arrangements and cultural practices (like witchcraft, or bride-price) determine the position of tribal women in their respective societies. The other set of

forces that can set the roles and perceptions of the women constitute the exogenous forces, like the State-injected institutions and programmes, the organs of the civil society (like the political parties, trade unions, voluntary organizations) or social movements.

On the whole we would be addressing the question of interrelationship tribe and the larger society or between tribe and civilization to use the phrase of Surajit Sinha. Sociologists have in general looked into this interface from the dominant-dependent perspective, where the tribes constitute the losers. The state, the ideology of modernity, development and welfarism etc. are often read as the instruments at the hands of the dominant for subordination of the marginal. In modern India 'the stance of the civilization' is fast changing to create new conditions for the tribes. The conscious stance of the modern nation state, according to Sinha, is to make tribes fully participate as equals in the emerging civic order of the nation. In practice the tribal people, particularly the primitive groups, continuously lose command over the vital resources. The tribal populations have reacted to this arrangement of subjugation in a variety of ways. One of the ways is to take an aggressive stance. Such groups have tried to mobilize their population on dissatisfaction. But creative cultural movements accompany ethnic based political movements too, which accentuate and universalize the traditions. In order to make them authentic and prestigious, borrowing is often from the Hindu and Christian traditions (Sinha, 1982: 34). The range of movements launched by the tribal people cover a wide spectrum from cessation to seeking some educational and economic support. We have to keep this wide spectrum in mind to locate the nature of political participation and activism of the tribes of North Bengal and their women folk.

## **OPERATIONALISATION**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The present study is designed on the following framework:

1. Theoretical materials have been collected from books, journals, periodicals, Govt. reports etc.
2. The empirical data have been collected from the universe of the study through a questionnaire which included both open ended and closed ended questions.
3. The data so collected has been analysed with the help of computer and report has followed accordingly.

Accordingly, the work is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources of data has been supplemented by secondary sources of data.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Following from the brief outline of the problem of research given above we have drawn a number of preliminary research questions around which the present study revolves.

- Q1: What constitute the economic, social, and cultural background of the region and the people we are studying?
- Q2: What has been the political background of the region and the people we would study?; their political culture, political tradition, customary laws, traditional *panchayats* and so on, and how has been the relative participation of the tribal men and women in democratic politics?
- Q3. How has been the transition from traditional *panchayats* to the modern democratic institutions? What has been the nature of constraints and adaptations and how has the gender factor played its part in it?
- Q4. What has been the exact nature of participation (as leaders of political parties and trade unions, as members of *panchayat* and other democratic bodies, as ordinary and unattached voters, or as active workers of the organs of civil society) of the tribal women in the democratic processes thrown open by the institutions of Indian democracy and what are problems (economic, social and cultural) that constrain their political participation and activism?
- Q5. What have been the patriarchal arrangements that the tribal women have been subjected to and how such arrangements are coming in the way to their political activism and political participation?
- Q6. What are the rights and privileges that have come as a part of development packages to the tribal women? What democratic rights have been conferred on the tribal women by the Indian Constitution? Are they aware of their rights and privileges they are entitled? What level of awareness do they have about such rights and privileges and how are they making use of them in their empowerment?
- Q7. What are the major constrains for socio-political upliftment of tribal women especially in terms of their social, economic, educational, and health issues.
- Q8. Whether the support of organizations under which they are employed (especially tea gardens) are substantial enough for furthering their goals towards socio-political upliftment.

Q9. Whether involvement of political parties (thereby lending a political colours) at grass root panchayat levels is helpful or detrimental towards evolving of an independent tribal political leadership.

Q10. If the purpose of the extension of democratic rights to the tribal women is to build up a participatory and integrationist democracy to what extent the state has succeeded in its objective? Or alternatively, is there an undercurrent of disenchantment and nihilism being sustained by the otherwise marginalized communities which might explode in some form of disintegrationist movement? In other words, how far the tribal communities appreciate and accept or dislike and reject the democratic political space offered to them by the state and the dominant society. The persisting political mood shared at the community level could be grasped by closely following the political perceptions and behaviour of the tribal women in the study area.

### **HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses have been verified in connection with the proposed work:

- 1) India's democratic process has created open space for the wider participation of women, mainly tribal women in the political functioning of the country.
- 2) Lack of adequate knowledge about the political system of the country stands in the way for greater participation of the tribal women in the political process.
- 3) Without adequate participation of the tribal women in this region, a social equilibrium may not be easy to achieve.

### **METHODS OF ENQUIRY**

Among the identified groups of tribes in North Bengal, primarily having agriculture and tea garden employment as their means of livelihood, tribal population belonging predominantly to the Dooars and the Terai regions have been chosen as the target population for my studies. Both these regions have a proportionate representation of tribal population who are, for ages, employed in either pursuing agricultural activities or being employed as tea garden labourers. The varied demography amongst this tribal population further adds to this being a fertile field for conduction of my studies. The tribal groups of Darjeeling Hills have been left outside the scope of the present study. The scope of our study would be delimited to the tribes like Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Mahali, Chik Baraik, Lohar, Kissan and so on, i.e., the tribes which have migrated in the agricultural and tea-garden setups from Central India, or the region popularly known as Chotanagpur.

As the first it was proposed to prepare an exhaustive list of tribal women who have been participating in local self-governments in my area of study. They are classified into two groups: (a) those who are living in tea gardens in a block in Jalpaiguri Dooars and (b) those who are living in villages, in the agricultural setup in a block in the Terai region of Darjeeling district. The next step was to draw a sample of suitable size and study the participating women in the sample in the two selected blocks with the help of an elaborately drawn questionnaire-cum-schedule. It was proposed to substantiate the interview method with observation and case study methods. A close-range observation of the women in action (in *panchayat* meetings, in *gram sabha* and *gram samsad* meetings, in political and trade union meetings etc.) has helped us draw an insight of the nature of their political participation. Apart from the study of participating women it is proposed to conduct intensive study of tribal communities in two different locales, preferably of two blocks: (a) one in the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district, with high concentration of tea garden labourers, and (b) one in the Terai region of Darjeeling district, which has high concentration of agricultural tribes.

1. exploratory, descriptive, diagnostic in nature.
2. survey method
3. structured and unstructured schedule containing questions
4. purposive and probability

The selection of the sample respondents was both purposive and probability. So far as the women politicians in the *Panchayati Raj institutions* are concerned, the sampling was purposive so as to cover a large number of women. The selection of other sample respondents, namely, the common women citizens the sampling was probability. The selection of the district has been purposive as the district exhibits demographic relevance because a sizeable section of the inhabitants of the district belong to the tribal communities and the selection of the blocks was also purposive because the level of development, demographic configuration, geographical location were considered in selecting the blocks. In total, two districts of North Bengal namely Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts respectively were selected. Two blocks were selected and studied, they are Phansidewa block (Darjeeling district) and Matelli block (Jalpaiguri district) of North Bengal.

Census data, NSSO data and the findings of other scholarly studies on the same problem in other parts of the country were taken into account for the purpose of comparative analysis and generalizations. Analytical value of the study would be its possible contribution to the models of participatory liberal democracy. The study is expected to have some practical and policy implications as well as it aims to explore the responses of one of the otherwise marginalized section of the society, the tribal women, to the 'welfare', 'empowering' 'capacity building', and 'integrative' arrangements of the liberal democratic social order. Apart from its essence in the field of political studies the present study can hopefully contribute to the field of gender studies immensely.

### **UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY**

The proposed study had sought to examine the nature and extent of tribal women's participation in the political process in the Dooars and Terai region of North Bengal. Needless to mention, the region under investigation offers a number of unique features- the most important of it the demographic composition. It offers an example of a mixed society where people of different religions, castes, beliefs, languages and other reside. But one notable feature is the general level of mal-development of the people belonging to the background segment of the population. The segment of tribal population constitutes a sizable portion as these people belong to both to tea-garden and non-tea-garden areas. There is some kind of homogeneity among these people and it reflects in their group-behaviour in social and political areas. Moreover, because of political penetration into this section by political parties, a sense of commonness has developed. The trade union activities by different political parties have opened up new space for their participation. But the outputs of such activities have not reached a satisfactory level and there are gaps between these efforts and achievements. The proposed study looked into this aspect and contextualizes the problem by identifying the reasons behind and the policy needed to overcome these obstacles.

### **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

The prime objectives of the present study has been to study:

- a) the extent and nature of participation of tribal women in different levels of local self-governments and other democratic bodies and process; the role tribal women in local movements, like agricultural labour movement or tea-labour movement;

- b) the socio-economic, cultural and migratory background of the participating tribal groups and tribal women in the area of our study;
- c) the patriarchal arrangements (property rights, traditional authority structure, beliefs and practices) which leads to the subjugation of the tribal women in the agricultural and tea-garden setups; gender discrimination in terms of differential efforts in capacity building, health practices and determination of roles;
- d) the course and orientation, or political socialization that led the tribal women to take part in local self-governments and politics, the growth of the choice for a particular political ideology or party;
- e) the intensity of their participation and effectiveness of their participation in politics;
- f) the nature of capacity building, the change of perception and self-development that has resulted from their participation, the way the community in general and the women of the constituency in particular have been benefited and the way the fellow tribal men and women assess the benefits of political participation of tribal women;
- g) the way the participating women mobilize fellow tribal people in support of their respective political parties and in support of the various government programmes;
- h) the way the tribal women participate in *panchayat* meetings, party meetings, *gram sabha* and *gram samsads*;
- i) the way the women motivate themselves to continue in politics and the way they themselves assess their new role;
- j) the way the participating women adjust their new political role with their traditional role of worker and home manager;
- k) the way women's participation help generate awareness about the rights and responsibilities of the tribal women;
- l) the way the whole community assess this new experience in their life in terms of consolidation of the foundation of democratic politics and in terms of addressing the common problems of their everyday life; and
- m) to see if there is any disillusionment with the present democratic arrangement and processes and if the tribal women along with their male counterparts nurse any anti-systemic grudge or involved in any anti-systemic activities.

From 1993 *panchayat* election in West Bengal the tea gardens of Terrai and Dooars have been brought under local self-governments. With reservation of seats for STs and for the women the scope for political participation for tribal women has unquestionably

increased. Apart from the *panchayat* bodies and general political activities as a part of democratic polity the tea gardens provide an opportunity for the tribal men and women to participate in the trade union activities. With cent per cent unionization of the tea garden labourers the women workers have been participating in trade union activities in one form or the other. The present study has also explored the nature of women's participation in trade union activities and how this has helped arouse their political awareness and political self.

### **RESEARCH GAP**

Traditional Indian society through ages have always been patriarchal and male dominated in majority of India, few states of North-Eastern part of India and few other scattered societies across India. This gender bias has been a major hindrance towards wholesome development of India. This major lacuna has been sought to be addressed by political legislation, socio-economic measures, addressal and correction of various discriminatory social practices, and measures to bring parity to the male-female population ratio.

Studies on tribal women in their political activities are few in number. The region under investigation offers many unique features in terms of geographical position, demographic composition, cultural complexities and levels of political mobilization by different political parties. Apart from the fact that the tribal population in the region migrated long back from Chotanagpur area of Jharkhand, their long association with this region has enabled them to adopt many habits and customs of the local people while maintaining their own rich cultural tradition. At some points, this interaction between these two currents has led to conflictual situation but in most of the cases, this conflict situation has been suitably resolved through a process of assimilation. It is sociological perspectives. The proposed study would cover the political dimension of the problem.

The role of various scholars and researchers has always been to analyzed the effectiveness of such measures and highlight any deficiencies that crop up. Publications by scholars and luminaries across India have endlessly tried to point out the way forward to address this major obstacle for true realization of the potential of India as a country. Thus, over a period of numerous years' scholars across the country have tried to bring forth the true ground realities pertaining to the issue of women empowerment at the local

levels. There is thus, a lot of literature by various scholars' right from the southern part of India to northern extremities.

Tribal population comprises a substantial percentage of population in northern part of Bengal. This geographical place has a substantial number of tea gardens, the major of working force of which are tribal. Located in far flung and inhospitable terrains, this population of tribals has always been secluded, and there has not been enough research studies aimed towards assessment of the status of this population.

There thus arises a need of, comprehensive study aimed towards addressal of the ground level scenario of this population; especially the situation of the women of this society, a comprehensive study will also help to formulate strategies aimed at upliftment of these women so that they can be at par with women of other sections of the Indian society. Difficult terrains and remote locations make it extremely difficult to carry out any research activity amongst the tea garden working population. Furthermore, living in such societies for years, makes it extremely difficult for a researcher to penetrate into these isolated far-flung societies. These factors therefore contributed towards lack of meaningful research amongst these societies. This population is of course quite substantial, and cannot be neglected if a wholesome social progress is to be attempted.

Our sphere of study is principally directed towards this section of society and their ground reality so that a proper assessment of their progress can be done and also a direction towards means aimed at their further upliftment can be promulgated. Though *Panchayati Raj* system was adopted as a means of reaching democracy to the grassroots level, a sincere study to assess its effectiveness amongst these desolate and isolated sections of society is a must. Participation of women of this society can be taken as a litmus test for assessment of the effectiveness of the *Panchayati Raj Institutions*. Our study also aims to analyze effective women participation in *Panchayati Raj Institutions* of this strata of society. Lack of meaningful studies amongst the tribal population of North Bengal leaves a huge scope for research and analysis within these populations. Our sincere effort has been to carry out comprehensive research spanning across this population in Dooars and Terai regions of North Bengal.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the Constitution in Articles 29-30 every citizen has the right to protect and promote one's culture. The act ensures that the tribal people will be empowered to manage their affairs according to their own culture within the purview of the Act. In recent years there has been a lot of studies on the local self-governments and women's participation in them, yet, there is hardly any literature on the participation of tribal women in *panchayats*. Although women are enfranchised and are given Constitutional equality, they remain practically in a subordinate position to men in almost all the spheres of the socio-political life.

1. **Jha** (2004) asserts that local self-government Acts were prevalent even before independence. Government resolution of 18<sup>th</sup> May 1982, under Lord Ripon's vice-regal is considered as the pioneering Act aimed towards local democracy in India. Implementation of these ideas in Bengal were brought about by Bengal Local Self-Government Act of 1885 which set up district and local boards at sub-divisional levels and union committees for groups of villagers. In 1825, eight provinces in British India had passed Acts for the establishment for the village *panchayats*. By 1948, 20 native states had village *Panchayat* Acts. The earliest being the Cochin *Panchayat* Regulation Act 1919. The first draft of India's Constitution, despite our history of *panchayats*, did not find a place for democratic decentralisation below the state level. Gandhiji immediately opposed it stating that without provision of *panchayats* people's voice could not be truly reflected in political decision-making. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report subsequently forced almost all states under the Indian union to pass legislations for establishment of *panchayat* by 1959. These *panchayati raj* institutions were however, rendered ornamental and majority of the states did very little to promulgate the *panchayati raj* system in its true letter and spirit. The non-functioning *panchayati raj* institutions in majority of the country brought this repute to entire concept and practice.

By the end of 1988, a sub-committee of consultative of the parliament under the chairmanship of an MP, P.K. Thungon made recommendations for strengthening of *panchayats*. It was against this background that Constitutional Amendment Bill (64<sup>th</sup> Amendment) was drafted and introduced in the parliament on 15<sup>th</sup> may, 1989. Two major objections to this bill were:

1. The bill overlooked the state and was seen as an instrument of centre to deal

directly with *panchayati raj* institution, and

2. It was imposing a uniform pattern throughout the country instead of permitting the individual states to legislate the details.

We now have great expectations from the democratic decentralisation that has taken place in West Bengal. It may be noted that West Bengal has achieved this level under an uninterrupted rule of one political party. A three tier *panchayati raj* system comprising of village level *panchayat*, *panchayat samities* and district level *Zilla parishad* has however been set in motion through various constitutional amendments all across the country. The primary political and economic power has although been vested with the state governments. This remains a huge impediment towards actual empowerment of the population at the grass root level. A novel and extremely productive measure has the *panchayati raj* system aimed towards empowerment of the masse at the grass root level can never be successful without positive intends of political parties across the spectrum. (pp. 26-35)

2. According to **Pande** (2001) the 73<sup>rd</sup> which came into force on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1993, *panchayat* institutions were given constitutional status. Though the nitty-gritty's of these vision were put under the domain of state legislature. Article 343 B has laid down the provision of a three tier *panchayati raj* system constituted mainly by village level, intermediate level and district level. There has however been lots of power laid down with the state legislative vis-à-vis constitution of an elected *panchayat* body. The Amendment also provides that the seats for SC and STs shall be reserved in proportion to their population in territorial area of a *panchayat*. A new feature of the amendment is that it also provides for reservations of one thirds seats for women, whether they are general seats or reserved for SC or SC. This according to the amendment not only makes provisions for reservations of seats of members but offices of chairpersons. However, the decision-making power is bestowed with the state legislature.

The question of reservation in favour of backward classes as well as extend and manner of such reservation is left at the mercy of state legislature. Section 3 of the constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) has made it obligatory on the finance ministry of India to make recommendations for augmenting the financial resources of *panchayats*. It thus suffices to say that though numerous constitutional prerogatives aimed towards empowerment of tribal women populations have been laid down, the power to enact these measures are yet

under the prerogative of the state legislature. Thereby empowering them to manipulate the provision of the Act aimed towards furthering of their political agendas. Checks and balances, though in place, have not been able to rid the tribal women population of being used as stooges for narrow political gain. Pande (2001) further opines that participation of women members does not depend upon their social status or prosperity. He cites example from the village of Bhithauli Khurd in Lucknow district where he found that their voters never see most of the women members in village *panchayats* who belong to well to do families. They cannot recognize them by face, nor do they know their names. Even where she is the *Pradhan* of the village she never appears before the public. Her husband or some near relative does everything and he is known as the member or *Pradhan* as the case may be.

In this regard he observes that without the awareness and active participation of women nation cannot progress. If they remain dormant the country will be deprived of their contribution in nation building process. Studies suggest that political participation could be influenced by numerous factors like sex, caste, social, status, education, income, age, family background, etc. It is learnt from the past experience that women with a good record of political participation were highly educated and were from upper class families. Domestic pressure and over dependence on male members also make women politically neutral. He points out several factors that explain why the women members are incapable of functioning independently: 1) because of *pardah* system prevailing in Muslims and upper caste Hindus; 2) because the men, who have been so used to provide village leadership, do not sincerely want power to go to women; and 3) lastly if somebody asks her question or puts his problems before her she is not normally allowed to speak; others who act on her behalf start answering. This practice prevents generation of confidence in the women members and they are made to remain dependent upon men even for minor things (Pande, 2001: 180-81).

3. According to **Chandra** (2005) in the modern civilized society politics is chiefly a skilled controlled area. It is significant to note that since independence more and more number of women have been educated and have entered public life. However, ‘an enormous disparity exists between women’s formal equality and their meaningful exercise of political power’ (V.Raj Laxmi). Trade unions came into place principally aimed at providing power to the working labour class in industry. There is quite a

substantial percentage of women labour force in our country. These women laborers have shown that though it may be difficult to participate in day today activities of trade union, women laborers have during the course of time provided great strength during crisis period such as strike. A study on textile strike of Bombay in 1982 proved that without the support of the women textile workers and wives of male textile workers, the leaders would have found it difficult to continue the strike for their legitimate demands. It is however unfortunate that a patriarchal society like India is an obstacle to male colleagues accepting women's crucial role. Despite this it is heartening to note that today after more than a decade of our struggle we find it our satisfaction that the questions and problems of working women are discussed widely in our country by various organizations, individuals, and press and also by the government. The tenacity of women workers of the under privileged society like the tribal women working force aimed principally towards having their rights preserved is commendable.

The issues which concern women most such as equal wages, non- provisions of maternity benefits and child care facilities, retrenchment of women worker in the wake of equal remuneration act have not been taken up seriously by trade unions. Problem of women working in unorganized sector highlights the sexually biased attitude of mainstream trade unions. The trade union movement, principally aimed towards preservation of rights of workers can never fulfill its true potential without active and meaningful participation of the women labour force. In this regard he observes that participation of women in different organizations has two important connotations: (i) it gives them a status in the society; and (ii) it permits contribution of women not only in rural development process but also in their own development. It also gives them an opportunity to (a) work in group or project of common interest, (b) associate with the on-going development programmes; (c) participate in the decision-making process; (d) articulate women's needs, (e) leadership in the national development process. The *Panchayati Raj Institution* were in fact, considered to be the most effective instruments for realizing the goals of economic betterment and social justice for the least privileged. Participation of women, who constitute nearly half of the population, in *Panchayati Raj Institution* has been considered essential for enabling them to participate effectively and independently in democratic and political process and to influence decision-making. It has been recognized as a step towards equal society and a means of realizing for women the development goals. But he strongly feels that today *Panchayati Raj Institution* hardly gives any scope for women

members to participate effectively and independently in democratic and political process to influence decision-making process. In spite of the provision of reservation for women the real power equations in the village whereby women, if they know what is good for them, leave politics to those who know better – the husbands, father-in-law or sons. Often they degenerate into party spokeswoman and hardly voice their own opinion on the floor of the house. Most of them remain as silent spectators to the proceedings of the house and rarely participate in its work (Chandra, 2005: 214).

4. **Jha** (2005) connects the concept of equality to women's equal right to political participation. Equality of presence, she adds, is a rough approximation to the social groups that make up the society, is already implicit in the notion of participation. In the Indian context, it has generally been observed that despite women's mass participation in the national struggle, their representation in the formal political structure has remained marginal in the post-independence years. Though women have been visible in mass movements, group upsurges and protest struggles, their presence is not felt in structured decision-making institutional settings. Participation of women in the village based on formal and non-formal organizations has caused significant changes in their social status as well as their position within the family. It is largely because of the women's participation in these political organizations that there has been change in the traditional norms and social arrangements that had restricted the free movements of the female members of the society.

5. Ashok Kumar **Jha** (2004) in his book *Women in Panchayati Raj Institution (2004)* cites some encouraging developments in the otherwise backward State of Bihar. He, in his study, has observed that the majority of women are of the opinion that they should take part in politics and should actively take part in the election campaign in favour of the candidate and party of their choice. They wanted to extend their political activities. With this idea in their mind, perhaps, the women had taken part in political campaign as among the women who were exposed to political campaign in the elections. Seventy per cent of them had the desire that women should take part in campaigning (Jha, 2004: 88).

6. **H. C Upreti and Nandini Upreti** (2000) opine that besides educational and social backwardness, domestic responsibilities, lack of awareness, shyness and fear of violence at polls are found to be reasons of low female turnout in politics. These factors are also

responsible for lower level of political participation of women in various political activities and lower level of political consciousness. Tribal communities of India remained isolated from the regional political main stream for long. They lived in the forest and remained in the hills and inaccessible terrains. The scope for their interaction with the State Governments was very limited. The revenue officials, forest guards and police acted as linkage between tribes and the government. In their traditional social setups the tribal communities had developed their own political systems to address the problem of disorder. They were highly reluctant to be a part of the modern and coercive political order, which was largely alien to them for generations. The tribes had developed their own *panchayats* in order to resolve disputes within the communities and to preserve their identities and self-reliance. The *tribal panchayats*, the traditional authority (in Weberian sense) based system of the tribes, provided them with solidity when the state-sponsored modern administrative and legal system was alien to them. However, effective analysis of the structure and functioning of the tribal *panchayats* would reveal that these were primarily the male domain and used as a mechanism to perpetuate male domination of the females. We hardly know of tribal *panchayats* which have women representation and which offer women a say in the running of the *panchayats*. Upretis opine that mere State intervention through legislative measures cannot bring about the desired social transformation. Mere legislative change, like the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, is not a guarantee to effective and meaningful participation; a numerical increase of women representatives in government bodies is a significant steps but in order to make their participation meaningful the women need to break free from their domestic confines, they have to be empowered economically and educationally and they have to be allowed ample free space to operate independently.

7. To **Sinha** (2005), political and the social lives of the tribes are no longer separate. Like all other societies among the tribes the men take important decisions in all matters. His study in Chotanagpur shows that the political system of the agriculturist-gatherer tribes traditionally excludes women. Women participate in village assemblies, *panchayats*, only when they are party to a case, or are called upon as witnesses. At the same time, in some situations, women can become village chiefs (*munda*), or a village priest (*pahan*). This opportunity may present itself when they are widows and if their husbands had been *mundas* or *pahans* (Sinha, 2005: 92). The tribals have their own traditional *panchayats* known as *Panch*. The *Panch* was not elected by any democratic

methods and the post was hereditary in nature. This *Panch* was to negotiate in case there had been a conflict among the parties. The matters reported to *Panch* were largely social and partly economic in nature. Disputes relating to marriage were the opt-referred cases to the *Panch*.

8. **Roy** (2005) observes, even after the reservation of seats for tribal women they are not seen with a voice in the local bodies of democratic institutions. Some major reasons as to why the tribal women continue to remain voiceless and absent in trade unions in tea gardens, in party organizations or in local bodies, not to speak of the state and national legislative assemblies or in administration, are strong patriarchal domination, overexploitation of women labour, early marriage and conception, and their lack of access to education (Roy, 2005: 41)

9. In her argument as to why women should have a significant place in *Panchayati Raj* and why should there be reservation for them **Zenab Banu (2005)** points out that anthropologically tribal women are different from non-tribal women. They enjoy more freedom as they can repudiate their marriage and can easily re-marry. The only problem in re-marriage is to settle the amount of bride price. However, in all tribal societies-patrilineal and matrilineal, it is the man who controls the children and family. It is this subaltern position and the hegemony of patriarchy that requires a reserved place for women in *Panchayati Raj institutions*. Banu considers the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Development to be a water-shade in the evolution of *Panchayati Raj Institutions*. *Panchayati Raj Institution* provides an opportunity for the weaker sections of the society to march on the path of the progress. She has studied the participation of tribal women in the districts of Rajasthan. Her finding shows that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment has diluted the rigor of empowerment and in the course landed the women to disempowerment. In this respect she observes:

To us the reservation given to tribal women does not carry much weight. They are dictated, as there is enough research evidence, by their men. And when we further analyze the affiliations of the men in the tribal community, they are also not educated. In fact, they have nothing except their big body or manliness. In reality they survive as the stowage of party bosses. The tragedy is that both the tribal male and female are 'sold out' to Hindu leaders. They are the 'yes men' of the Hindu lobby of the region. In the whole region of South Rajasthan there is not a

single tribal leader whose credential are acceptable by the tribals at large. In absence of any recognized leader, the PRIs are ruled neither by the women members and nor by their male. The PRIs in fact, are ruled by the high caste Hindus with their varying political affiliation (p,184).

10. **Singh, Narain and Kumar** (2006) in their studies on women of Cachar district and their political participation of tea workers opines that the tea workers, particularly the women are members of the union not due to their ideological commitment but under compulsion of the co-workers or the union office bears at the garden level. He further observes that women in tea gardens are politically immature and ignorant. Most of the office bearers of the union or the *bagan panchayat* are male workers. The women workers remain always in the rear everywhere. They are ignored and cornered in the distribution of elective posts, even at the garden level. Recently, after due and cry some women workers have been included in the *bagan panchayat* of Cachar districts. Some of the women are non-committal in the union leadership. They further elaborates that plantation workers, particularly the women workers remain busy with their daily routine works of the garden and whatever time they save is consumed by their domestic works. They start their domestic work at five in the morning and retire after 10pm. Obviously they are physically exhausted after such hard work with mal-nutritious diet.

Further, they live in the garden society which is cut off from the mainstream of national life. Their level of political perception, degree of political consciousness and political knowledge are limited and inadequate. Their lack of political awareness, low level of political consciousness and attitude towards political activities is most horrible. This is mainly due to their solitary garden life. The women workers are completely cut off from the mainstream socio-political life of the nation. According to them the social environment is responsible for their poor political awareness. The plantation life is different from other profession. The women workers are engaged in the plantation work from morning to evening and they get practically no time to ponder over political matters even at local level.

Despite efforts, participation of women workers in political or decision-making remains far from satisfactory. Following may be the reasons:

1. There is a general apathy towards political participation owing to their lower socio-economic status which leads to their devaluation.

2. Since times immemorable politics had been the bastion of males, yet to be substantially breached by women.
3. Traditionally, women are supposedly for attending to household chores. This obligation keeps them little time to expend in political activities. Social structure of India does not further the concept of women actively engaged in political activities.
4. Political parties are thus reluctant to promote women candidates as their wholesome and active participation in politics is not guaranteed.
5. Patriarchal attitude of majority of the Indian society which is inculcated in political parties is detrimental to projection of women as potential political persona, for this renders women at par with men, which is in opposition to the laid down social protocols in Indian society.
6. Politics, in recent times has have an increasing influence of use of money power and criminalization. Women entering the political sphere are supposedly easy victims for character assassination which is a big stumbling block for active and meaningful participation of women in politics.
7. Abysmal levels of education in women lead to a monumental lack of social awareness which coupled with burdens of work and family responsibility acts as a huge impediment towards participation of women in decision-making and active political process.
8. Inequality of wages based on gender bias amongst working women and the lack of suitable employment amongst the non-working women is a substantial barrier towards participation of women in active politics. Women folk in a predominantly patriarchal society like India face an uphill task to make their mark in social and political sphere. The path towards having a meaningful social and political contribution is ridden with numerous obstacles which, for majority of women is quite an arduous task.

11. **Pruthi** (1999) in her studies shows that the participation of women in trade union is far from satisfactory due to the trade union's ways of functioning and also because of the nature of women's work. Another reason according to her is that trade unions cover mainly the organised sector and much of the women's work fall under the unorganised sector. There are many who are loyal to the trade union activities and show keen interest in participating. The first trade union in India was founded by Anusyaben Sarabhai in

Ahmedabad in 1917. According to her the patriarchal attitude of the male workers is responsible for: a) poor representation of women in decision-making position, and b) the neglect of issues concerning women. Male workers in general tend to view their female counterparts as home makers. It is only in recent times that the three major trade union namely INTUC, AITUC and CITU have begun paying attention to women workers. At the same time, women workers have started struggling on their own, seeking to fulfil demands that concern them as women. This has not always been successful, but many a time this firmness as well as the support received from active women's group have paid dividends. However, even in these movements they have not been able to emerge beyond middle level leadership despite their commitment and militancy.

12. **Praharaj** (2010), in her study on the status of women opines that it is based on three pillars: such as education, employment and political participation and achieving these is in another word, "empowerment". According to her education creates consciousness for better health, and better health along with better education help in achieving higher productivity. Increase in productivity leads to economic growth. Economic growth generates resources. Accessibility towards resources improves people's health and education which again raise productivity. So education, therefore, is both seed and fruit of economic development, social awareness and on the other hand active political participation of the educated women, empower them to open the possibility of new avenues for development and to root out corruption.

Female literacy is negatively related with fertility rates, population growth rates, infant and child mortality rates and it shows a positive association with female age at marriage, life expectancy, participation in modern sector of economy and above all, the female enrolments. But it is found that urban female is well literate compare to their women are at the bottom of the heap. Though the dropout rates are not declined so appreciably in primary level, the enrolment ratio in the secondary stage is not exceeds to 50 per cent. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) took steps to eradicate women literacy in 15 to 35 age group by 1995. Steps were also taken to promote adult education for women linked with up gradation of their skills and income generation activities. The process of learning was supported by general Higher Educational Institutes, Technical Institutions like Poly Technique, Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Women Centres in Agricultural and Home Science Colleges etc.

13. **Tripathy** (2010), in his study on Orissa tribes opines that with the adoption of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution amendments and incorporation of Article 21 A in the Constitution, making Right to Education a Fundamental Right, any attempt on the part of government to absolve itself of its mandated role as the sole provider of basic education or non-functioning or poorly functioning primary schools are more likely to provide public action of profound proportions. Informed and vigilant public can wad of inefficient functioning of schools. Tremendous potentiality of public action notwithstanding, unfortunately denial of access to good quality basic education has not always led to public action due probably to relatively low visibility of educational deprivation.

14. **Rajkumar Pruthi** (1999) opines that position of women in Indian context does have a great gender bias, even despite numerous attempts backed up by Constitutional reforms. This is specifically due to the predominantly male dominated structure of our society. Though the political rights of women have constitutional backing, the reality at ground level still requires a lot to be desired. The intriguing question of women are used as mere political cases, is primarily due to dominant male, unwilling to relinquish and share political platforms with women or whether there is a wide spread lack of women of our society to meaningfully assert their political views. The ground reality bears connotation of both of these. While, extending from remote village level *panchayats* right up to the highest decision making bodies like *Lok Sabha*, Constitutional reforms have sought to address the problem of gender bias, women political representatives, in majority of cases end up just as pawns in the hands of male members of their family who wield all the control.

Our numerous interactions at ground level do substantiate it. Amongst the various elected women *panchayat* members, who got primarily elected as representatives owing to reservations aimed for women, it is quite rare to find women independent of political patronage of a pre-existing political family. Thus, a previously elected male political representative simply puts a women member of his family as a candidate if his political constituency gets notify as a reserved seat for women. This extends right across from *panchayats* to municipalities and right up to *Lok Sabha*. Majority of women of our society still shy away from politics at large, and thus involvement into a political decision-making body bears little significance for them. While these constitutionally guaranteed reservations for women have thrown up quite a few positive and enterprising

women, who have managed to have a significant and positive influence on socio-political agendas, these still remains largely an exceptions. Merely thrusting women reservations down the throat of a society, without backup of proper social reforms aimed at gender equality, will always be a cosmetic and superficial attempt.

The tendency of men of our society to cast women of their family into political positions of power when confronted with and debarred from holding public office goes up to the highest echelons of power. Many political parties, across the political spectrum bear testimony to this general trend. It is thus extremely rare to find an independent female voice in our society, devoid of patronage of her family.

15. According to **Praharaj** (2010) educational upliftment of women is of prime importance for their political empowerment. A woman, educationally empowered, can do justice to the political positions which are entrusted upon her. Education provides women with the sense of independence, so very essential for meaningful contribution towards her own family and society at large. My numerous studies at the grass root level do collaborate this. Educated women, cropped into position of power, often end up as stooges in the hands their male compatriots fellow persons. Even amongst a predominantly male dominant society like India, educated women do manage to keep themselves afloat and contribute meaningfully to the society, thereby doing justice to their positions of power. It has to be admitted that purposeful strides towards women's education have been taken during the recent past, aimed principally at providing basic education to the girl child, social constrains still remain a huge hindrance towards actual realisation of substantial women education. This is far more challenging to implement schemes aimed at girl education amongst the fringe elements of the society; tea garden population in North Bengal being a primary a part of this society. (pp. 115)

He further observes that corruption has plagued politics at all levels in our country. Various studies point out to the fact that women, when empowered with political positions of power, are much less prone to corruption, vis-à-vis their male counterparts. Women, who have their ability to assert their political agendas strongly, are much more efficient and less prone to corruption. This however does not hold proof for those women representatives who have nothing but ornamental posts, thereby leaving the political decision-making process to their male kith and kin. She further opines that strong women

in position of power at the grass root level bring forward a strong female perspective, thereby contributing to lend gender equality to the whole political process. Subjugated for the ages, a strong women perspective is necessary for getting the gender equilibrium. This is even of more paramount importance amongst the underprivileged class of society. A strong and purposeful women presents is essential to bring forth the women perspective in socio-political sphere. It has to be stressed again that women education is the basic building block toward achievement of a strong and vibrant women political force at the grass root level, especially amongst the underprivileged sections of the society. (pp. 170-173).

16. **Baviskar** (2005) while presenting a profile of women's participation mentions that the reservation of seats for women (and for SCs and STs) concerns not only members but also office-bearers. Thus not only one third of elected members but one third of *sarpanches* or chairpersons have also to be women. In the country as a whole, there are 231,630 gram *panchayats* (village councils). Over 77,210 of them now have women as sarpanches. At the intermediate level, there are 5,912 *taluka* (or block/mandal) *panchayat samitis*. More than 1,970 of them have women *sabhapatis* or heads. And of the 594 *zilla parishads* (district councils) 200 have women now occupy positions as members or heads in rural and urban local government bodies. This may be unique in the world. Baviskar also brings out the phenomenon of all-women *panchayats* which have arisen in a few progressive states, such as Maharashtra and West Bengal. Although insignificant in numbers, they deserve attention. At one time there were about a dozen all-women *panchayat* in Maharashtra. These all-women *panchayats* were partially successful as experiments, but for a variety of reasons they did not endure. Women preferred to tackle problems of water supply and toilets. They also took greater interest in schools, particularly in the attendance of girls. They were innovative in their methods for getting things done. And on the whole, women were less prone to be tempted by opportunities of corruption. But men did not like women's campaign against the consumption of alcohol or vending of liquor in the villages. Most men did not favour giving another tem to women, although the latter had managed the *panchayat* well despite various obstacles. On the whole, all-women's *panchayat* were an imaginative experiment in women's empowerment. (pp.332-334).

17. **Webster (1992)** has opined: "As with the majority of the states, West Bengal accepted the need for the form of *Panchayati Raj* without the underlying philosophy and principles presented in the Mehta report." In order to study how far the principles of democratic decentralization has been followed in the organization and functioning of the *Panchayati Raj* bodies in West Bengal- the cherished ideal behind the introduction of *Panchayati Raj* in India - it is necessary at first to discuss the legislative enactments on this score.

18. A separate perspective vis-à-vis participation of women in political scenario in Nigeria according to **Agbalajobi (2010)**, though constitutionally guarantees in Nigeria equality in politics, participation in meaningful political process by Nigerian women is far from satisfactory. The study points out towards lack of women empowerment through the years as the primary cause. A dearth of measures aimed towards women financial empowerment is a primary cause of this disparity. Predominantly patriarchal society renders women prone to male dominance whereby guaranteed constitutional provisions aimed towards women empowerment are unattainable. Religious doctrines are of paramount importance which aid and abate socio-political subjugation of women in a country like Nigeria. Predominantly downtrodden women society in a country like Nigeria bears resemblance to the Indian society. The common linking factor which needs to be addressed is lack of education amongst the womenfolk of both of these societies which lay them vulnerable to being subjugated by the menfolk. This is a classic study in case which proves the importance of women education which is of paramount importance towards realization of constitutional provisions aimed at women empowerment at grass root level.

19. According to **Subrata K. Maitra and V.B. Singh (2009)** there is an inherent force in Indian society, primarily at the grass root level which presents itself as a catalyst for social change. There is an inherent empathy towards political leaders representing a wide spectrum of political parties. Authors in their book *When Rebels Become Stakeholders: Democracy, Agency and Social Change in India* explore the agency of ordinary men and women in the making of democratic social change in India. The study is specific to India, but the issues that it examines are of wider significance. The authors join the debate on democracy and development on the basis of case studies that showcase the opinions and attitudes of the Indian voter. The force for catalysing a socio-political

change is however very much prevalent in Indian society, and that is in spite of the unproductive and corrupt force of organised political parties. Constitutionally laid down reservations aimed towards empowerment of tribal women thus find many participants who want to distant themselves from agendas of various political parties. These persons principally representation the down trodden tribal women are truly driven by an ideology which is aimed towards betterment of their fellow compatriots. This remains a driving force towards true realization of various measures aimed at decentralisation of power. Thus study therefore reflects a positive trend prevalent among majority of the down trodden society, whose ultimate aim is to work for upliftment of their society. It is heartening to note that many of the elected women representatives in the local governing bodies have managed to rise above narrow political windows, thereby channelizing their powers for furthering of their immediate social upliftments and interests. This alone should serve as a driving force towards implementation of local self-governments whose primary and sole agenda is to progress and consolidate the immediate society. Various constitutional measures would have been rendered redundant without this indigenous and strong socio-political movements arising out of primarily the tribal population aimed towards self-assertion.

The authors have used the public opinion data from three national surveys of the Indian electorate held in 1971, 1996 and 2004 to focus on the political understanding of India's voters and their leaders. While agency is a much-discussed theme in contemporary social sciences, connecting the rationality of ordinary men and women to explain electoral participation and rapid structural change in the lives of people of this country is specific to this study. This book argues that the cohabitation of democracy and social change in India is not merely incidental or coincidental; rather the two are institutionally linked in a manner that is fundamentally causal, to the extent that the weakening of the one renders the other ineffective. These positive phenomena should definitely be a driving force towards furthering of measures, constitutional and social, aimed at political empowerment of this down trodden strata of the society.

20. **Deepika Jha** (2010) in her study on men and women of Babapur and the surrounding villages in the Amreli District observes that in a patriarchal society like India women still remain subjugated. Distended to look after her family through age old

tradition she has little scope to exercise her political prowess. Even basic amenities like provision of portable water are hard to get by in quite a majority of the Indian village population. Hardships of life are many for these women. When confronted with serious challenges to manage and run their families smoothly, political empowerment remains a distant dream. Without addressal of means aimed at easing out their daily chores of activities aimed at sustenance, political empowerment remains a distant dream. The primary pillar has to be women education whereby self-sustenance and upliftment of self-esteem is of paramount importance. Meaningful contribution of women at the socio-political level can only be attained by an educated and vibrant women population, especially amongst the down trodden sections of our society. Various reservations aimed at catapulting women to positions of power will be rendered fruitless if the basic measures aimed towards gender equality at the grass root level are not addressed. Women, being equal to men or at least being an important being a supplementary force to the men has to be recognized by the Indian society. Various political measures aimed at lifting up the status of women in Indian society will definitely have no sustainable impact unless and until they are complimented by social measures. The role of administrative decentralization of the political structure over the long term is also necessary in government structure itself.

Jha further observes in her book *Women in World Politics* that without empowerment of women in proper political decision-making process democracy as a whole is bound to be rendered futile. A state cannot claim to be politically prudent if it does not address the question of equality of the lower most strata of its society and women therein. In a country like India though there have been numerous measures or upliftment of the tribal women socio-politically, concerted efforts are still lacking therefore appears as if various means aimed at political empowerment of women is just a cosmetic effort at the best. Without backing of strong political measures intended towards actual empowerment of women, political actions will be rendered futile. Lack of concrete measures for women empowerment will only lead to women in political positions at the grass root level, devoid of actual political power. The true political power will always be wielded by men men-folk of the society, thereby rendering women nothing more than stooges. In a predominantly male dominated society like India it is extremely challenging for women to carve out their own political identity. This huge crevice can only be bridged by well-meaning government efforts to actually bridge the gap between the genders. She further

observes that in a society like India the predicament of political parties is to project educated and socially conscious women as their candidates to participate in political process. The problem is thus at the grass root level where proper education of women is not of primary importance neither for the political force or of the society in general. Without addressing this inherent basic problem in Indian society proper empowerment of the women will always remain a distant dream.

21. According to **Ghosh** (2000), studies conducted in sub-urban areas of a metropolis like Kolkata, which is supposedly modern in its outlook, still has a lot of negative gender bias vis-à-vis participation of women in political process. Even established political parties are reluctant to succeed political powers to women. There is an overwhelming preference for male candidates over their female counterparts when it comes to projecting candidates for elections. Negative influences borne out of social prerogative are a huge impediment towards recognition of women as successful and positive political tools. She further argues that the acceptability of women political representatives is extremely low even among the general female respondents. This reflects the huge social gulf that exists between the male and female gender towards active socio-political involvement. It is disheartening to note that even general female respondents tend to prefer a male candidate as their political representative. This is borne out of a general lackadaisical attitude of women in general towards political process as a whole. She further notes that once elected to political position, women are far more efficient towards discharging their duties as compared to their male counterparts. The ultimate conglomeration of facts points out towards the unquestionable importance of women education. Educated women, in any strata of society, are much more assertive towards realization of their socio-political rights. Educated women do have the capacity to overturn male supremacy and carve out a niche for themselves. It thus suffices that women education has to be of primary importance if gender equality and women empowerment in Indian society has to be truly realized.

22. To **Sharda** (2010), the grassroots village level democracy that was prevalent in Indian society through ages of monarchy is the natural forerunner to the present day *panchayati raj* system. Devolution of democratic power at the grass roots level has always been a feature of Indian society, even during monarchy. The present day *panchayati raj* system, in heterogeneous and amalgams population like India can never

succeed without true devolution of power to the actual marginalized sections of the society, specially the economically down trodden and tribal population. Constitutional means to empower these sections of the society has definitely been forthcoming, but lack of proper incentives to enhance these political measures have been lacking. She further opines that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of Indian Constitution is the landmark step which placed India in the group of those societies where the people are really powerful. They have power to resolve their own destiny. She observes that the socio-economic and political weaknesses are the reason for which the process of democratic decentralization is not effective and active. The participation is still the pseudo participation. The reason for the pseudo participation of masses are the poor human capabilities and lack of responsive, accountable, efficient and effective leadership which misguides the masses who are merely informed and issues are manipulated. But she is very positive about in her thinking that these hassles can be finished by the process of modernization of the rural society. To overcome the impediments in the way of *New Panchayati Raj* Sharda has come up with many strategies for strengthening the grassroots democracy.

She opines that economic empowerment of down trodden tribal women is the only means towards furthering of their meaningful and assertive political participation. For this she advocates giving of incentives to tribal women dominated *panchayats*, if they are involved in having positive social programmes aimed towards progress of their society. a huge impediment towards contesting any elections right from the grass root level *panchayati raj* system to *Lok Sabha* is financial constraints of the aspirants candidates. A means towards overcoming this financial hurdle may be if the government reaches out to the tribal women population and helps them financially to fight the tough political battles. Thus if their financial constraints are met with, tribal women in grassroots level can forcefully contest elections, the primary agenda of which will be empowerment of women of their society. A truly democratic election can thus be had where financial muscle power will not be a deciding factor towards election of meritorious candidates. The success of tribal women in political process can only be sustained through regular and meaningful training of this section of the society so that it has a meaningful and positive impact towards endeavours of the tribal women for betterment of their society as a whole. She stresses upon the importance of sustained training programme by competent authorities towards imparting of proper guidance for these so-called down trodden

women of the society. The trainers should be competent enough to envisage the potential of grassroots political participation of women of our society.

23. According to **Desouza (2003)**, through economic empowerment of the *panchayati raj* bodies was ensured through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment which envisaged means of devolution of economic power to the *panchayati raj institutions* through demarcation of revenues between the state government and the local institutions. The ground level *panchayati raj institutions* like the *gram sabhas* have definitely to be institutionalized so that they have a legitimate constitutional bearing so as to carry out the process of democratic decentralization meaningfully. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution (1933) has further ensured reservations of seats for the tribal and backward women to participate in the decentralized political planning mechanism.

24. The view of **Sen Choudhury (1995)** reveals that any democratic process without true participation of lowest strata of society in the democratic decision-making process is bound to be unstable. Thus a mature democracy always aims to encompass the most under-privileged section of its society into the political decision-making process so that democracy as a whole is rendered stable. Without proper and meaningful participation of the lowest echelons of the society, democratic process is rendered futile. Such a democracy is always prone to explore on itself. Thus it is imperative on the State to indulge in measures aimed towards empowerment of the weakest sections of the society. The feeling of meaningful political participation within these sections of society is of paramount importance to bolster their self-esteem. The gains of democracy in a larger contest with active participation of the weaklings of a society are manifold. Not only serves to encompass society as a whole into the political process but also helps to delineate any feeling of political isolation amongst the under privileged section of the society. Thus, a stable democratic platform can only sustain itself by the process of decentralization whereby the poorest sections of society are brought into the ambit of democratic process. It also enhances the concept of nation as a whole thereby aiding in the process of nation-building. Foundations of a strong democratic nation are definitely built upon pillars of political empowerment at the grass root level whereby the whole plethora of citizens comes to identify with the concept of a nation. Alienation of masses at the grassroots level from the democratic political process will always serve as an impediment towards nation-building at large. Without the wholesome involvement of

citizens of a country, a strong national foundation can never be laid. In a predominantly patriarchal society like India this process of democratic decentralization cannot be properly addressed without measures aimed at correcting the gender bias. Women especially at the grassroots level have definitely to be pro-actively drawn into the political process. The measure impetus of Indian state thus should be directed towards involvement of downtrodden tribal women into the political process, for without their meaningful participation in the democratic process, democracy will be a futile exercise.

25. **Shobha Shankar (1992)**, in *Women issues: An Indian Perspective* in Lakshmi Misra (ed), opines that through the periods of independent struggle of India, majority of women in Indian society have always taken a back seat. They were predominantly the house keepers who rendered support to their political endeavours of men. She defined Indian women as 'soldiers unknown' for their contribution of Indian freedom movement by their sacrifice and devotion. Post- independence Indian society has witnessed an upsurge of political prowess, but this has definitely been restricted towards the educated urban women populace. Women belonging to the marginalized and socio-economically constraints parts of the society still find themselves deprived of powers to influence the political make-up of the country. A truly and wholesome socio-political empowerment of women spanning across all sections of society is the need of the hour. Women empowerment restricted to elite urban pockets of the Indian society will always be hollow. Her study shows that statistically the male-female gender ratio should definitely have a much more healthy women participation in political process. However, age old Indian system which has legitimized subjugation through ages is definitely a hard nut to crack. Though various political parties do pledge of means to empower women and thus bring clarity within the genders, the moves are always predominantly dictated by political gains during elections. Owing to years of gender discrepancy it is extremely difficult for political parties to eke out means to put forward strong and educated women candidates for elections. She further says that lack of endeavours to educate women at all levels will definitely be a hindrance towards addressing of the problem of gender equality.

26. Views of **Giri (1998)** on urban women society- urban population in the Indian context has a large proportion of migrants, slum dwellers and economically deprived communities. A true political representation in an urban political body can never claim to be truly representative without incorporations of these sections of urban population.

Women of these sections of urban society are the most vulnerable and socio-economically challenged. Though constitutional means towards empowerment of women are in place, actual empowerment of women of these sections of urban populace remains a distant dream. She observes that the true aim of any elected member should therefore be to avail of schemes which are aimed towards empowerment of women of their social class so as to uplift the whole section of their society. The author focuses primarily on these women belonging to backward sections of urban society, though being empowered with political power cannot do justice to their political agendas without proper training programmes aimed towards their enlightenment. The need of the hour is to set up organized institutions aimed towards imparting proper training and guidelines for true realization of the political powers that are bestowed upon them through various political measures. Lack of such training programmes renders the very exercise of women empowerment futile. It is therefore mandatory to setup such training institutions at the state and regional level so that larger vision of women empowerment actually percolates at the grass roots level. The situation is not different from what exists at even the most rural societies of Indian as compared with the urban population. Women, and their participation in political process, irrespective of rural or urban population has the same obstacles.

She further states that with the various measures initiated by the highest echelons of power that is the state and central governments aimed towards wholesome development of the Indian society can never claim a complete success without involvement of the lowest strata of the society. As the saying goes an army is only as powerful as its weakest link. Thus, without proper empowerment of the weakest link of our society India can never claim to be a prosperous and buoyant nation. She gives emphasis on the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and disease. (pp. 175-184).

27. **Andal N. (2002)** in his studies shows that through the many years of independence women belonging to the so-called higher classes of urban society have successfully waged a war for gender equality. Upper class urban society thus has put to the forefront many strong and powerful leaders. But the fact of the matter remains that India still is a predominantly rural society and women belonging to these rural setups still remain largely deprived of their socio-political rights. The powerful women leaders representing urban upper class have over the years failed to stand by their rural women

counterparts. An educational level amongst the rural women populace is abysmal. This remains a huge impediment towards realization of their socio-political aspirations. The history of the women movements in the whole world lay emphasis on women education. Rural areas are worse than urban. Accruing to her even today the importance of education is confined to middle class families. Among whom employment of women outside the home has been most restrictive. Education alone is incapable of removing disabilities. There are however enormous obstacle to women in education.

28. In 1931 itself, Gandhiji, emphasized 'that the reconstruction and development of the Indian nation would not be possible without full participation of women as equal partners.' **L.C. Jain** (2005) in his edited book 'Decentralization and Local Governance' opines that since we came into our own in 1947, we have buried Gandhiji's advice five fathoms deep. Conditions have not been created in over the past fifty years either for full participation of women or for them to be equal partners.

29. **Sisodia's** (1999), studies shows various interactions with the vast tribal population of India across the country has led him to conclude that though this indigenous tribal population can claim to be the forerunner of original inhabitant of India, they have been neglected not only during the British rule but also in the post –independence era. The traditional means of earning livelihood for tribal populations at large have been seriously compromised through the ages. Farming land being under the control of financially powerful landlord has rendered the involvement of tribal population into agricultural sector financially nonviable. They are thus forced to look upon other professional outlets which will bring financial securities for their families. Thus hitherto unchartered avenues of earning livelihood were being forced upon this tribal population. In search of new avenues to earn their livelihood they were forced to indulge in foreign territories of work, such as working as construction workers and manual labourers in fields of activities which were never under their domain.

His study on the tribal region of Jhabua districts of Madhya Pradesh further shows that though largely marginalized, in the context of modern day society no section of the society can be kept isolated. Thus, interaction of the tribal society with the various other elements of the society has over the years led to empowerment of the tribal society at

large. The question of socio-political identity has thus emerged in the tribal population. The need for their social identity has thus forayed them towards means to enhance their socio-political standing. Though, the political awareness amongst the tribal society of India still fall below the non-tribal society, numerous interactions between the various sections of society, has rendered the tribal population with newer avenues to truly enhance their socio-political position. Under the modern scenario no class of society can be taken for granted and exploited under the ages of modernization. In this vastly global world, no section of society can claim to be untouched by modernization. Thus the thitherto neglected and cocooned tribal sections of the society have managed to have their own political narratives aimed towards enhancement of their socio-economic agendas. Issues meant at furthering the empowerment of tribals can thus not be brushed under carpet. Political measures aimed towards empowerment of tribal community are thus at the forefront. The only means that remains to be addressed is endowing them with proper educational background so that they can justify their role in socio-economic development of country at large. (pp. 19, 163).

30. According to **Md. Abdur Razzaque**, (*Decentralized Governance and Empowerment: A Study of the Participation, Role and Empowerment of women of the weaker sections and the Muslims in two selected Blocks of Cooch Behar District (1978-1998)*, Ph.D Thesis submitted to the department of Political Science, North Bengal University, 2006.) the very essence of *panchayati raj* system and its implementation is based on decentralization of power to the weakest and the most marginalized sections of the society. Tribal women of course do comprise the major sections of such a society. He argues that mere reservation of seats in the present political setup is not enough towards true empowerment of these marginalized sections of society. He tries to analyze the reasons for the huge gender bias that exists amongst the tribal population which renders any means aimed towards gender equality futile. Through his studies he opines that without means to address this basic problem of gender bias at the grassroots level, various socio-political measures aimed towards upliftment of the tribal women population at large will be rendered futile. Though decentralization of any government initiative is the primary requisite for its success, without actual empowerment of the tribal women, such endeavour will always continue to have just a cosmetic value.

31. According to **Jyoti Sen, N. Saha & S.K. Mukherjee** in their study of Khasi

women of Shilong have tried to understand the nature of involvement of Khasi women in economy with special reference to the trade, in which usually men, elsewhere, dominate. Even in traditionally matriarchal societies like the Garo and Khasi tribes of North- East India political powers still continue to be under the male prerogative. Thus though the women may be at an advantage as far as the immediate social issues that are concerned, men-folk are reluctant to let go off their political prowess. Thus political measures aimed towards enhancing the women political force, are always met with a strong impediment, based on a predominantly male dominant social structure of India. Without meaningful means to educate the tribal women population, true empowerment of women of the most downtrodden sections of society can never claim to be fruitful. The primary role of any social movement has to be having gender educational parity as its sole driving force. The huge potential that democratic decentralization has through *panchayati raj system* can only be truly realized if proper measures intended towards imparting to education to the tribal women are strongly emphasized.

32. According to **H.C. Upreti and Nandini Upreti** (2000), in their book *Women and Problems of Gender Discrimination* The spectrum of political expression has transcended through ages thereby incorporating various measures like petitioning, participation in mass movements, agitations, strikes, demonstration, protests, presenting memorandums and violent acts designed to change political system. It therefore suffices that any political movement will lose its validity without involvement of masses in general. Thus, no section of society, howsoever, backward it may be, cannot insulate itself from the force of a socio-political movement. The primary role for meaningful and active political participation of the various strata of societies, specially the backward class, largely hinges upon the awareness the society towards such issues. Without a proper educational background to boost of, various sections of society would be laid astray. Thus educational empowerment of the down trodden sections of the society is the primary requisite for socio-political empowerment of any section of the society. Without proper educational empowerment of the deprived sections of the society any socio-political movement can never be successful. Thus, he stresses upon imparting proper education to the lower strata of the society to be a pre-requisite towards any successful socio-political movements. He further observes that on women participation in political system are heavily dominated by men. So far as political involvement of women is concerned, we find that women have never aspired for it. Traditionally they have allowed

the leadership in political orientation to come from men. Perhaps due to this, women have been denied access to political world prior to the start of twentieth century and the trend has been everywhere to grant them voting rights much later than men. In India female suffrage was given from 1927. Under the present Constitution of India women are equal to men in all respects, but we have not thrown out the age-old traditional barriers imposed on them. Despite the Constitutional guarantee of 'equality before the law' and 'equal protection of the laws'. There remains inequality which the legislatures actively endorse and the courts passively accept.

Broadly political participation of women is severely limited due to the nexus of traditional factors, there are Indian politics by consideration of caste, class, religion, feudal and family status, etc. all of which are parochial, essentially patriarchal forces that work in favour of men against women. Consequently, 'women are still left on the periphery of the political process' and continue to have their interests defined, debated and often ignored by their husbands and fathers.' (pp.107-109).

33. According to **Doshi**, (1997) the evolvement of *panchayati raj* system has helped the tribal population to realize their political importance at least to some extent. Prior to active involvement of tribal population through means of *panchayats* the whole tribal population was devoid of any meaningful platform to further their socio-political cause. The *panchayati raj* system has thus, managed to render political voice to this sections of the society. The involvement of grassroots population is definitely ensured through *panchayati raj* institutions. Through the *panchayati raj institutions*, predominantly tribal villages have found means to integrate with the national political cause. *Pannchayati raj* system thus provides the tribal women to leave a mark, howsoever miniscule it may be, towards realization political empowerment at the grassroots level. Without the aid of the *panchayati raj* system these politically deprived sections of the society would never find and avenue to put their political agendas at the forefront. He stresses on the participation of the tribal population into means aimed towards political empowerment never goes uncontested. This therefore indicates a strong desire amongst the tribal society to have a say in national political dialogue. This attitude of the tribal population to have a meaningful political contribution has to be thus appreciated. It is thus expected that the tribal women who come to the forefront of the political process, despite so many struggle will have a much more higher level of understanding of political struggles that they had to

undertake. Empowered with education, these women tribal representatives have the wherewithal to actively pursue measures intended towards empowerment of the tribal women population at large.

34. **Bhattacharya and Datta** (1999), in their book *Governing Rural India* opine that it is a fact that rural Indian population is much more in magnitude as compared with the urban population. It also a fact that this vast rural population has traditionally been dominated by the minority urban population. It has dawned upon the rural population over the years that, if organised, they have a much more strong voice in the political setup of the country. New realignment of the rural population thus began with an endeavour to usurp the political dominance of the urban population. During the course of years this indigenous movement for rural upliftment transgressed into a powerful political movement. This collective effort of the rural population to uplift themselves made it difficult for the relevant political parties to neglect them. Thus began the moves to exploit this resurgent rural population politically. Political manipulations were thus primarily targeted towards winning over this rural population in course of this, various means were adopted to exploit the caste related differences inherent in the Indian rural population. (pp. 177).

35. **Singh, Narain and Kumar** (2006), have done intensive field study of the socio-economic and political problems the tea plantation labourers of Assam. They observe that the union of various tea garden labours in Assam is principally constituted under the umbrella of one labour organisation that is CCSU. This serves as not only an umbrella organisation but also as the cradle of supposedly new trade union organisations of the tea gardens. It however, has to be noted that political decision-making bodies at the ground levels in form of tea garden unions and *panchayats* continue to be predominately male dominated. Though various socio-political measures aimed towards correcting this gender inequality have been recently initiated, women who have managed to get into positions of power due to these amendments, continue to adorn such positions purely for the namesake. Extremely hard working schedule for tea garden women workers coupled with domestic responsibilities make it hard for these women to indulge in any meaningful political activity. The secluded environment of tea garden further renders them immune to the external world. The women working force in the tea gardens thus continue to be marginalised and pushed to the rear in all socio-political programmes. True political

measures aimed towards empowerment of this sections of women will be rendered futile unless and until backed up by means towards betterment of their social and personalised. The trade unions working in various tea gardens will continue to remain defunct unless and until proper and meaningful participation of the women tea garden workers is ensured. Though it is a cumbersome task for the society as a whole to accomplish, well directed government measures are a must to fulfil this task. (pp.173).

36. **Rawat**, in his article on “Tribes of Terai” in Aradhana Shukla (ed.) Indian Tribes: A Psychological Perspectives opines that the tribal population in the *terai* area has been over the ages a deprived lot. His study shows that economic deprivation over the ages has led them to probe other avenues which will bring them economic stability during a short period of time. Thus develops the nexus between high ranking officials and the tribal population. Tribal leaders predominantly aimed to exploit this nexus towards short term economic gains. Thus, government programmes aimed towards upliftment of these sections of society over a period of time get jeopardise over a long period of time. Indulgence in corrupt practices between the tribal and government officials renders this whole socio-political initiative by the government vulnerable to corruption. Leor of easy many leads these tribal leaders to further lay themselves open to manipulations by fringe elements like a naxallite groups and various antinational organisations. This is primarily true in context of the tribal population of the *terai* region which is always a hot bed of socio-political activity as it not only represents an economically backward region, but also is a region representing conglomeration of international boundaries between various sovereign nations. Percolation of various benevolent government measures to the grassroots level can bloviate this sense of economic deprivation amongst the tribal population of *terai* region. This will go a long way towards breaking off this unholy nexus between unscrupulous tribal leaders and the government leaders so that true economic empowerment is reached up to the grass roots level. Once these tribal population of the *terai* region are included into government aided drives for their political empowerment, the need to rely upon unlawful activities to enhance their economic profile, will automatic subside. Tribal population in *terai* region have a unique problem, being a resident to an area which has so many international boundaries. Thus, special attention towards upliftment of the tribal population residing in this area is mandatory. (pp. 152-153).

37. According to **Chandra** (2005) those who oppose reservation of seats for women in *panchayats* brandish four main reasons in support of their stand. First, women who become members of *panchayats* and local bodies disturb the harmony of homes and of family life. Even those men who tolerate women working in offices for fixed hours do not take kindly to them when their roles change to one of community leadership. In that case, the women have to attend to people's problems as leaders. This means irregular hours of work and a twenty-four hour demand on their time. Therefore, who will look after the children and household chores, the men folk ask? Second, women will become targets of attacks by anti-social elements when they move of their homes or go outside their villages for work, meeting, and so on. Third, whenever women hold elected offices, the male officers are the ones who 'dictate' what is or is not to be done. They take control of the entire situation and women elected representatives become the helpless victims or mute spectators at the hands of men-dominated environment (Chandra, 2005, 215).

It is a revolution in the Indian history when the Constitution of India passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act in 1993, which sanctioned *Panchayati Raj* and its 33 per cent reservation for women and SC/STs in PRIs. This is to promote greater participation by expanding the democratic base. It is true that with the passing of this amendment women's participation in the *panchayat* has varied with the local conditions and personalities.

38. According to **Chandra** (2010), the great challenge encompassing women world in the modern society is whether to adhere to traditional concepts of women in Indian society or to come out and assert themselves as a path breaking force in the society. Participation of women in grass root political levels is very much governed by the dilemma of womenfolk whether to come out of their traditional social position. Chandra argues that women at grass root levels often are reluctant to come out of their traditional roles. She however, argues that women have successfully and forcefully contributed to various social movements positively. Thus, it goes without saying that women, if politically empowered at the ground level can contribute meaningfully towards upliftment of the society at large. She further argues that the theory of women's "backward consciousness" is a huge hindrance towards realization of their socio-political position. Age old patriarchal society thinking renders them incapable of doing justice to political positions that they may be in. thus they, more often than not, end up as just political faces, the real power being bestowed with the men-folk.

Another hindrance according to Chandra is that the participation in political process even at the grass root levels in a society like India requires a substantial economic mileage. It is thus extremely difficult for the down trodden tribal women to have the financial leverage to contest elections. Devoid of financial independence, they are subjugated to the male populace who are masters of economic destiny of a family and society at large. Thus, though there are many elected women political faces at the grass root level, economic and social constraints always render them as defunct, where the actual political power is wielded by the men.

39. **George Mathew (2002)**, in his article “Panchayati Raj and Food Security: Opportunities for Women’s Participation” observes that despite a massive political participation of tribal women the dream of gender equality has not been realized. This is largely due to lack of education amongst the deprived girl population of the tribal society. The predominantly male dominant society is a huge obstacle towards empowerment of women without proper means aimed towards educating a girl child. There remains an element of huge discrimination based on gender which encompasses even difference in wages between male and female sections of society. The primary issue for a poor country like India is guarantying a food security to the majority of economically deprived class of society. Through political representation of the socially compromised sections of society a move was initiated towards adressal of this basic problem, without meaningfully involvement of women of the society. The whole process will always lack a strong political platform to accomplish this. Thus involvement of the elected women of all sections of the society has to be the primary driving force towards accomplishment of any positive social movement. (pp. 26-32).

40. **Marilee Karl (1995)**, in her book on *Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision-Making* suggest that new strategies must be developed for women to increase their access to decision-making positions and bodies to build a critical mass of women within political and social structures and to create links between women working in public life and NGOs. Through various governmental measures, substantial participation of women in political decision-making process has been ensured. She observes that the substantial involvement of women in the political decision-making process is a testimony to the fact that women participation in political and all other spheres of social life are at rise. Under the present scenario means to ensure continuation

of women participation and to further enhance this process is of paramount importance. Not only should the women who are actively involved in political space be encouraged, they should be amalgamated as successful examples to attract other women into this process of social and nation building. The primary breakthrough has been achieved through various constitutionalized measures to seat these women in positions of political decision-making. However, this still represent a very insignificant proportion of the women population who can aspire to have a meaningful and positive impact. The modern day challenge in a society like India is to forge these women as examples to positively nurture larger sections of women towards the process of socio-political participation. (pp.149).

41. Over the course of years, involvement of women has been constitutionally guaranteed. According to **Nirmala Buch**, (2000), in her article “Panchayat and Women” women’s participation in the political process has thus managed to alleviate women in general. Of special importance is the fact that women belonging to the downtrodden social strata have managed to find meaningful political voice. Their powerful political presence, despite being in a predominantly patriarchal society, is praiseworthy. These women have been successful in projecting a powerful social message across the society, thus resulting in more and more number of enthusiastic women who are willing to utilize political deprivation as the driving force and challenge to establish themselves amongst the echelons of power in India. For majority of women seen in a pioneering role, this was an avenue to stress upon and further their socio-political reputation. Through the course of many elections, women leaders have been thrown into positions. They are thus the beacons of hope for the future progeny. Her study shows that despite all the stacked against women, the post-73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment *panchayats* have shown emerging leadership of rural women and that they have moved ahead from the initial learning phase in the first year after the 1994 and 1995 elections when they entered *panchayats* in a critical number for the first time. (234-235).

42. Experiences of **G. Palanithurai** (2007) specifically directed towards the state of Tamil Nadu point towards the fact that various self-help groups have had a pioneering influence towards involvement of women into the broader spectrum of socio-political decision-making. It is through these self-help groups that the backward women in Tamil Nadu could find a voice towards blossoming of their potential. These self-help groups

were primarily directed towards giving credence to the voices of downtrodden women. Thus based upon the endeavours of this various self-help groups, downtrodden women in Tamil Nadu managed to find platform for their self-assertion, transgressing into socio-political field, whereby they were able to voice their opinions into the ground level political system of their state. His findings further shows that women who are politically empowered tend to manage their socio-political duties in a much more positive way. A truly empowered woman will contribute a lot towards micro-level management of her immediate neighborhood. Deprivation of women at the grassroots level, especially in state like Tamil Nadu, was fulfilled by involvement of various self-help groups which were primarily aimed towards women empowerment. Fruitful women participation in the grassroots political system is largely dependent upon the economic and educational prowess of women. Without a proper educational and economic background women who are politically endowed with power can never do full and proper justice to their political position for in a predominantly patriarchal society like India, for a woman to establish herself politically, a powerful support in form of educational and economic background is a must. Thus women who manage to scale the heights and reach positions of political decision-making, a meaningful impact is only possible if backed up by strong economic and educational background. (pp. 180-181).

43. **R.C. Agarwal** (2005) while discussing about the potential impediment towards participation of women in Indian political system on a whole in his article on “Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions”, opines that rampant criminalization of politics has laid to women being primarily reluctant to women participation to politics. He cites numerous other causes like the extremely low educational level of women, lack of proper implementation of the *panchayati raj system*, lack of social awareness of women of the backward sections of the society and predominantly lack of measures to overcome a patriarchal form of society whereby women can dream to transcend this gender equality to bring about a powerful social structure. Even if women are elected into positions of political decision-making, an overwhelming patriarchal approach makes them extremely vulnerable to pressures created by the men folk. Without a strong education background to boost of it renders women incapable of strongly fighting to overcome the hurdles of male dominance. Devoid of a strong educational background women at the grassroots level remain susceptible to manipulation by the traditionally strong men population. The economic independence is lacking within large sections of women of this society. Thus

the author suggests the measures to impart trainings aimed principally towards empowerment of women have to be initiated so that economic independence of backwards women of our society is realized. The women empowered with education and economic status will definitely be in a position to contribute meaningfully towards any political decision-making process. A politically socio-economically strong women force will definitely be in a position to contribute strongly towards nation building. The primary aim therefore should be to empower women educationally and economically so that they cannot be pulled down by educational constrains, thereby being in a position to have strong socio-political contributions. (pp. 68-73).

44. **Seema Sharma and Kanta Sharma (2006)**, while commenting upon the larger political scenario in Assam, dwell upon the fact that political career has never been sought after by women. This is principally due to the fact that women, in a predominantly male dominated society, still continue to harbor home-making as their principal socio-familial duty. They thus cannot take themselves out of this social prejudice and venture out into a hitherto uncommon political field. Thus it is a hugely cumbersome task for women to take the leap forward to embrace a political career. Leave aside the under privileged rural population even women of urban and semi-urban societies find it hard to establish their say in a predominantly male dominated political scenario. (pp.237-246).

45. **Balram Singh (2006)**, observes that women participation in *Panchayati raj institution* has met with strong opposition from a predominantly male dominated society, especially in the states like Uttar Pradesh. The males, who have over centuries enjoyed power over women and have dominated the social fabric of a society, are extremely reluctant to let go off their dominance. He further stresses that even if women are elected into *Panchayati raj institutions*, it is extremely difficult for them to attend various political meetings, due to in conducive socio-political environment. Thus efficacy of these elected women members is largely compromised. Even if elected to position of grassroots politics, women have virtually little to contribute, as there has been rampant bureaucratization of grass root political institutions. Various schemes such as *Indira Awas Yojana, Jivan Dhara* and IRDP, should have ensured a positive role for women involved in grass root politics. However, due to rampant bureaucratization, the political power has been garnered by state governments, thereby depriving the elected women representatives at the grassroots level of their political leadership. (pp. 53-66).

46. **According to K.C Vidya (2007)**, reservation for women of backward society does contribute towards securing political rights of women. It is much easier for women to successfully contest against male candidates at grassroots level elections. If these women candidates can establish themselves as an effective working force towards social development, they can over a course of time mount meaning full and strong challenge to the men even at elections at higher levels. Her analysis on women in politics in her article on “Political Empowerment of Women at the Grassroots” reveals that women have not been given proper representation in the political parties. But with the policy of reservation of seats for women at the grassroots level by the women organizations at the State level as well as at National level if implemented it will naturally affect the political parties and they will be force to give representation to women.(pp. 141).

47. **Meenu Agrawal (2005)** opines that 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment aims to empower women at the grass root political level, ensuring them with the 33 percent reservation. The factual reality remains that majority of these reservations for women are usurped by women candidates who belong to existing powerful male candidates who already wield political power. Thus according to author these women end up as being political faces who are controlled by their powerful male counterparts. Thus, at the grass root level, women political participation remains just eyewash as reservations aimed towards upliftment of women continue to be dominated by the males. By fielding women candidates belonging to their own family, who are little conversant with their political rights, male members of the society continue to hegimonize political cloud. In majority of the cases, despite reservations, women are still governed by a male dominant society which is not ready to relinquish its hold over women at large. Poor educational standards and age long social norms make it extremely difficult for women to break free and assert their political will independently. Thus, though various constitutional measures aimed towards reservations of women so that they can uplift themselves politically is a welcome move, without radical social measures aimed at addressing gender bias, true and effective means towards women empowerment can never be realized. It is thus mandatory to initiate social measures in concordance with constitutional means so that true potential of women is brought to the fore. Lack of either of these measures will always render these women gullible to male dominance, thereby hindering their progress as an independent and strong political section of society. The author concludes that the system of

*Panchayati Raj* in the state has the necessary potential to transform the rural areas but it requires a political will which, if used can go a long way in fruitful utilization of decentralization process for development of all sections of society. (27-52).

48. According to **J. K. Chopra**, (1993), age old social traditions in India have castigated women as being apolitical. Thus, even when endowed with political power women continue to be marginalized in various elected bodies. If the issue of gender equality is not addressed at the grassroots level, meaningful participation of women in politics in Indian society can never be truly realized. This holds true from the lowest political strata to the highest platform of democracy that is the parliament, all across the political Diaspora. Despite recent Act aimed towards women reservation in political sphere, there still remains a huge gulf vis-à-vis the actual women population and their political representation. Though the parliament, through years, has enacted various legislations towards safe-guarding the interests of women and protecting them from such social evils like dowry, sexual violence and social menaces like depriving of their ancestral property, actual implementation of these legislations remains a time consuming process. Even though the legislations may be in place, it is largely dependent upon the bureaucracy at the grassroots level for proper implementation. Thus, lack of effective functionaries to enact the provisions of legislation remains a major obstacle for meaningful implementation of the various provisions of such legislations. While it has to be noted that the percentage of women elected representatives in parliament have gone up considerably, effective women representation is still a cause of worry. A truly miniscule percentage of these women representatives can boast of having made effective contribution towards the decision-making process that is bestowed with the Parliament. It is however noteworthy that women representative in Parliament has managed to rise up to positions of ministers and speakers in Parliament. These women however represent only the urban and the semi-urban population of our society. The truly backward and economically compromised sections still cannot boast of effective women representation from their society. (pp. 313).

49. **Prabha Singh**, 2005, gives suggestions for awareness of *Panchayati Raj Institutions* and participation of women's *Panchayati Raj Institutions* that it is duty of the *Panchayati* system to create awareness among women members so that they can perform their duty efficiently. The general people should be also be made aware of the various

schemes and provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act. Every women of the village should be made politically mindful and this could only be done through proper and appropriate election campaigning made by the women's organizations prior to election and the right woman candidate should be selected. The local general mass also should be made aware of the necessity of selecting a right and responsible person who will be dedicated to work for the development of the village. It the duty of the villagers to have a election in a peaceful manner. Once elected as a member, they should compulsorily attend the training programme so that they know their actual role, rights and duties. These elected women members should also know the structure and functions of the PRIs. Lastly, she suggests that the women elected members should be expressive and vocal. (294).

50. **Vandana Singhal** (2005), concludes that elected women representatives in positions of power have definitely a unique approach which may aid in positively approaching social issues such as religious and gender divide. These women representatives may serve as the uniting force across all sections of society. Local bureaucratic setups however continue to be a huge obstacle towards meaningful contribution of elected women representatives. This holds especially true for women representatives of the *panchayati raj institutions* that are challenged by not only a patriarchal society but also by the bureaucracy with whom they have to engage on a day to day basis. Oppressed women have a common background across all sections of society. Therefore, it is but natural for women in political positions to formulate policies aimed towards comprehensive development of women spanning across all sections of the society. This positive force is however, always challenged by a patriarchal social make-up and bureaucracy, thereby restricting their potential positive influence towards initiation of social movement. The author is optimistic that the caste based reservations for women have definitely helped to catapult the women of socially backward sections of society into positions of political power. However, lack of education leads them vulnerable to being manipulated. The stress therefore be on providing women with educational leverage so that they can emerge as strong and independent decision-making units. (pp.360-361).

51. **Sarita Jain**, (2005) concludes that any endeavors aimed towards women upliftment at the grassroots level can only be truly realized if a proper financial backing is available to run all such programmes. A predominantly agriculture dependent country like India can definitely claim to have financial viability based on a properly channelized rural

economy. Effective and meaningful aims towards decentralization are hence needed for making rural economy independent and sustainable. This will aid in generation of funds for economic empowerment of women at the grassroots level. She further concludes by saying that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment has been aimed towards increasing political participation of women. True political participation of women however remains a myth as majority of these political seats are represented by women whose families have boosted of a political culture through ages. The women in India largely remain apprehensive towards entering into political sphere as they are largely handicapped by traditional and age old negative prejudices towards social and familial role of women in Indian society. (pp. 384-385).

52. **Ekta Saxena** (2005), observes that lack of education is a huge hindrance towards devolution of power to women through *Pachayati Raj Institutions*. Thus, elected women representatives at the PRIs levels find themselves incapacitated, thereby having to lean upon other means for fulfillment of their socio-political obligations. Various women organizations have tried to organize these neo-women political leaders into a strong forum so that they are able to become powerful political voices at the grassroots level. She suggests that in a recent past strongly motivated women organizations have successfully laid positive role in ushering environmental and social changes. This stretches right across from movements aimed towards protection of reverse to fight against rampant alcohol abuse in the society. An educated and strongly unified women force under effective women organizations can definitely lay claim towards being forces aimed towards socio-political change. (pp. 440)

53. **Vidyadarhi and Rai** (1976), The tribal population is governed through ages by their own socio-political norms and hence it becomes extremely difficult for them to adjust in adhere to modern political processes. Predominantly the tribal society over ages has been laid to live their life under this political backdrop. Having to adjust to this modern political outlook, tribal population at large does perish because of inability to mould their social outlook in cognigence with the modern approach. All tribal political representatives who have been thrown into the forefront as the result of political reservations find themselves expose to a political scenario which was hitherto unknown to them. Being members of an organized political force is quite tedious for tribal society at large. A holistic approach has to be thus initiated so that these tribal political representatives are assimilated into the modern day political scenario. (pp. 202).

54. According to **J. Meenakshi**, (2007), without educational empowerment of women measures aimed at women empowerment will continue to be frugal means. Just putting women in positions of power based on reservations is not enough to actually empower women. Being stooges in the hands of predominantly males, in a male dominated society like India, they can never have avenues to measures that are aimed at through women empowerment. The primary emphasis has always to be on empowerment of women in health and educational fields which are of paramount importance to the development of women as a whole. Various schemes have been brought into effect under the aiges of human resource development programme and the other means to actually empower women. The actual ground reality is that without proper empowerment of women a truly vibrant and modern Indian society will always continue to be a distant dream. A nation can never progress with abject neglect of half of its population. (151-159).

55. **J. Meenakshi** (2007) opines that the fallacy of reservations for women is the fact that this provision has been largely controlled by the male patriarchal society. Women though in positions of power, have not been able to come out of this patriarchal mind set. Thus policies aimed towards development of women continue to remain a dream. As women in power fail to push themselves towards empowerment of the whole women populace at large. Just ensuring a voluminous representation for women through reservations is not the correct approach. She suggests that women, unless and until capped up by education, will continue to throw up women into political positions where they will just make up the numbers devoid of any meaningful contribution. The various policies aimed primarily towards increasing political participation of women can never realize its true potential unless backed up by measures to put educated women into positions of power. Unless and until this is done, women will continue to be tools in the hand of men, in a predominantly patriarchal society.

56. **Poonam Vats** (2004) opines that the prerequisite for meaningful political participation in politics is women mobilization without proper enlightenment of women towards their political rights, any measures aimed at women political empowerment will be futile. It is sad to know that none of the recognized political parties in India have thus far initiated measures to build this strong women population into a vibrant political constituency. Her study shows that through various elections the undisputed fact thus that has come to the forefront is that across India, states boasting of better literacy level

amongst women have always claimed to have better women participation in electoral politics. Thus it is without contest that political awakening amongst women is predominantly dependent upon their literacy level. (pp. 144-150).

57. In case of women empowerment Seventy Third Amendments is a step to empower half of the population of the country. **Sharda** (2010) observes that at present approximately thirty seven per cent of the total representatives in PRIs are women. But Indian society is a patriarchal society. Women in India reel under the pressure of irregular employment, under-employment, dowry harassment, sati, poor nutrition, inadequate prenatal and postnatal care, rape and single parenthood. Politics is considered as the domain of the male folk of the society. Besides reservation in the PRIs the functioning is dominated by the males. She further opines that in case of female *pradhans* even if they are educated, male family members as well as male representatives of these institutions consider it to be their prerogative to take decisions on the behalf of women representatives.

58. **Damina Chawdhury**, (2000), the tribal women community, though being granted a separate socio-political status have found it difficult to make their mark in political field. Despite the fact that a few tribal communities boast of a matriarchal society, women participation in politics even in these societies have traditionally remained a taboo. Though a few fringe tribal groups like *Tharu* and *Sansi* have this traditional social concept of involving women in political decision-making, this has not translated into the process of larger political sphere in term of getting elected to constitutionalized political bodies. The tribal women, despite being granted a special status, continue to lag behind in terms of granting meaningful political leadership. Traditional social make-up of the tribes has always dissuaded women from political participation. This social hindrance still remains a potential obstacle towards political empowerment of tribal women. Coupled with lack of proper education amongst the tribal women, this constitutes an insurmountable barrier. With genuine and prolonged efforts by measures aimed primarily to educate, this barrier can of course be overcome and larger and meaningful participation of tribal women into political decision-making bodies can be achieved. (pp. 150-173).

59. **Iqbal Narain** (1963) observes that democratic decentralization implies people's right to initiate their projects for local well being and the power to execute and operate

them in an autonomous manner.

60. **Pranab Bardhan** (1996) defined decentralization in the sense of political decision-making power from mere administrative delegation of functions of central government to local agencies. To him, local accountability is essential in decision-making and its implications.

61. **B.S. Bhargava** (1979) expressed the view that political development and growth of democracy depends on the local leadership and their functioning in the *Panchayati Raj* institutions.

62. **Abdul Aziz** (1996) held the view that present-day emerging political culture is decentralized and the participation of people in it through democratic institutions of lower levels below the national level.

63. According to **Bharat Bhushan Gupta** (1968), Democratic decentralization expresses the notion of popular government at the grass-root democracy and involves people directly in administration.

64. **Prabhat Datta** (1994) opines that democratic decentralization associates people with local administration, and aggress with the right of the people to initiate and execute decisions in an autonomous way.

65. According to **S. Narawanswamy** (1998), in the eve of 21<sup>st</sup> century, grass root institutions must be strengthened and *Panchayati Raj* institutions should be guided by the poorest of the poor. The institutional expression policy of 'decentralized governance' in India is identified by '*Panchayati Raj*'. The Balwantray Mehta committee recommendations (1957) have laid down the major trust in introducing '*Panchayati Raj*' system as institutions of decentralized governance after independence in India. The Ashok Mehta committee Report (1978) provided a new look towards decentralization and development in the country.

66. **Debesh Chakraborty** (1981), **Nageshwar Prashad** (1986) and **B. N. Sahay** (1989) are of the positive view that as the instruments of decentralization of power *Panchayati Raj* institutions directly provide plans and funds to the rural people, and thus

they increase their competence to make plan and implement development schemes.

67. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act (1992) provided participation of women in local government. **Hazel D' Lima** (1993) held that before the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act, major participation of women in the local bodies were from dominant sections of the society.

68. While **Nirmal Buch** (2000) expressed his view that the post-73<sup>rd</sup> Amendments *Panchayat* have shown emerging leadership of rural women in the field of local self-government institutions. In the post 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment scenario, the *Panchayati Raj institutions* have taken the charge of development, and weaker sections and women have given a share to perform their role.

69. Thus **S. R. Ranga Rao** (1998) expressed his opinion that *Panchayati Raj institutions* are not only traditional local bodies, but it involves in the participation of rural people in the process of socio-economic reconstruction and development of rural India.

70. According to **Moitree Bhattacharya** (2002) the concept of representative democracy offers opportunity to the people to elect their representatives to whom they would want to vest the authority to govern. That is why the concept of participatory democracy gained prominence over the years. Its objective is to involve people directly in the process of decision making. The capacity of the people to contribute to development is immense and is also largely advantageous. Hence it seeks their participation in development and administrative programmes of which they are the beneficiaries, getting relevant information that is necessary for proper planning, mobilizing local resources and developing new strata of leadership. Thus broadening political participation is considered a virtue. The idea behind PRIs was to bring about such a participatory democracy through democratic decentralization.

71. **Walter Hauser and Wendy Singer** (2007) in their *The Democratic Rite: Celebration and participation in the Indian Elections* have done their studies in the otherwise backward state of Bihar. They consider Indian election process as ritual where Indian society throughout this process asserts its belief in its own changing political and social culture by the actual performance of the ritual itself. In the election ritual, approval

is given both individually by voter as each personally selects a candidate for office, and collectively as voters go the polls and through their ritual action bring a party into or out of power. The ceremony of election marks the final hours of India's elaborate rite of democracy. Through its performance Indians reaffirm the unity of the nation and the investment of power in the rulers by the ruled. The central importance of this rite to the political system is obvious even in a superficial view of the election that shows only the massive level of participation by candidates, party workers, voters, and the non-voting population. In this respect the election is a political festival incorporating the elements of planning, pilgrimage, procession, and other collective experiences that characterize both secular and religious rituals in the sub-continent.

72. **Subrata K. Mitra** (2007) in his article *Ballot Box and Local Power: Elections in an Indian Village* has done his studies in the village of Kashipur in Orissa and has tried to show that how the electoral process has changed the rural India. He observes that the electoral process is no longer an alien and unfamiliar institution, imposed from outside on the intimate and face-to-face society of rural India. Rather, electoral competition for power has become enmeshed with local and regional struggles for power, and elections-to a large variety of voluntary, semi-official, and political bodies at the local, regional, and national levels-have become a major instrument of political change. In India's plural society where groups and coalitions are always being formed and re-formed, elections are used as instruments by various sections of the society to convert their political resources and power into authority.

## CHAPTER II

### PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONS OF TEA GARDENS

#### PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA

Through the ages the Indian population has had ingrained value of grassroots democracy spanning across villages. Even during eras where monarchy was largely prevalent, village level democracy was always a driving force. Indian monarchy through the ages did not interfere with the village democratic system. Thus the present day *panchayati raj* system is thus an extent of the largely prevalent village democracy which has been a mark of grassroots democratic system in Indian society for ages. It is hard to believe that without the backdrop of this grass root democracy, Indian political system would have been able to embrace the concept of the *panchayati raj* system.

*Panchayati* system in India has an ancient heritage that draws its lines much before Indian independence. Gandhiji laid stress on implementation and active participation of the *panchayati raj* system in his vision of India. This thought process was amalgamated into the vision of India even prior to independence. According to Gandhiji autonomy of villages, each acting as a republic on its own was a compulsory and active deterrent to the evils of the centralised state. Autonomy and participation in active decision-making process is a mandatory element for successful democracy in a wide and varied state like India.

Implementation of *panchayati raj* system, according to Gandhiji, would render the vertical structure of society, where each person is weighed by his social and political position, redundant. If the basic unit of administration is bestowed with *panchayats*, political and social empowerment is reached to the lowest strata of society, thus rendering a sense of equality between the highest echelons of powers in form of central and state government and lowest power hubs endowed with *panchayat*.

Majority of Indian population, even in this era, lives in villages. In the form of *panchayati raj*, Gandhiji envisaged villages which are socio-politico-economically independent entities. The close knit social fabric of villages will thus facilitate consensus in decision-making process. The primary pillars of democracy will thus be a chain of self-sufficient

villages. Role of elected parliamentary bodies will thus be just to aid these *panchayati* institutions. Impetus for growth and major decision-making will be primarily with the bodies under *panchayati raj* system, central and state governments only helping in implementation and aiding of such policies and decision formulated by the *panchayati raj* bodies. Every village thus has to be self –sustained and capable of managing its own affairs.

Gandhiji's concept of decentralisation could effectively function only in real decentralisation where political power is bestowed in small units. The draft constitution completed in February made no mention about the *panchayat*. Gandhiji's attention, upon being drawn to this omission, resulted in him giving an observation regarding this to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar, the main architect of Indian Constitution condemn a village as a 'sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism'. Nehru wrote to Gandhi 'a village, normally speaking is backward intellectually and culturally, and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.' In view of strong resentment of various members of the Constituent Assembly towards Ambedkar's views on villages per say (like H.V.Kamath and K.Santhanam) ultimately the following amendment was moved: 'The state shall take steps to organise village *panchayats* and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-governance.' This was accepted and incorporated in Article 40 of the Constitution.

Mahatma Gandhi encouraged *panchayat raj* as the heart of India's political system. There has to be a decentralised form of government where each and every village would be answerable for its own affairs. The term for such a vision was *gram swaraj* (village self – governance). There are significant differences between the traditional *panchayati raj* system, that envisioned by Gandhi, and the system formalised in India in 1992. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi pictured an alternative system shaped on the traditional wisdom of our ancestors, who succeeded their lives and affairs by themselves without much of outside intervention. It was a village oriented approach of life and control which Gandhi called as inner *Swaraj* and outer *Swaraj*. According to him higher the level of inner *Swaraj*, the

necessity for outer *Swaraj* will be minimal. Although he talked of his predilection for the state of rational anarchy, he never rejected the importance of outer *Swaraj*.

Gandhi wanted revolutionary changes based on the original system of the village life and its governance. He was fully aware that centralised administration becomes the background of exploitation and corruption. Further it also kills the basic spirit of democracy. It was very well revealed in his writings on a model village system. Gandhiji portrayed the picture of an ideal village of his dreams which would be self-sufficient and self-reliant in its actual nature. He wrote: 'My idea of village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary. Thus, the first concern of every village will be to grow its own food crops, and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding *ganja*, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Nonviolence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village.' (Harijan 26-7-1942).

Community Development Programme (CDP) initiated in 1942 is a precursor to *panchayati raj* in India. Coupled with National Extension Service (NES), these programmes laid the foundation for economic empowerment of the village. Community development blocks was set in as a new unit of administration at the grass root levels as a remarkable innovation. This was aimed at catering to hundred or so villages with a population of around eighty thousand. The post of a multi-purpose village worker known as the *gram sevak* was created who was supposed to provide the final link in a chain that ran from state capital and from Delhi right through the remotest area.

## POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

After independence the most important task before the government was to restructure the socio-economic set-up of the country. The true picture of the country was that India was living in the villages. More than ninety per cent of the population was rural. Thus the upliftment of the people was possible only if the government concentrated its efforts in rural areas. For the development of the rural areas centre and state governments took many programmes and schemes for the community development.

Block Advisory Committees were constituted in 1955. These consisted of 'all the block level officer and leading known officials, progressive agriculturist leading co-operators, representatives of voluntary organisation, heads of educational institutions in the block, representatives of local authorities and members of parliament and of the state legislature assembly from the area'. These advisory committees were created for advising the Block Development Officers (BDO) for stream lining development programmes that they could effectively cater to local needs and requirements.

The block advisory committee was converted to block development committee in 1957. Under this chairmanship was passed from the BDO to non-official persons. This committees consisted of all the presidents under the jurisdiction of the block, representatives from the co-operative societies, representatives from the organisation of women and other social service organisation, and MPs and MLAs representation the constituencies under the block. *Panchayats* at that time were authorised to execute local works the cost of which did not exceed Rs. 3000/-. Co-ordinating committee of officers at the district level was enlarged to incorporate representatives of the blocks, both official and non-official and MPs and MLAs. The purpose was to blend official and fringe un-official elements in the process of administration.

After 1952 the CDP actively emphasized on the need for public participation in implementation of the development programmes especially in the country side. However, there were glaring inadequacies of the old *panchayat* institutions or of their post-independence successor. Fourth conference of the development commissioners who were the administrators for the community development reported that working through and with the village *panchayat* had not in some case proved to be satisfactory.

### **The Balwantray Mehta Committee Report:**

The second five year plan raised serious concern on the effective expenditure of the CDPs. The then finance minister (in 1956-57) stressed on the need for avoiding wastage arising from delays and inefficiency in transaction of public business by CDPs. Subsequently a committee on plan project (popularly known as Balwantray Mehta Committee) was appointed by National Development Council (NDC) under 'with a view to economy and efficiency, with special reference to problems connected with the organic linking of village *panchayat* with popular organisations at a higher level' and secondly, aimed at reorganisation of district administration 'so that democratic bodies should take over the entire general administration and development of the district or the sub-division perhaps other than such functions as law and order, administration of justice and certain function pertaining to revenue administration'.

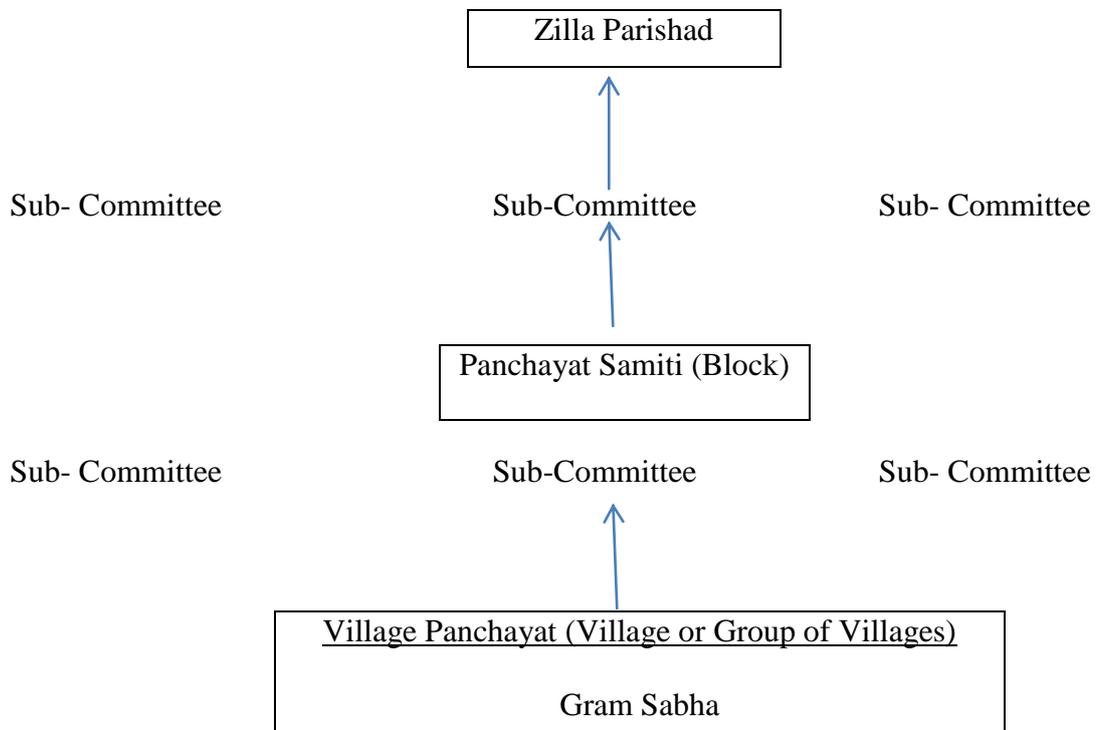
In the second five year plan the Planning Commission stressed on the need for administrative reorganisation in the interest of development. Principle recommendations of the Planning Commission in this regard included:

- a. Establishment of organic linkage between village *panchayat* and higher level popular organisations and
- b. Gradual taking over of the bulk of general administration and development functions in districts and sub-districts by the democratic bodies.

The research team questioned the role of adhoc advisory bodies. They concluded that in order to evoke local interest it was necessary 'to discover or create a representative or democratic institution invested with adequate power and appropriate finance.'

The Balwant Ray Mehta Committee (1957) observed that the failure of CDP was due to the noticeable absence of people's participation. In order to streamline this, the Committee suggested that 'a set of institutional arrangement' would have to be created to make the participation meaningful and effective. A suggestion for a three tier structure of rural local self-government was given by this team- the *panchayat* at the village level, *panchayat samiti* at the block level and *zilla parishad* at the district level to organise and manage the rural development activities.

### Three tier Structure of Panchayati Raj (All India Pattern)



*Panchayats* were to be directly elected with special provisions for representation of women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Sources of income for the *panchayats* were projected as: property or house tax, tax on markets and vehicles, octroy or terminal tax, conservancy tax, water or lighting rate etc. *Panchayats* were supposed to perform compulsory duties such as provision of water supply, sanitation, lighting, maintenance of roads, land management etc. Thus began a new experiment in the sphere of rural development administration to formulate and execute developmental process through the participation of people.

Village *panchayat* in the block were supposed to elect members who would constitute the *samiti*. Further each municipality could also elect one member to the *samiti*. The representatives of the *samiti* were supposed to comprise of a stipulated number of persons belonging to scheduled castes, tribes, workers, directors of co-operative institutions and local residents who have apt experience in public life and rural development. *Samities* were expected to cover the development of agriculture in all its aspects, the improvement of cattle and local industries, public health, welfare work, administration of primary

schools and collection and maintenance of statics. Furthermore they were given the duty of acting as agents to implement the special schemes of the state governments.

The team failed to give specific direction about the district tier, i.e. the *zilla parishad*. The major functions being assigned to the *panchayats* and the *samities*, the team thought that very little would be left for any higher body other than the government. An indirectly elected *zilla parishad* was thus proposed which would consist of presidents of the *samities*, MLAs and MPs, and district level officers of the state government including the collectors. It was basically thought of as a non-executive, co-ordinating body bestowed with functions such as general super vision of *panchayat samiti* activities within the district, distribution of state funds and approval of their budgets.

**Table 2.1: Women representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions**

States	Panchayats	Panchayat Samitis	Zilla Parishad
Andhra Pradesh	2-4	2	2
Assam	2	-	1
Bihar	-----	2	2
Gujurat	2	2-3	3-5
Haryana	1	2	-
Himachal Pradesh	1-2	2	2
Jammu & Kashmir	1	-	-
Kerala	1	-	-
Karnataka	1-2	2	1
Madhya Pradesh	2	2	-
Maharastra	2	1	2
Orissa	-	1	-
Punjab	2	2	4
Rajasthan	2	2	2
Tamil Nadu	1	3	-
Uttar Pradesh	-	5	3-5
West Bengal	2	2	2

Note: The details in the table show the position during the year 1978. Subsequently, states like Karnataka, Kerala and Orissa introduced reservation of seats for women in their respective Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Source: Report of the Committee on Pachayati Raj Institutions, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, Government of India, New Delhi, 1978. Pp. 215-26.

A second variant was also suggested wherein the state government, in view of their differential circumstances might like to have a larger body which is jurisdiction conglomerating with the district. Such a body was proposed as an executive body operating directly in areas where community development programmes was not sanctioned. This body would consist of members of *panchayats* within each *samiti* area to be elected by the *panchayat* members. A third variant which the team realised was ‘a purely elective body with perhaps a few co-opted members.’ This scheme of democratic decentralisation was approved by the NDC in January 1958. The council decided that under ‘each state should workout the structure which suited its conditions best and consequently there was no need to insist on uniformity between the different parts of the community.’ These guidelines were however supposed to be in abeyance:

- a. A three tier structure of local self-governing bodies from village to district level with an organic link from lower to higher bodies;
- b. Transfer of power and responsibilities should be genuine;
- c. Financial resources should be a plenty with these bodies so that they are able to carry out the task assigned to them;
- d. Development programmes assigned to the grass root level should be rooted through these bodies;
- e. The system should evolve in such a manner so as to ensure further decentralisation of power in future.

Though the community development programme elicited quite a genuine interest from many state governments, it was ridden with corruption, careless expenditure and administration inefficiency. The Congress party being in power in the centre and most of the state at that time tried its best to push through *panchayati raj*. Nehru said ‘*panchayati raj* would bring about a revolution in the entire rural life of India’.

Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were the first to implement the three tier system of *panchayat* as envisaged by the Mehta Report. By March 1965 it was at least set in motion in the majority of states and union territories.

### **73RD AMENDMENT ACT OF THE CONSTITUTION, 1992**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act came into effect on April 23, 1993. This Act made a provision of 33 per cent seats to women in *Panchayats*. The main objective of this amendment were to address the inability of *panchayati raj institutions* to acquire status and dignity of viable and responsible and people's bodies due to a number of reasons including absence of regular elections, prolonged super sessions, inefficient representation of weaker sections like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women, inadequate devolution of power and lack of financial resources. Elections to these bodies were made compulsory and stipulated time frame was provided for, for conducting of elections to these bodies. The governor was given the power to involve the State Election Commission for conducting of free and fair election. Avenues for generation of funds for the meaningful conduct of functioning of these bodies were put in motion. Proper and proportional representation of the weaker sections of the society like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women were ensured through this act to the extent that even the post of heads of these bodies like *pradhans*, presidents of *samities* and *zilla parishads* were reserved for candidates belonging to these sections. Majority of Indian population, being rural based, most of the political parties were forced to comply with the provisions of this Act as they were otherwise in danger of being delineated from the rural population. Although the onus of meaningful implementation of this Act lies primarily with the state governments, there are not enough provisions to compel the state government to comply with the laid down directives in letter and spirit. It must still be admitted that majority of state governments do try to comply with the laid down directives because implementation of this Act leads to a favourable disposition of the majority rural masses of India. The Constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act 1992 mandates for:

1. Establishment of a three tier structure (village *panchayat*, *panchayat samiti* and *zilla parishad*);
2. Establishment of *gram sabha* at village level and regular election to *panchayat* at every five years;
3. Proportionate seat reservation for SCs and STs;
4. Reservation of not less than one third of seats for women;
5. Constitution of state finance commission to recommend measures to improve the finances of the *panchayats*.

As per statistics available, more than 8-lakh women had entered in *Panchayats* in 20 States and 4 Union Territories by 1998. They also sufficiently held the position as chairpersons. Statistics published in '*Kurukshetra*', March 2001, shows the picture of elected women representatives in *Panchayat Raj Institutions* in the table (3.2) given below:

**Table 2.2: Showing the Percentage of Women Representation in Panchayat Raj Institutions**

Category of P.R. Institutions	Total No. of P.R. Institutions	Women Representatives	Percentage Representation
Gram Panchayats	24,49,759	7,68,582	31.37%
Panchayat Samities	1,29,871	38,582	20.71%
District Panchayat	12,671	4,039	31.80%

Despite the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment 1993, this gave 33 per cent reservation to women, who came forwards and accept challenges. This is revolutionary step and a landmark in the history of women's development as women could now participate in decision-making and in political process in the country at least at the grass-root level. With the Amendment women's representation in *Panchayati Raj* bodies increased in many States from almost 2-3 per cent to at least 30 or 32 per cent. This was a major achievement. The following table (3.3) shows some important achievement.

**Table 2.3: Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions Before 1985 and After 1995 Comparison**

States	Overall per cent in GPs 1985	Overall per cent in 1995
Gujarat	Only 2 women	33.3%
Haryana	Only 1 woman	33.1%
Karnataka	Only 1-2 women	37.0%
Madhya Pradesh	2 women	38.0%
Kerala	1 woman	38.2%
Punjab	2 women	30.2%
Rajasthan	2 women	32.4%
West Bengal	2 women	35.4%
Uttar Pradesh	0 women	29.6%

Source: Panchayati Raj Development Report 1995.institute of Social Science, New Delhi.

## **DECENTRALIZED PLANNING AND PANCHAYATI RAJ IN WEST BENGAL**

West Bengal Panchayat Act was introduced in 1957. The village government in Bengal was, however, formally inaugurated in 1870 with the passing of the Bengal Village

Chowkidari Act. It may be mentioned here that three pre-independence Acts e.g. the Bengal Village Chowkidari Act, 1870; the Bengal Local Self Government Act, 1885, and the Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919, governed the rural administration in Bengal until 1957. A two tier system of rural local system with *gram panchayat* at the village level and *anchal panchayat* at the union level were put in place. *Zilla parishad* Act was passed in 1963 resulting in emergence of four tier *panchayat* system. *Zilla parishad* at district level and *anchalik parishads* at block level was established. The United Front which voted to power in 1967 put forward its own scheme of *panchayats*. Subsequently the congress party which was voted to power in 1972 introduced the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973. This Act was not however put into effect by the Congress government. The Left Front came into power in 1977 and took up the task of organising village *panchayats* in a concerted and serious manner. Elections to the bodies of *panchayati raj* were held in 1978. Following the elections there came into being 15 *zilla parishads*, 324 *panchayat samities* and 3242 *gram panchayats*. This great democratic exercise had a voter turnout as high as 75% . The declared policy of the state government of the time was to decentralise power through *panchayats* and other such bodies. The left front government decided to utilise the *panchayats* for benefit of the under privileged.

**Table 2.4- Particulars of Panchayati Raj Institutions in all tiers of West Bengal (As on 2003)**

Sl No.	Name of Tier	No. of Bodies	Total No. of Directly Elected Members	Break-up of Members					
				ST		SC		General	
				Women	Open	Women	Open	Women	Open
1.	Gram Panchayat	3,358	51,201	1503	1969	5199	8445	11571	22514
2.	Panchayat Samiti	341	8,579	310	294	784	1599	1923	3669
3.	Zilla Parishad	18+1 (Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad)	723	16	51	74	202	156	224

Source: State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development, Department of Panchayat and Rural Development. Government of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, W.B.

**Table 2.5: Category of District wise Gram Panchayat Members in West Bengal**

Name of District	Scheduled Tribe			Scheduled Caste			General			Men	Women	Total
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total			
Bankura	141	152	293	538	321	859	1085	505	1590	1764	978	2742
Birbhum	103	67	170	454	286	740	960	491	1451	1517	844	2361
Bardwan	199	128	327	878	547	1425	1803	905	2708	2880	1580	4460

Cooch Behar	2	2	4	647	383	1030	564	282	846	1212	667	1880
Dakshin Dinajpur	47	70	117	74	121	195	534	163	697	655	354	1009
Hooghly	103	63	166	598	372	970	1506	776	2282	2208	1211	3418
Hawrah	1	1	2	303	209	512	1362	696	2058	1666	906	2572
Jalpaiguri	320	189	509	606	350	956	580	297	877	1506	836	2342
Malda	27	64	91	108	152	260	1234	610	1844	1369	826	2195
Midnapore	360	304	664	754	458	1212	3496	1816	5312	4610	2578	7188
Murshidabad	28	16	44	354	200	554	2298	1263	3561	2680	1479	4159
Nadia	53	25	78	595	381	976	1324	674	1998	1972	1080	3052
North 24 Parganas	76	52	128	619	365	984	1391	730	2121	2086	1147	3233
Purulia	244	189	433	253	144	397	851	434	1285	1348	767	2115
South 24 Parganas	38	25	63	1116	681	1797	2014	1030	3044	3168	1736	4904
Uttar Dinajpur	56	44	100	326	187	513	645	337	982	1027	568	1595
<b>Total</b>	<b>1798</b>	<b>1391</b>	<b>3189</b>	<b>8223</b>	<b>5156</b>	<b>13380</b>	<b>21647</b>	<b>10990</b>	<b>32656</b>	<b>31674</b>	<b>17557</b>	<b>49225</b>

Source: SIPRD, Government of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, W.B.

**Table 2.6: District wise distribution of numbers of the members in the Zilla Parishad (as on 1998)**

Sl No.	Name of District	Total of ZP members	No. of SC members	No. of ST members	No. of Women members	No. of Open Seats
1	Bankura	42	13	5	14	10
2	Birbhum	35	11	3	12	9
3	Bardwan	68	22	5	23	18
4	Cooch Behar	27	14	0	9	4
5	Dakshin Dinajpur	15	5	3	5	2
6	Hooghly	47	15	2	16	14
7	Hawrah	34	7	0	12	15
8	Jalpaiguri	32	13	7	11	1
9	Malda	33	6	2	11	14
10	Midnapore*	108	18	10	36	44
11	Murshidabad	60	8	1	20	31
12	Nadia	41	13	1	14	13
13	North 24 Parganas	50	15	2	17	16
14	Purulia	34	7	7	12	8
15	South 24 Parganas	67	24	1	23	19
16	Uttar Dinajpur	23	7	1	8	7
17	Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad (Darjeeling)	7	2	1	2	2
18	<b>Total</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>227</b>

\*Information on undivided Medinapore district.

Source: Information on West Bengal Panchayats, SIPRD, Govt of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, WB.

**Table 2.7: Reservation pattern of the office of Sabhadhipati, Sahakari Sabhadhipati, Zilla Parishad, West Bengal, 1998**

Sl No. Name of District	Office	Open	Women	SC	SC Women	ST	ST Women
1. Bankura	Sabhadhipati		√				
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
2. Birbhum	Sabhadhipati			√			
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
3. Bardwan	Sabhadhipati	√					
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati					√	
4. Cooch Behar	Sabhadhipati				√		
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
5. Dakshin Dinajpur	Sabhadhipati			√			
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
6. Hooghly	Sabhadhipati	√					
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati			√			
7. Hawrah	Sabhadhipati				√		
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
8. Jalpaiguri	Sabhadhipati		√				
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
9. Malda	Sabhadhipati		√				
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
10. Midnapore	Sabhadhipati					√	
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
11. Murshidabad	Sabhadhipati			√			
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
12. Nadia	Sabhadhipati	√					
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati			√			
13. North 24 Parganas	Sabhadhipati	√					
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati		√				
14. Purulia	Sabhadhipati	√					
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati				√		
15. South 24 Parganas	Sabhadhipati		√				
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	√					
16. Uttar Dinajpur	Sabhadhipati	√					
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati				√		
Total	Sabhadhipati	6	4	3	2	1	0
	Sahakari Sabhadhipati	10	1	2	2	1	0

Source: State Institute of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, W.B.

**Table 2.8: District wise distribution of numbers of the members in the Panchayat Samitis (as on 1998)**

Sl No.	Name of the District	Total No. of PS Members	No. of SC Members	No. of ST Members	No. of Women Members	No. Open Seats
1	Bankura	496	153	52	172	119
2	Birbhum	422	125	32	141	298
3	Bardwan	743	232	57	251	203
4	Cooch Behar	339	182	1	118	38
5	Dakshin Dinjapur	178	56	32	62	28
6	Hooghly	577	163	27	196	191
	Hawrah	433	74	0	142	217
8	Jalpaiguri	388	160	83	136	9
9	Malda	385	72	24	131	158
10	Midnapore	1296	215	123	445	513
11	Murshidabad	700	90	6	240	364
12	Nadia	504	157	12	173	162
13	North 24 Parganas	549	165	21	190	173
14	Purulia	391	72	82	135	102
15	South 24 Parganas	843	310	10	290	233
16	Uttar Dinajpur	272	88	18	93	93

Source: SIPRD, Government of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, WB.

**Table 2.9: Reservation pattern of the office of Sabhapati, Panchayat Samiti West Bengal, 1998**

DISTRICT	Unreserved	Women	SC including women	SC Women	ST including women	ST Women	Total No.
Coochbehar	4	2	6	2	0	0	12
Jalpaiguri	3	2	5	1	3	2	13
Uttar Dinajpur	4	1	3	1	1	1	9
D. Dinajpur	3	1	2	0	2	2	8
Malda	8	3	3	1	1	1	15
Murshidabad	15	8	3	1	0	0	26
Nadia	8	4	5	2	0	0	17
North 24 Parganas	9	5	7	3	1	0	22
South 24 Parganas	12	6	11	4	0	0	29
Howrah	7	4	3	1	0	0	14
Hooghly	8	4	5	2	1	0	18
Midnapore	27	13	9	3	5	2	54
Purulia	8	4	4	1	4	2	20
Bankura	8	5	7	1	2	2	22
Burdwan	12	7	10	2	2	2	31
Birbhum	8	7	6	3	1	0	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>329</b>

Source: SIPRD, Govt. of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, W.B.

**Table 2.10: Reservation pattern of the office of Sahakari Sabhapati, Panchayat Samiti West Bengal, 1998**

DISTRICT	Unreserved	Women	SC including women	SC Women	ST including women	ST Women	Total No. of offices of Sahakari Sabhapati
Coochbehar	8	0	4	2	0	0	12
Jalpaiguri	10	0	0	0	3	1	13
Uttar Dinajpur	5	0	3	1	1	1	9
D. Dinajpur	5	0	1	1	2	0	8
Malda	8	3	3	1	1	1	15
Murshidabad	15	8	3	1	0	0	26
Nadia	10	2	5	2	0	0	17
North 24 Parganas	13	1	7	3	1	0	22
South 24 Parganas	17	1	11	4	0	0	29
Howrah	7	4	3	1	0	0	14
Hooghly	10	2	5	2	1	0	18
Midnapore	31	9	9	3	5	2	54
Purulia	8	4	4	2	4	1	20
Bankura	14	0	6	3	2	0	22
Burdwan	19	0	10	3	2	1	31
Birbhum	11	1	6	2	1	1	19
Total	191	35	80	31	23	8	329

Source: SIPRD, Govt. of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, W.B.

**Table 2.11: Reservation pattern of the office of Pradhan, Gram Panchayat, West Bengal, 1998**

DISTRICT	Unreserved	Women	SC including women	SC Women	ST including women	ST Women	Total No. of offices of Pradhan
Coochbehar	40	20	67	23	1	0	128
Jalpaiguri	37	19	59	19	33	12	148
Uttar Dinajpur	41	20	32	11	6	2	99
D. Dinajpur	22	11	20	2	12	9	65
Malda	72	36	28	9	11	4	147
Murshidabad	145	72	34	11	4	2	255
Nadia	82	41	59	20	5	2	187
North 24 Parganas	87	44	61	21	8	2	200
South 24 Parganas	130	64	114	39	4	1	312
Howrah	84	42	31	11	0	0	157
Hooghly	94	46	59	19	11	5	210

DISTRICT	Unreserved	Women	SC including women	SC Women	ST including women	ST Women	Total No. of offices of Pradhan
Midnapore	254	128	86	31	46	13	514
Purulia	68	35	32	7	35	15	170
Bankura	72	36	61	21	21	7	190
Burdwan	112	56	88	27	21	10	277
Birbhum	69	34	52	20	12	2	167
Total	1409	704	883	291	230	86	3226

Source: SIPRD, Govt. of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, W.B.

**Table 2.12: Reservation pattern of the office of Upa Pradhan, Gram Panchayat, West Bengal, 1998**

DISTRICT	Unreserved	Women	SC including women	SC Women	ST including women	ST Women	Total No. of offices of Pradhan
Coochbehar	88	0	39	13	1	0	128
Jalpaiguri	111	0	17	5	20	8	148
Uttar Dinajpur	58	3	32	11	6	2	99
D. Dinajpur	43	1	10	4	11	4	65
Malda	86	23	28	9	10	4	147
Murshidabad	146	71	34	12	4	1	255
Nadia	111	12	59	19	5	3	187
North 24 Parganas	113	18	61	20	8	3	200
South 24 Parganas	182	12	114	37	4	3	312
Howrah	84	42	31	11	0	0	157
Hooghly	116	24	59	18	11	6	210
Midnapore	301	81	86	29	46	15	514
Purulia	69	34	32	13	35	10	170
Bankura	118	0	51	17	21	7	190
Burdwan	165	3	88	32	21	5	277
Birbhum	98	0 doubt	51	16	11	5	167
Total	1889	331	792	266	214	76	3226

Source: SIPRD, Govt. of West Bengal, Kalyani, Nadia, W.B.

**Table 2.13: Result of Panchayat Election, 2003 in West Bengal**

Sl No.	Tier	Total No. of Bodies	Total No. of Members	Office bearers
1	GP	3220	49140	Pradhan 3320/Upa Pradhan 3320
2	PS	329	8500	Sabhapati 329/Sahakari Sabhapati 329
3	ZP	17	713	Sabhadhipati 17/Sahakari Sabhadhipati

Sl No.	Tier	Total No. of Bodies	Total No. of Members	Office bearers
				17

N.B. These results do not include the district of Darjeeling. Result of election to the SMP, 4 Panchayat Samitis and 22 Gram Panchayat are not included here.

Source: Dept. of P. & RD, Govt. of WB, Kolkata (www.siprd.org).

Lump grants to Zilla / Mahakuma Parishad for Scheduled Castes 2000-2001- Lump provision for grants to Zilla Parishad for infrastructure development for the Welfare of the SCs & STs during 2000-2001 has been made. A statement below shows the amount allotted to the Zilla Parishads during the year 2000-2001.

**Table 2.14: Lump grants to Zilla / Mahakuma Parishad for Scheduled Castes 2000-2001**

Name of the district	Total Allocation
<b>Coochbehar</b>	Rs. 2,73,70,000
<b>Jalpaiguri</b>	2,32,30,000
<b>Siliguri</b>	1,38,00,000
<b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>	1,24,20,000
<b>D. Dinajpur</b>	98,90,000
<b>Malda</b>	1,10,40,000
<b>Murshidabad</b>	57,50,000
<b>Nadia</b>	1,15,00,000
<b>North 24 Parganas</b>	1,38,000
<b>South 24 Parganas</b>	1,84,000
<b>Howrah</b>	59,80,000
<b>Midnapore</b>	1,38,00,000
<b>Purulia</b>	94,30,000
<b>Bankura</b>	1,84,00,000
<b>Birbhum</b>	1,61,00,000
<b>Burdwan</b>	1,08,10,000
<b>Hooghly</b>	1,08,10,000
<b>Total</b>	Rs. 23,00,00,000

**Table No. 2. 15: Lump grants to Zilla / Mahakuma Parishad for Scheduled Castes 2000-2001**

<b>Name of the district</b>	<b>Total Allocation</b>
<b>Coochbehar</b>	5,10,000
<b>Jalpaiguri</b>	1,60,20,000
<b>Siliguri</b>	25,40,000
<b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>	28,00,000
<b>D. Dinajpur</b>	56,00,00
<b>Malda</b>	48,30,000
<b>Murshidabad</b>	7,60,000
<b>Nadia</b>	12,70,000
<b>North 24 Parganas</b>	22,90,000
<b>South 24 Parganas</b>	10,20,000
<b>Howrah</b>	2,50,000
<b>Midnapore</b>	91,60,000
<b>Purulia</b>	1,17,00,000
<b>Bankura</b>	78,80,000
<b>Birbhum</b>	22,90,000
<b>Burdwan</b>	50,90,000
<b>Hooghly</b>	22,90,000
<b>Total</b>	7,63,00,000

Source: Govt of WB, Annual Report of Backward classes Department,2000-2001

Self-government that was introduced for the first time in Bengal covering districts and villages has suffered from many serious shortcomings which seem to have hindered the subsequent functioning of the Act. The *first* weakness was that the Act tried to introduce a system of local self-government in Bengal, but the experiment started from the district and the village was made completely dependent and subservient to the district authorities and this was contradictory to the spirit of self-government. *Second*, despite there being a provision for extensive use of elective principles under the Act, the Bengal Administrative Report of 1891-92 has shown that the elected members were minority. A related shortcoming that also needs mentioning is that an extremely limited electorate, selected on the criteria of age, place of residence, taxation and education, elected members who constitute an insignificant portion of the total number of members in the body. *Third*, Ripon's declaration that the elected non-officials shall be made the Chairman of the local government was not followed in the implementation of the Act.

*Fourth*, the Act could not create any effective organization at the villages. Until 1908, only 147 Union Committees were created and upto 1898 there was no Union Committee in Bengal. *Fifth*, nominal functional and financial decentralization provided to the local bodies also acted as a cause of their unpopularity. Local bodies had no fixed important roles and had to depend upon very limited grants and subsidies. As a result, they were abolished shortly.

The entire story has been well summarized by Webster (1992). He has put forth, "While the idea might have been to establish self-governing bodies with an element of democracy in their constitution, in reality they were little more than minor appendages to the administration, a limited extension of the colonial state into the districts with the aim of appeasing the nascent nationalism of an elite capable of mobilizing local political power. It was a thinly disguised attempt to incorporate them into a formal relationship with the colonial government's existing administrative framework ... At the district level real power was retained by the District Officer appointed by the colonial state and the denial of funds and responsibilities of the boards reflected their real status in government thinking as being largely peripheral."

#### **WEST BENGAL PANCHAYAT ACT, 1957**

The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957 comprised of altogether 120 sections and divided into three parts. Different structures associated with the system of *panchayats* described in the Act were *Gram Sabha*, *Gram Panchayat*, *Anchal Panchayat* and *Nyaya (Justice) Panchayat*. Measures for enhancing PRIs:

A number of steps can be taken to overcome the factors that militate the effective participation and management of *panchayats* at all levels by women. They can be:

1. Imparting training in administration and management so as to give meaning to their empowerment. In fact, this is the fundamental requirement for women entering PRIs. They have to be trained in such areas the roles and responsibilities of *panchayats* how to priorities the problems, make plan and execute them. Training is also needed to develop leadership skills in them. This means how to lead *panchayats* to the path of development and inspire others to work untidily for implementing community based programmes.

2. Role of NGOs: NGOs and other voluntary organisations can play pivotal role in spreading awareness among the women of rural areas. This will help them to contest elections in greater numbers against men and enter the PRIs.
3. A concerted movement for building public opinion is required to be launched by the state government.
4. The role of media: More and more media coverage should be given where women have entered the PRIs and have started working either in the capacity of members or chairpersons. A continuous communication must be maintained through media between the government, *panchayats* and the people. (Singh, Balram, 2005, “The Impact and Challenges of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment on the Status of Women”, in J.L. Singh (ed.), *Women and Panchayati Raj*, New Delhi, Sunrise Publications. Pp. 53-66 )

In the structural arrangement of the Act, first came the *Gram Sabha*. The State Government was to constitute the *Gram Sabha* and to determine its area, name and extent of jurisdiction. The entire fabric of the village *panchayat* was built up on this basic body composed of all persons whose names are included in the electoral roll of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly for the time being in force pertaining to the area for which the *Gram Sabha* has been constituted. The functions assigned to this statutory general body were to elect the *Gram Panchayat* for a period of four years, to hold one annual and one half-yearly general meeting mainly to consider the budget of the concerned *Gram Panchayat* for the following year and to consider the report submitted by it on the work done during the previous year and the work proposed to be done during the next year.

The *Anchal Panchayat*, located between the block and the village level was the second executive tier in the state's *panchayat* system covering roughly about seven to ten *Gram Panchayats* and a population of about eight to ten thousand. Thus it had similarity with the Union Board under the Village Self-Government Act of 1919, but as far as its composition, powers and scope of activities are concerned, it largely differed from the board. Regarding composition, the Act stated that the State Government shall establish *Anchal Panchayat* and shall fix by notification the number of contiguous *Gram Sabhas* that should be included within each *Anchal Panchayat*. The system of election at the *Anchal Panchayat* stage was made indirect.

*Third*, the Act provided special responsibility and power to *Anchal Panchayat* by providing functions pertaining to rural police, rural finance and rural justice. Over and above, they had an important say over the *Gram Panchayat* budget. Funds of the *Gram Panchayat* were distributed through the *Anchal*. Thus rural leadership has been invested in the *Anchal* than in the *Gram Panchayat* but curiously enough, this body would be elected indirectly by the Gram Panchayat and not by the village people. This was certainly undemocratic for indirect election at such an important decision-making body might pave the way for coterie rule and undermine the capacity of *Gram Sabha*. The tax structure and financial provisions were, no doubt, improved, but still it remained inadequate and unsatisfactory because no thinking was provided whether village people would be able to bear the additional burden or not. Despite these shortcomings, the village people in West Bengal appear to have broadly greeted the new self-governing system of the state. Compared to other states, the *Gram Panchayats* of West Bengal enjoyed lesser power and scope of activities as they were transferred to the *Anchal Panchayats*.

### **The first phase**

The devastating flood in 1978 resulted in entrustment of the *panchayat* bodies with the execution of three important programmes, namely, food for works programme, rural development programme and rural reconstruction programme.

### **Second phase**

In November in 1980 second phase of the programme devolution was under taken under the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP). The *gram panchayats* rendered financial assistance to the homeless to enable them to build their houses at a very minuscule interest rate. Poor cultivators, earmarked by the *panchayats* were given loans by the state governments through nationalised commercial banks. Rural goddowns were created along with marketing committees for the crops with representatives from the *panchayats*. Rural marketing outlets were setup at the block levels in districts, owned and managed by the *samities*. *Panchayats* were also amalgamated into the programme of eradicating rural illiteracy. Financial constraints of the local bodies were tried to be met with by proposals such as:

1. Granting a certain percentage of land revenue collected by the district administration to the *panchayat samities*,

2. Empowering the *panchayat samities* to control the *haats*, *bazars* and fair services and levy rates upon them,
3. Crediting the entire collection of road cess, public work cess and rural development cess directly to the funds of *zilla parishads*.

Democratic decentralisation of power in the true sense was implemented by left front government in West Bengal. Land reforms was the key element aimed towards empowerment of the lesser privileged class of the society. The underprivileged and economically deprived sections of the society by having the privilege of holding their own lands, gained a lot of socio economic prowess. This ensured that a meaningful participation in *panchayati raj* system was possible. Thus an attempt was made to truly involve the down trodden masses of the society.

While the constitutionally laid down three tier *panchayati raj* system could flourish in rural Bengal lacunae were many. One of the primary problems was the rampant political influence which slowly became part and parcel of the grass root politics represented by the *panchayats*. Political parties during the course of time pride their utmost to have an impact in the *panchayati raj* system. In order to shape out the grass root politics in a positive manner *panchayati raj* system was of a paramount importance. However one of the major crisis felt by the village *panchayat* was the lack of economic funds, thereby restricting the whole of the *panchayat* bodies. Though the constitutional guarantee for upholding the *panchayati raj* institutions has always been there, lack of measures towards provision of economic freedom of the *panchayati raj* institutions has been a huge hindrance. The *panchayati raj institutions* have to often depend on the benevolence of local state governments for generating revenues to implement their agendas at the grass root level. Political true will towards making these *panchayati raj* institutions economically vibrant decision-making bodies is truly lacking. Embroiled in unfortunate political conflicts, this powerful concept of *panchayati raj* system has failed to realize its true potential. Though the constitution provides with measures aimed to tie over the economic depravity of *panchayati raj* institute, success at the ground level still is very much dependent upon funds provided by the respective state governments for enactment of their various programmes. Thus many of enterprising *panchayati raj* institutions have always to fall back upon political influences, principally in the form of ruling parties in the state governments. *Panchayati raj* system, it fully implements in letter and spirit, is a very powerful step towards these centralisation of power.

## **INFILTRATION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM INTO TEA GARDENS OF NORTH BENGAL**

North-east India is home to diverse ethnic groups. *Panchayats* were included in Article 40 under the directive principles of the Constitution of India. In 1989 Rajiv Gandhi government introduced the bill for amending the Constitution for giving constitutional status to panchayats. But the bill could not be passed. Subsequently in 1992 the Constitution was duly amended by P.V. Narshimha government by introducing the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment. The tribal dominated states under 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution were however given option either to introduce *panchayati raj institutions* or to continue with their traditional self-government institutions. All the states included under 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule except Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mijoram amended their Panchayati Raj Act to accommodate the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act.

## **TRADE UNIONS IN TEA GARDEN**

Traditionally trade unions in tea garden of north Bengal have been dominated by unions affiliated to ‘leftist’ parties. The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) has had substantial influence in trade union movements across all tea garden in north Bengal with certain pockets of influence of other left leaning political parties. The influence of these trade unions towards betterment of living conditions of tea garden labourers cannot be denied. Right from fixing of minimal labour wages to ensuring proper living and health standards of tea garden labourers owe a lot to these leftist trade unions. In recent times however, political institutions such as the *Adivasi Bikash Parishad* have managed to infiltrate amongst the tea garden labourers, thereby making their presence felt even amongst the trade union movements.

However the fact remains that tea garden labourers trade union movement largely remains dominated by the political parties who wailed political power at the state level. It is therefore not a surprise that majority of trade unions in tea garden have changed their affiliation to Trinamool Congress (TMC) after change of the governing political force at the state level. Instances of tea garden trade union leaders changing their affiliation with changing political times are galore. It however is debatable as to the real grass roots benefits that a common tea garden labourer has managed to incorporate vis-à-vis his daily life.

While there remain inspiring stories about tea garden trade union leaders who have remained enshrined towards promoting and looking after the interest of the tea garden workers, their number is definitely not substantial. Standing under the present scenario where so many tea gardens are threatened with the closure, thereby threatening the very means of livelihood of workers, it is disheartening to note that trade unions representing these workers seldom have a strong voice to protest. Tea garden labourers' trade unions have largely lost their way in the quagmire of politics, thereby rendering themselves incapable towards redressal of real workers' issues.

Personal case studies of tea garden trade union leaders of Chalsa Tea Garden bear testimony to the fact that personal clout is the predominant driving force for these trade union leaders. These trade union leaders have thus been reduced to being stooges for furtherment of the political agendas of the ruling political establishments. A prime example for this is one prominent trade union leader named Bishnu Chhetri, who had huge socio-political clout within the tea garden labourers. For the majority of his life, he was enrolled as a member of CITU, i.e. the trade union wing of CPI(M). With changing political scenario and the advent of other political forces like AVP (Adivasi Bikash Parishad) and the trade union wings of TMC (Trinamool Congress), these new political institutions invested their energies into tea garden leaders like Bishnu, who had a huge sway amongst the tea garden labourers. Thus the personal clout of a grass root political leader was aimed to be sub-served by the political parties to further their own interest. The shifting of allegiance to various political formations is therefore quite common, whereby, grass root political leaders often end up as being sub-servant to the dominant political party.

**Table No. 2.16: Major Trade Unions in North Bengal Tea Zone**

S.No	Names of Union	Affiliation	No.of Tea Estates
1	Progressive Tea Workers Union (PTWU)	AVP	159
2	Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union (DTDPLU)	GJMM	128
3	Cha Bagan Majdoor Union (CBMU)	CITU	121
4	National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW)	INTUC	113
5	Darjeeling Cha Bagan Workers Union (DCBWU)	UTUC(BB)	66
6	Terai Dooars Plantation Workers Union (TDPWU)	INTUC	40
7	Darjeeling District Cha Kaman Mazdoor Union (DDCKMU)	CITU	35
8	Trinamool Tea Plantation Worker Union (TTPWU)	INTUC	30

<b>S.No</b>	<b>Names of Union</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>No.of Tea Estates</b>
9	Tea Employees Association of West Bengal (TEAWB)	CITU	24
10	West Bengal Tea Garden employees Association (WBTGEA)	Not Affiliated	27
11	West Bengal Cha Mazdoor Sabha (WBCMS)	HMS	19
12	West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (WBCSU)	HMKP	10
13	All West Bengal Tea Garden Labour Union (AWBLU)	AIFTU (New)	7
14	North Bengal Cha Bagan Employees Union (NBCBEU)	UTUC(BB)	5
15	Jatiya Cha Mazdoor Congress (JCMC)	Not Affiliated	4
16	Zilla Cha Bagan Workers Union (ZCBWU)	AITUC(CBI)	4
17	Rastriya Cha MazdoorCongress (RCMC)	Not Affiliated	3
18	Pachim Banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union (PBCBSKU)	Not Affiliated	2
19	Progressive Plantation Workers Union (PPWU)	Not affiliated	2
20	Terai Sangrami cha Shramik Union (TSCHU)	AICCTU	2
21	Himalayan Plantation Workers Union (HPWU)	GNLF	2
22	North Bengal Tea Plantation Employees Union (NBTPEU)	UTUC(LS)	1

Trade unions have always had the sole objective of protecting the interest of the workers. This specially bears relevance towards organised fringe industries like tea gardens. Though the tea industry in India is quite a force to reckon with, it still cannot compete with other industrial setups in various other fields such as textile and leather. The remote locations of tea garden further isolates the industry from socio-political purview. They are thus left to fend for themselves. Labour's right thus always tend to be compromised in such a predominantly remote setup. It is thus of paramount importance that labour unions in tea garden undertake a major role so as to ensure and protect the rights of tea garden labourers. A strong trade union movement is thus extremely important in a tea garden set up.

1. AICCTU- All India Central Council of Trade Unions (Communists Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation)
2. AITUC- All India Trade Union Congress (Communist Part of India)
3. AIUTUC- All India United Trade Union Centre (Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist))
4. BMS- Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, wing of Bhartiya Janata Party)
5. CITU- Centre of Indian Trade Unions (Communist Party of India (Marxist))
6. HMS- Hind Mazdoor Sabha (Unaffiliated)
7. INTUC- Indian National Trade Union Congress (Indian National Congress)

8. LPF- Labour Progressive Federation (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)
9. NFITU- National Front of Indian Trade Unions (Unaffiliated)
10. SEWA- Self Employed Women's Association (Unaffiliated)
11. TUCC- Trade Union Coordination Centre (All India Forward Bloc)
12. UTUC- United Trade Union Congress (Revolutionary Socialist Party)

The INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress) was the largest union in terms of absolute numbers till 2007. From 2008, as per the 2002 round of verification, the BMS (Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh) is the largest trade union federation having a verified membership of around 6.2 million.

During the course of many years trade unions in tea gardens have managed to bring forth meaningful and positive contribution towards protection of labour rights. However existence of a vast plethora of trade unions affiliated to various political parties has diluted the influence of trade unions. Concerted efforts emerging out of a single committed political forum aimed towards protection of labour rights has thus taken a back seat. Tea garden trade unions have thus rendered as means of furthering political agendas various political parties, thereby resulting in dilution of their main focus that is protection of labour rights in tea gardens.

It is to be noted that there remains isolated participation of women in trade union movement spanning across various tea gardens. It still remains a fact that majority of tea garden unions have predominantly male members in their decision-making bodies. Though women are equal if not more, affected by living conditions existing in tea garden vis-à-vis their male counterparts, there still largely remains fringe elements in tea garden trade union political set up. Thus they remain largely isolated and disconnected with this important aspect of labour empowerment through trade union movements. Men folk of tea gardens have continued over ages to wield power through these trade union movements, thus rendering women tea garden labourers defunct.

Thus an already diluted tea garden trade union movement has over the years lost its potency and effectiveness to deliver on genuine issues concerning the tea garden labourers as majority of the women tea garden labour force has miniscule say towards implementation of proper labour reforms. This two pronged attack namely, dilution of

trade union through involvement of diverse political parties and exclusion of women tea garden labourers from active political participation has rendered tea garden trade union movement largely ineffective through the course of years. Thus rendering tea garden trade unions nincompoop.

Recent forced inclusion of women into grass root political set ups through reservations of seats for women extending right from grass root political set ups to the state and national levels have provided women with a platform to get incorporated into political decision-making process. It is heartening to know that even amongst remote and isolated societies like tea gardens, a substantial percentage of women population have come forward to effectively use these reservations and participate in the democratic setup.

We thus find quite a percentage of women folk who are elected political representatives, having a desire to effectively contribute towards emancipation of women and betterment of society at large. Though there are many instances of these women of political stature being largely influenced and controlled by their male counterparts, there remain a healthy population of elected women political representatives who have an endeavour to pursue independent political agendas devoid of the influence of their male counterparts. These women have largely tried to make a meaningful difference towards the socio-political status of women positively.

Trade union politics has over ages not been able to bring forth women leaders, barring a miniscule of exceptions. Thus, though the value of trade unions cannot be belittled, projection of women into positions of power within this movement has been largely unsuccessful. Constitutionally guaranteed provisions like reservation of seats for women, right from the grass root political level has had a much more effective influence towards catapulting women into positions of power.

Though it is a reality that majority of women who get elected into this positions of power eventually adorn just ornamental posts, there remain quite a substantial percentage of women who are actually willing to come forward and make a positive political impact. Thus, though the trade union politics can be epitomised as a means of safeguarding the social-economic interests of labour class at large, it definitely cannot absolve itself from its failure to project the women leaders. It is only through constitutional and legal

provisions that a traditionally patriarchal society has been forced to give political space to women. Bhowmik (1999) in his studies shows that lack of education restricts choices of alternative occupations but this is not all. They are also marginalized in the area which tend to make them group together in their own communities in the plantations. Hence they look towards the plantation for employment in the present and the future.

It is heartening to note that, though the percentage may be substantial, many elected women political representatives do come forward in galvanising women oriented issues specially for belonging to labour class in any industry. Labourers working under tea gardens were largely an unorganised sector of workforce, thereby deprived of their very basic labour right. Trade unions spanning across various tea gardens in north Bengal, definitely have had a meaningful role in organising this motley group of tea garden labourers under one umbrella and working relentlessly to promote their basic labour rights. many basic issues such as determining a hours of work, minimum labour wages and other fringe but necessary labour benefits are ensured, have been the outcome of relentless struggle of various tea garden trade unions.

Though it has to be admitted that allegiance to a vast plethora of political parties spread across a wide spectrum in a country like India, has definitely resulted in weakening of the thrust of trade union movement, it still remains a fact that the positive impact of trade union towards protection of workers' rights cannot be denied.

A note - worthy lacunae in this influential trade union movement spread across tea gardens is the absence of meaningful women participation. It is remains a fact that any trade union movement relies on women workers participation. But transgressing into positions of power in this trade union setup has still been extremely restricted for the women workers. They still remain confined to just mustering up of the numbers. It is however noteworthy that certain progressive tea gardens have managed to inculcate institutions like Mother's Club which really serve to give voice to the aspirations of women tea garden labourers. Though they cannot claim to have positions of power in the trade union, they certainly do have an influencing factor towards channelizing the face of trade union movement. Institutions like Mother's Club actively pursues social issues like controlling alcohol abuse which rampant in a tea garden society, ensuring proper anti-natal care, helping in implementation of various vaccination programmes for neo-natal,

putting stress on universal education programme so that the girl child is not devoid of education rights, and in general working tirelessly towards propagation of better living standards of tea garden as a whole.

While discussing about the marginalisation of tribes Bhowmik (1999) further opines that the main problem of the tea garden workers is rooted in the fact that they were migrants to the areas of Dooars and Terai and were levelled low social status. Though, the tea garden workers are responsible for building up the wealth of the state through their labour in the tea industry they have been kept out of the mainstream society. This can be seen from the fact that though these communities are numerically large in the region they have never been politically effective. This large section of the population has been kept in isolation and they can hardly articulate their interests on their own. Non-worker, non-tribal trade union leaders (mainly belonging to the dominant Bengali community) continue to lead the trade unions and take decisions on behalf of the tribal workers. Isolation and lack of employment opportunities in the area has made these people dependent on the plantation system or on subsistence agriculture in the vicinity for their subsistence.

Our studies shows that though, they may not actively wield power within the trade union setup, they definitely are an influencing force towards giving direction for trade union movements. While fringe tea gardens that are not associated with large business houses still are deprived of active and meaningful participation of women workers, it is heartening to note that in certain big tea gardens women workers have tried to venture into grass root political levels and have managed to positively influence the political agenda. However, a large population of women tea garden workers remain deprived of this chance to set the agenda for their upliftment. Trade union still largely remain confined within a patriarchal set up where women get little space to reach up to the highest rungs of leadership.

Under the aegis of Plantation Labour Act (1951), there has been a concerted effort to protect the rights of tea garden labourers. The PLA was passed by parliament in 1951 but it came into effect in 1955. This act stipulates a number of guidelines relating to living and working conditions of plantation workers. According to this Act the employers must provide workers with permanent structures as houses, there should be sanitary facilities

and supply of drinking water in the labour lines (quarters). The plantation must afford free primary education to children of plantation workers through primary schools within the plantations. There are also provisions for recreation and cheap canteens for the workers. Bhowmik (1999) opines that the lives of plantation workers would improve substantially if these provisions were implemented. In reality, there is not a single tea plantation in the state that has fulfilled all provisions of the act.

Trade unions at large have used this act to enhance and protect their labour rights. However the most subjugated and exploited section of tea garden labourers i.e. the women workers, still find themselves at the mercy of a predominantly patriarchal social setup whereby trade union movements at large continue to formulate laws without meaningful participation of the women workers. Thus genuine issues involving the women workers yet remain to be meaningfully addressed. The need of the hour is thus to encourage and ensure women participation in trade union movements so that a wholesome social perspective is reached.

Though women participation in grass root political setup has been tried to be addressed through political measures such as reservations for women candidate in grass root political institutions like *panchayats*, meaningful involvement of women in trade union movement will definitely ensure a much more galvanising influence towards participation of women at the very basic and core level of the society. Nurturing of institutions such as the Mother's Club, which primarily serve as platform for women to give strong and meaningful voice towards shaping of society, is of paramount importance. Institutions such as these can serve as stepping stone towards an active participation of women workers in tea garden trade unions.

The women working force in various tea gardens can definitely contribute and have a much more positive influence towards laying down a positive way forward for the tea garden workers as a whole. The various rights of tea garden workers enshrined within the Plantation Labour Act (1951) can definitely be better protected and nurtured with an active participation of women workers within the tea garden setup. As they comprise of almost half of the tea garden working population, any means to protect the workers right will lose its relevance without active involvement of women workers.

During the course of my study I have noticed these huge lacunae that exists vis-à-vis a trade union movement towards participation of women workers. Any trade union movement can never succeed without active participation of the women workers. The provisions of the Plantation Labour Act are many, but lack of women workers participation renders most of these provisions futile. Thus means to ensure women workers participation have to be thought of so that true deliverance of provisions within the Plantation Labour Act is ensured.

It thus suffices that true political empowerment of women hinges upon that active and meaningful participation within the aieges of tea garden trade union movement. Grass root level democracy amongst the women tea garden workers can never be accomplished without significant incorporation of women. Involvement of women within the tea garden trade union movement can definitely serve to have a positive political impact. It is therefore of prime importance to actively pursue and ensure women participation amongst various tea garden trade unions. Their meaningful participation will definitely render a positive socio-political environment.

The enormous role of trade unions cannot be denied vis-à-vis their role in ensuring proper working conditions for labourers. A female perspective into this would however been much welcome as females do constitute 50 per cent of the labour force. Denial of a meaningful representation of women in tea garden labour unions has deprived a political voice for women. They have been thus reduced to a state of just making of numbers for various political agendas. True women empowerment at the very grass root level has thus been always compromised. Women populace thus continue to be viewed upon as a mass that a fit for only adding up numbers to any agitation. True redressal of issues concerning the women tea garden labourers still remains a distant dream.

Predominant women issues like pre-natal and anti-natal, provision of a healthy family environment, gender equality in terms of providing education to her children, equal wages as compared to her male counterparts, creation of a healthy socio-familial environment, etc. are never brought to the forth as there is a constant neglect of the aspiration of women workers in various trade union movements. An active and meaningful participation of women in trade union movement has to be ensured so as to bring about a wholesome

change in the status of tea garden labourers. Any movement that ignores the aspirations of half of its population can never achieve its goal.

Even before constitutionally guaranteed reservations for women in grass root *panchayat* level, it is necessary to focus on women empowerment in trade union movements. Involvement of women in trade union movements across all tea gardens can of course have a far reaching and meaningful impact, which will thus ensure socio-political upliftment of women. During the course of my studies, absence of powerful women trade union leaders has been a lacuna which should concern all social engineers. It points out to the glaring fact that meaningful women political leadership can never develop spontaneously and that it is still under the realms of targeted women reservations. These targeted women reservations can of course serve as precursor to real women empowerment at the grass root level, for many of the women who, being beneficiary of women reservation policy, have arisen to politically important positions at the grass root *panchayat* level.

While many of these women have subjugated themselves and work as mere tools in the hands of their male counterparts, there still remain a substantial percentage of these elected women representatives who have managed to overcome all adversities and put forward their socio-political agendas at the forefront, primarily directed towards women empowerment.

## CHAPTER III

### TRIBAL POPULATION AND THEIR PROBLEMS – SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL – A GENERAL SURVEY

#### DEFINITION AND MEANING

There are numerous terms used to describe the tribes of India such as, *vanvasi*(forest dwellers) or *girijan* (hill people). However, *adivasi* carries with it the most relevant meaning of being the aboriginal inhabitants of a given region. It was in 1930s that the term *adivasis* was specifically coined for describing the aboriginal population of a particular area.

Tribal population is the indigenous population of India. Their socio-economic background is entrenched for ages. It goes without saying though that there are a multitude of tribes that reside in India. Though they can harp upon being clubbed under ‘tribes’ on a whole, there are nonetheless a plethora of tribal groups and denominations each bearing distinct individual characteristics of their own. The one thing however, that binds them together is their social structure born out of a culture that draws its influence from being indigenous, devoid of any external influences. The majority of tribes in India can still be regarded on a whole as being cocooned from the socio-economic upheavals that seem to influence the other strata of society. In the modern era though, quite a substantial part of the tribal population is in the process of integrating itself with contemporary society. The conflict between the age long social structures and values of the ever changing contemporary society is however extremely hard to bridge every tribal society. Thus, faces a challenge of enormous magnitude in trying to incorporate itself into a dynamic modern society, while trying its best to hold on to its long and deep seated roots.

While Ghurye contested the idea of ‘tribe’ as a separate category and viewed that ‘tribe’ should be looked into as a section of the larger Hindu society, Sinha (1982:13) observed that ‘it was the British scholars who felt that the tribes were outside the frame of varna-jati system. The tribes themselves presented a wide spectrum of relationship with the plough cultivations from complete isolation to close interaction. Sinha (1958:504-518) on the basis of his observations on the central and peninsular India viewed a ‘tribe’ ‘as a system of social relations as well as a state of mind and cultural tradition, both characterized basically by isolation and lack of stratification. He defined a set of characteristics of ‘tribe’ namely habitat, economy, social structure and ideological system. To him tribes have specific features like— isolation in ecology, economy, politics and other social relations— from other ethnic groups. They have a strong in-group

sentiment, homogeneous, devoid of social stratification and role of specialization other than by age, sex and kinship. Ideally no interaction with Great traditions of Indian civilization, they have a value system of equality, closeness of human, natural and supernatural world, lack of systematization of ideas, etc. He conceived 'tribe' in India in a classical evolutionary frame, where this section of population was constantly moving towards caste pole. It may be noted that while underling important features of 'tribe', Sinha consciously prefixed the term 'ideally' in the beginning of the sentence 'no interaction with Great traditions of Indian civilization'. This indicates that Sinha was well aware that the criteria of ecological isolation and absence of any kind of contacts with other populations were far from a reality in case of the population groups categorized as 'tribe' (1965:61).

The definition for tribal population in Indian society has always been contentious. S. C. Dube has laid down certain categories for recognition of divergent social groups as tribals:

- Firstly, a very long association with the land that they inhabit is of primary importance,
- Secondly, their abodes are generally in lands that are away from the mainstream population, primarily inhabiting isolated areas in forests and hills,
- Thirdly, lack of a well-documented history of their ancestors which need them to primary have a concept of their origin based on mythologies,
- Fourthly, being primarily secluded from the mainstream population they have very little wherewithal for their economic and technological advancement,
- Fifthly, they have socio-cultural traditions which are unique to their society and have little resemblance to the mainstream population, and,
- Lastly, the society at large is intrinsically immune to the hierarchical concept in the so-called modern societies. (150).

Going by their socio-economic-political standing the tribal population is described with adjectives like the 'marginal', 'exploited', 'most backward' 'subaltern', 'deprived' section of Indian society that is still waiting to be 'developed' and integrated into the 'mainstream'. Although not a homogenous and organized force tribal communities express their anger and frustration in sporadic protest movements asserting their rights for autonomy and even for independence. The state and organs of civil society, on the other hand, want more and more development for the tribal communities for the sake of 'peace', 'amity' and national integration.

In his book *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (Vol.II) H.H. Risley mentioned that the Munda is a large Dravidian tribe of Chotanagpur who spoke the Kolarian group of language, which was close to the Hos and Santals, The name Munda is of Sanskrit origin. (Risley,1891).The original homeland of the Mundas was in the Chottanagpur hill-plateau region of eastern India, which at present is included in the Jharkhand state of India. During the British colonial period large number of Mundas, Oraons and Santals were forcefully uprooted from their homeland to the tea gardens of Assam and North Bengal to work as labourers. Another section of these tribes were brought in by the local zamindars(the landowners) to the mangrove forest region of Sundarban in South Bengal. These tribal people cleared the forests and built up embankments and were settled as agriculturists in the different islands of Sundarban. The Sundarban is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests, and presents an excellent scenario of ongoing ecological process wherein the people struggle for their existence under harsh natural conditions with poverty. (Danda, 2007: 27- 45).

There is little doubt that the development efforts in the post-independence period have met only with partial success. The policy of protective discrimination in the form of reservation in education and jobs, the ITDP, the provision of devolution in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules have contributed to the creation of a neo-elite among the tribal population and to the creation of new internal divisions, while little has been done to free the large majority of the tribal population from the wretched condition.

In other words, Beteille considers the populations who remain outside the larger caste based Hindu society as isolated, irrespective of their nature of contacts with other population groups as could be seen in Arunachal Pradesh. In a later writing, Beteille (1992) clarified that ‘the concept of ‘tribe’ will be different where tribes and civilizations co-exist. In such situations, when anthropologists speak of tribes, they mean communities of people who have remained outside of the state and civilization, either out of choice or for necessity. That was the reason, it is supposed, for calling them ‘non-civilized’ but certainly not ‘uncivilized’. In India, they all stood more or less outside of Hindu civilization’(Srivastava and Chaudhury 2009: 72).

The biggest challenge for the modern generation of tribal population is to firmly establish their foot holds in professions quite contrary to the ways and means of earning livelihood for their forefathers. Another big hurdle is the problem of integrating with the modern non-tribal population, while trying to pursue and get footholds into professions quite new to them. Quite a majority of the tribal population however, still continues to engage in

profession like working in tea gardens, working as daily wage labourers in ploughing lands etc. the life for those choosing to indulge in these professions is ridden with problems of a different nature and magnitude.

In the areas of North Bengal and adjoining areas like Nepal there have instances where tribal groups have fought for the authorities over their rights of self- determination. The Nepali civil war is a prime example where the majority of guerrilla fighters were largely *adivasis*. Indian perspective has, though insignificant, parallels. The usage of the term *adivasis* is contentious in Indian context. There are views that suggest that the *adivasi*-non *adivasi* divide that has been created in Indian context is artificial. It is of significant importance to note that in north eastern part of India the term *adivasi* specifically applies to only the tribes involved in tea gardens, imported from central India during colonial times.

The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines scheduled tribes as “such tribes or tribal community or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal community as are deemed under Article 342 to be the scheduled tribes for the purposes of this Constitution”. Article 342 has elaborately laid down procedures to be followed for specifications of scheduled tribes. Criteria’s for promulgation of a particular community are often based on attributes such as:

1. Geographical isolation- there by meaning that they leave their lives in closed, remote and inhospitable areas such as hills and forests,
2. Backwardness- that the livelihood of such communities is primarily dependent on primitive agriculture having a below per level of technology which contributes to their economic deprivation. The health and literacy levels thereby are also at an abysmal.
3. Distinctive traits in culture, language and religion- communities who have over a prolonged period of time evolved cultural, linguistics and religious characters which are unique to them. These communities thus have distinctive attributes to their cultural and linguistic attitudes.
4. Reluctance to get out of laid down social norms- communities having increased tendency of adhering to their own social, cultural and religious spheres, thereby actively shunning interactions with social groups having views contrary to their established norms.

The main purpose of the recognition of tribal and semi-tribal population under the Constitution is to bring such population at par with other sections of population and integrate them with the mainstream of national life. It, therefore, logically follows that the communities, which are considered to be such as would require special measures for being integrated and for being brought at par with other sections of populations for operational purposes be recognised as “Scheduled Tribes”.

Amongst all the scheduled tribes thus identified, there are certain tribal groups which were categorised as more backward communities amongst the tribal population. They were grouped under ‘primitive tribal groups’ (PTGs) by the Central Government of India in 1975. Today there are 75 tribal communities which have been identified as ‘primitive tribal groups’ spanning across different states of India. According to 2001 Census of India, tribal people constitute 8.2 per cent of nation’s population, thereby amounting to over 84 million people. It is noteworthy that in the north eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, more than 90 per cent of the population is tribal.

The Commission for Scheduled Tribes in the report of 1952 has listed eight rich common factors that available in each tribal community. These are:

1. Tribal live away from the civilised world in the inaccessible parts lying in the forests and hills.
2. They belong to either one of the three stocks Negritos, Anstereloids and Mongofrid.
3. They speech the same tribal dialect.
4. They perform primitive religion known as “Animism” in which the worship of ghosts and spirits is most important element.
5. They follow primitive occupations such as gleaning, hunting and gathering of forest products.
6. They are largely carnivorous or flesh and meat larks.
7. The live either naked or semi naked using tree-barks and leaves for clothing and
8. They have nomadic habits and love for drink and dance. (pp.206)

Yet another substantial population of tribals lives in hilly areas of central India (Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh). This belt is bounded by Narmada River to the north and Godavari River to the south. Another substantial population of tribals resides in Jharkhand and West Bengal. Smaller numbers of tribal people also reside in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and South India, in the western Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan and Union Territories of Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nikobar Island.

Indian Anthropological Society demarcates Konkan as the original home of Kurukh and Munda tribes. It is from here that they migrated to the northern parts of India. A Kurukh influence is very much prominent in the language of Konkan. Kurukh or Oroans are principally the tribals of Chotanagpur plateau. They are divided into many totemistic clans, residing mainly in Chatanagpur plateau, Raigarh, Sarguja, Jashpur District of Chattisgarh, Ranchi district of Jharkhand, Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, Sundargarh district of Orissa and also in Bangladesh. Sizable number of Oroan population has migrated to north eastern part of India where they are predominantly employed in tea estates of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura.

Srivastava (2006) observes that there are debates on whether one should continue to use the word 'tribe', or should one think in terms of alternatives to this term. Because against the background of change, these communities may be called 'tribes in transition', or perhaps, the appellation 'tribe' may be dropped altogether for them. They may be simply called 'communities', with the word suffixed after their name (for instance, 'Santal community', 'Birhor community', 'Seharia community'). He further opines that in contemporary times the anthropologists say that the term 'tribe' has become as pejorative as were the terms like 'primitive', 'savage', 'rude', 'non-civilized', and several others of the same type, in the mid-twentieth century and subsequently, they went out of currency. But little disagreement exists with respect to the meaning of the Scheduled Tribes, which is a Constitutional term and there exists an all -India list of these communities that are entitled to a set of privileges under the policy of compensatory discrimination. In its well known People of India Project, the Anthropological Survey of India counted 4,635 communities in India, of which 461 were tribal. However, different sources give different numbers of communities classified as Scheduled Tribes. In a revised version of Nirmal Kumar Bose's *Tribal Life in India*, published in 2002, the list given is of 300 communities, while the Draft of the National Policy on Tribals, issued in February 2004, records 698 Scheduled Tribes. Today, when anthropologists use the word 'tribe' they mean:

1. The communities included in the list of the Scheduled Tribes;
2. The communities that were isolated at one time and later had their integration with the outside world, but have continued to call them tribe because of their vested interests, and;
3. The communities that still dwell in remotely situated forests and hills and are backward in terms of the indices of development, although they may not have yet found a place in the list of the Scheduled Tribes.

The traditional concepts of a tribal society were that they carry with them rituals, lifestyle and characteristics typical and inherent to them and that they maintain their originality owing to the fact that they have little interactions with other social structures. However, Srivastava (2006), based on his numerous experiences in fieldwork with the various tribal societies, perceives that this concept has gradually outlived itself during the course of last three to four decades. The present scenario is such that a majority of these tribes have adopted a much more modern outlook towards life. This very well explains the influx of these populations in large numbers in the national job scenario, both in private and public sectors in the recent past and the numbers continue to increase by the day. (Srivastava 2006).

There is this notion that the tribes are conservation and want to revive and glorify their past. This may be borne out of interpretation of cases where tribe persons crave for returning to their traditional methods of cultivation specially slash-and-burn. As in case a Baiga, he would trace back the roots of his poverty to the period when he was forced to abandon shifting cultivation. According to Srivastava (2006), a Baiga would tell you that he was able to grow as many as twelve crops in a year previously and that his misery began when he started ploughing the land which according to him amounted to “tearing the breasts of mother earth”. Similarly Choudhury (2006) observes that the Kondhs of Orissa attribute their miserable state to the fact that they have not been performing the human sacrificing since the British banned.

These statements may give the impression that the tribal people want to hang on to their traditional life style and that they are very much immune to changes. However, this is far from reality. The Baigas for example have been forced to give up shifting cultivation without being proper economic alternatives acceptable to them. Neither were they trained in the technology of plough cultivation nor were they apprised of the fact that shifting cultivation would not be able to support their growing population. If proper alternatives are offered and people understand them, realizing their efficacy there will be no reason for them to cling to their anachronistic ideology. (pp. 54-55)

Tribespersons who have come in contact with the outside world have aspirations pertaining to their education, health and employment very similar the middle class and upper middle class strata of the society. The process of modernization and globalization have brought a vision of a modern affluent life to their door steps. Because of their migration to different areas, making use of locally available opportunities, tribespersons have become internally differentiated. Having come in contact with the local population, many of the tribespersons have picked up the cultural trades of the local communities. In

this process, they have also lost many of their customs and practices. Thus, tradition does not bind them; what really binds them is the 'vision of good life'. (55-56)

But locally some tribespersons may attempt to revive some of their cultural and traditional practices which may not be detrimental to their acceptance of a modern life. For example, the Rebari Council expects their members to attend their meetings in their traditional costumes. However, they also expect them to educate their child, stop selling their women, take their sick to the dispensaries rather than to the local healer, observe the norms of physical cleanliness etc. The Rebaris want to progress, they are far from being conservative.

Thus, the tribes, Srivastava (2006) opines, are now internally differentiated, passing through different stages of acculturation and trans-acculturations. Therefore, it would be difficult to define them in purely cultural terms. Today, tribe is a cultural artifact to negotiate with the state its vision of good life.

The tribes, women and people of various down ridden so called lower caste have long been subjugated, and isolated from the main stream. It has of course to be admitted that there have been various measures taken by the government to rectify this mistake and bring the under privileged section of society into the main stream, there still remain a lot to be done in terms of giving it a social legitimacy towards equity of various castes and creed. Recent history is filled with instances where the downtrodden and socially marginalised forces have been given platform and sphere to voice their views, there still remains a lot that can be done as far as ground reality is concerned.

The perception of Jawaharlal Nehru in this regard totally advocated the holistic maintenance of characteristics typical to the tribal society. In this regard the first principle he enunciated was: 'people should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them.' during his visit in the 1950s to Bastar, which a predominantly a tribal area the tribal people were made to shun their traditional attire and come out in white saris and dhotis to greet him. This infuriated him so much that the local Congress leader was instructed to never attempt to interfere and influence the tribal way of life in any way. The Nehruvian policy on the indigenous communities in general and tribal populations in particular always sought to be based on and guided by this principle of his.

*Adivasiis* an umbrella term which describes a divergent set of ethnic and tribal groups who claim to be the aboriginal population of India. The so-called tea-tribes are in

principle brought in by the colonial British planters by the Chotanagpur plateau region. The tea-tribes basically being labourers live in villages inside tea estates. These estates are primarily located in interior and remote places, thereby rendering them vulnerable to backwardness and exploitation by tea planters.

The scheduled tribe groups were identified as more isolated from the wider community and who maintain a distinctive cultural identity have been categorised as “particularly vulnerable groups by the government at the centre. These hunting, food gathering and some agricultural communities have been identified as tribal groups requiring special programmes aimed at their sustainable development.

### **DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF TRIBES IN INDIA**

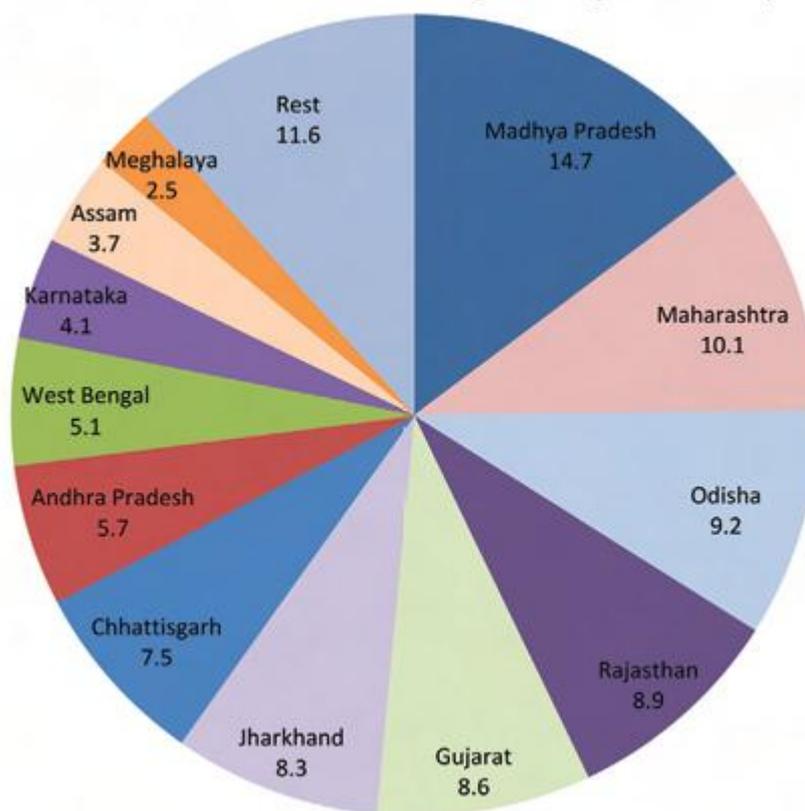
The tribal population of the country, as per 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribal’s from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the entire population. The sex ratio for the overall population is 940 females per 1000 males and that of Scheduled Tribes 990 females per thousand males. The trend in ST population since Census 1961 is illustrated in Table 3.2 from 30.1 million in 1961, the ST population has increased to 104.3 million in 2011 (see Table 3.2).

Sex Ratio (number of Females per 1000 Males) is an important population characteristic that highlights the social attention provided to women. Though the sex ratio has been a matter of great concern for all population, the same has been good in case of tribal population. From Census 2001 to Census 2011 there has been an increase from 978 to 990 females per 1000 males. The State-wise Sex-Ratio among Scheduled Tribes by residence is compared for Census 2001 and 2011 in the below table. It is found that the Child sex ratio (CSR), population 0-6 age group of the total general and Scheduled Tribes population has been declining since Census 1991, 2001 and Census 2011. The CSR of the Scheduled Tribes is 957 in Census 2011. The State-wise CSR is also illustrated in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.1: Scheduled Tribe Population Census – 2011**

State	Population	Male	Female	Child (0-6)	Literacy	Sex Ratio
India	104,545,716	52,547,215	51,998,501	16.01%	58.95%	990
Madhya Pradesh	15,316,784	7,719,404	7,597,380	18.46%	50.55%	984
Orissa	9,590,756	4,727,732	4,863,024	15.86%	52.24%	1029
Maharashtra	10,510,213	5,315,025	5,195,188	14.78%	65.73%	977
Rajasthan	9,238,534	4,742,943	4,495,591	18.40%	52.80%	948
Chattishgarh	7,822,902	3,873,191	3,949,711	15.33%	59.09%	1020
Gujarat	8,917,174	4,501,389	4,415,785	15.85%	62.48%	981
Jharkhand	8,645,042	4,315,407	4,329,635	16.97%	57.13%	1003
Andhra Pradesh	5,918,073	2,969,362	2,948,711	13.03%	49.21%	993
West Bengal	5,296,953	2,649,974	2,646,979	13.17%	57.93%	999
Karnataka	4,248,987	2,134,754	2,114,233	13.19%	62.08%	990
Assam	3,884,371	1,957,005	1,927,366	14.12%	72.06%	985
Meghalaya	2,555,861	1,269,728	1,286,133	19.86%	74.53%	1013
Nagaland	1,710,973	866,027	844,946	14.86%	80.04%	976
Jammu & Kashmir	1,493,299	776,257	717,042	20.30%	50.56%	924
Tripura	1,166,813	588,327	578,486	15.03%	76.05%	983
Bihar	1,336,573	682,516	654,057	18.70%	51.08%	958
Manipur	1,167,422	588,279	579,143	13.21%	72.58%	984
Mizoram	1,036,115	516,294	519,821	15.50%	91.51%	1007
Tamil Nadu	794,697	401,068	393,629	13.08%	54.34%	981
Uttar Pradesh	1,134,273	581,083	553,190	18.21%	55.68%	952
Arunachal Pradesh	951,821	468,390	483,431	15.86%	64.58%	1032
Kerala	484,839	238,203	246,636	11.23%	75.81%	1035
Himachal Pradesh	392,126	196,118	196,008	12.22%	73.64%	999
Uttarakhand	29,903	148,669	143,234	11.84%	73.88%	963
Sikkim	206,360	105,261	101,099	10.62%	79.74%	960
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	178,564	88,844	89,720	16.01%	61.85%	1010
Goa	149,275	72,948	76,327	9.99%	79.14%	1046
Lakshadweep	61,120	30,515	30,605	11.54%	91.70%	1003
Andaman & NI	28,530	14,731	13,799	13.47%	75.58%	937
Daman & Diu	15,363	7,771	7,592	11.54%	78.79%	977

**G1.2: Distribution of Scheduled Tribe Population by States - 2011 (In %)**



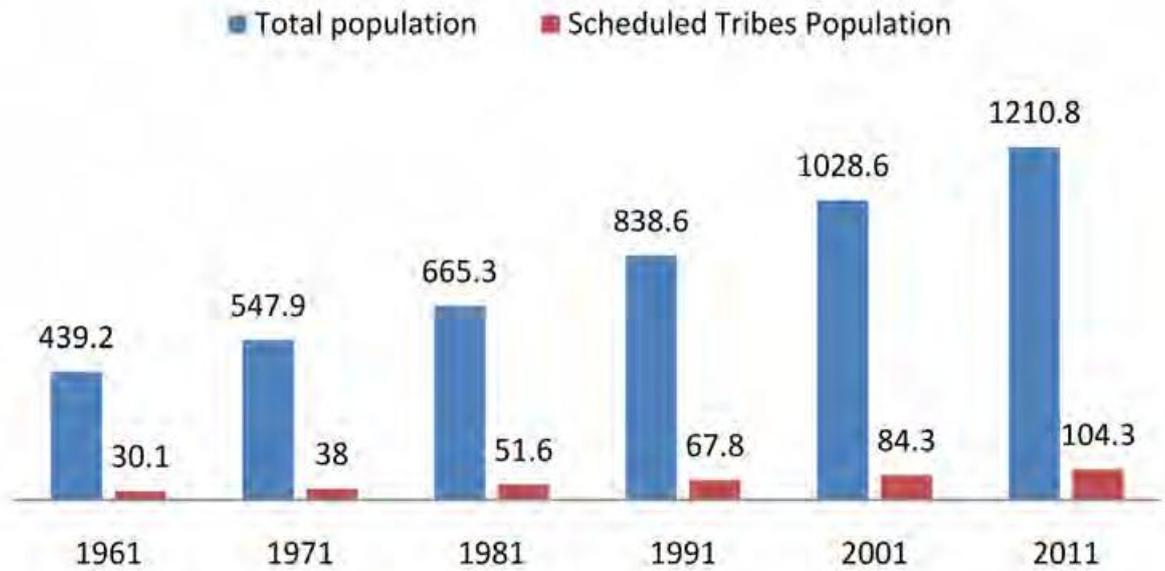
**Table 3.2: Trends in population of Scheduled Tribe Population**

Census year	Total Population (in million)	Scheduled Tribe Population (in million)	Proportion of STs population
1961	439.2	30.1	<b>6.9</b>
1971	547.9	38.0	<b>6.9</b>
1981#	665.3	51.6	<b>7.8</b>
1991@	838.6	67.8	<b>8.1</b>
2001\$	1028.6	84.3	<b>8.2</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>1210.8</b>	<b>104.3</b>	<b>8.6</b>

Note: # Excludes Assam in 1981 @ Excludes Jammu & Kashmir in 1991 \$ The figures exclude Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur, census 2001.

The trend in ST population since Census 1961 is illustrated in Table (3.2). From 30.1 million in 1961, the Scheduled tribe population has risen to 104.3 million in 2011.

### G1.1: Trends in Scheduled Tribe population (Million)



**Table 3.3: State-wise Distribution of Tribal Population (in percentage) and Sex-Ratio**

State/Union Territory	Percentage of tribal pop. To total pop.	Sex Ratio
West Bengal	5.49	982
Jharkand	26.3	987
Jammu Kashmir	10.9	910
Himachal Pradesh	4.02	996
Uttar Pradesh	0.65	934
Rajasthan	12.56	944
Bihar	0.91	929
Sikkim	20.59	957
Arunachal Pradesh	64.2	1003
Nagaland	89.15	943
Uttaranchal	3.02	950
Manipur	34.2	980
Mizoram	94.5	984
Tripura	31.1	970
Meghalaya	85.9	1000
Assam	12.4	972
Orissa	22.1	1003
Chhattisgarh	31.8	1013
Madhya Pradesh	20.3	975
Gujarat	14.8	974

State/Union Territory	Percentage of tribal pop. To total pop.	Sex Ratio
Daman & Diu	8.85	947
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	62.2	1028
Maharashtra	8.85	973
Andhra Pradesh	6.59	972
Karnataka	6.55	972
Goa	0.04	893
Lakshadweep	94.5	1003
Kerala	11.4	1021
Tamil Nadu	1.04	980
Andaman & Nicobar Island	8.27	948

Source: Census of India, 2011

It can be seen from the above table that more than two-thirds of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated only in the seven States of the country, viz. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh. There is no ST population in three States i.e. Delhi, Punjab and Haryana and two Union Territories i.e. Puducherry and Chandigarh as no Scheduled Tribe is notified. Among States, Mizoram has the highest proportion of Scheduled Tribes (94.43) and Uttar Pradesh has the lowest proportion of Scheduled Tribes (0.57). (see Table 3.3). 17 States and 2 Union Territories has higher percentage of Scheduled Tribe population than country's average of 8.6%.

**Table 3.4: Tribes with more than 5 lakh of Population as per Census 2011**

Sl. No	Tribal name	Population	State of Habitation
1	<b>BHIL</b>	12689952	Tripura , Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra , Karnataka
2	<b>GOND</b>	10859422	Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand , Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka
3.	<b>SANTAL</b>	5838016	Bihar , Tripura , West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand
4	<b>MINA</b>	3800002	Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh
5	<b>NAIKDA etc.</b>	3344954	Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Daman & Diu , Dadra & Nagar Haveli , Maharashtra , Goa
6	<b>ORAON</b>	3142145	Bihar , West Bengal, Jharkhand , Orissa , Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh , Maharashtra
7	<b>SUGALIS</b>	2077947	Andhra Pradesh

<b>Sl. No</b>	<b>Tribal name</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>State of Habitation</b>
8	<b>MUNDA</b>	1918218	Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh , Tripura, Orissa
9	<b>NAGA etc.</b>	1820965	Nagaland
10	<b>KHOND</b>	1397384	Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa
11	<b>BORO etc.</b>	1352771	Assam
12	<b>KOLI MAHADEV</b>	1227562	Maharashtra
13	<b>KHASI etc.</b>	1138356	Mizoram , Meghalaya, Assam
14	<b>KOL</b>	991400	Orissa , Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh , Maharashtra
15	<b>VARLI</b>	974916	Gujarat, Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli , Maharashtra, Karnataka , Goa
16	<b>KOKNA</b>	926763	Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra , Karnataka
17	<b>KAWAR</b>	812770	Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh , Maharashtra
18	<b>HO</b>	806921	Bihar , West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa
19	<b>GUJJAR</b>	799344	Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh
20	<b>KORKU etc.</b>	774196	Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
21	<b>BHUMIJ</b>	765909	West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa
22	<b>GARO</b>	725502	Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Assam, West Bengal, Tripura
23	<b>KOYA</b>	692435	Orissa , Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka
24	<b>ANY MIZO (LUSHAI) TRIBES etc.</b>	667764	Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Assam
25	<b>HALBA etc.</b>	639094	Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
26	<b>DHARUA</b>	630469	Gujarat , Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa
27	<b>DUBLA etc.</b>	627599	Gujarat , Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Maharashtra , Goa
28	<b>MISING/MIRI</b>	587310	Assam , Arunachal Pradesh
29	<b>TRIPURI etc.</b>	543848	Tripura
30	<b>RATHAWA</b>	536135	Gujarat , Maharashtra, Karnataka
31	<b>SAHARIA etc.</b>	527015	Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh , Rajasthan

Source: Census of India, 2011

The above table (3.4) shows the lists of the Tribes with more than 5 lakh of population and their usual place of habitation (States) as per Census 2011. The table illustrates that the population of Bhil tribe is most followed by Gond and Santhalis.

The whole issue of tribal situation in India can be viewed from another very important as well as sensitive perspective: issues relating to exclusion from the main stream social structure. So far as the concept of 'main –stream' is concerned, one may not be fully wrong to suggest that such a concept is bound to create confusion as to what constitute the 'main-stream' elements. In a society which is marked by diversity and differences, such a formula is bound to be a mismatch. If the notion of main-stream concept is given importance, it may suggest that the very basis of diversity may be at stake.

During pre-independence period such a concept helped the foreign imperialist power to keep the country divided socially and continue their hegemony. This main-stream concept brought with it two important issues: 1. problem of assimilation and 2. Problems of exclusion. If one goes by the first one, it will mean that all streams of social formation will be submerged, losing their own identity. This may lead to what is known as identity crisis. Such a crisis is dangerous in the sense that it may lead to social disintegration. On the other hand, if a section of the society feels that it has been socially excluded, it may lead to indifference and a sense of non-participation in the social process. In both the cases, results are bound to be destructive in nature.

A brief reference to the circumstances in the post-independent period will show that at the dawn of the independence, the Indian society was fragmented, economy was shattered and political institution making process was very weak. The state was in its infancy and it was almost unable to provide leadership in the field of political cohesion. Society was exposed to social tension and communal riots were almost visible everywhere. So far as economy was concerned it was totally shattered as the Britishers had simply exploited the economy over about two centuries. In such a situation, it was quite natural for the makers of modern India to take up issues of nation-building and state-building. They could realize that the first and foremost thing that was needed was to place the Indian society on a solid foundation so that every segment of the society can feel that it is an integral part of the whole. In other words a sense of social inclusion, although not explicitly mentioned, guided the policy makers at that time. The result was an elaborate arrangement in the Constitution for the protection of all sections of the society. Even during the British-rule,

the Indian Statutory Commission (Simon-Commission), observed that the responsibility of the tribal tracts should be entrusted to the Centre. In its opinion, the reasons for such actions were:

1. The simple tribal communities needed protection from economic subjugation of their neighbours, freedom to pursue their traditional methods of livelihood and follow their ancestral customs and traditions.
2. It was the responsibility of the administration to assist the people suitably so as to enable them to manage their affairs in the changing situation. This vital task could not be left to the initiative of individuals or missionary societies.
3. The provincial governments could not be in a position to spare the funds required for achieving the above objectives from their revenues. It is interesting to note that the Simon Commission suggested that these tracts can be classified into, two categories, namely 'excluded and partially excluded areas.' Even in the Government of India Act (1935), made provisions for extensive powers of the Governments this can be summarized as follows:

1. No Act of the federal legislature or provincial legislature could apply to those areas except on the direction of the governor who was empowered to make such exceptions and modifications as he considered necessary.

2. The governor could make resolution for peace and good governance of the said areas. However, such regulations required ascent of the Governor General before they could come into effect.

**Table 3.5: Distribution of ST Population in the Country**

Sl. No.	Percentage of ST Population	No. of Districts/Villages
1.	Nil	-
2.	Less than 1%	173 Districts
3.	Between 1 to 5%	106 District
4.	Between 5 to 20%	124 District
5.	Between 21 to 35%	42 Districts
6.	Between 36 to 50%	23 Districts
7.	<b>50% and above</b>	<b>75 Districts</b>
8.	<b>30% or more</b>	<b>1,14,766 villages</b>
9.	<b>Exactly 100% saturation</b>	<b>20,597 villages</b>

Source: Census of India, 2011

The Constitutional frame adopted in India after independence has paid adequate attention to this aspect of tribal population. Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the Constitution make elaborate arrangement for the protection and well-being of the tribal population. The Fifth Schedule under Article 244 (A) begins with the title which is sufficient to indicate the Constitutional requirement. It is titled as Provisions as to the Administration and Control of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Article has been divided into two parts: Part A deals with the general features and Part B is concerned with 'Administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes.' The Article makes provision for Tribes Advisory Council whose duty is 'to advice on such matters pertaining to the welfare and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes in the State.'

In the same Scheduled, while Part C deals with Scheduled Areas, Part D specifies Amendment of the Schedule itself. It is important to note that in Part C dealing with Scheduled Areas, the Constitution has vested enormous powers in the hands of the President of India for the protection, enlargement or any other matter relating to Scheduled Areas. Following the Fifth Schedule, the Sixth Schedule under Article 244 (2) and 275 (1) makes detailed out lay relating to the provisions as to the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Viewed from this perspective, it has been observed that tribal affairs have been accepted as a national task above party or political considerations. These are to be the exclusive concern of the Government which has been empowered to handle the affairs because of the knowledge, understanding and experience of its members gained through their inter-actions with the people at large. The scheme under Fifth Schedule provided a detailed frame for this purpose. It has made fundamental rights contained in Article 15, 16 and 19. The frame would obviously share the benefit of the Preamble and the Provisions of the fundamental rights and the Directive Principles of the state policy which serve as the firm 'foundation' and the 'moving – spirit' of the national development process.

That the issues of tribal development in India has a special significance can be understood from a number of suggestion made by different scholars for an over all improvement of the position of the tribal population. One such suggestion demands the effective use of the Fifth Schedule. It has been observed that the tribals govern by the Sixth Schedule have done better than those governed by the Fifth Schedule. Secondly, it has been suggested that the tribal should have full control over natural resources such as land, water and

forest. It has further been observed that greater involvement of voluntary organizations in tribal development is a necessity because only governmental initiatives cannot be considered to be sufficient for the all-round development of the tribal population.

### STATUS OF EDUCATION AMONG SCHEDULED TRIBES

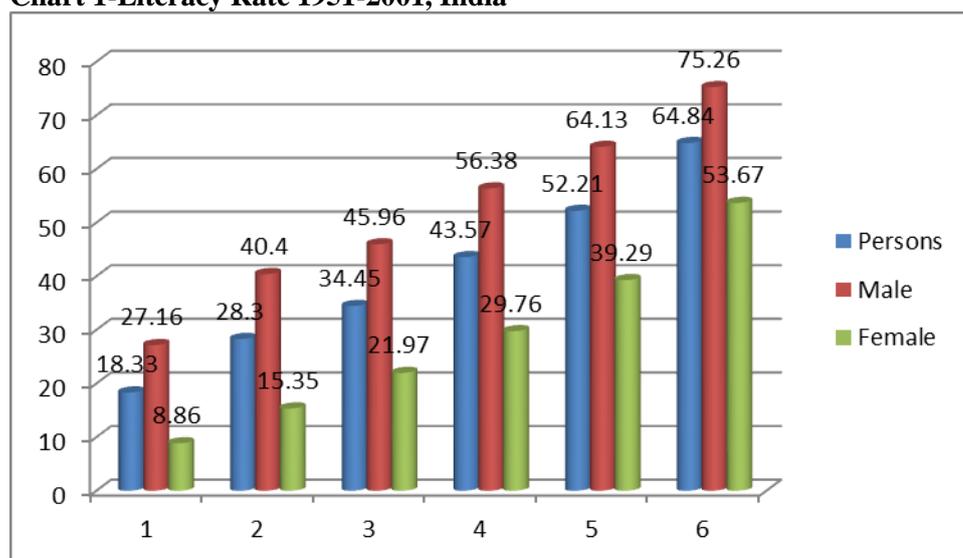
Literacy rate is defined as percentage of literates among the population aged seven years and above. Although literacy levels of STs have improved, the gap in literacy levels, both for tribal men and women has not declined significantly. In fact the gap increased between 1971 to 1991, falling thereafter, to a little above the 1971 level. The table below illustrates a comparison between the literacy rates of the total population and the STs, from Census 1961 to Census 2011.

**Table 3.6: Literacy Rate 1951-2001, India**

Census Year	Persons	Male	Female
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67

Source: Census of India (1951-2001)

**Chart 1-Literacy Rate 1951-2001, India**



Literacy Scenario in India (as per 2001 Census) – literacy in India has made remarkable strides since independence. This has been further confirmed by the results of the Census

2001. The literacy rate has increased from 18.33% in 1951 to 64.84% in 2001. For male it was 27.16% in 1951 and for female it was 8.86% which increased to 75.26% for male and 53.67% for females in 2001 census year. This is despite the fact that during the major part of the last five decades there has been exponential growth of the population at nearly 2% per annum. (see Table 3.6).

**Table 3.7: Comparative Literacy Rates of STs and Total Population (in per cent)**

<b>Category/ Census Year</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>
Total Population	28.3	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	<b>72.99</b>
Scheduled Tribes	8.53	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	<b>58.96</b>
<b>Gap</b>	<b>19.77</b>	<b>23.15</b>	<b>27.22</b>	<b>22.61</b>	<b>17.74</b>	<b>14.03</b>

Source: Census of India

For the Scheduled Tribe Population in India, the Literacy Rate increased from 8.53 percent in 1961 to 58.96 percent in 2011 for STs while the corresponding increase of the total population was from 28.30 percent in 1961 to 72.99 percent in 2011 (see Table 3.7). Literacy rate increased by 11.86 percentage points from 2001 to 2011 for STs and 8.15 percentage point for total population during the same period. LR has however, all along been lower both for males and females STs as compared to Total Population (Table 3.7). Male - female gap in literacy rate decreased from 24.41 percentage points in 2001 to 19.18 percentage points in 2011 for STs and for the total population, it declined from 21.59 percentage points in 2001 to 16.25 percentage points in 2011. For SCs, this gap decreased from 24.74 in 2001 to 18.71 in 2011. (see chart 3.1)

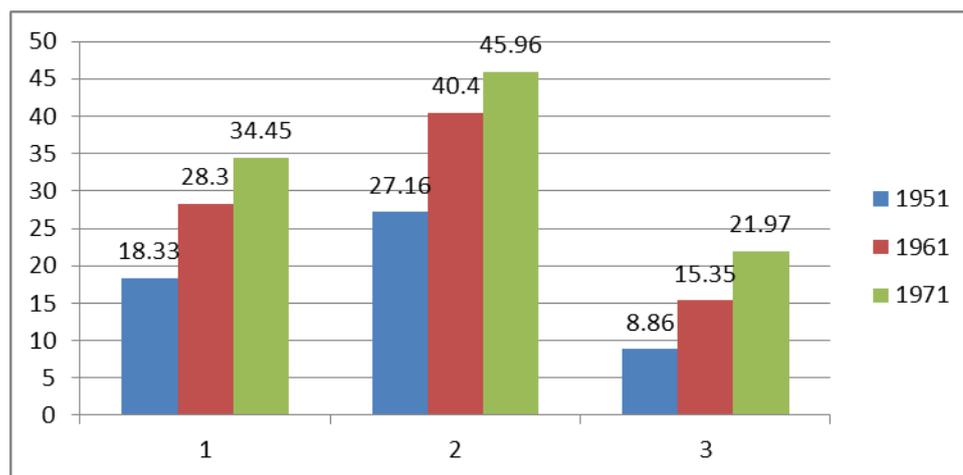
**Table 3.8: Scheduled Tribes Literates and Illiterates by Sex**

	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Literates	18,503	11,686	6,817
Illiterates	35,151	15,212	19,939
Literaty Rate	42.1	53.0	31.1
Graduate	215	132	83

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Table 3.9: Female Literacy of STs and General Population (1971-2001)**

Category	1971	1991	2001
All communities	18.69	39.2	53.7
STs	4.85	18.2	34.8
Gap between STs and all communities	<b>13.84</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>18.9</b>

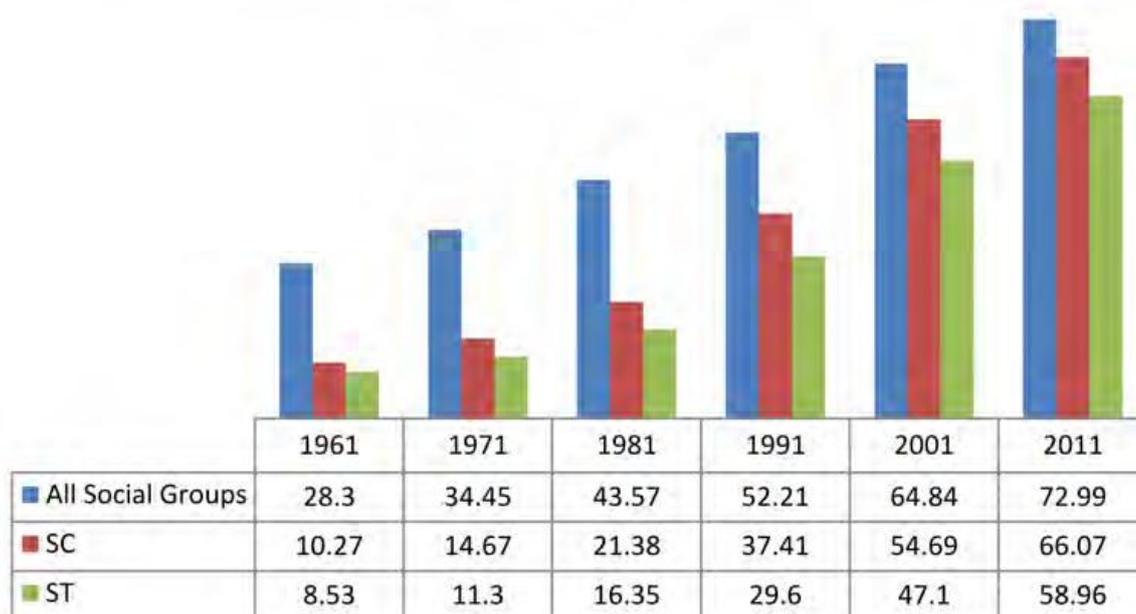
**Chart 2- Female Literacy of STs and General Population (1971-2001)****Table 3.10: States having ST literacy rates less than country's average for STs**

Sl. No.	State/UT	Literacy Rate
1	India	58.96
2	Andhra Pradesh	49.2
3	Madhya Pradesh	50.6
4	Jammu & Kashmir	50.6
5	Bihar	51.1
6	Orissa	52.2
7	Rajasthan	52.8
8	Tamil Nadu	54.3
9	Uttar Pradesh	55.7
10	Jharkhand	57.1
11	West Bengal	57.9

Source: Census of India, 2011

Among states, Mizoram and Lakshadweep have highest LR for STs, while the lowest LR was observed in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. (Table 3.10). Gap in LR was highest in Tamil Nadu in 1991 and in 2001 and decreased only marginally (6.1 points) in 2011. (Table 3.10). Ten states having Literacy Rates less than country's average (58.96 %) for ST population in Census 2011 are indicated in table above (Table 3.10).

**G2.1: Comparative Literacy Rate of All Social Groups, SC and ST Population (1961-2011)**



**Table 3.11: Enrolment and Ratios (2001-2002)**

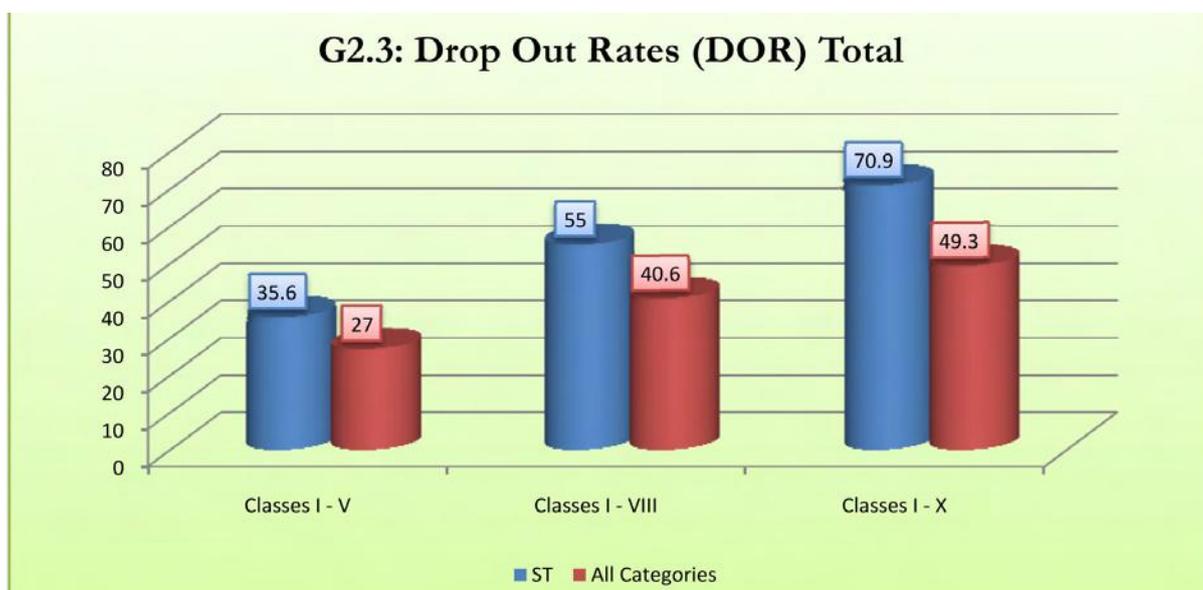
<b>Classes I-V</b>			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>GAP</b>
Total	95.4	98.7	<b>-3.3</b>
Boys	97.5	104.8	<b>+7.3</b>
Girls	93.1	92.3	<b>-0.8</b>
<b>Classes VI-VIII</b>			
Total	61.0	48.2	<b>-12.8</b>
Boys	65.3	55.0	<b>-10.3</b>
Girls	56.2	40.8	<b>-15.4</b>
<b>Drop-out Ratio (Classes I-VIII)</b>			
Total	52.8	68.7	<b>+15.9</b>
Boys	52.3	66.9	<b>+14.6</b>
Girls	53.5	71.2	<b>+17.7</b>

Source: Census of India, 2001-2002

**Table 3.12: Dropout Rate of Tribal Boys and Girls**

Drop Out Rates (DoR) (in percent)							
Class	Boys		Girls		Total		
	ST	All	ST	All	ST	All	Gap
Classes I – V	37.2	28.7	33.9	25.1	35.6	27	8.6
Classes I – VIII	54.7	40.3	55.4	41	55	40.6	14.4
Classes I – X	70.6	50.4	71.3	47.9	70.9	49.3	21.6

Source: Statistics Of School Education 2010-2011



**Table 3.13: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) - Total**

Classes	ST	All Categories
Classes I - V (6 - 10 Years)	137	116
Classes VI - VIII (11 - 13 Years)	88.9	85.5
Classes I - VIII (6 - 13 Years)	119.7	104.3
Classes IX - X (14 - 15 Years)	53.3	65
Classes I - X (6 - 15 Years)	106.8	96.2
Classes XI - XII (16 - 17 Years)	28.8	39.3
Classes IX - XII (14 - 17 Years)	41.5	52.1
Classes I - XII (6 - 17 Years)	94.8	86.5

Source: Statistics Of School Education 2010-2011

**Reasons for Dropping Out:**

The main reasons for the girls non-enrolment and dropping out from schools are social, economic and cultural. The government of India prepared a country Report in 1995 in which the following reasons are mentioned:

- 1) Boys are given preference over girls in education due to gender discrimination. This disparity is particularly marked in rural area and in urban when opportunity costs are high.
- 2) Girls are made to help in domestic activities earlier than boys. They are expected to look after the younger siblings, collect firewood or fuel and fodder, fetch water etc. in order to free the mother for productive activities they are also needed to shoulder domestic responsibilities.
- 3) When girls attain puberty fear for their safety bolt on the family name and conservative cultural norms make parents withdraw them from schools.
- 4) Early marriage ends schooling.
- 5) Parents are reluctant to spend on the education of their daughters because they will anyway be spending on her dowry.

The census data on literacy suggest that although there has been a steady increase in literacy rate, among tribes the gap in literacy rate between the STs, SCs, and 'others' has actually widened over the years. The gap in literacy rate between the STs Female and others females in 1961 was 13.43% but in 1991 the gap increased to 26.77 per cent. Similarly the gender gap among the STs has also increased over the years. Thus in 1961 among the tribes the gap was 5.38 but in 1991 the gap increased to 11.41 per cent.

**Table 3.14: Literacy for SCs and STs and Others**

Year		SC	ST	OTHERS
1961	TOTAL	10.27	8.54	27.86
	FEMALE	3.24	3.16	16.59
1971	TOTAL	14.67	11.30	33.80
	FEMALE	6.49	4.84	17.11
1981	TOTAL	21.38	16.35	41.22
	FEMALE	10.92	8.04	29.51
1991	TOTAL	37.41	29.60	57.40
	FEMALE	23.76	18.19	44.96
2001	TOTAL	-	47.10	65
	FEMALE	-	34.75	54

Source: Census Reports.

It may not be wise to suggest that all the tribal movements in the country are either anti-developmental or anti-national. Such a statement might fail to take into account the roots of such movement. Historically tribal population is closely linked up with land as the main source of livelihood. Any attempt to evict these people from land may create a sense of alienation. This may be the cause behind any movement either for forest protection or protest against displacement from the actual place of residence. In most of the cases the feeling of self-determination means the control of the local people over natural resources. It has been very correctly observed that the autonomy of the tribal demands is precisely around their life support system. Any attempt at disturbing this system may threaten their economy hold. What is generally seen is a process where vested interest stand in a way and influence the policy-makers to justify the non-recognition of tribal autonomy.

A peculiar conflictual situation arises from the conflict between the vested interest and tribal demand for autonomy. In most of the cases, the tribals themselves concentrate on autonomy by which they mean control over local economy and over their political life. In other words it is a conflict between localism vs. nationalism and if one accepts such a preposition, one might commit a mistake because in the ultimate analysis there cannot be any such conflict between these two because the whole process seeks to end in a total development. Moreover, such an artificial construction may clash with cultural tradition, economy, religious beliefs and techniques of production. It is very often said that the tribal social system is so unique in nature that they cannot be accommodated within the main-stream society. Such an idea emanates from the belief that main-stream social system is not only closed but also non accommodative in character. This is a wrong idea because integration cannot be seen as assimilation or absorption. Such an interpretation can create a situation not only of disbelief but disintegration.

There is a section of opinion which holds that the intervention of the formal legal system can solve such problems. But formal legal intervention has its own limitations. It can prescribe norms or even make arrangements for the implementations of such norms but it cannot make the society ready to accept such methods. This is a dilemma which provides social unrest, agitation, protest and a sense of deprivation leading to alienation.

Again it is held that the poverty stricken tribal population can be given relief through poverty alleviation programme by the state. The close identity between their communities and the natural resources needs to be re-established in some form since tribal identity as a group is closely linked to these natural resources. It is very correct to suggest that they have either lost their identity or are in the process of losing it because of the loss of control over the natural resources. In a world, such a vicious circle will ultimately destroy the very foundation of the society.

The whole issue relating to the state of tribal population in India can be examined from a broader perspective of national integration. Before going into the issue it should be stated at the outset that the process of transition of a multi-ethnic or plural society is always a very complex one. India has been experiencing such a segment of pluralism on social front right from the beginning. That has made the situation more complicated where national integration becomes a serious problem in the phase of casteism, communalism, linguism and regionalism. There is a section of opinion which tries to situate tribalism as a social force in this scheme. It has been very correctly observed, 'by and large the Indian tribes are on assimilationist society in as much as both the tribals and non-tribals accept the idea of assimilation of the former into the wider Indian community'. (Doshi: 462-76). Therefore national integration, its success or failure 'ought to be conceptualized and understood with a closer analysis of the social and political history of India.' (Ibid)

Again the issue relating to tribal population, their assertion and aspiration should be viewed as a long chain of socio-economic and political exploitations. The central problem of national integration in a new nation is precisely due to the conflict between primordiality (affiliation to tribal) and modernity. This is a situation where an individual considers himself to be very much rooted in traditionality while at the same time he becomes an integral part of the process of modernization. This becomes a paradoxical situation where it generates a conflictual situation for the individual. If he prefers to be within the primordial limits, he fails to adjust himself with the new social situation which is the result of modernizing process.

The post-independent tribal policy in India has been essentially an extension of the policy adopted by the British. It was a policy based on protectionism. There had been two views:

one for bringing the tribal community within the main-stream of social process and the other to keep the tribal population within the bounds of their own social set-up.

Right from independence till today various efforts have been made for the upliftment of the conditions of the tribal people in India. It may be recalled that Pandit Nehru, as a first Prime Minister of independent India had played a key role in the making and implementation of planning for various programmes relating to tribal development. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of modern India, took keen interest in the development of the hitherto deprived tribal communities in order to integrate them into the National mainstream. He outlined India's approach to tribal development in his foreword to Verrier Elwin's A Philosophy of NEFA in 1958. He wrote: 'Development in various ways has to be such as communication, medical facilities, education and better agriculture. These avenues of development should, however, be pursued within the broad framework of the following five fundamental principles:

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture;
2. The tribal rights in land and forest should be respected;
3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially, in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory;
4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes we should rather work through, and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions; and,
5. We should judge results, not by statistics of the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.'

Scanning the Nehruvian Panchsheel of Tribal Development one can see that he was largely in favour of (a) continuation of the British policy of 'seclusion and partial seclusion' of the tribal areas, (b) upholding their rights to land and forest and to their traditional art and culture, (c) avoidance of over-administration and promotion of self-rule through capacity building, and (d) improvement of quality of life. Although such

prescriptions were primarily for the North-East India, the scope of the *Panchsheel* was logically extended to other areas of tribal concentration as well.

Pandit Nehru elaborated his perception of tribal development on a number of occasions, and also spoke on the caution needed in developing the tribal areas. Pointing to the disastrous effect of the 'so called European civilization' on tribal people in other parts of the world, putting to an end, their arts and crafts and their simple way of living, he declared that 'now to some extent, there is danger of the so called Indian civilization having this disastrous effect if we do not check and apply it in a proper way'.

Nehru's adviser on tribal affairs Verrier Elwin elaborated Nehruvian idea further. Elwin argued that in order to ensure tribal development it is essential that we 'get on with the job of ensuring that the tribal people have the same opportunities and the same freedoms that we enjoy ourselves'.(pp.35-36)

Elaborating the need for establishing an effective communication and mutual trust between the tribes and the outside world Elwin wrote:

'The first and most important thing is to make these areas accessible. Unless we can bring the tribal people into real touch with India as a whole, they are likely to remain suspicious of our intentions and unwilling to co-operate. We may give them hospitals and schools, co-operative societies and artificial insemination, veterinary centres, but they will, obviously, be useless if the tribal people do not come to them.' (pp. 37).

Elwin further said:

'The integration of the tribals with the non-tribal people of the plains is of fundamental importance, and to ensure this, the non-tribals need education as much as the tribals themselves'. (pp. 35).

In order to strike an effective understanding and mutual trust the non-tribal population, the dominant, the latter have to make an effort to understand the tribal people and the riddles of tribal life. An understanding of tribal culture and attitudes would enable the non-tribals and the functionaries engaged in the implementation of various tribal welfare schemes. An effective and spontaneous participation of the tribal population in the planning and development process would also help establishing the much needed communication with the outside world. It was in Elwin's prescription that the administrators and the outsiders coming in contact with the tribals should not treat the

latter as subjects to be dominated and exploited; rather they should treat them as equals and free of all stereotypes and stigma, free of ‘superior-inferior’ kind of complex.

A look into the successive five year plan will suggest that right from the beginning issues like communication, health, irrigation, education, supply of drinking water were given preference for the development of tribal areas. In the second plan, special multi-purpose tribal blocks were established for an integrated development of tribal people. In the third plan emphasis were placed on the working of different tribal blocks for meeting specific problems of tribal people. The same process continued since then where the main focus was on tribal welfare.

**Table 3.15: Plan Allocations for Tribal Development (1969-2002)**

Plan Period	Total outlay	Outlay for Tribal Affairs	% (col3 to 2)
Fourth Plan (1969-74)	15902	78.85	0.5
Fifth Plan (1974-79)	38853	1157.67	3.0
Sixth plan (1980-85)	97500	3640	3.7
Seventh Plan (1985-90)	180000	6745*	3.8
Eighth Plan (1992-97)	434100	22410*	5.2
Ninth Plan (1997-2002)	859200	32087*	3.7

\*Includes flow of TSP (Central + State), SCA to TSP and GIA under Article 275 (1).

Source: Planning Commission

But the main problem relating to tribal development centres around the issue of implementing these developmental programmes. It has been observed by many that due to lack of commitment on the part of the policy implementing agencies, no substantial progress has been made. As a result of this a feeling of discontent appears to have arising in some quarters of tribal population. In a good number of research works it has been suggested that even within the tribal communities, a new elite class has emerged who very often establish connections with political decision makers for extracting benefits from them. In fact this is an area where politics dominates over the process of developmental activities.

The whole issue of tribal situation in India can be viewed from three important perspective: language perspective, displacement and alienation perspective and national integration perspective. So far as language issue is concerned, the imposition of the

dominant language over other languages by the tribals creates a feeling of resistance and non-acceptance. This has happened in many parts of the country, more particularly in the North-Eastern region. In Orissa also, the tribal people have attached primary importance to the promotion of language and literature of their own and a good number of tribal associations have been formed for the protection of such language.

Another important area which creates discontent and dissatisfaction among the tribal population is the issue of development and its consequence, displacement and its consequence, displacement. This is a problematic area and a good number of studies have shown that in many parts of the country there are instances of resistance because development, in many cases leads to displacement of the local people. More over, there are issue like ecological balance which the local people maintain in their own ways. For the purpose of solving their problem a general as well as specific development policies should be adopted which will take into account issues like development, displacement and rehabilitation. It should be noted that development involves a process of participation by the people of whom development is meant. In any conflictual situation, the ultimate goal of development may find a secondary place which means no development at all.

A third dimension of national integration involves greater association of the tribal people in the development measures. Here besides governmental efforts, non-governmental and voluntary associations can do a lot. In place of development from below as it will broaden the base for people's association both in the policy making and policy implementation process.

This brings one to the issue of political socialization which enables the people of a particular community to consider themselves as essential part of socio-political process. The achievement of this world becomes necessary in case of tribal population sing any isolationistic policy may stand in the way of achieving the national role-national integration on a large scale.

A review of the health, education and income status of the tribal population in the post-independent India appears to be less than encouraging. The contributions of the tribals in India to the modern civilization have not yet been fully appreciated. The cultural heritage of India owes a great deal to the contribution of tribal population.

## CHAPTER IV

### TRIBAL WOMEN POPULATION AND NORTH BENGAL SCENARIO: DEMOGRAPHIC SETTLEMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SETTING- A REGION SPECIFIC ANALYSIS

#### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF NORTH BENGAL TRIBES

Primarily the tribal population in North Bengal comprise of tea garden workers. This large population of tribals owe their origins in North Bengal to the large influx of tribal population brought about by the British, primarily aimed at manning the tea gardens. Diverse tribal communities thereby conglomerated principally into the northern part of West Bengal, predominately as tea garden workers. However, it does goes to suffice that not all tribals residing in North Bengal were brought in as tea garden workers. Quite a majority of the tribes migrated in search for better avenues for livelihood. Not all of these tribal groups got incorporated into the tea industry. They thus had to eke out their own means for sustenance. Many of these tribal groups who migrated from place like Chota Nagpur and Madhya Pradesh have over the course of time managed to sustain themselves based on having a livelihood which is divergent to the tea garden tribal working populace.

The northern part of West Bengal, popularly known as North Bengal, consists of six districts, namely Malda, South Dinajpur, North Dinajpur, Darjeeling Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. The region connects rest of India with the North-East and has a long international border with Bhutan, Tibet, Nepal and Bangladesh. Agriculture, agro-based industries, tea, timber, commerce and tourism constitute the backbone of the region's economy. The region has drawn a large number of tribes from Central India, popularly known as Chotanagpur, and North-East India in different historical periods. The expanding *zamindari* and *rayatwari* estates, the vast fallow lands, and the sprawling tea industries had drawn tribal populations from various parts in various parts of the last century. The tribes of North Bengal are predominantly engaged in agriculture and tea gardens and their economy could largely be termed as subsistence economy. The subsistence economy forces the tribal women into manual work and they predominantly work as agricultural labourers and tea workers.

The maximum population amongst the districts of West Bengal resides in North 24 Paragana (which accounts for 11.04 percentage of the total West Bengal population). South 24 Pargana and Burdwan districts take the next lion's share of the total residential

population of West Bengal i.e. 8.93 and 8.46 respectively. If we see the six districts of North Bengal the most populous districts are Maldah (4.38%) and Jalpaiguri (4.24%). Among the six districts of North Bengal which is less populous amongst all is Dakshin Dinajpur 1.83%. Darjeeling district (which falls under my jurisdiction of studies) accounts for 2.02 percentage of West Bengal population. Another district with which I have dealt with during the course of my study is Jalpaiguri which accounts for 4.24 percentage of the West Bengal population. The subsequent table brings forth the population distribution amongst various districts of West Bengal.(see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 : West Bengal Population and District wise Population 2011**

Sl No.	District	Population 2011	% share in total population of the state 2011
Total	West Bengal	9,13,47,736	100
1.	Burdwan	77,23,663	8.46
2.	Birbhum	35,02,387	3.83
3.	Bankura	35,96,292	3.94
4.	PurbaMedinipur	50,94,238	5.58
5.	PaschimMedinipur	59,43,300	6.51
6.	Hooghly	55,20,389	6.04
7.	Purulia	29,27,965	3.21
8.	North 24 Parganas	1,00,82,852	11.04
9.	South 24Parganas	81,53,176	8.93
10.	Howrah	48,41,638	5.30
11.	Nadia	51,68,488	5.66
12.	Murshidabad	71,02,430	7.78
13.	Darjeeling	18,42,034	2.02
14.	Jalpaiguri	38,69,675	4.24
15.	Coochbehar	28,22,780	3.09
16.	Uttar Dinajpur	30,00,849	3.29
17.	DakshinDinajpur	16,70,931	1.83
18.	Maldah	39,97,970	4.38
19.	Kolkata	44,86,679	4.91

Source: Census of India, 2011

A statistical analysis in context of the wider Indian population has been made in this table which has attempted to break-down the population broadly under the sub-headings of gender predominance, neo-natal percentage, educational and social background. In Indian context the population still at large has a male preponderance, which is reflected in heavily prejudiced percentage towards the male population. Though the state of west Bengal lags behind marginally vis-a-vis the national al literacy percentage, the two districts namely Darjeeling and Jalpiguri which constitute the field of my study can boast

of substantially higher literacy standards when compared with other districts of West Bengal. The gender ratio stacks up quite favourably for the women population, when compared with national and state level statistics. (see table 4.2).

**Table 4.2: Total Population of India, West Bengal and Six districts of North Bengal-2011**

	<b>Population</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Child (0-6)</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Sex Ratio</b>
India	104,545,716	52,547,215	51,998,501	16.01%	58.95%	990
West Bengal	5,296,953	2,649,974	2,646,979	13.17%	57.93%	999
Darjeeling	1,846,823	937,259	900,564	953	79.56	970
Jalpaiguri	3,872,846	1,983,064	1,889,782	955	73.25	953
Cooch behar	2,819,086	1,451,542	1,367,544	953	74.78	970
Uttar Dinajppur	3,007,134	1,551,066	1,456,068	953	59.07	939
DakshinDinajpur	1,676,276	857,199	819,077	957	72.82	956
Malda	3,988,845	2,051,541	1,937,304	944	61.73	950

Source: Census of India, 2011.

In West Bengal, according to 2001 Census, tribal population is more than 44 lakh which increased to 52 lakh in 2011 Census of which 2,649,974 are males and 2,646,979 are females. Percentage of ST population in West Bengal is 5.8. Total tribal population is 5,296,953 of which 4,855,115 lives in rural area whereas 441,838 reside in urban area. Child (0-6) is 13.17% according to 2011 Census and sex – ratio for the same year is 999. Scheduled Tribe literacy rate is 57.93%. the number of households is 1,160,069. The state has registered 15.7 per cent decadal growth of ST population in 1991-2001 and 20.2 per cent in 2001-2011. In North Bengal, the tribal population is more than 14.5 lakh, of which 49.6 per cent are women. Tribal population in six North Bengal districts constitutes 33 per cent of the total tribal population in the State. Among the North Bengal districts tribal population in Cooch Behar is 14246, which is the smallest in a single district, whereas Jalpaiguri has the largest size of tribal population at 64,1688. Tribal population in Cooch Behar constitutes only 0.32 per cent of the total population in the district, but in Jalpaiguri district the percentage share of tribal population to total population is 14.56. Among other districts the percentage share of tribal population to total population is 5.51 in South Dinajpur, 5.15 in Malda, 4.60 in Darjeeling, and 2.84 in North Dinajpur. Sex ratio in the tribal population is much higher compared to that of the total population. According to

2001 census whereas the sex ratio for the total population in West Bengal is 934, for the tribal population it is 982. In the districts where the concentration of tribal population is high, i.e., in Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, South Dinajpur and Malda sex ratio is always more than 980. Whereas the sex ratio for the total population is falling in almost all parts of the country the tribal population in North Bengal do not show any such trend at least in 2001 census (see Tables 1, 2 & 3).

**Table 4.3.- Area, Population, Decennial Growth Rate and Density for 2001 and 2011 at a glance for West Bengal and the Districts of North Bengal**

Sl. No.	District	Area	Population 2001			Population 2011			Decennial growth rate %		Population density per sq km.	
			P	M	F	P	M	F	1991-2001	2001-2011	2001	2011
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	West Bengal	88,752	80176197	41465985	38710212	91347736	46927389	44420347	17.77	13.93	903	1029
1	Darjiling	3,149	1609172	830644	778528	1842034	934796	907238	23.79	14.47	511	585
2	Jalpaiguri	6,227	3401173	1751145	1650028	3869675	1980068	1889607	21.45	13.77	546	621
3	Koch Bihar	3,387	2479155	1272094	1207061	2822780	1453590	1369190	14.19	13.86	732	833
4	Uttar Dinajpur	3,140	2441794	1259737	1182057	3000849	1550219	1450630	28.72	22.90	778	956
5	Dakshin Dinajpur	2,219	1503178	770335	732843	1670931	855104	815827	22.15	11.16	677	753
6	Maldah	3,733	3290468	1689406	1601062	3997970	2061593	1936377	24.78	21.50	881	1071

Source: Census of India, 2001 & 2011.

**Table 4.4: District-wise population growth of North Bengal**

	Population		Male		Female		Population Growth	
	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001
Darjeeling	1846823	1609172	937259	830644	909564	778528	14.77%	23.79%
Jalpaiguri	3872846	3401173	1983064	1751145	1889782	1650028	13.87%	21.45%
Coochbehar	2819086	2479155	1451542	1272094	1367544	1207061	13.71%	14.19%
Uttar Dinajpur	3007134	2441794	1551066	1259737	1456068	1182057	23.15%	28.72%
Dakshin Dinajpur	1676276	1503178	857199	770335	819077	732843	11.52%	22.15%
Maldah	3988845	3290468	2051541	1689406	1937304	1601062	21.22%	24.78%

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Table 4.5: Population Growth of Six Districts of North Bengal**

<b>Population Growth of six districts of North Bengal</b>		
<b>District</b>	<b>2011(%)</b>	<b>2001(%)</b>
Darjeeling	14.77	23.79
Jalpaiguri	13.87	21.45
Cooch behar	13.71	14.19
Uttar Dinajppur	23.15	28.72
DakshinDinajpur	11.52	22.15
Malda	21.22	24.78

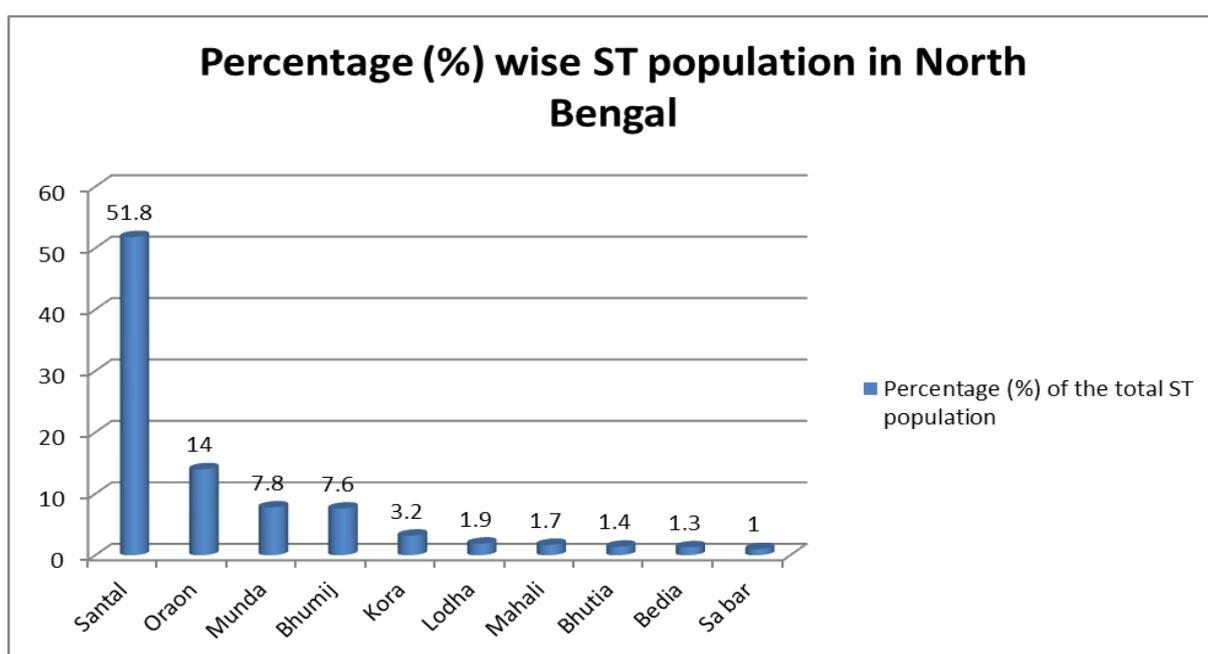
Source: Census of India, 2001, 2011.

**Table 4.6: Percent wise ST population in West Bengal**

<b>Sl.no.</b>	<b>Scheduled Tribe</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of the total ST population</b>
1.	Santal	2,280, 540	51.8
2.	Oraon	617,138	14.0
3.	Munda	341,542	7.8
4.	Bhumij	336,436	7.6
5.	Kora	142,789	3.2
6.	Lodha	84,966	1.9
7.	Mahali	76,102	1.7
8.	Bhutia	60,091	1.4
9.	Bedia	55,979	1.3
10.	Sa bar	43,599	1
	Total	40,39,192	100.00%

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Chart No.3- Showing Percentage of ST population in North Bengal, 2001**



From the above table, it is clearly shown that Santal, Oraon, Munda, Bhumij, Kora, Lodha, Mahalli, Bhutia, Bedia and Sabar concentration in the state of West Bengal are 51.8 per cent, 14.0 per cent, 7.8 per cent, 7.6 per cent, 3.2 per cent, 1.9 per cent, 1.7 per cent, 1.4 per cent, 1.3 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. The over all sex ratio of the ST population in West Bengal is 982 which is higher than their national average of 987. The child sex ratio among them is 981 and this is much 111 better (0 - 6 years) as compared to the national average of 973 among the STs according to 2001 Census. (see Table 4.6).

**Table 4.7: Tribal population in West Bengal and North Bengal in 2001 and 2011**

	2001			2011		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
West Bengal %	440,679 4	222392 4 50.47%	218287 0 49.53%	5,296,95 3	2,649,97 4	2,646,97 9
North Bengal %	145,433 0	733064 50.40%	721266 49.60%	731,733	365,239	366,494
Percentage of NB ST pop. to State ST pop.	33.00%	32.96%	33.04%	13.81%	13.78%	13.84%

Source: Census of India, 2001, 2011

The above table (4.7) shows that the tribal population according the Census 2011, comprise of 13.81 per cent of the total West Bengal population. Substantial part of this resides in North Bengal primarily employed as tea garden workers and in various agricultural activities. Since my area of work is in North Bengal, it provides a huge scope for the effect of various government initiatives to enhance this tribal population which are potential beneficiaries of all government schemes. Percentage of ST population is substantially higher in Jalpaiguri district when compared with other districts. This is largely because of the various tea gardens which are scattered across the district, which primarily boast of tribal population as the predominant working force (see Table 4.8) north Bengal thus provides for the fertile ground for the analysis of impact of socio-political measures primarily aimed towards empowerment of tribal population.

**Table 4.8: Tribal population in North Bengal districts according to 2001 and 2011 Census**

State/ District	ST Population						% of ST Population to District total pop.		
	2001			2011					
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Cooch Behar	14246	7425	6821	4,654	2,585	2,069	0.32	0.33	0.31
Jalpaiguri	641688	324250	317438	5,740	2,902	2,838	14.56	14.58	14.54
Darjeeling	204167	102287	101880	397,389	197,251	200,138	4.63	4.60	4.67
Uttar Dinajpur	124865	63123	61742	3,441	1,736	1,705	2.83	2.84	2.83
DakshinDinajpur	242317	122442	119875	6,525	3,237	3,288	5.50	5.51	5.49
Malda	227047	113537	113510	3,13,984	1,57,528	1,56,456	5.15	5.11	5.20

Source: Census of India, 2001&amp; 2011.

**Table 4.9: Sex Ratio: Tribe and Non-Tribe Compared (2001, 2011)**

State / District	Total Population				Tribal Population	
	Total		0-6 group		Total	0-6 group
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2001
India	933	943	927	919	978	973
West Bengal	934	950	960	956	982	981
Darjeeling	937	970	962	953	996	1001
Jalpaiguri	942	953	969	955	979	991
Kooch Behar	949	942	964	948	919	898
U. Dinajpur	938	939	965	953	978	973
D. Dinajpur	951	956	966	957	979	981
Malda	948	944	964	950	1000	985

Source: Census of India, 2001, 2011

**Table 4.10: Literacy by Sex and Gender Gap in Literacy Rate in North Bengal for Total Pop and Tribal Pop 2001.**

	Total population				Tribal population				
	Person	Male	Female	Gender gap	Person	Male	Female	Gender gap	Gender gap b/w total and tribal pop.
West Bengal	68.6	77.0	59.6	17.4	55.30	66.38	43.30	23.08	8.00
Cooch Behar	63.3	75.9	56.1	19.8	42.58	54.23	30.33	23.57	20.32
Jalpaiguri	62.9	72.8	52.2	20.6	55.48	65.06	45.85	19.21	16.32
Darjeeling	71.8	80.1	62.9	17.1	28.68	39.51	17.62	21.89	19.22
Uttar Dinajpur	47.9	58.5	36.5	22.0	42.81	55.14	30.22	24.92	20.79
DakshinDinajpur	63.6	72.4	54.3	18.1	32.15	44.72	19.63	25.09	18.15
Malda	50.3	58.8	41.3	17.5		44.7	19.6	25.1	

Source: Census of India, 2001

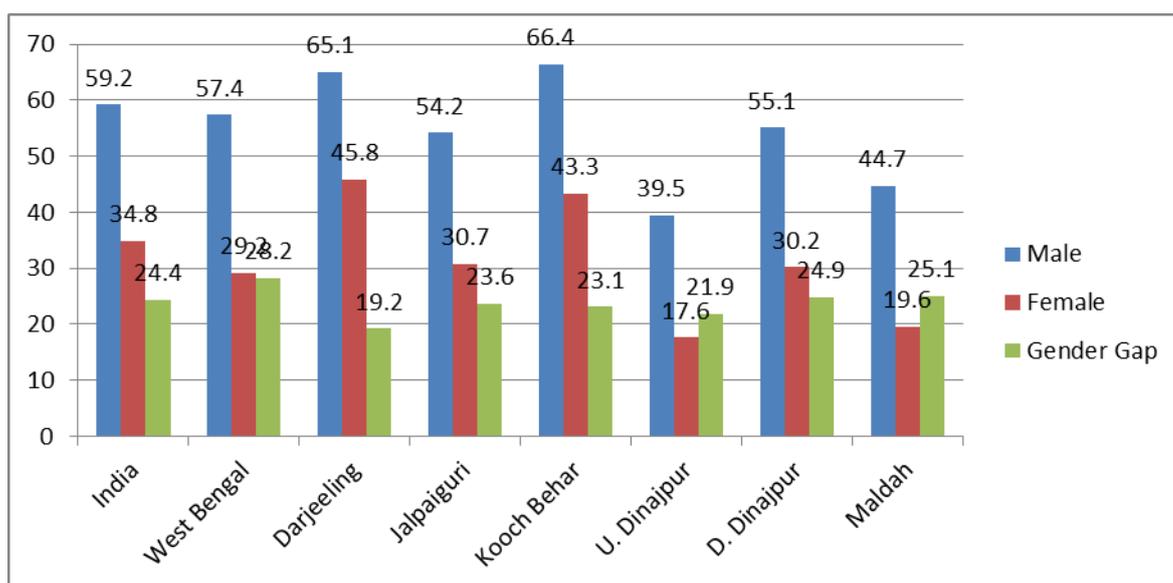
According to the Census of 2011 the tribal male literacy is 68.5 and the female literacy rate is 49.4 per cent and the tribal gender gap for India is 19.1 per cent. Despite government efforts to promote education among the Scheduled Tribes (STs), their literacy rates as compared to the national average have remained low. The literacy rate as per Census 2011 is 73 percent but for STs is 59 percent only. The overall literacy gap amongst the various groups and STs has come down from 19.77 percent in 1961 to 14.03 percent in 2011, a scrutiny of state-wise literacy data reveals that in most of the north eastern states like Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, STs are at par with the general population. Although still lags way behind the general population, the tribal population in India, West Bengal and even in North Bengal has made some significant progress in the field of education. Among the tribal male population the literacy rate is 59.2 per cent in India and in West Bengal the literacy is 57.4 per cent. The female literacy in the tribal population in India is only 34.8 per cent and in West Bengal it is 29.2 per cent. In Jalpaiguri, South Dinajpur and Malda districts the female literacy is 30.7, 30.2 and 19.6 per cent respectively. In all the districts the gender gap in literacy ranges between 19.2 per cent in Darjeeling district and 25.1 per cent in Malda district. The gender gap in literacy in North Bengal districts, however, is much less than the West Bengal figure of 28.2 (for details see Table 4.10, 4.11 and 4.12).

**Table 4.11: Tribal Literacy Rate (2001)**

	Male	Female	Gender Gap
India	59.2	34.8	24.4
West Bengal	57.4	29.2	28.2
Darjeeling	65.1	45.8	19.2
Jalpaiguri	54.2	30.7	23.6
Kooch Behar	66.4	43.3	23.1
U. Dinajpur	39.5	17.6	21.9
D. Dinajpur	55.1	30.2	24.9
Maldah	44.7	19.6	25.1

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Chart No.4- Showing Tribal Literacy Rate in 2001**



Since the tribal population largely lives in subsistence economy the work participation rate among them is generally high, compared to the general population. According to 2001 census, the work participation rate in India is 49.1 and in West Bengal it is marginally less at 48.8 per cent. While among the tribal males in West Bengal the participation rate is 53.8 among the females it is 43.7 – a gap of more than 10 per cent. The gender gap in work participation rate in the districts of North Bengal is equally wide. Among the districts of North Bengal the work participation rate is relatively high, around 50 per cent, in Malda, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur districts while the rate is much lower, close to 41 per cent, in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts.

**Table 4.12: Tribal Literacy Rate compared with Total Literacy Rate (2001& 2011)**

	Total Male		Total Female		Tribal Male	Tribal Female	Total Gender Gap	Tribal gender gap
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2001		
India	75.26	82.14	53.67	65.46	59.2	34.8	16.68	24.4
West Bengal	77.02	82.7	59.61	71.2	57.4	29.2	11.5	28.2
Darjeeling	80.1	85.61	62.94	73.33	65.1	45.8	17.2	19.2
Jalpaiguri	72.8	80.52	52.21	66.73	54.2	30.7	20.6	23.6
Kooch Behar	75.9	80.71	56.12	68.49	66.4	43.3	19.8	23.1
U. Dinajpur	58.8	65.52	36.5	52.17	39.5	17.6	22.3	21.9
D. Dinajpur	72.4	78.37	54.3	67.01	55.1	30.2	18.1	24.9
Maldah	58.8	66.24	41.1	56.96	44.7	19.6	17.7	25.1

Source: Census of India, 2001, 2011

The female work participation rate in the latter three districts is also much less, almost by 10 per cent, than in the former three districts. A look at the sector-wise distribution of tribal workforce reveals that women are predominantly engaged as agricultural labourers. In West Bengal 70.4 percent of the tribal women workers are engaged as agricultural labourers against the all-India figure of 35 per cent. Tribal women outnumber the male workforce in this sector by more than 5 per cent in West Bengal. In the districts of North Bengal one can notice a contrasting picture; in the tea garden dominated districts like Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling the women engaged as agricultural labourers constitute 24.4 and 32 per cent of the women workforce but in agriculture-based districts namely North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Malda, and Cooch Behar the percentages of agricultural labourers are 83.4, 86.0, 83.5 and 51.7 respectively. In the non-agricultural occupations, the male workers outnumber the female workers quite significantly (see Tables 4.14 & 4.16).

**Table 4.13: Tribal Work Participation Rate (2001)**

	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
India	49.1	53.2	44.8	50.4	53.8	46.9	34.6	46.8	21.6
W.Bengal	48.8	53.8	43.7	49.6	54.1	45.1	35.5	48.6	21.6
Darjeeling	40.9	48.2	33.5	42.2	49.0	35.4	31.0	42.2	19.9
Jalpaiguri	41.6	46.9	36.3	41.9	46.9	36.7	33.5	45.6	20.6
K. Behar	42.4	53.5	30.4	43.4	54.0	31.7	31.2	46.8	14.6
U. Dinaj	49.5	54.9	44.0	49.8	55.1	44.5	35.4	48.2	19.9
D. Dinaj	53.1	57.7	48.4	53.7	58.2	49.0	31.1	38.1	23.7
Malda	50.7	56.6	44.8	50.9	56.7	45.0	34.5	48.8	19.1

Source: Census of India, 2001.

**Table 4.14: Tribal Work Participation as Agricultural Labourers and Other Workers (2001)**

	Agricultural Labourers			Other Workers		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
India	28.4	24.9	35.0	18.9	21.8	13.4
W.Bengal	68.7	65.6	70.4	15.1	19.2	12.8
Darjeeling	31.9	31.6	32.0	41.4	44.7	39.0
Jalpaiguri	23.4	21.6	24.4	61.5	66.2	58.5
K. Behar	49.0	42.3	51.7	23.9	30.8	21.1
U Dinaj	81.6	76.7	83.4	5.6	7.9	4.8
D. Dinaj	84.2	78.6	86.0	4.9	7.5	4.0
Maldah	81.6	76.8	83.5	6.0	9.1	4.7

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Table 4. 15: Number of Workers and Work Participation Rate by Sex-2001**

		Work participation rate(Main + Marginal)		
State/ District	Area	Person	Male	Female
West Bengal	Total	48.8	53.8	43.7
	Rural	49.6	54.1	45.1
	Urban	35.5	48.6	21.6
Darjeeling	Total	40.9	48.2	33.5
	Rural	42.2	49.0	35.4
	Urban	31.0	42.2	19.9
Jalpaiguri	Total	41.6	46.9	36.3
	Rural	41.9	46.9	36.7
	Urban	33.5	45.6	20.6
State/ District	Area	Person	Male	Female
Kooch Behar	Total	42.4	53.5	30.4
	Rural	43.4	54.0	31.7
	Urban	31.2	46.8	14.6
Uttar Dinajpur	Total	49.5	54.9	44.0
	Rural	49.8	55.1	44.5
	Urban	35.4	48.2	19.9
DakshinDinajpur	Total	53.1	57.7	48.4
	Rural	53.7	58.2	49.0
	Urban	31.1	38.1	23.7
Maldah	Total	50.7	56.6	44.8
	Rural	50.9	56.7	45.0
	Urban	34.5	48.8	19.1

**Table 4. 16: Percentage Distribution of Total Workers by Main and Marginal Category**

State/ District	Area	Main Worker (%)			Marginal Worker (%)		
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
West Bengal	Total	32.0	42.1	21.8	16.7	11.7	21.9
	Rural	32.3	42.2	22.3	17.3	11.9	22.8
	Urban	27.7	40.4	14.4	7.7	8.2	7.2
Darjeeling	Total	32.5	41.1	23.8	8.4	7.1	9.7
	Rural	33.0	41.3	24.7	9.2	7.7	10.8
	Urban	28.8	39.6	18.1	2.2	2.6	1.9
Jalpaiguri	Total	30.9	38.8	22.9	10.7	8.1	13.4
	Rural	31.0	38.7	23.1	10.9	8.2	13.5
	Urban	28.0	41.2	13.8	5.5	4.4	6.8
	Total	31.9	47.7	14.6	10.5	5.7	15.7
	Rural	32.3	48.2	14.8	11.1	5.8	16.9

<b>Kooch Behar</b>	Urban	27.5	41.8	12.4	3.7	5.1	2.2
<b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>	Total	37.2	48.5	25.7	12.3	6.4	18.4
	Rural	37.3	48.6	25.9	12.5	6.5	18.7
	Urban	32.6	46.3	15.7	2.9	1.8	4.1
<b>DakshinDinajpur</b>	Total	37.4	50.4	24.1	15.7	7.3	24.3
	Rural	37.7	50.8	24.4	15.9	7.4	24.7
	Urban	25.1	35.7	13.9	6.0	2.4	9.8
<b>Malda</b>	Total	32.8	46.3	19.2	17.9	10.3	25.6
	Rural	32.8	46.3	19.3	18.1	10.4	25.7
	Urban	29.2	45.4	11.7	5.3	3.4	7.4

In the agricultural sector the tribal population mostly constitutes the landless, small- and marginal farmers. Thus it is rather difficult for them to take the advantage of agricultural development that has taken place in the districts of North Bengal over the years. When the tribal population grows and there is growing pressure on land a section of tribal labour force is forced to move out of the region. Being in subsistence economy the tribal population of North Bengal cannot save money to explore income opportunities in the expanding rural and semi urban markets of the region. Similarly, the tea gardens, which have provided subsistence to most of the tribes in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts, are facing either stagnation or gradual decline in recent years. Casualization of labour force and downsizing of labour force, seasonal closure of gardens have added to the hardship of the tribal labour force that have depended on the gardens over the generations and have not equipped themselves to face such a sudden crisis. As a means to fight this crisis a large section of tribal men and women are leaving the tea garden bases in Terai and Dooars and this has been reflected in the declining tribal population in some parts of North Bengal in the 2001 census. The intensifying economic crisis in tribal life in the region has shaken their life and it would therefore be interesting to examine how the tribal men and women use political participation to sort out the economic and other problems of their life.

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF TEA GARDEN IN NORTH BENGAL**

The history of tea industry in India goes back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the colonial capitalist were busy developing tea plantation in Assam. Gradually West Bengal was found suitable for tea cultivation and experimentally tea plantation were established. The tea producing areas in West Bengal are Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai regions. In

Darjeeling district the Kurseong and Darjeeling tea company opened the first tea garden known as Alubari in 1856 and in Jalpaiguri district Gazelduba garden was started in Dooars in 1874. (Bhadra,1992:52). Within two years thirteen gardens sprung up in this area, Phulbari (now known as Leesh River tea garden) and Bagrakot, being the first two. (Bhowmik, 1998:52).

After five years of first tea garden, which was started by the British planters, a few Bengali lawyers and clerks of Jalpaiguri formed the first Indian tea company called the Jalpaiguri Tea Company with one garden called Mugulkata. Since then many Indian-owned gardens sprung up in the district. (Bhowmik, 1981:53).

A large area for cultivation and a large labour force are the two basic requisite for the development of tea plantations. The tea regions of West Bengal were either sparsely populated or the local people rarely worked on plantation because of the low wages offered by the planters. Since local labourers were not willing to work on plantation, the planters had to look elsewhere for the supply of cheap and hardworking labourers.

In West Bengal the Chota Nagpur tribals were recruited to the tea garden in Jalpaiguri district. This area is known as Dooars. The majority of the workers were “drawn from the Oroan, Munda, Kharia and Santhal races”. But there was also a sprinkling of the semi-Hinduised castes of Chotanagpur, such as Lohas, Baraiks, Bhogtas and so on. (Bhowmik, 1981:55). The tea industry was started here in 1874. The tea industry in Jalpaiguri developed rapidly from 1885 onwards. Demand for labour increased consequently, there was an increase in migration to district. The most tempting target was the helpless Adivasis who, due to alienation from land and natural calamities, had become a sturdy, hardworking (and submissive) person and who was able to live at a sub-human level of existence.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the colonial capitalist were busy developing tea plantation in Assam. They had already tried and failed to recruit local labour to work on the plantations. The planters then turned to tribal labour from Chota Nagpur. The tribals were recruited through *arkatis* and *sardari* system. The *arkatis*, were professional recruiters and maintained no contact with the labour after recruitment. A *sardar* is a plantation labourer who is sent back to his own area to help recruit additional labour for the plantations. The *sardar* is in a position to win the confidence of the native labour

because of his social contacts. He maintains contact with the labour recruited by him even in the plantation; because of this the new recruits join the plantation with a greater sense of security.

Tea gardens started being set up in large scale in Darjeeling since 1856 and in Dooars since 1872. The area was sparsely populated and with British patronage the planters had little difficulty in procuring land. They however had difficulty in drawing the labour force from the local population. While plantations in Darjeeling drew labour from Nepali immigrants the gardens in Dooars and Terai had both Nepali and tribal labour from central India. The plantations in Assam, started in 1958, also drew tribal labour from central India. There was labour shortage in the gardens in Terai and Dooars until mid-1940s as the industry was expanding until then. In Dooars, between 1901 and 1941 the area under tea doubled and the labour force grew three-fold. In Darjeeling the area under tea increased during the same period by 20 per cent and the labour force increased by 50 per cent.

There was a mood of expansion and stability in tea gardens between 1930 and 1950 and more and more workers were taken in as permanent workers which contributed to a sharp fall in the temporary workers (Sharit Kr. Bhowmik, "Tea Plantations in West Bengal" in Sarath Davala (ed.) *Employment and Unionization in Indian Industry*, New Delhi: Fredrich Ebert Stiftung, 1992: 11-40; Ashok Mitra, *Census of India 1951, Vol. VI, Part 1A (West Bengal) Sikkim and Chandernagore, Report*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1953, p. 264).

**Table 4.17: Tea industry in North Bengal, 1941-1989**

Place	1941			1989		
	No. of gardens	Area under tea (hectare)	No. of permanent labour	No. of gardens	Area under tea (hectare)	No. of permanent labour
<b>Darjeeling and Terai</b>	136	25565	67838	171	33412	83884
<b>Dooars</b>	189	53325	136491	159	67622	157316
<b>Total</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>78800</b>	<b>204329</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>101034</b>	<b>241200</b>

Source: Amal Dutta, 'North Bengal-A Brief Profile', *Human Migration-A Social Phenomenon*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 2003, pp.79.

### **Nature of work which the labourers have to perform in the tea garden**

The plantation workers in the Dooars perform hard manual labour under condition which are primitive, if not savage. The worker wakes up around 4.30 am, cooks and eats his meal and has to report for the duty by 6.30 am. The plucking season, which stretches from February to mid-December, passes through the varieties of nature. These include hot, humid weather along with heavy rains, from June to October. During this time the weather alternates from brazen heat to heavy showers. Towards the middle of November, when the cold weather sets in, the routine of work remains the same. One can see workers plucking leaves relentlessly, irrespective of the change in the climate and the effect it has on their bodies. During the monsoons, the skin of their fingers peels off due to excessive contact with water. But this does not slacken their pace. Quite often one can see female workers plucking away in heavy rains with an infant strapped on to umbrella, which provides barely adequate protection. In winter their fingers are numbed with contact of dew-covered leaves, but they continue plucking at the same pace. (Bhowmik, 1981:242)

### **Migration of Chota Nagpur Tribes to North Bengal**

Migration, according to M.S.A. Rao is an area of study which permits multi-disciplinary approach in social science, including it does, social demography, sociology, social and cultural anthropology, economic, history and psychology. Migration is a major factor in economic development and manpower planning. It is necessary to consider migration and settlement as interrelated aspects of social and cultural life of the people (Rao, 1986:19). Migration is defined as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. It is a shift in the place of residence for some length of time.

Ayan Mukhopadhyay in his studies on Munda tribes of Sundaban deals with the important fact about the subsistence strategies adopted by the Mundas of this village is out-migration in search of livelihood. The reasons for such out-migration according to their field study 'were mainly landlessness, lack of economic opportunities in and around the village and reluctance to undertake the risks involved in forest product collection'. In this context it may be mentioned that all-India level governmental demographic data on the scheduled tribes reported that overall internal migration rate has decreased over time. (Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India, 2013:53-63).

For over hundred years, the tribals of Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas region of Bihar have been steadily migrating out of their homeland in search of new places of residence.

A large section of them have poured into West Bengal. (Choudhury&Bhaumik, 1986:321)

Tribal migration, which was another significant consequence, again has to be seen within the political economy framework. On the one hand the tribals were forced out their homeland, by the colonial policy; on the other hand they were encouraged to join the labour force in plantation, mines and to some extent factories, as tribal labour was not only cheap but was committed. Hence migration was the result of the double-edged colonial policy of land alienation and labour recruitment.

**Table 4.18: Immigration to Jalpaiguri District from outside West Bengal 1891-1941**

Year	Actual Population	Immigrants
1891	433,334	44,329
1901	544,906	95,899
1911	661,282	152,174
1921	694,054	163,024
1931	739,166	158,757
1941	854,702	156,765

Source: Sharit Bhoumik, *Class Formation in the Plantation System*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, pp.42.

**Table 4.19: Major tribes in North Bengal (1971 & 2001 Census)**

Tribe	1971	2001	Increase	% increase
Oraon	<b>2,30,595</b>	<b>501,188</b>	<b>270593</b>	<b>117.34</b>
Munda	<b>1,04,650</b>	<b>137,579</b>	<b>32929</b>	<b>31.46</b>
Santal	<b>3,05,512</b>	<b>443,681</b>	<b>138169</b>	<b>45.22</b>
Ho	193	<b>992</b>	<b>799</b>	413.99
<b>Mahli</b>	<b>32,605</b>	<b>24980</b>	<b>- 7625</b>	<b>- 23.38</b>
Lodha/ Kharia	<b>17,679</b>	<b>32317</b>	<b>14638</b>	82.79
<b>Mal Paharia</b>	<b>24,037</b>	<b>11813</b>	<b>- 1224</b>	<b>- 50.85</b>
<b>Bhumij</b>	<b>7,039</b>	<b>2531</b>	<b>- 4508</b>	<b>- 64.04</b>
ChikBaraik	1627	15,370	<b>13743</b>	844.68
Kherwar	134	11,164	11030	8231.34
Kora	<b>11,283</b>	11,933	650	<b>5.76</b>
Nagesia	2385	<b>7153</b>	4768	200.00
<b>Kaamali</b>	754	179	<b>- 575</b>	<b>-76.25</b>
Lepcha	22,786	32116	9330	41.00
Bhutia	33,733	59,117	25384	75.24
<b>Chakma</b>	<b>2887</b>	136	<b>- 2751</b>	<b>-95.28</b>
Rabha	<b>2235</b>	14534	12299	550.29
Mech	<b>10,718</b>	<b>35296</b>	24578	229.31
<b>Garro</b>	<b>1641</b>	1473	<b>- 168</b>	<b>-10.23</b>
Magh	243	1652	1409	579.83
Hajang	134	362	228	170.14
Others	93,993	108764	14771	15.71
Total	<b>8,99,824</b>	1454330	554506	61.62

Source: Census of India, 1971 & 2001

Oraon, Santal and Munda, the tribes of Chotanagpur origin, are the most populous tribes in the region as they figure on top of the list of most populous tribes in most of the districts (see Table 4.19). The other major tribes of Chotanagpur origin found in North Bengal districts are the Chick Baraik, Mahali and Mal Paharia. The tribes like Bhutia, Lepcha, Mech and Lodha are concentrated mostly in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts, while the Rabhas are found in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts. In two Dinajpurs and Malda districts the major tribes in terms of population size are the Santal, Munda, Oraon, Malpaharia, Mahli and Kora. The Bedia are found mostly in North and South Dinajpur districts and the Kora are found in two Dinajpurs and Malda districts. In Jalpaiguri district we can see the heavy concentration of all the major Chotanagpur tribes, the Hill tribes, and many other tribes like the Mech, Toto, Rabha, Nagesia and some presence of the Garo, Magh, and Hajang. The later mentioned tribes in Jalpaiguri district are the ones which are usually found in the States in North East India. Cooch Behar district has the distinction of accommodating the least number of tribes. Yet, tribes with larger population in the district are the Santal, Munda, Rabha and the Garo. Thus, there is not much penetration of tribes of North-Eastern origin (like Mech, Toto, Rabha, Magh, Hajong, Garo, etc.) into the districts beyond Cooch Behar and Jalpaugiri.

Data presented in Table 4.19 suggest that while some of the tribes are growing in terms of population size some others are dwindling. The reason could be that the economy of the region does not offer many opportunities for the younger generation among the tribals and that many of them move out of the region in search of income opportunities. The tribes, which have shrunk in terms of population size in 30 years, between 1971 and 2001, are the Mahali, Mal Paharia, Bhumij, Kaamali, Chakma and Garo. The size of the Chakma has declined by 95 per cent, followed by Kaamali (76 per cent), Bhumij (64 per cent), Mal Paharia (51 per cent) Mahali (23 per cent) and Garo (10 per cent). On the other hand, the Oraon, ChikBaraik, Mech, Magh, Kharwar, Nagesia, Rabha are some the tribes which have grown significantly in the region in this 30-year period. These contradictory tendencies would suggest that the tribes in the region are living in diverse material conditions and the levels of their adaptation are not the same. While some of these tribes appear well settled some others, unable to adjust themselves well, are leaving the region in a significant scale. Some of these tribes might be moving out to evade the process of marginalization they have been subjected to in the region. Our firsthand observations that

we have drawn from our recent trips to the villages confirm that many among the younger generation have migrated to developed states like Punjab, Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka and Maharashtra in search of employment opportunities.

## **Historical Context of Migration**

### **Land Alienation**

The history of land alienation in Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas is a well-documented and well-established fact. After moving around for centuries in the plains of North India, the tribes of this region finally settled down in Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas. (Badgaiyan, 1986:293). Hinduisation firstly, alienated the tribal raja and his kinsfolk from the rest of the people. Secondly, it brought in an infiltration of non-tribal into this region. These people were known as *dikus* (aliens) by the local tribal population. These *dikus* or non-tribal were encouraged to settle in Chota Nagpur by the members of princely family. As these people (*dikus*) were literate the princely family encouraged them to take up administrative posts.

All these non-tribals were rewarded with land and in order to reward them with land, the tribal owners were dispossessed of the land they had owned for generation (Badgaiyan, 1986:295). This practice of rewarding land dealt a severe blow to the traditional agrarian structure. It increasingly alienated the tribals from their land and a class of non-tribals became firmly entrenched, prospering and multiplying at their expense. While the tribals were struggling with the unhappy effects of Hinduisation, came the British penetration into the area. Both these elements, i.e. Hinduisation and British rule, thrust alien people and alien ideas on the tribals. (Choudhury&Bhoumik, 1986:323)

### **Tribal Unrest**

The entire 19<sup>th</sup> century is dotted with tribal uprisings-1795-1800, 1811, 1820, 1831, 1885 and 1899. The unrest of 1831 was the first major revolt against the *dikus* and the British. All cultivating tribes- Munda, Kharia, Oraon, Ho, etc. joined hands to fight their enemies. The Mundas had been in the forefront during this whole period of insurrection. They rose in revolt in the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They joined other tribes in 1820 and 1831. Through out the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they carried on a litigational war which has been called *sardarlarai* and finally, under the leadership of BirsaMunda, they had a violent struggle in 1899. The Hos and Cheros joined other tribes in armed insurrection in 1831, which is better known as ‘Kol

insurrection'. The Santals rose in revolt in 1855-57. The Bhumij took to armed uprising in 1832, soon after the suppression of the Kol insurrection. (Badgaiyan, 1986:300)

All these violent uprising were short-lived. The tribals on each occasion gained initial success but were soon crushed with all the might of the colonial power. Their dream of driving away the *dikus* remained unrealized; their faith in their traditional spirits and deities also failed them. The crushing defeat must have left them dejected and demoralized. They came to be treated as outlaws in their own territory by outsiders who came and disposed them of their traditional rights on land and forest.

### **Natural Calamities**

In addition to the turmoil, which alienated tribals from their lands and their traditional rights, the forces of nature also played havoc with their lives. Famines and flood plagued the area. Prior to 1897, there was no information of famines. The severest famine took place in the year 1897 when the death rate rose to 36.40 per mille. As a result of the above factors, there was a steady exodus of tribals to other places in search of land or work. (Choudhury & Bhoumik, 1986:326)

Thus in the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the tribals in Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas stood alienated and ejected from the ownership of their land. Many might have even lost the right to stand on the land their ancestors had cleared and which they had nourished with their sweat and blood for generations. They had fought with all their might, with all their ferocity, to restore to themselves their own land. At the end of all these efforts, they stood alienated and defeated, despised and demoralized. The painful decision to leave their ancestral land and resettle themselves in new lands for some might have appeared to be the only alternative, those who did so were not doing this for the first time, they were only following the precedents they had learnt in their tradition of migration. (Badgaiyan, 1986:300).

For the Mundas of Sundarbans the main activity of subsistence survival is collection of crabs, prawns and fishes from the river. Another is collection of honey from the forest land and thirdly, collection of fuel wood. All these activities involved various kinds of risks and dangers which came from nature, wild animals and governmental laws and restrictions. The economic life of the Mundas in this village, like the other tribal groups who were settled in Sundarban began with the clearing of forests for agriculture.

Agriculture was the main foundation of their economy and they still depended on agriculture, although a substantial number households in Sardarpara did not own land. This is one of the major reasons behind the search for non-agricultural economic pursuits by the Mundas of this village. Last but not the least, is the emergence of temporary non-seasonal out-migration as a subsistence strategy adopted by the Mundas of this village. (Bandopadyay and Guha, 2016).

For the alienated tribals of Chota Nagpur the possibility of outside employment must have come as a good opportunity. Centuries of economic, political and social dispossession, exploitation and repression might have already prepared them psychologically to leave. There are three reasons on deciding in favour of large-scale exploitation of the new opportunities of employment. Firstly, the plantation was recruiting not individually but whole families. Tea plantation needs the service of both men and women. In fact the women have the reputation of being better tea-leaf pluckers. This family recruitment made it possible for every member of the family to earn, besides making it possible for the entire family to live together. Secondly, this would allow and help them live communities on the plantation. Hence, it was possible not only for the whole families to live together but whole lineage; clans and tribal groups could live together. And indeed in the labour lines of the tea plantations one does find many tribal groups living as communities rather than as individual tribal workers. Living as communities has made it possible not only to enjoy a greater sense of solidarity and security but has also helped them recreate their society and culture in an alien environment, hundreds of mile away from their native area. Finally, in addition to industrial employment, there was also the possibility of getting land for cultivation, not only after contract has expired but also, in many case, even before that. For the agricultural tribal community deprived of its ancestral land, the attraction of this opportunity can well be imagined. (Badgaiyan, 1986:302-303).

In course of my interaction with the tribal population residing in North Bengal fascinating stories of these tribal groups trying to establish a meaningful foothold into the society, have come to fore. The backgrounds of independent tribal population who migrated to West Bengal from various parts of the country in search of better avenues of livelihood are divergent. While the majority of these populations got incorporated into the tea industry, thereby professing their lives and those of the future generations as tea garden

labourers, there remain quite a substantial percentage of this population who tried earnestly to charter out a life which give them a right of self-determination.

### **Case Study 1- Sabina Beck (90yrs)**

This tribal lady residing presently in SaldangiBasti village, of Phansiedewa Block has her own fascinating story to narrate. She originally belongs to the present day state of Chattisgarh, most specifically to the village of Jashpur, Gholeng. Their whole family, driven by poverty migrated to North Bengal in search of better avenues of livelihood during the British era, the job as a tea garden worker was a lucrative enough perspective for the genre of tribal population during that era. Hence the all family migrated to North Bengal in search of better avenues of livelihoods. She and her eligible members of the family were employed as tea garden workers in Shahbad Tea Estate. It was during this period of time that she came in contact with one Mr. Pascal Beck who was at that time a resident of one of the many tribal communities who had at that time set up their own vibrant communities. These were not essentially tribal communities' dependents on tea gardens as their whole and soul income avenues.

Mr. Beck and his family had migrated from the present day Chota Nagpur area with the equivocal hope of a better means of sustenance. Religion (mainly Christians) had a major influence amongst this migrant tribal population. Part of this migrant population having even an iota of educational capabilities were romped in by the Christian missionaries. Mr. Pascal Beck, who was, by the educational standards of that era, was a so-called "jewel in the crown" was promptly spotted and nurtured by the Christian missionary society. He was there by groomed and projected as one of the leading face in his community. It was however, the age-old tradition of families fixing marriages of their progeny that Sabina Beck was ultimately bequeathed to Mr. Pascal Beck. Being amongst a better educated populace of this migrant tribal population the Christian missionaries projected Pascal Beck as an example and pioneering individual towards promulgation of their faith. Pascal Beck, however, migrated to the nearby town of Siliguri where he was successfully able to have meaningful sustenance. The missionaries, seeing his potential, brought him back into their fold. He subsequently served as an active member towards furthering of their agenda. Upon setting of a medical facility aimed towards serving the needs of tribal population Pascal Beck was employed as a health worker. In course of his employment as health worker he uplifted his financial status to such an extent whereby he was able to

procure enough agricultural lands for providing comfortable livelihood for progenies to come. It was during this period of time that Sabina Beck was married to Pascal Beck. Despite being married to a family of substantial repute amongst this closed tribal community, life was not always an easy walk way for Sabina.

After being married to Pascal Beck though life was much easier for her as compared to other tribals employed as tea garden workers, she still had her fair bit of struggle during the initial period of her marriage, owing to financial constrains she herself worked as a tea garden employee for the initial period of her conjugal life. She subsequently gave birth to ten children. Most of the surviving children are well established within their own realms, many of them having little need to fall back upon their tribal identity to further their livelihood. It is thus an excellent and noteworthy example of a tribal family struggling to numerous handicaps during their initial years so that the progenies there after could have the means to establish themselves.

A life bequeathed as a tea garden worker will surely not yield such a transformations amongst the generations to come in such a short span of time. It thereby goes to suffice that the migrant tribal population who were bold enough to charter their own course of life bereft of the traditional life as tea garden workers, have truly integrated amongst the general population of the country. Though this migrant population has over the course of time lost their roots from the lands of their origin, they still have definitely, by their perseverance, have managed to generate a substantially impactful life for their progenies.

Sabina Beck, though widowed years back, has managed to bring up her children in such a manner that majority of them have established themselves in the social fabric. Influence of her late husband, as she profoundly admits, has been a major source of inspiration for her. At an age nearly touching 90 she proudly looks back at the substantial improvement that she along with her husband has been able to generate amongst her children and the generations thereafter. Even at this date she proudly recalls those incidents and moments where her husband was akin to a medical professional when her husband was the sole source of qualified medical health amongst her society.

**Case Study 2- Clara Lakra (85)**

She has a story very much similar to Sabina Beck of her neighbouring village, her family also migrated from Chattisgarh in search of better avenues of livelihood. Her husband popularly known as Louis master amongst the tribal community, having migrated from Chotanagpur area, where already established. His family was amongst the pioneers for establishing the DanagacchBasti. In accordance with the set trends of those time Clara Lakra got married to Louis Lakra due cognence of both the families. Mr. Louis Lakra, being educated, was absorbed as an academician in educational institution set up by the Christian missionaries, aimed principally at providing education to nearby tribal communities. Late Mr. Louis Lakra ordained himself as an educationalist, mainly attached with St. Peter's School, Gayaganga. He was and is still remembered as 'Louis Master' by the tribal population in vicinity. Clara and Louis Lakra had ten children, the majority of whom have managed to eke out a living for themselves, which are away from livelihood based on tea gardens.

This episode is testimony to numerous such tribal populations who have withered and successfully overcome all odds and managed to further their family structure.

**Case Study 3- EmeldaTigga (57)**

EmeldaTigga of Gumla Tea Estate is a garden worker in the same garden. She is 57 years old. Her father had migrated from Chippatala village which is under Semdega district of Ranchi. He was brought to this garden by the *sardars*. Later he married MargragteLakra of the nearby village. They had four children. Emelda is the third child of their parents. Emelda got married when she was fourteen years old to a man name FancisTigga. He was a permanent worker in the same garden. He died at the age of 42. Emelda has four children with her husband (two boys and two girls). The elder son named AmardeepTigga (40) is a garden worker. He married a girl from Trihana Tea Garden, Bagdogra. He studied up to class seven. He has two children aged 8 and 6 respectively. The second son of Emelda is AmitTigga. He worked in Kerala as a cook for some years but returned back home. Now he is also a garden worker in the same garden. Married a girl from the same garden and has two children of 6 and 4 years respectively. Emelda's two daughters Kriti and Aruna are married to different places and are well settled.

Emelda has good contact with her native place. She has travelled many a times to place of her origin with her husband. When asked if she likes to go back and settled down in her native place. Her reply is no and one of the reason she says is the poverty there. Also because she now is happy here, has got many relatives and this place has given her so much.

#### **Case Study 4- Selbester Ekka (56)**

He is presently employed as a garden worker at Kamla Tea Estate of GhoshPukur gram *panchayat*. His parents migrated from Kurdeg, Chotanagpur, Parkel. The reason for this migration was predominantly driven by poverty. Working in tea gardens was a lucrative avenue, at least ensuring a meaningful means of sustenance for his family. Mr.Selbester Ekka's father subsequently had six children, Selbester being the youngest of the lot. Despite having migrated from his ancestral land, as Mr.Selbester recalls his father was not able to cut off all relations with his land of origin. He had thus, during his very early years of settlement in West Bengal sent his eldest son to Chotanagpur with the purpose of guarding his lands that he had inherited owing to his ancestral lineage.

His endeavour was however short lived and unsuccessful as his eldest son did not find it lucrative and feasible to base his livelihood upon this ancestral property. He thus returned back to West Bengal. Mr.Selbester Ekka's whole family has since resided under the premises of Kamala Tea Garden. However, having been employed as workers in a tea garden, the avenues for upliftment of the family as a whole were restricted. His family thus could not emerge out of the socio-economic constrains of a tea garden worker.

Selbester Ekka has six children. Majority of his children have subsequently chosen a life being employed at the tea garden, since they were primarily school dropouts, thereby not having any means to explore other avenues of livelihood. It here needs to be brought to the fore that some of SelbesterEkka's own siblings who chose to harbour a profession away from that of tea gardens, have subsequently not only managed to have a meaningful life of repute, but also they have managed to alleviate the educational standard of their progeny.

Thus their remains a very stark difference amongst this tribal population, mainly based on the choices of the first migrant population vis-à-vis getting absorbed as tea garden

labourers or having the wherewithal to successfully pursue a livelihood away from the tea gardens. Repeated encounters with this migrant tribal population, covering both these spectra's of possibilities, has led me to firmly summarise that in majority of the cases the migrant tribal population which chose to charter their own course of livelihood have managed to have a much more robust, vibrant and successful progenies. And those percentage of the tribal population which chose to get absorbed as tea garden workers have definitely a much more dismal and regressive stories to tell.

#### **Case Study 5- Shanta Kerketta (30)**

Her father has worked as a tea garden employee at Suhasini Tea Garden, Hasimara. The immediate ancestors of her father had migrated from a place at present day Chattisgarh. The reasons for migration were again mainly driven by poverty. Her father has five children, all of them are daughters. Shanta is the youngest amongst her sibling. Despite being employed at a tea garden her father invested strongly towards the education of his daughters. All of Shanta's siblings and she herself were thus educated in institutions away from the tea garden, most of them thereby having to reside in hostels. Three of her siblings have completed their graduation while Shanta and another of her sibling have gone on to successfully complete their post graduate curriculum. Shanta is presently pursuing her Ph.D, having successfully completed her M.Phil.

Driven by a strongly motivated tribal person, employed in a tea garden, as her father is, the whole socio-economic outlook of her family has under gone a drastic positive make over during the course of a single generation. Examples such as these were a tribal tea garden worker has through single minded dedication aimed towards upliftment of his family, make an inspirational case study. Though, it goes to suffice that a vast majority of the migrant tribal population absorbed in the tea garden industry as labourers, have at large had a very poor drive to get their families out of the quagmire of tea garden ruckus.

#### **Case Study 6- Mr. Srinieus Kerketta**

He is presently employed in Union Bank of India. His ancestor origin is from Toli, Jharkhand. Maternal grandparents of his had migrated to North Bengal, principally centred around Alipurduar. Leaving his parents and other siblings he chose to join his maternal grandparents upon their migration to North Bengal. His maternal grandfather , having worked in numerous tea garden plantations like Fagu Tea Garden, Damanpur Tea Garden and many gardens, ultimately found an employment to his liking as principally of peon

with additionally responsibility of cook at St. Joseph's School, Alipurduar. Mr.Srinius was inducted into St. Joseph's School, Alipurduar by his maternal grandfather. He subsequently successfully completed his school curriculum up to the high school level in the same school.

Through his personal endeavours, he managed to thereby, get absorbed as an employee under the aegis of Union Bank of India. Considering the era in which he, as a young child migrated to North Bengal, his subsequent achieving in the educational field held him in good steps, whereby he was able to raise himself socio-economically from his clan. He subsequently married to Nirmala Kerketta from Damanpur Tea Garden. His wife works as a nursing staff with the Madhu Tea Garden. He has two children both of whom are daughters. Both of his daughters have successfully furthered their educational accomplishment of their father, the elder one on the verge of completing her graduation as an English honours student and the younger one being a class twelve student at Kendriya Vidyalaya. It goes without saying that Mr.Srinius Kerketta and his wife have had a very positive and meaningful influence on their children, thereby being an active party towards furthering the educational status of his daughters.

After having married Nirmala he principally set his dwellings at Madhu Tea Garden, where his wife was entitled to have a residential quarter in lieu of being employed as a nursing staff of the garden hospital. Madhu Tea Garden has faced lockout for the last two years. Mr. Srinius Kerketta has managed to build his own residential dwelling at Alipurduar. His wife was being forced to quit her job as a nursing staff at Madhu Tea Garden. They have hence managed to successfully built an identity bereft of tea garden

A noteworthy fact here is of the fact that Mr. Srinius Kerketta has successfully invested his endeavours towards providing worthwhile education to his daughters, thereby providing them with a freedom, based on which they are in a position to have a successful economic platform. Mr.Srinius Kerketta has over the course of years visited his ancestral place quite a several number of times. Upon asked, he definitely does not possess a desire to migrate back to his ancestral place in Jharkhand. Though he admits that there is definitely not huge gulf in educational achievements through all these generations, within his ancestral areas in Jharkhand vis-à-vis North Bengal, he opines that economic avenues in North Bengal are far more substantial and superior. He therefore has no desire to

pursue his livelihood in Jharkhand. Having built his own accommodation at Alipurduar, he basks in the educational achievements of his daughters.

His story epitomises the successful endeavours of many a migrant tribal population who have been successful in uplifting their family socio-economically within a very short time span.

### **Case Study 7- Manju Toppo (38)**

Manju's father migrated from Chargai Padda of Chotanagpur along with his family. He initially worked in a few tea gardens of North Bengal. He got married to Kishori Clara Toppo. He subsequently had five children, one son and four daughters. Though his intention was to get all his children well educated, it was Manju and her elder brother who could have a meaningful conglomeration of the education that was bestowed upon all her siblings. Having successfully completed her school curriculum, she subsequently got herself enrolled as a graduate student under North Bengal University, thereby completing her graduation from Malbazar College.

She moved to Siliguri and completed her post graduate studies from North Bengal University. Having successfully competed in the in the selection procedure for getting absorbed as State Government employee, she was absorbed under the department of *gram panchayats*, at Patharghata. Having reason thus far she still endeavours to accomplish something even better. Thus she quit her job within the *gramin panchayat* system, at present working hard and competing to get a placement which will guarantee her a more secure and economically profitable job with the central government.

Manju's father, though having not been able to pursue his own academics after having clear his standard six exams in schools should definitely be commemorated for having successfully instilled the value of education amongst his children. In those bygone years he still had managed to land himself a reasonable employment with the forest department, despite his educational handicap. The fervent zeal with which he pursued the goal of providing education to his children is commendable. Manju's elder brother has also managed to scale substantial socio-economic heights, having been presently employed with the State Bank of India, working as DGM.

The utmost and dedicated endeavour of socio-economically deprived and migrant tribal individuals towards betterment of their future clan is praiseworthy, Manju's father being a shining example. His whole future progeny has leap-frogged from being in a state of socio-economically compromised into a state where they are very well established and absorbed into the main social stream. What is even more commendable is the constant struggle for striving to have even more higher success by second generation tribal girls like Manju who are not ready to sit on already achieved laurels.

### **Case Study 8- Rakhi Munda (32)**

Rakhi Munda aged 32, a third generation migrant tribal population has through her three generation being employed as tea garden workers with Chalsa tea garden under the Goodricke Group. My extensive studies spanning across numerous tea gardens in the Dooars and Terai regions of North Bengal has led me to conclude that tea gardens manned by the Goodricke Group are definitely amongst the better administered gardens in the area. The story of Rakhi Munda still remains an episode of failure to overcome the socio-economic constraints of having been born into a migrant tribal population.

Through generations this migrant tribal family did precious little to absolve their future generation from the clutches of tea garden employment. Being bestowed with social skills that were superior to her siblings, Rakhi constantly found herself as a favourable employee, fit to be deployed within the managerial staffs of the tea garden. It however has definitely to be emphasised that the lack of a proper and meaningful guidance from her family, never allowed Rakhi to harbour the dream of her life beyond the tea garden premises. This notable lack of a support element from her family hindered her vision, thereby laying herself vulnerable and devoid of any growth transcending the tea gardens. Having had constantly worked with the highest managerial staff of the tea garden, she was exposed to a plethora of avenues aimed at betterment of her socio-economic strata she, however, got herself entangled within the economic agenda of the socio-economic goals of the Indian government.

As with the majority of young female garden workers, she got herself married to a tea garden worker from her own garden, this was despite the constructive advises of the highest echelons of power in her tea garden. Her tryst with the age old social tradition of her society got entangled with the social strata of the powers that be, in the tea garden.

The prospect of a meaningful and strong contribution towards bringing up of a positive society was reduced and subsequently it withered away. Had she been born in a society away from the nuances of a tea garden life, she definitely would have managed to rationalise her life.

Upon my interaction with Rakhi, I have this strong impression that she regrets the lack of a strong familial support that would have propelled her towards pursuance of a livelihood away from the tea gardens. She admits that there was little positive impact from her family and her closest of society aimed towards having a more meaningful and positive life. As is the traditions amongst the vast majority of the tea garden workers, she got married at a very young age, thereby closing out all opportunities for the furthestmost of her life. Presently having already given birth to two children, she regrets about the possibilities of what might have been, had she not succumbed to the traditions and the pressures of her family and her immediate neighbourhood.

It is a sad story of how a whole future progeny has been kept entangled within the tea gardens, despite an individual having acumen to get herself out of the regressive life of a tea garden worker. A strong, government driven educational programme, aimed primarily at the female population of this strata of the society will definitely go a long way towards arresting such trends. While many government social schemes do claim to be in place, the story of Rakhi is a strong pointer towards the incapability of these schemes to permeate up to the levels of the most needy.

A strong drive from the government is a must so as to minimise episodes such as that of Rakhi, who despite having the capacity to overcome the social hurdles, ultimately succumbed to their socio-economic environment, primarily due to lack of meaningful external support.

#### **Case Study 9- Chaitu Baraik (48)**

Chaitu Baraik aged 48, a garden worker employed in Chusla Tea Garden in the Goodricke Group of Companies. His father had migrated from Chotanagpur area in his early 20s in search of a better living condition and earning a meaningful livelihood. Though his other siblings and parents stayed put in their ancestral land, he, upon his arrival to North Bengal, managed to land himself a job as tea garden worker in Chusla

Tea Garden. He subsequently married Chaitu's mother from a neighbouring tea garden of Indong. Chaitu being, the eldest amongst his four siblings inherited his father's employment upon his retirement.

He was specifically given the responsibility of maintaining the water supplies within the garden premises. He subsequently married a girl within his own tea garden and had three children. Though the opportunities to pursue education were not totally non-existence, Chaitu is a school dropout, even before the completion of his primary school studies. Having being exposed to the prevalent tea garden worker culture where the eldest of the siblings is guaranteed an employment within the tea garden upon retirement of parents, the zeal to improve on his socio-economic status by availing of educational opportunities was missing in Chaitu. This holds true for many generations of tea garden workers where they, having had the assurance of employment within the tea garden, the desire to look for other avenues for upliftment of their living standards is lost.

My interaction with various sections of management and workers alike has always yielded a positive outlook towards the working expertise of Chaitu. He was projected as an efficient worker. However, the most prevalent vice amongst the tea garden workers of rampant alcoholism is very much a part of Chaitu's life. Chaitu himself lays down these negative elements against life to utter despondency from where he cannot think of a better future for himself and his progeny.

Chulsa Tea Garden is segregated from a forest range by a tributary of Murti River. The economic constrains faced by the tea garden labourers often lead them to wincher out into the forest areas in search of firewood, required not only to supplement their own household requirement but also as an avenue to earn extra money by selling off these illegally procured firewood. Chaitu narrates an incident where a foray into the forest with his friends in search of firewood led to the death of a co-worker of his, named Kancha Lama, having been trampled by an elephant in the forest. This incident, he reiterates is not an isolated incident. There have been scores of such deaths amongst the tea garden labourers entering the forest searching for means to maximise their economic condition.

Such sojourns into the forest are not only least with the dangers of encounters with wild animals, but also bear the risk of being caught by the forest officials. The economic

depravity of tea garden workers can be gorged from the fact that even after fully in knowledge of the risks involved with such activity, this still remains a prevalent activity amongst majority of tea garden workers. Chaitu still continues to visit the forests in company with his co-workers in pursuit of economic gains. It is hard to conclude whether the decision of Chaitu's grandfather to migrate from his ancestral place of Chotanagpur has really been fruitful for himself and his generations to come. A better living condition, whereby the tea garden management is forced to deal out the legitimate needs for sustenance of workers would definitely have provided for betterment these tea garden labourers to have a life much more positive, meaningful and worth looking up to. But the present ground reality is such that it is an extremely cumbersome task for a tea garden worker to break free from so much of negativity to which he is exposed. Chaitu is a prime example of where an individual has not been able to break free from the negative constrains surrounding a tea garden worker.

#### **Case Study 10- Telesphore Toppo (58yrs)**

Telesphore Toppo is presently employed as a staff in North Bengal University. His grandfather had migrated from Nawadighi, Gumla presently under Jharkhand. The land that is grandfather's father held in is an ancestral property was insufficient to work out a meaningful means of sustenance. Telesphore Toppo's grandfather thus migrated to North Bengal. He was initially employed as garden worker as Motidhar Tea Estate. The tea garden environment however, was not conducive for him. He thereby started to look for employment separate from tea gardens. He got himself employed as an agricultural worker under the *jamindars* of those areas.

During the era of 1970s owing to large scale land reforms by the then CPI (M) government, his grandfather managed to have agricultural lands under his own prowess he thus diligently got himself absorbed into this socio-economic improvement whereby managing to do away with the hard and insufficiently compromised life of tea garden workers. Telesphore Toppo's grandfather along with his children did manage to successfully cultivate the agricultural land that was bestowed on them as owners of agricultural land following land reforms by the initial Left Front government. All of Telesphore Toppo's siblings managed to have some amount of successful imprints in the educational field, thereby successfully managing to get into even higher education. Telesphore Toppo having successfully completed the post graduate curriculum was duly

absorbed as a staff within the North Bengal University. Another of his siblings had got employed with the State Government machinery. His life however got curtailed by his premature demise.

The educational empowerment as envisaged as Telesphore Toppo's grandfather still helps to further the socio-economic life of his progeny. Toppo did not sit back upon his achievement but furthered the cause of providing employment for his own children. This commitment has borne fruits as one of his children, despite numerous problems has managed to procure a post graduate degree for himself in physical education from Gwalior. His daughter is pursuing the curriculum aimed at graduation.

The numerous obstacles which surely were a part of this new migrant population did manage to propel the future generation towards establishing themselves amongst the mainstream population.

My numerous studies spanning across this migrants population lays bare the fact that individuals amongst this population, through their own zeal and mission, have successfully managed to uplift their future generation. Another hearting fact to note here is that once a particular generation, has got themselves established socio-economically, they have invariably tried to push the generations to come for better employment avenues, principally dependent on providing meaningful employment away from the tea gardens. Thus Telesphore Toppo himself being a post-graduate has successfully furthered the educational status of children thereby establishing the firm socio-economic foothold for his generations to come. There is a wide plethora of difference between these migrant tribal population, many of whom being content of their life as tea garden worker vis-à-vis many of the others trying their utmost to raise their educational standards thereby exposing their progeny towards dreaming of a life, much more economically viable than that of a tea garden worker. TelesphoreToppo's story is one such prime example where these first to second generation migrant population have managed to successfully rise up the social radar.

### **Crisis due to closure of the Tea Gardens**

Starvation deaths and death due to acute and prolonged malnutrition are increasing in these gardens. The health centre sources in the garden think that the average worker does

not get even 1500 calories a day, whereas the minimum should be more than 2200 calories per head per day. The average calorie intake is less among females. During our field visit we could easily notice the malnutrition of workers.

The health centre sources say that diseases related to prolonged and acute malnutrition have increased and the death rate of children has risen significantly. The two gardens we have visited did not have any cases of suicide. The workers, however, informed us that the number of premature deaths and physical impairments have increased in recent times. Some case studies of the female-headed families suggest that the men are laid off because they are ailing seriously and are not in condition to continue with work. In their place their wives have been taken as permanent labour. The breakdown of health services after the closure of both gardens have made the workers more vulnerable.

The incidence of water-borne diseases has increased as the regular supply of water has suffered greatly. With the increase of pressure on existing water sources for washing, bathing and drinking, the quality of water has suffered. Existing wells are not maintained properly.

With the breakdown of health services in the gardens the incidences of malaria and malaria related deaths have increased in recent months.

With the deterioration of the economic condition of the workers' families the drop-out rate at the primary and secondary level has increased significantly. By withdrawing children from schools parents save family expenses and engage children in odd jobs for some income; they are sent to the local markets to work in shops, hotels and in buses and small cars as helpers while the girls are being sent to work as domestic help in the middle class families. The workers we have interviewed have informed us that the incidence of child labour has substantially gone up despite the recent ban by the government.

Because of the closure, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS aims at preparing children below 3 years of age for school) programme and the Government drive for primary education and child health have been adversely affected. DOT, Pulse-Polio, and other health programmes of the government could not advance in these gardens because of the lack of any health infrastructure.

Women workers are not getting maternity allowance and maternity leave in closed gardens. This is making workers scared of pregnancies. In the event of pregnancy, women go without earning although they need extra money to take care of themselves, particularly for medicines and nutrition. Women workers are not even getting 1,500 calories against the standard of 2,250 calories a day.

According to a senior trade unionist, the trade union leader, the management of other running gardens is taking advantages of the huge number of unemployed workers and is engaging them at very poor wages and with an inhuman workload. In this fashion, planters of the state are trying their best to dismantle established wage-structure as well as work schedules.

Taking advantage of the state of complete disorder and absolute lawlessness, traders of green leaf and owners of Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs) and established manufacturers are keeping the price of green leaf low. This, in turn, is seriously affecting the interests of small holders and the workforces in those gardens.

### **STATUS AND POSITION OF TRIBAL WOMEN**

In order to have a square view of the elements of gender discrimination and the patterns of subjugation of women one has to explore the familial and social fields. The ideology of patriarchy runs down the social fields and family and finds its expression in the everyday life of tribal women. Also deserves attention is the pattern of cultural legitimization of the practices of domination and subjugation. Social scientists have given clues as to how family could be the immediate field of subjugation of women and how it functions as a field for reproduction of patriarchy. According Oberoi (1995: 36), for example, ‘family is also a site of exploitation and violence...’ In arguing that the family, more than the caste system, is responsible for reproducing inequalities within society, Andre Beteille observes that it works towards ‘transmitting its cultural and social capital to its younger members ...’ (Beteille 1995: 440). Certainly family plays a key role in fortifying the younger members with the elements of cultural capital but we should not overlook the fact that it is the family that institutionalizes the foundations of gender inequality and exploitation and adds credence to the ideology of patriarchy. The girl child is often discriminated against in granting share of the capital (material or otherwise) that is distributed through the family. Elaborating the point Karlekar says: ‘This inequality is embedded in oppressive structures of a family ideology committed to an age and gender hierarchy

which is worked out within a household' (Karlekar 1998: 1742). Karleker regrets that the violence against children and the aged are hardly perceived by scholars as instances of domestic violence; 'studies that would speak of discrimination against the girl child or the old grandfather in food and nutrition would view this in terms of physical impact of deprivation', she observes. Using the life cycle approach she argues that at every stage, there is discrimination and violence, particularly against girl children and later women within the household, either natal or conjugal. With age, problems are compounded with increased dependency, illness and fatigue. However, the patriarchic familial ideology may not be supremely hegemonic as 'micro studies may well point to the emergence of alternative discourses which question in many ways a dominant familial ideology' (Karlekar, 1998: 1742-43).

Going beyond the family, one can look for strings of patriarchy in the social field. Some such areas could be education (early dropout for women and feminization of some branches of education), land rights (denial of land right to women), employment (feminization of low paid unskilled jobs), political leadership (absence of women), and social functions (held under male leadership), and so on. One could also look for subjugation of women in practices like killing of female foetus, continued preference for male child, female infanticide, witch hunting (among the tribal communities), practice of polygyny, and so on. Such institutions and practices are reproduced in the social field as they are culturally legitimized and flow from the overpowering patriarchic social order. In India, and in other South Asian countries, 'it is socially and culturally accepted for women to be "possessed" by malevolent spirits; elaborate procedures for exorcism – which are often violent in nature – bring into focus the woman or girl who as a victim of this particular affliction is entitled to behave in ways which violate conventional norms of appropriate conduct (see Kakar 1983; Karlekar 1998: 1741). The other areas of subjugation could be over-exploitation of women labour, treatment of women as objects of sex, commodification of women by the market forces, marginalization of women in decision making, subjection of woman to disrespect and mal-treatment in everyday life in the family and in social space.

And then there is a social arrangement to reproduce the subjugated self in the shape of rules, prescription, values, customs and social expectations. The subjugation of women in everyday life, which automatically means loss of freedom for women, and its legitimation

in cultural terms and in the name of collective good could find illustration in *talibanism*, Islamic as well as Hindu versions, or in justification of practices of early marriage or witch killing in case of tribal communities.

Atrocities and cruelties are often institutionalized and they appear so natural that the perpetrator of cruelty and the victim are both unaware of their presence in everyday life unless enlightened otherwise. Examples: (1) even when the husband and wife have conflict-free normal relations the husband is in the habit of belittling the worth and quality of his wife. A lack of appreciation of the works of the wife is expressed in dismissive terms (words and gestures) resulting into insult of the wife. The institutionalized repetition of the same attitude and gesture permanently place the woman in a subjugated position in the family. The role expectations that follow from such a position spoil the possibility of growth of her free self. The space and freedom of the woman here is clearly encroached upon. The atrocity here may not come to the surface because neither the husband nor the wife is aware of the relation of coercion. They do not find any reason to regret or protest. At the most a sensitive wife would be upset at the undeserving treatment at the hands of the husband but she would prefer to keep her feelings within her. (2) The way the children in our society are brought up in their early formative years there is very little scope for free development of self; the career path and personality and capability (the self embodied with values) are unquestionably shaped by the patriarchy. The misconceptions and frustrations of the parent (read father) creep into the personality of the daughter/ son and thus ruin the possibility of the growth of free self. There is nothing wrong in the father playing a supportive role in the development of a free and self-reliant self of the daughter as she grows up but a dictatorial control of every movement of the girl and wrongly diagnosed career prescription can definitely hinder the free flowering of the self. The girls are brought up in such a way that they move on the terrains set for them by the society. Although there is always a possibility of a girl defying the social dictates and choosing a self-reliant path and living a life of dignity, fighting against patriarchic control. However, the girls are not often fortified with resources to change the prevailing gender relations nor they are allowed any free space to free themselves from the patriarchy and set gender relations in egalitarian terms.

Despite being in tune with the natural human tendencies and widely in practice socially polygamy and homosexuality are still to be culturally or legally legitimized and are

stigmatized, when such relations come to light. Such monolithic definition of sexuality and the associated morality straight away go against the natural tendencies and greatly impair the growth of self by way of suppression of freedom. The ideology of monogamy widely backed by the patriarchic society and legislations (the Marriage Acts, for example) tend to defy the natural tendencies and the praxis of life and prompt social deformities (social pathology, to use Durkhemian phrase). The male with his wider exposure and greater access to power is strategically better placed to subvert the moral and legal constraints and realize his polygamous or homosexual urges. His economic self reliance and patriarchic moral support motivates him greatly in this task. In the Indian social context the woman is in a disadvantageous position in comparison. Often she lacks the economic power and operates under much greater patriarchic and social constraint; often opportunities are less to express the impulses and are under closer social surveillance; more tied down to home and lack the exposure. This prepares her for withholding all her desires and passions and suppresses them under greater social and self restraints. Overall the patriarchic society offers too narrow a space to the woman to express her drives and desires. Marriage is thus taken as a life long relationship even when no love is lost between the partners. While the man can make a mockery of the institution of marriage and the associated moral codes by holding it and still satisfy the polygamous tendencies with certain degree of social tolerance (because the patriarchic arrangements is in most cases successful in making the woman reconcile with this) the woman is simply not allowed the necessary space to replicate this in her life.

In such an arrangement people tend to turn hypocritical and unfaithful to family values and the prescribed moral codes. One can thus question the holding capacity of the moral coded embedded in marriage acts and the socially defined morality enshrined in the practice of monogamy and heterosexuality. The basic question is that the pre-existing modes of 'social disciplining' are coercive, hypocritical and anti-freedom and ineffective.

The known history of the Indian tribes is a masculine history and in the literature on tribes the women are largely absent. In a nation-wide survey of tribal women the Indian Anthropological Society (1978) confirmed this observation. The survey found out that in the existing literature studies of tribal women is either absent or very sketchy. Whatever ethnographic accounts of tribal life we have could be used to have some idea about the status of women in tribal societies. The existing literature could be classified into two

broad categories in terms of their assessment of the status of tribal women. The European anthropologists working on the Indian tribes largely draw a very positive picture of tribal women. The recent studies by Indian scholars however bring out the universally patriarchic character of tribal communities.

About the observations of the European scholars we have to keep in mind that studies were made about some specific tribes and the scope for generalization was little. We have also to keep in mind that the tribal communities of today are not in the same socio-economic formation. There are wide variations in the social, economic and cultural standing of various tribes and as a result the social standing of the tribal women would vary from tribe to tribe. The life of the tribal women thus could bring out contrasting pictures, making generalization a very difficult task. Contra the views of the European scholars, relatively recent studies by Indian scholars however draw out a picture of subjugated tribal women.

Examining the impact of modernization and development on the life of tribal women Xaxa has identified two dominant trends. He argues that the state-sponsored and market induced development process has widened the internal class difference within the tribal communities. While the better sections among the tribal population have availed of the opportunities to their advantage. The women in this section have elevated their social status by following the urban ways of living and by emulating the norms and practices of the women of the dominant caste groups. Citing the example of educated Ho in white-collar jobs Sachchidananda suggests that how the preference is changing from a working wife to homebound wives (Sachchidananda 1988: 84). In this process of modernization the better off tribal women have distanced themselves from their cultural roots (Xaxa 2004: 358). The impoverished tribal women, however, remain largely immune to forces of modernization. The wretched tribal women who migrate to urban and industrial centres find them utterly marginalized in the social, economic and political fields and find them further subjugated. Punalekar (1988: 94-102) observes that in towns the women develop a strong sense of insecurity and a sense of dependence. In matters of jobs and wages they heavily depend on their husbands or fathers. Thus, not only modernization or urbanization do not bring any liberation message to the subjugated tribal women they in fact prepare the ground for further subjugation of the wretched tribal women.

Whatever may be the *de jure* situation, we generally see that tribal women hardly have any access to property; neither of husband's property nor father's property. We have documented ethnographic accounts of the traditional tribal *panchayats*, where there is not a single instance of a woman member being elected as a *panchayat* leader, not even in the matrilineal societies like the Khasi. A woman convict is not even allowed to present her version before the tribal *panchayat* court; decision making is the male prerogative. Metaphorically speaking the tribal women are often seen dancing to the male tune (in folk dance forms), the women are subjected to manual labour until they breath their last, and their body is alienated from them as they are subjected to unitary sexual exploitation in the family and outside, in adolescence and until they remain sexually capable. As they live in subsistence economy tribal women in India are universally made to double their roles as housewife and earner. Besides if we look in the treatment of women in the every day life and take into account the indices of gender discrimination it appears rather easy to discern that the exploitation of women in tribal society is more or less total and institutionalized. The set patterns of male domination find their expression in various gestures, interaction patterns and social institutions and are thus reproduced in the social and cultural spheres.

Despite such evidences of tribal patriarchy there section of social scientists who nurse a false perception that the tribal women enjoy a relatively higher status compared to their caste Hindu counterparts. They tend to draw a positive picture of the status of tribal women on the basis of some casual and surface-level observations like higher sex-ratio, absence of the practice of identification and destruction of female fetus, absence of dowry. They are unnecessarily elated at the presence of the institution of bride-price, the higher level of work participation, higher incidence of love- and intertribal marriage, their greater role in handling the money they earn, and possibly at their greater role in house-keeping.

A first time visitor to a tribal settlement would simply be fascinated to see the ease and elegance with which a tribal woman would face him/her and answer the queries, and answer even uneasy questions at times. She/he would be impressed to notice how the average tribal women remain absolutely unperturbed at being snapped or when a micro microphone is tagged in her blouse as preparation for a long interview or at being asked awkward questions concerning conjugal life, use of contraceptives or imposition of sex

on them by their husbands. A tribal woman does not feel shy in narrating how she got pregnant before marriage or how her husband made her younger sister pregnant when she had come to look after her during her pregnancy. A young tribal mother can easily ignore the presence of a stranger to feed her new born baby while being interviewed. Anthropologists with long experience of working among Hindu and Muslim communities would at once notice the distinctiveness of tribal character. However, a closer look at the micro-details of gender relations would reveal a picture that would take us to deconstruct the prevailing notion. In order to have a closer look at the gender equations in tribal communities we have, in the following section, traveled to a field situation in a tea plantation in Dooars of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal.

‘The Santhal have different sets of village rituals for the village collective and for the family. There is complete exclusion of women from participation in worship of family spirits, just as their role in collective worship is also very limited. .. Men alone can relate to the family spirits nor participate in their worship. Married sisters and daughters are not allowed into the internal shrine (‘bhitri’). It is usually cleaned by unmarried girls. But no woman is allowed to participate in the rites. They cannot sacrifice animals or witness the sacrifice. On marriage the women leave the father’s clan, but never become full members of the husband’s clan. This is a crucial step in creating a class of persons with lower political rights. Women are also excluded from most of the village collective rituals. They cannot enter the sacred grove (jaher or saran). Women are virtually excluded from participation in worship. While women do participate in many matters of ritual, including preparation of materials for the various sacrifices, they have a definitely inferior position in this regard and are not supposed to show familiarity with the various spirits, bongas.

Tribal communities in the tea gardens of Dooars in Jalpaiguri district, which had their origin in Chotanagpur plateau, are by nature patriarchic. The elements of patriarchy are manifest in their economic, social and cultural fields, in family relations and in conjugal relation, and in political participation. The elements of gender discrimination are well entrenched in tribal conscious and they appear so “natural” to them and are therefore non-issues. It is difficult not to notice that although the tribal communities show a high degree of homogeneity in their economic and social life and show a great deal of adherence to the “collective consciousness” there are signs of differentiation and departure from the collective and the emergence of micro areas of autonomy at the

individual and family levels. This makes generalizations about gender relations difficult; there could thus be various levels and layers of gender discrimination among the tribes in a plantation situation.

Women were generally shy of talking on this issue of sex but it is understandable that there were many more cases of imposition as tribal women had little control over their body, which was captive of their husband. We found that the idea of using contraceptives by men was totally absent. Although the men are aware of various methods none uses them since they are universally guided by the perception that contraceptive use would minimize the pleasure. The obvious consequence of not using contraceptives is that the frequency of conception is high, and that the women simply do not have a say or control in matters of conception until they go for ligation. Sterilization is almost universal for the women while their husbands safely avoid operation and the associated trouble. The prevailing idea is that if there is any impotency let the women bear it. That the women are treated as objects of consumption is evident also from the incidents like conception before marriage; in three such cases one was made pregnant by her lover; one had come to the relative's place before marriage where she got pregnant by a distant relative; and one was made pregnant by her brother-in-law when she had come to take care of her pregnant sister.

In a subsistence economy it is always the choice between work and starvation. The women suffer the most as every bit of their labour is put to use in order to make best use of whatever income opportunities come by their way besides being put at the service of the men in the family and at the work place. The use value of the women possibly adds credence to the institution of bride price, which is often mistaken as the symbol of women's higher status among the tribes. The orientation of the girls is tuned in such a way that they turn out to be the objects of satisfaction of physical and material needs of the men-folk. Discriminatory treatment of the girls begins even before they attain puberty. They are withdrawn from school mostly at the primary stage as they reach 9/10 years of age, are engaged in domestic chores, engaged as casual labour in the garden, and restrictions are imposed on their movements and they are prepared for marriage, the greater phase of subjugated life. Dropout among the girls takes place earlier than among the boys. In case of many families if someone among the children has to be withdrawn from school because of poverty it would obviously be the girl and if anybody's education

is to be supported it would obviously be that of the boy. All such practices of gender discrimination are culturally and ideologically legitimated and are reproduced in the social field in the name of love, care, affection and child rearing. We did not come across any apparent grudge against the discriminatory practices in course of the fieldwork.

Because of high incidence of family break up the tribal families do not have the support system a normal joint family would have had. As a consequence, the working tribal women have to work harder in the domestic field and as an adaptation they seek support from their unmarried daughters in looking after the younger children and in sharing the other burdens of domestic chores. There is thus a set pattern of how a tribal girl would grow up and how she would be exploited as a manual labour throughout her life and, in the absence of education, the possibility of becoming someone 'better than a manual labour' is nipped in the bud.

The women in the plantation are engaged in marginal, lowest-rank jobs bearing lowest wage and lowest status; they cannot be found in office jobs even when there are qualified women; the office jobs are monopolized by the men. The total absence of diversification of women's job and total dependence on the garden for job opportunities leave the women with little option but to remain in perpetual captivity. Some women are predominantly involved in *haria* making, although they have less freedom to drinking, which is a male prerogative.

There is a crèche in the garden which is run for certain hours in the day. However, the women in the garden still prefer to carry their little kids on their back while going to the market or going for collection of firewood. They do it because they have to breast-feed the new born and also because they do not have an alternative support system to take care of the little kids. Sometimes when the mother is at work she carries the baby on her back, securely bound with a piece of cloth.

There is simply no idea of inheritance of property by the daughters. With their marriage the women lose all rights on the jobs or the retirement benefits of their parents. The grown up sons, on the other hand, inherit the jobs and properties of their retiring parents and treat them with neglect in their old age. The working mothers in the 40s and 50s are often pressurized to retire from their service in order to make room for their sons. The

working mothers thus help their sons settle down while putting their own future at risk. We can refer to the cases of Bohamuni Munda (44 years) and Budhuwari Oraon (55 years) who had to opt for VRS in favour of their sons.

The retiring women are robbed of their pension and retirement benefits by their young sons as they demand money to satisfy their craze for TV, Music System and Motor bike, thanks to the spread of consumerist culture among the garden tribes.

A woman's life is lived in the family and much of how this life would be lived would largely depend on how she is treated in her childhood in the parental family and in the later stages by the husband and grown up children. The treatment at the hands of the in-laws does not matter much as in most cases the families split into nuclear families after the marriage of the son. The high incidence of illiteracy and lack of education suggest that the parents do not take much care in developing the human resources in their daughters. As a result, they grow up with limited resource in the shape of physical labour and this adversely affects the growth of woman self. Preference for male child continues to be an expectation of the mother and father; women confirmed that they expected a boy when they conceived for the first time. They said that their expectation was in conformity with the social expectation. Interestingly, some women said that they did not have any preference but none admitted of having a preference for a girl child, at least for the first time they conceived.

Women's life moves in a narrow terrain, with not much of movement or entertainment. The negative effect of popularization of television media could be felt on the life of the women in the otherwise remote garden situation as well. Women have no scope for entertainment in life; they spend their whole life working in the garden and at home; visits to the market places are made with the purpose of shopping; entertainment trips are limited to trips to the fairs, circus, occasional film shows and to the house of some relatives at the neighbouring places. There are TV sets in most houses with cable connection and the local cable operators run popular Hindi and Bhojpuri films but the most common complaint was that the women do not find time to watch television programmes. They also complained that with the popularization of television they now visit their neighbours much less, the folk forms of dance and songs have suffered the most and with that the women have lost a very important source of entertainment.

Predominant preference for boys has already been mentioned. The discrimination receives institutional legitimation in *Chatti*, the purification ceremony arranged within a week of child birth. We noticed that the grandness of the function and expression of happiness vary depending upon whether the child is a boy or a girl. The parents usually treat the Dagrín by offering her a better package of gifts in case of a boy child.

In practicing their traditional beliefs a whole lot of restrictions are imposed on the pregnant women particularly on their movements. Their movement in the night is confined to the house for fear of a *Churin* (witch), who, it is believed, would try to make friendship with the woman to destroy her womb.

The practice of the institution of witchcraft speaks for uncivilized treatment of women in tribal communities in Dooars region. Although there has not been any incidence of witch hunting in this garden the neighbouring gardens in the region are often driven by this menace. Often the elderly women, and not the men, are identified as witches and are brutally killed; even their family members do not come forward in their defense. In our study we found that eleven women confirmed their belief in the institution and ten said that they do not believe in it, while the remaining seven did not come out with any clear cut answer. Worthwhile to mention is that those who rejected the institution of witchcraft were mostly Christian and of relatively younger age and that a voice is emerging within the tribal communities against the practice of witch hunting.

Health is one of the areas where gender discrimination is strongly felt. Early conception, unplanned conception, frequent conception, large number of children, frequent cohabitation, hard labour at the work place and at the domestic sector tells upon the health of the average women. The girls often grow up with fragile health; under sustained malnutrition and without proper health care they are often unprepared for the hard physical labour that their later life would demand of them.

The education scene the garden is characterized by: (1) wide gender gap in the literacy, (2) higher and early drop out from studies by the girls, (3) almost total absence of education beyond school level among the women, (4) in some cases boys are given preferential treatment as they are sent to privately managed English medium schools

which are considered to be the guarantee to better education, and (5) female education is not a priority or a part of the tribal culture in the garden. Girls are withdrawn before they complete primary education and are engaged in domestic chores. Some are even engaged as casual worker in the garden. Many women are not aware of financial support from the government for the education of the tribal children and they were not aware of job reservation for the educated tribal girls in the government sector. The missing link between education and job opportunity, alien medium of education, alien syllabus, high rate of failure in annual examinations, inability to pay for private tuition, early marriage, overdependence on garden for jobs are together responsible for keeping the women in the darkness of illiteracy.

**Empowerment: A Distant Dream-** Politically tribal women are generally dormant; they do not take much interest in trade union activities, and hardly take part in political activities. When they vote in *panchayat* and other elections they are influenced by the male members in the family, the husbands in particular. The access to political information is low and they do not believe that politics could be an effective means to better their life. The erstwhile solid and collective political existence of the tribal communities is no longer a reality as they are now politically fragmented; Unionization is cent per cent and as a result of some exposure to trade union activities the average workers are now aware of their rights as workers. After the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, which was put into effect in 1992 Panchayat election, the tea gardens were also brought under the *panchayat* system and the women and men workers had an opportunity to participate in the institutions of direct democracy. However, we have observed that the women workers are far from being active in *panchayat* politics. Incidentally trade union activism has not had much effect in transforming the women as active political agents of the decentralized democracy. They generally confine their political activism to mere voting, mostly for the party of their husband's choice; On enquiring about the nature of their political participation we found out that women were "apathetic" as they do not take any interest in politics apart from voting while "some interest" and participate in political activities mostly in the form of attending political rallies. However, out of 125 women 49 women elected members said that they came into politic 'voluntarily' and that they were "active" in politics. In order to understand the levels of political participation we have taken into account certain factors like level of information, whether she can justify her political action, whether she is influenced by her

husband in supporting a party, the details of participation in trade union and political activities like meetings, agitations and movements, and whether she is aware of the issues on which movements are launched. In the tea garden situation politics continues to be the male domain and the collective wisdom for political activism is nowhere in sight.

The way the tribal women have been located in this paper in the familial and societal contexts under the spell of patriarchy might appear misleading because the problem of tribal women could not be approached but in the context of overall social situation of the tribal people as a whole. Even the continuation of patriarchy is the outcome of the continuing social, economic and political order. Therefore, there is little scope to place the tribal women against the tribal men in finding way outs. The struggle for improvement of gender relations and the fight against patriarchy have to be a joint fight of men and women and the fight should spread to both the micro and macro areas of tribal life. One could easily notice some positive changes within the tribal communities and forces are coming up for a change. Strategies of change should be worked out to organize the pro-change forces from within and add muscle and strength to that. Any change to be effective has to be organic and from within and should not be imposed from above. The ultimate aim should be to effect a culture change, a change of perceptions by way of changing the objective conditions the tribal life at present.

Treating women as a class apart and playing them against the dominant men would not lead us anywhere in our fight for freedom for tribal women. An imagination of the 'social atom' would not be possible without any one of the dialectical forces, the men and the women. We can therefore strive for a greater space in the economic, social and political spheres for the women in order to strike a relationship based on equity, mutual respect, and partnership. Both the forces in the dialectics have to change their attitudes and approaches (to each other) to create a new social space of freedom. The men have to change more since they continue to be the dominant force in the power relations.

A change in attitudes and approaches on either side can recast the gender relations on the principles of humanity, mutual respect, equity and partnership. But a mere change in attitudes cannot take us very far in bringing about women's liberation. We need a macro and all-out approach to change the existing economic, political and social-cultural arrangements where the women would be able to roam with greater dignity and respect,

where womanhood can flourish to its full. A greater, conscious and active participation of women in the fields of education, economic activities, political institutions and movements, greater role in decision making in everyday life, sports and other fields of creative activities like arts and music, a self-defense and social defense mechanism to stop atrocities against women in their everyday life would go a long way in achieving our objectives. A change in the socialization process and priorities of the girls and women could also be very effective.

Social scientists and feminist activists are often content with addressing the expressed forms of atrocities against women such as rape, wife burning, wife beating, eve-teasing, denial of property rights to women, over exploitation of woman labour, fetus killing, female infanticide, and so on which could be captured in statistical form. The issues of gender discrimination are raised and fought in terms of reservation of seats in legislative and administrative bodies, minimization of women illiteracy, raising health status and raising work participation rate. The underlying perception is that gender equality could be achieved with governmental intervention, with legal and institutional restructuring in favour of the women. The essences of this formalist and statist approach could hardly be overstated for the simple reason that the macro statistics are indeed the indicators of the gravity of gender discrimination in a society and there is an immediate need for juridical-institutional restructuring if we aim at moving towards gender equity. At the same time we could argue that the gravity of gender discrimination could hardly be captured only in terms of statistics on expressed cruelties and that the institutional-statist approach to gender question cannot take us to a desired level of striking gender equity. We have therefore to look into the social field, the field of civil society and the micro aspects of everyday life, which often evade the attention of the activists and social scientists in their construction of gender problematic. Likewise, the battle for a free woman self has to be taken to the social field, to the micro aspects of subjugation, humiliation and marginalization of woman self.

Indian Constitutional Amendments in recent past have been directed towards empowerment of women of the underprivileged sections of the society. Various reservations for tribal women seats in local body elections right up to the highest echelons of powers are principally aimed at furthering these women of underprivileged society. Though, quite a substantial populace of women of this society has successfully tried to

further their social and political positions under these social reforms, there remain a substantial percentage of women of this class who continue to be just ornamental posts under this present domain. A principally male dominant society is a huge hindrance towards realization of true potential of women at large. A majority patriarchal society prevalent amongst the tribal population of North Bengal still is a substantial challenge towards promulgation of social reforms as envisaged in the various socio-political reforms. Women, though empowered with constitutional reforms aimed towards furtherance of their socio-political status, are still not in a social position to actually avail of the opportunities that are guaranteed for them at the grass root level. It is thus extremely hard to find women who have made true realization of the political powers that are bestowed on them through various constitutionalized programmes. Majority of them end up as just stooges in the hands of their menfolk who are least interested in political empowerment of women at large.

A vibrant social movement aimed towards gender equality is the need of the hour so that various constitutional provisions aimed towards women empowerment are brought to their meaningful social conclusion. Though the various legal means aimed towards empowerment of down-trodden women are praiseworthy, lack of meaningful social movements aimed towards actual empowerment of women remains an obstacle. Under this context, various reservations schemes continue to be meaningless. A vast majority of the tribal women still continue to be skeptical about their participation in political process. Amongst those who actually venture out in the political arena, the percentage of these women having substantial and independent and meaningful contribution towards decision-making process at the grass root level is miniscule. Majority of the them tend to be influenced and governed by the male members of their family and society at large, thereby rendering them to be nothing more but political tools in the hands of the dominant male folk.

Dismal standards of education amongst the women folk of this strata of society is a huge impediment towards meaningful social contribution. They thus lean towards the men for support for every aspect of their life. Having a powerful socio-economic contribution thus remains far from the realms of their life. Various means envisaged under constitutionalized political reforms thus have only a cosmetic value. Education of womenfolk has to be the primary driving force towards women empowerment. All other

measures although having constitutional and legal backing in form of reservations for the down trodden women, have little value unless and until supplemented by a vibrant and educated women members of this society.

Lack of education renders these women incapable of contributing meaningfully towards upliftment of their society. It is however heartening to note that many of the women folk, empowered with education have managed to have significant contributions as elected members of political bodies. Another major factor contributing towards deprivation of women is the appalling standards of health care amongst this society. Women primarily have to bear the brunt of lack of proper health care. This extends right from pre-natal health care facilities up to the pre-natal and ante-natal care of women. Abysmal levels of living standards amongst this strata of the society renders women victim to extremely poor health care standards.

Drawn between contributing financially towards economic stability of their families under (working as tea garden labourers) and looking after their households, they have precious little time for thoughts directed towards their own socio-economic upliftment. A life of a tribal woman employed as tea garden worker is extremely harsh as despite having obligations towards maintaining their families and doing their household chores, they have to adhere to the tough working conditions of a tea garden labourer. This is constrained by the constant threats of loss of their daily earnings, if they are not able to stick to the tea garden working schedule. The thought of being an influencing factors towards changing of their society and status of women as a whole does therefore not enter into their life. Majority of women amongst this class of society are extremely burdened by their own social position, thereby rendering themselves vulnerable to exploitation by the established political forces amongst the society.

It, however, has to be admitted that there has been quite a substantial progress amongst these sections of society over ages and generations. A woman having a politically important position whereby she has the capacity to have meaningful contributions was unthinkable even thirty to forty years back. It is heartening to note that some percentage of women of these society, though it may be miniscule, have come forward to lay claims to their legitimate political space. The common background of all women having made meaningful socio-political contribution is the fact that they have all an above average

educational background. Though the situation at the grass-root level is far from satisfactory, it has to be admitted that important and meaningful progress towards women empowerment has been attained. It has to be considered as a welcome and positive step forward.

The challenge in this scenario is to search out ways and means to further consolidate these gains. While reservations that are constitutionally guaranteed and aimed towards furthering of socio-political status of women of this society are a welcome step, social movements aimed at educating the under-privileged girl child are the need of the hour if we are to really bring about social and gender equality in a primarily male driven society like a India. Social awareness and demands of reservations does catapult many a woman into positions of power, but lack of education renders them to be pawns in the hands of primarily male dominated political spectrum of India. A truly benevolent state having empowerment of women as its main agenda should definitely strive towards actual empowerment of women encompassing all fields of social lives that is social, economic and political. My numerous encounters with elected political representatives amongst women of these society leaves me with lots of positivity (contributed by women representatives who have meaningful say in their society), and lots of cases which have failed to meet the required parameters for upliftment of their immediate society. It is however extremely difficult to judge whether the positives outweigh the negatives. But one thing is surely positive to know that participation of women of this underprivileged society in political decision-making has surely gone up quite a few notches.

Thus, the principal challenge is to consolidate and further the gains that have been achieved over years of social-political movements. Any society which is progressive and vibrant cannot achieve its true potential without incorporating the most under privileged and down-trodden strata of their society. Policies aimed towards making India vibrant and developed country has to definitely incorporate strategies aimed at upliftment of the weakest part of its society. A social movement is thus the need of the hour, movement that will lay primary emphasis on providing basic educational facilities to the under-privileged girls of the society. Political moves aimed towards generating equality amongst the gender and various classes of society can only have meaningful impact if it is backed up by social movements aimed towards generating educational parity amongst the various

sections of the society. While quite a substantial amount of work has been done in India, there still remain lots of lacunae.

There are quite a substantial number of female political representatives from these so called backward strata of Indian society who, by their sustained and meaningful socio-political activism, have managed to have positive social impacts. This should serve as a platform for furtherance of these socio-political movements primarily aimed at upliftment of the backward tribal women. It however, primarily hinges on provision of basic educational facilities across the society and creation of a strong and vibrant social awareness programme, so that these can supplement the political endeavors.

My study has analyzed the prevailing ground reality amongst women of tribal societies of North Bengal. A comprehensive analysis aimed towards assessing meaningful political participation of these women through interactions with these women assessment of data and comparative study between the past and present scenario is the principal goal of my study. It not only analyzed the progress achieved through years, but also to point out the lacunae that need to be addressed for further improving the condition of these tribal women.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Thus it is not uncommon to find large tribal group in North Bengal who, while being unattached to the tea industry, have over generation manage to have a alternative and meaningful source of sustenance. It is thus very common to find tribal groups who have principally conglomerated together into villages who collectively and personally hold substantial amounts of agricultural lands, which over the course of time have provided them with the alternative source of livelihood. It also to be noted that groups such as these have been able to hold on to their cultural and linguistic inheritance at a level which is far more indigenous, as compared with such tribal groups which have principally been employed as labourers in tea garden.

While it is so very common to find, for example tribals of Oroan clan employed in tea garden as labourers, who have been totally cut off from their primarily linguistic and social roots, the alternative tribal population who have chosen a path of self-determination in terms of procuring and cultivating agricultural lands have over the

period of time been much more successful in preserving their ancient cultural and linguistic heritage. It is thus very common to find an Oroan family working as labourer in a tea garden to be unable to even speak their language of origin. However, contrary to this a majority of the same tribal population who have chosen to struggle and cultivate vast agricultural land on their own, thereby negating the easy and secure path of guaranteed livelihood as tea garden workers, have over generations managed to uphold their linguistic and cultural heritage.

I thus found quite a majority of these population being able to speak and communicate in their original linguistic dialects, be it Oroan, Munda etc. vis-à-vis the tribal population engaged as tea garden labourers, who have principally fore gone their ancestral heritage and have amalgamated into a common cultural and linguistic platform. It is so very common to see these tribal groups, from whatever clan they may be speaking principally a common language like *Sadri* and having a cultural repertoire that is a conglomeration of all the different and varied tribal cultures, each divergent from each other. While integration of divergent cultures is always a welcome trend, perseverance of unique cultures is still of paramount importance. This amazing conflict that exists within these tribal groups of North Bengal, based primarily on their choice of ancestral livelihood, is an intriguing phenomenon.

Majority of present day tribal population in North Bengal are migrants. They migrated from the divergent areas ranging from Chotanagpur, Chattisgarh. Most of these migrant tribal population principally chose migrate to North Bengal in search for better avenues for livelihood. North Bengal has the unique advantage of conducive climate for a flourishing tea garden industry. This was mainly and initially recognised by the Britishers who had set up numerous tea gardens spanning across North Bengal. There was an extreme want of labourers for sustenance of this upcoming tea garden industry. This huge void for want of cheap tea garden labourers was filled up primarily by this migrant tribal population. Areas like Chotanagpur and Chatisgarh boasting of a substantial tribal population were not economically sustainable to support this population of these tribal persons.

Agriculture, being the sole means of livelihood in these areas, was not able to cater to this significant tribal population residing in these areas. The lure of a better livelihood as compared to the traditional agricultural means of earning a living was quite a factor in

this huge exodus of tribal population from these divergent areas into North Bengal. Though the majority of this migrant tribal population got themselves absorbed into this tea garden industry, there still remains a considerable amount of this population who have managed to charter out a livelihood which is not dependent upon this tea garden industry. This migrant tribal population was divergent in their social and linguistic character. It is however interesting to note that this varied group of tribal societies who subsequently got incorporated into the tea industry, where amalgamated into a homogenous group where by each tribe lost its distinctive cultural and linguistic identity. It is hence common to note that these varied tribal population working as labourers in tea garden have over generations even managed to come up with a common tribal language like *sadri*, which is very much the language of communication amongst the various tribal groups of tea garden. This however is in stark contrast to those groups of migrant tribals who chose to earn their livelihood, separate from the tea gardens. These individual tribal groups conglomerated together and set up their residential premises in close proximity of each other.

Thus it is very common, especially in the *terai* region of North Bengal to find villages which can claim to be the true inheritors of individual and distinct tribal groups. Over the generations to come these tribal groups have managed to outshine those tribes with have chosen to be absorbed into the tea gardens. Furthermore, it is worth a note that preservation of their cultural and linguistic identity is of paramount importance to these tribal groups which are away from the tea industry. Thus while it is very common in the areas of *Dooars* to find divergent tribal groups, who have lost their individual identity, and thus even foregoing their distinctive language to embrace a common language like *sadri*, it is still very common to find tribal groups in the *terai* area who still retain their individual and distinctive cultural and linguistic characters. There thus remains a vast difference between the tribal populations residing in *Dooars* and *terai* regions of North Bengal. Those migrant tribal populations who, over generation have been employed as tea garden labourers have still now found it extremely difficult to break away from this status as tea garden workers.

This has been a major impediment towards their socio economic progress and integration into the main stream of society. On the other hand their remains a quite a substantial tribal population in *terai* region who having chosen to live a life away from the tea gardens,

over generation, have managed to further their life, over course of generations, to enrich the life of their progeny. This is of course in furtherance of protecting their individual tribal characteristics, which are very much prevalent and noticeable amongst the present day generations of these tribes, where the present generation still communicates in their distinctive tribal language and maintains their distinctive tribal cultures and traditions.

In contemporary age while many tribal communities continue to be subjugated by their neighbors and outsiders, a majority of them refuse to submit themselves to the high handedness of the outsiders. Formation of organizations solely based on the agenda of looking after, projecting and highlighting the tribal society related issues has been a recent trend in the Indian social structure. In this context, mention must be made of the (AdivasiVikashParishad, AVP) which holds an enormous clout amongst the tribal populations of specially the North Bengal area. There have been many instances in the recent past when this organization has forced the administration to come to the discussion table regarding the various issues concerning the tribal societies of this area. The political force that is the organization such as these wields stems out of the fact that the tribal population in general is becoming increasingly more assertive towards protection and furthering of their cause.

To summarize, over a span of generations, the part of migrant tribal population who chose not to be absorbed into a tea garden industry have over generations, managed to definitely have a distinctive edge over their brethren who chose to work as tea garden labourers. It definitely is an interesting phenomena which goes on to prove that individual human groups which are left to fend for themselves under inhospitable circumstance do manage to, through their ingenuity, curve out a meaningful means of sustenance for generations to come.

## CHAPTER V

### **POLITICAL DEMOGRAPHY OF MATELLI AND PHANSIDEWA BLOCK: THE AREA OF STUDY**

#### **MATELLI BLOCK**

Malbazar subdivision of Jalpaiguri district has numerous tea gardens. It will not be an exaggeration to state that quite a majority of the population is herein employed under the aegis of tea industry. Tea gardens, at large, were set up in the colonial British era. The working force for this industry was primarily tribal, incorporated mainly from the tribal belt of Chhota Nagpur. Centuries and decades hence, the working population remains unchanged. Majority of the labour force are tribal emigrants from Chhota Nagpur. The vast majority have henceforth shaken their roots identify themselves fully with the culture and land that they have been working under for centuries. However, they still retain some part of their indigenous culture.

The tribal culture and languages have undergone an amazing amalgamation in dooars area of West Bengal whereby they have developed a common language like ‘*sadri*’– the principal language of community for the tribal population. For centuries and decades together, this population was castigated as the “working populace”, thus devoid of the fruits of advancement of the general society. Recent endeavours of the Indian government aimed towards assimilation of the downtrodden into the main stream has however, borne fruits. The local governing body and *panchayati raj* has provided this population a scope for putting forth their demands meaningfully through a platform that has constitutional validity.

Matelli Community Development Block is in Malbazar sub-division of Jalpaiguri district. This area falls under the jurisdiction of Matelli police station. Head quarters of the Block is at Chalsa. Geographically, Matelli is located at 26.55’30seconds North and 85;45’ East. Matelli Community Development Block has an area of 54.88 sq-km. National highway 31C passes through Matelli Block. It falls under Alipurduar Lok Sabha Constituency and Nagarkata Bidhan Sabha Constituency. There are two higher secondary schools (Matelli Higher Secondary School which is Bengali Medium school and Rastrabhasha Hindi High School) and one Junior Girl’s School. Besides this, there are two primary schools (Matelli Special Boarding Free Primary School and Aamtala Free Primary School).

Gram panchayats of Matelli Block/PanchayatSamity are Bidhannagar, Indong Matialli, Matialli Hat, Matialli-Batabari I and Matialli-Batabari II.

**Table 5.1: Showing the number of Gram Panchayats under Matelli Block**

<b>SL NO.</b>	<b>GRAM PANCHAYTS</b>
1.	BIDHANNAGAR
2.	INDONG MATIALLI
3.	MATIALLI HAT
4.	MATIALLI BATAARI I
5.	MATIALLI BATABARI II

Matelli Block predominantly comprises of rural population. As per 2011 census of India, Matelli CD Block has a total population of 117,540 of which 102,418 are rural populace and 15,122 are urban. There are 60,109 males and 57,431 females. Scheduled Castes numbered 17,622 and Scheduled Tribes numbered 51,769.

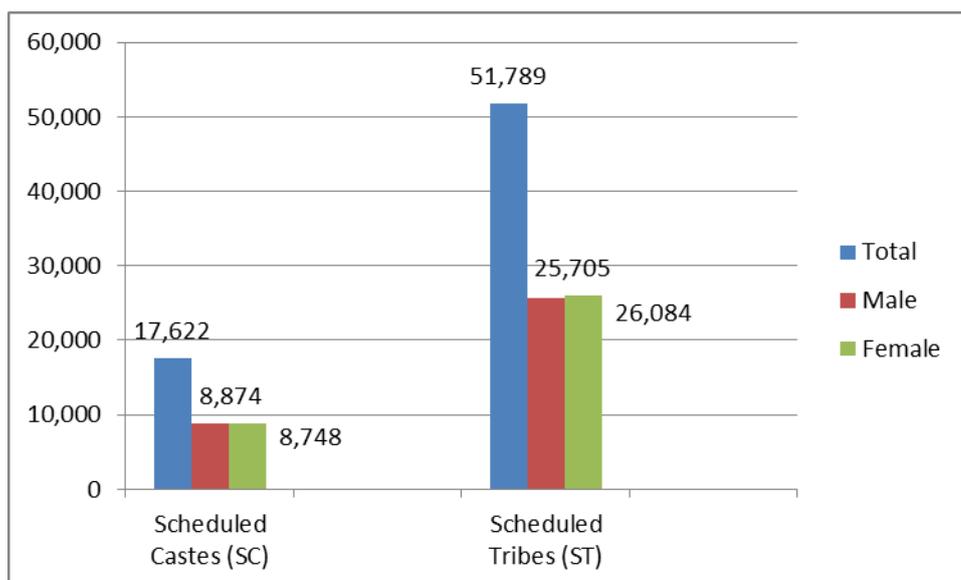
**Table 5.2: Showing the population of SCs and STs in Matialli Block**

<b>Matelli block (2011 census)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Scheduled Castes (SC)	17,622	8,874	8,748
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	51,789	25,705	26,084

Census of India, 2011

The above table shows that the Scheduled Tribe population outnumbers the Scheduled Castes population. According to 2011 census of India the ST population is 51,789 in Matelli Block where female population is 26,084 and male population is 25,705. It means that female population is higher than the male population. Total SC population is 17,622 where 8,874 is male and 8,748 is female population according to 2011 census of India (see Table 5.2). Below is the chart showing the population of SCs and STs in Matelli Block. (Chart No.5.1)

**Chart No.5- Showing the population of SCs and STs in Matelli Block**



**Table 5.3: Gram Panchayatwise Population of Census – 2001**

Block: Matelli

District: Jalpaiguri

G.P.	Total population		Category wise Population Break-Up			
	Male	Female	SC	ST	OTH	Total
Matialli- Batabari-I	12809	12524	3547	13680	8106	25333
Matialli- Batabari-II	9223	8604	4635	6596	6596	17827
Bidhanagar	9381	9093	2956	8868	6650	18474
Matialli Hat	9778	10062	2381	6349	11110	19840
IndongMatialli	12274	12113	1707	13169	9511	24387
Total Pop.ofMatialli Block	53465	52396	15226	48662	41973	105861

Source: Census Charge Officer & Block Development Officer, Matialli Development Block, 2001

**Table 5.4: Showing Block and GP wise Population of Census – 2011 of Matialli Block**

G.P.	Total no. of household	Total population			Category wise Population Break-Up			
		Male	Female	Total	SC	ST	OTH	Total
Matialli- Batabari-I	6044	13554	13653	27207	4052	16085	7028	27165

<b>Matiali- Batabari-II</b>	4227	9643	9345	18988	3997	8848	6005	18850
<b>Bidhanagar</b>	4573	10553	10187	20740	3790	8722	8294	20806
<b>Matiali Hat</b>	4413	10322	10652	20974	2659	9609	8801	21069
<b>IndongMatiali</b>	5564	12823	12925	25748	3155	14529	8169	25853
<b>Total Pop.ofMatiali Block</b>	<b>24821</b>	<b>56895</b>	<b>56762</b>	<b>113657</b>	<b>17653</b>	<b>57793</b>	<b>38297</b>	<b>113743</b>

Source: Census Charge Officer & Block Development Officer, Matiali Development Block, 2011

**Table 5.5: Decadal Growth Rate of Matiali Block (2001-2011)**

<b>Decadal Growth Rate of Matiali Block (2001-2011)</b>						
	Male	Female	Total	SC	ST	OTH
<b>Matiali Block</b>	0.64%	0.83%	0.74%	1.59%	1.87	-0.87%

## **HEALTH SYSTEM OF THE WOMEN WORKERS IN THE GARDEN**

The so called “support system” provided by the management in term of hospital and schooling system is extremely frugal to say the least. Majority of the tea garden hospitals do not have qualified doctors and are run by quacks who are hired by the management on meager wages. The so called hospitals in tea gardens are extremely ill equipped, barely having the infrastructure to cope with the minor emergencies. Their role is predominantly that of a referral centre devoid of providing workers with even the primary and basic medicinal care. The few qualified doctors who are yet a part of the health setup in tea gardens are under constant pressure from the management to curtail the medicinal expenditure. Thus they are unable to do justice to their profession and hence look for more meaningful jobs. The biggest sufferers in the whole scenario are the workers who are deprived of the basic medical facilities that is one of their primary rights. The medical coverage for the workers which is much flaunted by the tea garden management is a big farce.

**Table 5.6: Showing Health Profile of the Matiali Panchayat Samity**

No. of Health sub center	22
No. of Beds in Block Pry. H. Centre	15
No. of Child Birth (Year 2007)	2035
No. of Children covered under 6 Basic	4955

Immunization (year 2007)	
No. of Dai -	136 (44- Trained)
No. of Sanitized House Holds	11221
No. of Drinking Water Source	4094
No. of ICDS Centre Functioning	46

**Table 5.7: Showing details of Labour Quarters**

**GARDEN NAME – CHULSA TEA GARDEN**

SL.NO	TYPE OF QUARTERS	PUCCA	SEMI PUCCA	KUTCHA	TOTAL
1	DOUBLE	348	NIL	NIL	348
2	SINGLE	341	20	88	449
	TOTAL	689	20	88	797

**Square Feet Area / Labour Quarters**

SL.NO.	TYPE OF QUARTERS	PUCCA	SEMI PUCCA	KUTCHA
1	DOUBLE	680 sqrft	NIL	NIL
2	SINGLE	350 sqrft	280 sqrft	240 sqrft

The above two tables show us the labour quarters of Chulsa Tea Garden which is under Goodrick Groups of Tea Industry under Matelli Block. This shows us the very poor living condition of the workers of the tea garden. Close study and interaction with tea gardens in Matelli block has led me to conclude that the medical support for workers in tea garden is a great eye wash. The extreme locations of the tea gardens means that the workers have to travel great distance to avail government medical facilities provided by the Primary Health Centres and government hospitals. It is extremely under some and unpalatable for these workers to undertake their journey and avail of the medical facilities provided by the government. The extreme reluctance of the garden management to shoulder the medical expenses of the workers availing medical care outside the garden premises is a big deterrent. The larger sufferers in the whole scenario are the females and children. No wonder the infant mortality rate in the tea gardens is alarming high when compared with that of the general population. Basics requirements like vaccination of children are highly

neglected. Little is done to spread awareness among the workers towards the necessity of vaccination for children.

The antenatal checkup scheduled for the pregnant mothers are seldom complied with. Quite a considerable number of pregnant women in the tea gardens suffer from malnutrition. This has a detrimental effect on the pregnancy. The newborn are often underweight and would be mothers undergo lot of complications during the period of pregnancy. The penetration of *anganwadi* workers and *asha* workers has been a recent and welcome phenomenon. It however remains a fact that due to the flung locations of tea gardens, it remains quite unfeasible for the *anganwadi* and *asha* workers to reach to reach the needy tea garden workers. An innovative strategy to combat this would be to recruit these health workers from within the tea garden population. While this has been tried in many of the tea gardens, the strategy has not been too effective as it is extremely difficult to find women educated and competent enough to carry out the responsibilities bestowed on them as health workers. It brings us back to the basic point about the primary requisition of providing the tea garden workers, specially the women folk, with minimum and basic education. With proper emphasis on education, an educated working force can be raised within the garden populace that would be ready to shoulder bigger, effective and meaningful roles aimed towards betterment of the tea garden working class society as a whole.

#### **EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF TRIBALS IN MATELLI BLOCK**

The whole process has to begin at the grass root level where primarily the stress has to be on compulsory education for girls. Schemes like ICDS are a novel step towards realization of this goal. But here again comes the constraint borne out of the fact that the majority of tea garden are remotely located. It thus becomes extremely taxing for the children to actually be drawn towards education through ICDS schemes. The only way forward to redress this problem is to increase the number of primary schools. If every tea garden is provided with at least one primary school each, there is bound to be a phenomenal progress in terms of education level amongst the garden workers. This is of utmost importance and should definitely be considered by the powers that be on a priority basis.

### School infrastructure in Matelli Block at a Glance- (Educational Profile)

No. of Primary School-66

No. of Students-10,500

Average Students per School- 159

No. of Teachers -147 (as on Nov. 2003)

Teacher Student Ratio- 1:71

Average of Teachers per School- 2.2

SishuSiksha Kendra- 68

No. of H.S. School- 01 (ChalsaGayanathBidhyapith)

Middle / High School- 04 (Matiali, Samsing, MatialiRastraBhasha, Batabari C.M)

No. of Jr. High School- 08

No. of SSK- 58

No. of MSK- 03

No. of Collage- 01 (PMS College)

No. of Madrasha- 14

No. of pry.Madrasha- 01

ICDS Centre- 06

No. of Libraries- 05

Literacy (as per 2001 census)- Total: 46.29% (M-56.98%, F-35.39%)

Source: CLRC Office, Matelli, DPEP, Chulsa.

It is really appealing to note that this fringe population of our society is yet to be an effective part of our development. Interactions with management of various tea gardens in 'dooars' area has led me to conclude that the managerial staff of these gardens feel themselves better entranced if the working population at large remain uneducated and this repressed. They thus remain dependent on the management for their basic minimum requirements for their livelihood. This places the management in a position of power from where can unjustly manipulated the scenario and run the tea gardens according to their whims and fancies.

Although it has to be admitted that the literacy percentage has yet not progressed to levels that can be considered favourable, its still has to be admitted that various government schemes aimed at promoting literacy has had a positive impact overall. As per 2011

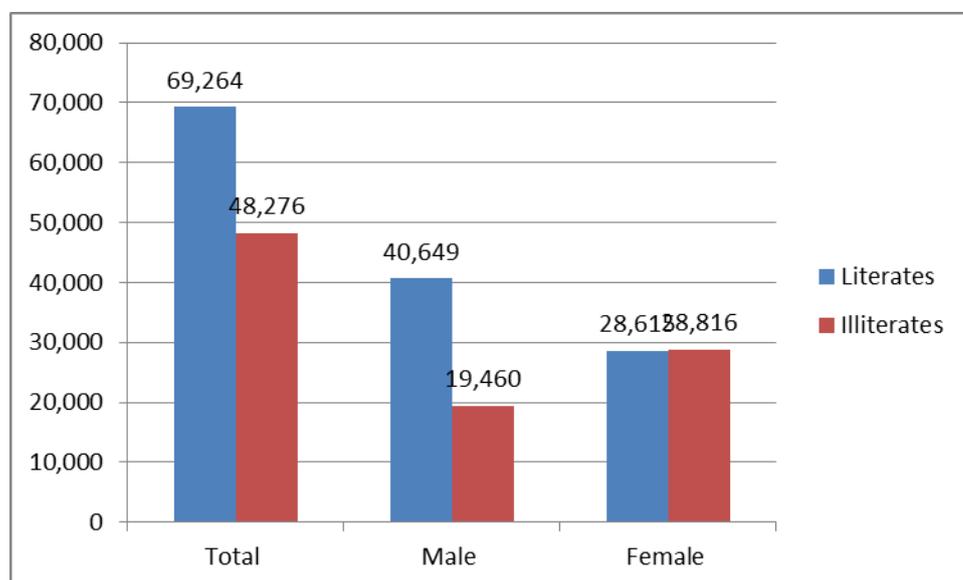
census, the total number of literates in Matelli CD is 69,264 out of which 40,649 were males and 28,615 were female

**Table 5.8: Literates and Illiterates in Matelli block (2011 census)**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Literates	69,264	40,649	28,615
Illiterates	48,276	19,460	28,816

Source: Census of India, 2011.

**Chart No. 6- Showing Literates and Illiterates Matelli Block, 2011**



Educations levels of the so called ‘backward’ strata of the society are yet to reach anywhere near the desired level. My interaction with this segment of the populace has time and again led me to conclude that whatever and however good the intentions and endeavours might be, without raising education level of this class, political empowerment will remain a distant dream. Political parties eventually just end up exploiting the system to further their own goals, which are not always pious to say the least. Primary stress has to be thus on education so that the actual fringe elements of society are able to drive benefits of political reforms like Panchayati Raj.

**Table 5.9: State of Tribal Literacy in Jalpiaguri District and Matelli Block in 2001**

Dist/Block	Persons literate		Male literate		Female literate	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Jalpiaguri district	2,27,633	42.58	1,46,652	54.23	80,984	30.66
Matelli Block	18,303	42.64	12,103	56.26	6,200	28.95

Source: Census of India, 2001.

There is however, quite a substantial percentage of this segment who have, when bestowed with power, toiled hard and sincerely towards betterment of their brethren. Many have managed to overcome political and bureaucratic hurdles successfully and have worked with zeal and earnestness. Endowed with the power of education, this marginalized section of society can definitely make the *Panchayati Raj* system an extremely successful concept. While the latest census data compares quite favorable with earlier data in terms of education, a more proactive attitude of the powers that be, can definitely go a long way in hastening us towards the desired goal, that is true empowerment of the so called 'subjugated' and fringe elements of society. Value of education can never be under played. Time and again I have been left to ponder over 'what might have been' had this basic requirement been met and dealt with in earnest.

Matelli Block falls under 'doors' Dooars is one of the principal producers of tea in our country along with Darjeeling and Assam. Dooars area is strewn with tea gardens. The life of the tea garden workers remains, even at this age, abysmal to the say the least. The uncertainty of garden lock outs, of which there have been plenty, remains an area of extreme concern. The gardens that are yet untouched by lockouts and performing too don't have rosy picture vis-à-vis the life of the workers. Their life is very much governed by the whims and fancies of tea garden management.

There are lots of organized unions claiming to represent the workers in these gardens. But almost all of these unions are affiliated to one political party or the other and their role thus is restricted to nothing other than furthering the political agendas of their parent political parties. They thus fail to address the real issues and just serve as a rallying force for creating vote banks for the political parties.

There is this rule in tea gardens where by the management is bound to offer one member of the retiring tea garden worker job in lieu of the retiring personal. This often does not suffice as many families are having one working member and their retirement does not provide avenues for all of their children towards gaining employment. There is thus generated a population who are forced to look and search for employment outside the garden premises. The deplorable educational standards prevailing in the tea garden is a huge hindrance towards gaining meaningful and respectable employment for this population. Lack of exposure towards life outside of the garden premises often lay them vulnerable when they are forced to leave the garden. They thus end up jumping from one exploitative system to another and generation after generation end up in the same quagmire.

Inter sibling rivalry aimed towards gaining one available employment opportunity upon retirement of the working member of the family is rampant. This leads to destruction of the basic ethos of the family. In this context one incident in Indong Tea Garden of Matelli Block is worth brining to the fore. The elderly mother of this family was declared a witch and castigated from the society at the behest of the elder son of the family so that he could gain employment in the garden as his mother was forced to retire. The dismal educational levels of the society made the “promulgation of witch” an easy task. The whole of the immediate society of the family was very easily led to believe the woman was actually a witch. The management did little to dispel this. It was ultimately left to the media to bring the whole episode to the forefront. The only means to redress the current situation is to provide education to the garden workers.

#### **TEA GARDEN MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE**

The tea garden management perspective is no different from the perceptive of management of any industry. The basic aim of any industry is to earn profit. Raw materials are converted into products saleable to markets, and the ways and mean towards attaining this objective are the labour force.

The labourours, in this scenario, are supposed to be protected by labour laws. Indian labour law refers to laws regulating labour in India. Traditionally, Indian governments at federal and state level have sought to ensure a high degree of protection for workers, but in practice, legislative rights cover only a minority of workers. India is a federal from of

government and became labour is a subject in the concurrent list of the Indian Constitution, labour matters are in jurisdiction of both central and state governments. Both Centre and State government have enacted laws on labour relations and employment issues.

Plantation Labour Act, 1951 is aimed at protecting the rights of tea garden workers specifically. With employment of over one million, the plantation industry in India is among the largest private employment in India. It is spread across the states of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. The plantation workforce, however, has been amongst the most exploited workforce in organized sector. Their wages are amongst the lowest when compared to other workers and working and living conditions most dismal. Most of the plantations are located in remote areas. Workers are mainly dependent on plantations as there is hardly any other employment avenue. Workers are illiterate and mostly migrants with no awareness or information about their rights.

In 1951, the Parliament passed the Plantation Labour Act (PLA) which sought to provide for the welfare of labour and to regulate the condition of workers in plantation. Under this law, the state governments have been empowered to take all steps to improve the lot of plantation workers. However, the potential benefits promised under the PLA, remains unachieved mainly due to ignorance of workers about their rights under this law. (see Appendices).

### **WORKER'S PERSPECTIVE**

The tea garden workers are certainly a deprived lot. More so under the present circumstances where closure of gardens is quite rampant. The situation that they are in is gruesome to say the least. The hard working conditions are coupled with the uncertainty of whether they will be able to provide for their family tomorrow or will they walk to their work place and find the gardens doors closed. The most hard pressed are the women folk in tea gardens. Most of the women in tea gardens are employed as working force and they share equal work load vis-à-vis the men folk. Added to this is the burden of having to look after their household. Pitiably financial condition along with having to manage a ceremonious situation at home is really a big task. Extension of *Panchayati Raj* System to grassroots level is definitely an endeavor to give a meaningful voice to this class. Many of the *panchayati* seats have been reserved for women so that they can be incorporated into

the larger political picture and made a part of the decision making bodies, so that they can have their say.

Women empowerment is the foremost requisite for development of any society. In fringe and underdeveloped, societies, it is all the more important to have a meaningful involvement of women so that real development of this society can be expedited. Most of the tea garden actually fails to provide the workers with even the basic amenities like proper medical care and housing, which the management is duty bound to provide under the aegis of Plantations Labour Act, 1951. (see Appendix)

My sustained interactions with tea garden workers spanning the tea gardens of Indong, Engo, Matelli, Samsing and Chalsa has led me to conclude that while many of the provisions laid down in the Plantation Labour Act are met with, there are still enormously glaring lacunas. The majority of these affect the women garden workers per say.

The granting of maternity leave is not always adhered to in letter and spirit. Many management, though not denying the leave, do not adhere to the mothers if they choose to avail of maternity leave. This fear of losing their wages makes many of the female workers to forgo the maternity leave to which they are legally entitled. Inadequate nutrition coupled with the hardships of working in the plantation often leads to anemic mothers presenting with complications before and during labour.

A visit to the maternity ward of the local Mal district hospital was an eye opener as quite a few of the pregnant mothers are admitted for blood transfusions at some stage of their pregnancy. Though the infiltration of health workers in the form of ICDS and *anganwadi* workers into the garden has managed to reduce the nemesis to a certain extent, a lot still remains to be done.

The result of pregnancies paralysed by so many deterrents often produces babies who are under weight and thus prone to infections at any early age. Though the national schedule for vaccinations is in place, the implementation of the same at ground level in tea gardens is far from being totally inclusive. Then comes the issue of the mothers post nately. This provisions laid in the Labour Act make it mandatory for the management to provide crèche for the children – which are (1) located close to the working place of the mothers

and (2) provided with trained female personnel or dais competent to administer and look after the needs of children. The gardens having crèches do not adhere to the number of crèches needed to be provided for a particular number of children in the first place and secondly the attendants put there in care hardly boast of having even the minimum basic training for child care. This leaves the woman with to choose between the devil and the sea- either quit the job and loose the wages that are so very important towards supporting her household or take the child to work with her and thus compromise with the care every child needs.

The second important lacuna that needs urgent redressal is lack of competent medical personnel in the garden premises for providing them with basic medical care. Though the management is bound by the Act to employ in their garden a qualified medical professional, majority of the tea gardens do not adhere to the laid down guidelines. The post is quite often filled up with “quacks” and compounders, who are incompetent to provide scientific medical care.

Third these few gardens who do employ qualified doctors, the doctors are forced by the management to curtail medical expenditures, thus rendering their efforts useless on ground. There is thus a major exodus of qualified doctors who, under constant pressure from the management authorities, are frustrated at not being able to provide with even the basic medical care to the population if tea gardens. As a result, a large population of garden workers is thus left to either fend for themselves in case of medical emergencies or rely on “quacks”, praying and hoping for the best. When a worker tries to beget a better medical facility outside of the garden premises, the management refuses to shoulder the financial burden. The remote location of the tea gardens renders it impossible for the worker to reach the nearest government medical facilities. It’s a pathetic scenario indeed.

The education facilities for children of workers that the many management is duty bound to provide is also abysmal. Primary schools that the management is bound to provide to the children within the garden area is either conspicuous by its absence manned by teachers who have little commitment to their profession. Though, admittedly, schemes like mid-day meal programme in schools has managed to push the students’ attendance in schools, wherever they exist, the lack of quality teachers renders the whole purpose of

providing basic education to the children futile. Thus, for majority of children of tea gardens workers attending these schools, it is more a means of securing a onetime meal rather than acquiring wholesome and meaningful education. Despite in plantation of the mid-day meal scheme, there however still remains a high percentage of school “drop-outs”. This is particularly for the girl child.

In majority of families of tea garden workers, both mother and father are workers, thus rendering the task of looking after newborns and toddlers quite impossible to manage. It is here that often the school going girl child is forced to opt out of school and take up the arduous task of looking after the younger siblings. They fall into a quagmire at quite an early age and when they grow up, they are forced to continue their adult like as garden workers, as they have little educational back up to dream of a life and livelihood outside the garden. And this vicious cycle thus keeps on repeating itself through generations.

#### **THE ROLE OF LABOUR WELFARE OFFICER**

The role of labour welfare officer can never be undermined for in any tea garden, he is the link between management and workers. The duties of labour welfare officer are manifold, as laid down in the Act. One of the important log in this wheel is his duty to provide workers with suitable and healthy accommodation within the garden premises. He is responsible also for proper maintenance of their accommodations.

The ground reality in the gardens that I studied was the accommodation for workers provided by the management is abysmal, to say the least. It is not that the labour welfare officers lack the desire to work and justify their job. But again it boils down to the management who are quite reluctant to allocate necessary words for fulfilling their social obligations. Even basic maintenance workers required in accommodations in worker’s colonies (labour lines) are almost non-existent. Whatever funds required for upkeep and maintenance of accommodations are necessarily met with by the workers themselves. Their paltry wages renders this task quite arduous for them but nevertheless, it remains a fact that it is the worker’s own personal endeavours that go into the basic maintenance or upliftment of these accommodations.

Most of the tea garden workers have been employed in these gardens through generations and the accommodation granted to them hence becomes like their permanent refuge.

Thus, in absence of substantial help from the management, which they are legally bound to give, the workers themselves try to uplift their accommodations through generations. But in case of being confronted with natural calamities like storms and earthquakes which are not so rare phenomenon in North Bengal, the workers are left to fend for themselves. Though surveys are carried out by the labour welfare officers after every such calamity to assess the extent of damage to the worker's accommodations, the actual grant coming in after submission of such surveys, is miniscule, to say the least. In many of the worker's colonies, specially those which are adjacent to forests, elephant menace is another factor. Herds of elephants wandering off into worker's colonies are quite common, often leading to widespread destruction of specially *kuccha* accommodations. The aftermath of these episodes is again detailed survey of the damages-which are more often than not, not met with inadequate compensation by the garden management and local government authorities.

The labour welfare officer in tea garden setup is supposed to be a link between the management and workers. On principle, he is supposed to look after the welfare of the labour force and convey to the management any issues that are brought up by the workers, so that smooth functioning of the garden is ensured. It is mandatory for the management to employ trained and suitable personnel to the post of labour welfare officer and also to give due cognizance to the feedback of the labour welfare officer.

The ground reality in majority of the tea gardens is quite contrary to the guidelines laid down in the Act. In majority of the tea gardens, employment of labour welfare officer is just looked upon as a formality by the management and often incompetent persons are employed to the post, just to fill up the post. In effect, they just end up being a tool in the hands of management, devoid of any meaningful contacts with tea garden workers. Bigger groups like Goodrick, do cater to the criteria laid down in the act and employ qualified personnel to the post of labour welfare officers.

My close interactions with the labour welfare officer of one such garden – the Chulsa Tea Garden, owned by the Goodrick group, was quite revealing. Though the welfare officers in this gardens have always been appointed adhering to the laid down criteria, the management always has the last say and inputs by these welfare officers is often just of academic interest. Little credence is given to the inputs of these personnel and any

measures which are aimed at welfare of workers are either duly discarded or kept in abeyance, if the economic fallout of such recommendations are not palatable to the management. Thus providing of basic facilities, such as proper maintenance of workers accommodation and providing of fire wood are often neglected, firewood, to this date, remains an important part of a workers life, which provide for not only a cooking media but also a means of keeping their household warm during the harsh winters. With precious little support from the management, the workers are often left to fend for themselves. The firewood provided by the management is often so miniscule that it is insufficient to tide over even a month's requirement. The tea gardens in North Bengal are often surrounded by forests which are potent sources of supply of fire wood. But these forests, especially in dooars area, are house to elephants.

There are many instances of ten garden workers infiltrating into the reserve forests in search of fire wood, where they are either conger and fined by the forest officials or they bear the brunt of elephants. I was witness to one such instance in Chulsa tea garden, where a young nepali garden worker, Kancha aged 37, who was employed as a cook in the garden doctor's bungalow, was murdered and killed by elephants in forest where he had gone after his duty hours to collect fire wood. Since the entry into these reserve forests for collecting of firewood is illegal, the family was denied any compensation whatsoever. If the management gives genuine credence to the needs of workers in this regard, which they are duty bound to do under the law, such calamities can easily be avoided. The role of labour welfare officer has to be truly carried out in earnest. The personnel employed under this post, have to be more diligent towards discharging of their duties so that effective and meaningful measures are taken from their office aimed at genuine welfare of the workers. It has also to be made mandatory upon the management so that under pressure is not brought upon the LWOs of the gardens and it is not degraded into an ornamental post.

The various avenues laid down under the Plantation Workers Act, if properly and earnestly implemented, would definitely go a long way towards better of tea garden worker's life. However, the ground reality, though the law exists, is far from satisfactory. There is a glaring lack of will and of course provision, to bring the guilty parties to book. The tea garden industry is centuries old, governed more by the traditions which are often hard on the workers. Laws, subsequently enacted, to safeguard the interests of workers

are laid in with lacunae. Workers awareness, though much better than may be a few decades back, is far from satisfactory. Workers engaged in such a big and wide industry, spanning across Assam and large areas of North Bengal deserve their rights to be protected and safeguarded. Majors aimed at truly looking after their interests will go a long way towards the socio-economic upliftment of this part of the country as a whole, as quite a substantial portion of the population in this area is directly or indirectly linked with the tea industry. The tribal population engaged as working force with this industry is enormous. Any measures aimed at resurrecting the status of this population will go a long way towards upliftment of the down-trodden women of the society. An educated, confident, politically aware and vibrant work force can be created which will be, in the long run, an asset and serve as a catalyst for betterment of the society as a whole.

## **PHANSIDEWA BLOCK**

Phansidewa (Community development block) is an administrative division in Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district in the Indian state of West Bengal. Phansidewa police station serves this block. Headquarters of this block is at Phansidewa. Phansidewa is located at 26.58°N 88.36°E. It has an average elevation of 98 metres (324 feet). Phansidewa community development block has an area of 336.56 km<sup>2</sup>. It has the density 171,384 (2001) and the area is 336.56 square kilometres (129.95 sq mi).

Phansidewa Block of Darjiling district has **total population of 204,501** as per the Census 2011. Out of which **103700** are males while **100801** are females. In 2011 there were total 42,138 families residing in Phansidewa Block. The **Average Sex Ratio of Phansidewa Block is 972**.

As per Census 2011 out of total population, 0% people lives in Urban areas while 100% lives in the Rural areas. The average literacy rate in urban areas is nil while that in the rural areas is 64.5%. Also the Sex Ratio of Urban areas in Phansidewa Block is nil while that of Rural areas is 972. Schedule Caste (SC) constitutes 29.7% while Schedule Tribe (ST) were 30.6% of total population in Phansidewa Block.(see Table 5.9 & 5.10).

**Table 5.10: Gram Panchayat wise Population, Census of India 2001 and 2011**

Name of the Gram Panchayat	Area in (sq.km)	Population 2001	Population 2011		
			Male	Female	Total
JalasNijamtara	39.693	26,368	16269	14990	31259
PhansidewaBansgoanKismat	33.34	18,612	10658	10158	20816
ChathatBansgoan	68	23,477	14917	14177	29094
Hetmuri-Singhijhora	108.8	27,909	17091	17419	34510
Bidhannagar I	42	25,121	15244	14826	30070
Bidhannagar II	33.758	22,294	13608	13451	27059
Ghoshpukur	53.378	27,636	15913	15780	31693
<b>Total</b>		<b>171508</b>	<b>103700</b>	<b>100801</b>	<b>204501</b>

Source: Block Development Officer, Phansidewa Development Block

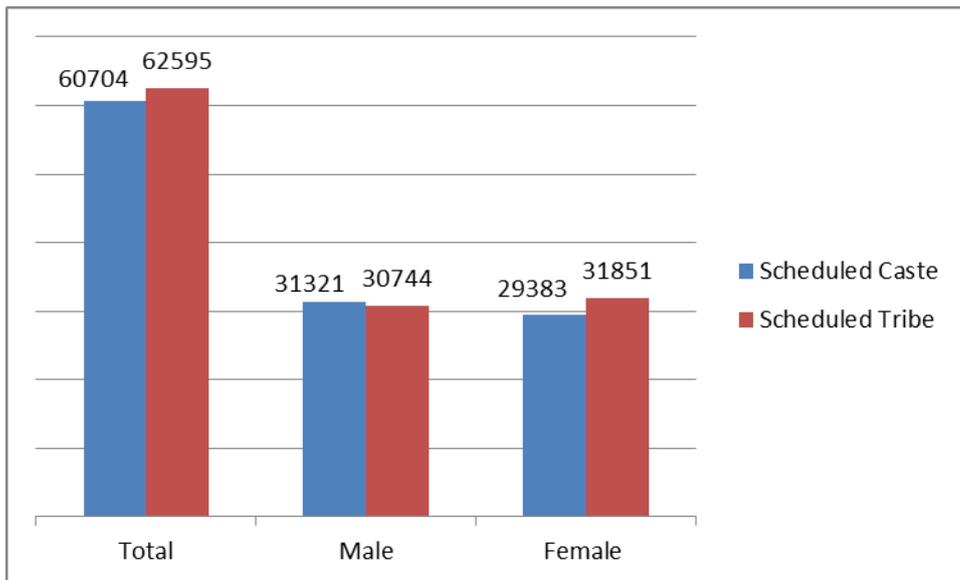
The above table shows that among all the gram panchayats in Phansidewa Block, Hetmuri-singhijhora Gram Panchayat has got highest population followed by Ghoshpukur Gram Panchayat. The lowest population among these seven gram panchayat under Phansidewa Block is PhansidewabansgoanKismat GP. The population of Children of age 0-6 years in Phansidewa Block is 28354 which is 14% of the total population. There are 14375 male children and 13970 female children between the age 0-6 years. Thus as per the Census 2011 the Child Sex Ratio of Phansidewa Block is 972 which is less than Average Sex Ratio (972) of Phansidewa Block. The Total literacy rate of Phansidewa Block is 64.46%. The male literacy rate is 62.56% and the female literacy rate is 48.29% in Phansidewa Block. Average literacy rate of Phansidewa Block in 2011 were 64.46% in which, male and female literacy were 72.63% and 56.06% respectively. Total literate in Phansidewa Block were 113,572 of which male and female were 64,890 and 48,682 respectively.

**Table 5.11: Caste-wise Population of Phansidewa Block**

	Total	Male	Female	% to total population
Scheduled Caste	60704	31321	29383	29.7%
Scheduled Tribe	62595	30744	31851	30.6%

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Chart No. 7- Showing Caste wise Population**



Census of India, 2001

MOUZA:- 113 Nos.

I.T.D.P. MOUZA:- 46 Nos.

NO. OF VILLAGES:-340 (Approx)

NO. OF ELECTRIFIED VILLAGES: - 255

TOTAL POPULATION -1,71,508

MALE- 87,945

FEMALE- 83,563

SCH. CASTE - 53,372

MALE- 27,748

FEMALE- 25,624

SCH. TRIBE - 53,654

MALE- 26,898

FEMALE- 26,756

POPULATION BY RELIGION:- (Not available)

LITERACY RATE:- 41.59%

MALE:- 51.85%

FEMALE:- 30.80%

**Background of Phansidewa Block**

POLICE STATION :- 3Nos.

COLLEGE :- Nil

H.S. SCHOOLS :- 13Nos.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS :- 5 Nos.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS :- 2 Nos.

PRY. SCHOOL :- 118 Nos.

HOSPITALS :- 2 Nos.

**HEALTH CENTRES**

Primary Health Sub-Centre :-21 Nos.

DISPENSARIES :- Nil

TOTAL NO. OF BEDS :- 17Nos.

Phansidewa Primary Health Centre :- 12

Bidhannagar Health Centre :- 5

AREA UNDER FOREST WITH NAME OF FORESTS :- Nil

TOTAL AGRICULTURAL LAND :- 18.45 HEC.

NO. OF COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES :- 14 Nos.

TEA GARDENS :- 14 Nos. (Big)

REGISTERED SMALL SCALE :- 36 Nos.

**INDUSTRIAL UNITS WITH NAME**

M/S Kayon Agro Industries, M/S Terai Paints, M/S Bhola Flour Mill, M/S Kamini Enterprise, M/S Himboard Pvt. Ltd., M/S Mandal Furniture, M/S Hitech Organic Industries, M/S Tarun Kr. Das, M/S Md. Rafiul, M/S Genesis Audio Visusul, M/S Chhetri Ata Chaki, M/S Shakti Tea Procession and Manufacturing Pvt. Ltd., M/S RadhaGobinda Press etc.

NO. OF BANK BRANCHES :- 6 Nos.

State Bank of India, Leusipukur Branch, within JalasNijamtara Gram Panchayat.

State Bank of India, Hansqua Branch, within Hetmuri Gram Panchayat.

Central Bank of India, Phansidewa Branch, within Phansidewa G.P.

Central Bank of India, Bidhannagar Branch, within Bidhannagar I G.P.

Uttar BangaKshetriyaGramin Bank, Ghoshpukur Br. Within Ghoshoukur G.P.

Uttar BangaKshetriyaGramin Bank, Chathat Br. Within Chathat G.P.

NO. OF POST OFFICE :- 12 Nos.

CINEMA HOUSES :- Nil

VIDEO HALLS :- 4 Nos.

NEWSPAPERS & PERODICALS PUBLISHED :- Nil

RIVERS :- 8 Nos.

HAATS :- 15 Nos. (Approx.)

**MELA & FESTIVALS:- 8 Nos.**Mela organized in different occasions like Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Maharam etc.

**TOURIST ATTRACTION / ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE:-** One Aqueduct at Haptia, Two Picnic Spot at JalsNijamtara GP and Bidhannagar

**ANY OTHER INFORMATION VITAL IN RESPECT OF THE BLOCK:-** This block has three types of border i.e. International, State, District border. Eastern side of this block surrounded by Indo-Bangladesh border, southern portion surrounded by Uttar Dinajpur District, western side is surrounded by Bihar State.

Phansidewa block consists of rural areas only with 7 gram panchayats, viz. Bidhannagar–I, Chathat-Bansgaon, Ghospukur, Jals–Nijamtara, Bidhannagar–II, Phansideoa Bansgaon and Hetmuri–Singhijhara. This block has one police station at Phansidewa. The headquarters of this block is in Phansidewa.

**Table 5.12: Gram Panchayat-Wise Area of Phansidewa Block**

Name of the Gram Panchayat	Area (in km <sup>2</sup> )
JalsNijamtara	39.693
PhansidewaBansgaonKismat	33.340
ChathatBansgaon	49.914
Hetmuri-Singhijhora	53.714
Bidhannagar I	44.332
Bidhannagar II	33.758
Ghoshpukur	53.378

Source: Block Development Office, Phansidewa Block

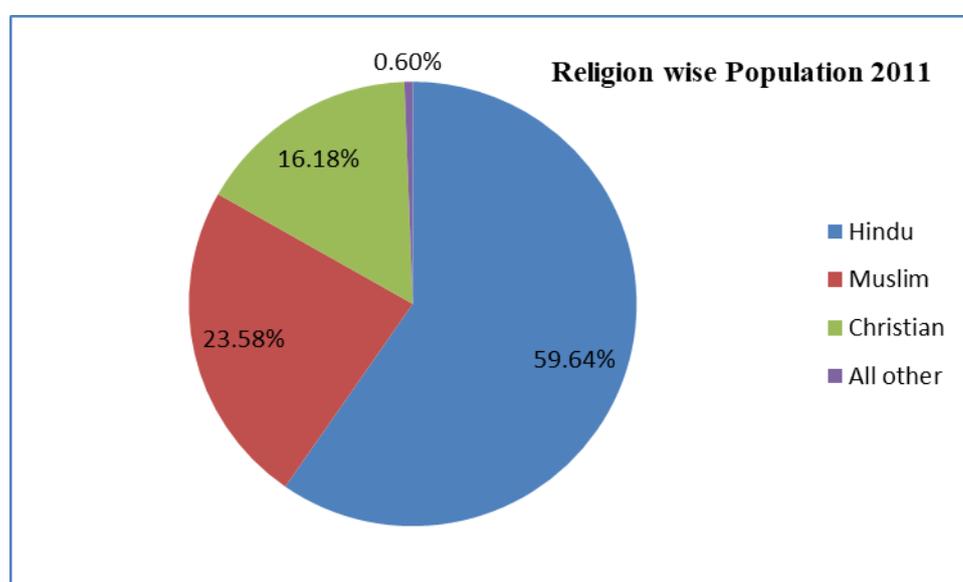
**Table 5.13: Religion-wise Population – Phansidewa Block**

Religion	Total	%	Male	Female
Hindu	122,064	(59.68%)	62,356	59,708
Muslim	48,202	(23.57%)	24,640	23,562
Christian	33,096	(16.18%)	16,140	16,956

Religion	Total	%	Male	Female
Sikh	148	(0.07%)	88	60
Buddhist	471	(0.23%)	231	240
Jain	13	(0.01%)	3	10
Other Religion	367	(0.18%)	187	180
No Religion Specified	161	(0.08%)	74	87

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Chart No. 8- Showing Religion wise population of Phansidewa Block in 2011**



If we see the above chart 5.4 which shows the religion wise population for Census 2011 has Hindu comprising of 59.64 per cent followed by Muslim 23.58 per cent in the sub-district. Since the area has tribal concentration the Christian community is 16.18 per cent in the area. (see Table 5.13). Growth of population of the sub-district has increased by 19.2% in the last 10 years. In 2001 Census total population here were about 1.7 lakh. Female population growth rate of the sub-district is 20.6% which is 2.7% higher than male population growth rate of 17.9%. General caste population has increased by 26%, Scheduled Caste population has increased by 13.7%; Scheduled Tribe population has increased by 16.7% and child population has decreased by -12.5% in the sub-district since last Census. (see Chart No. 5.3)

## Working Population – Phansidewa Block

In Phansidewa Block out of total population, 76,561 were engaged in work activities. 77.7% of workers describe their work as Main Work (Employment or Earning more than 6 Months) while 22.3% were involved in Marginal activity providing livelihood for less than 6 months. Of 76,561 workers engaged in Main Work, 7,917 were cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 9,725 were Agricultural labourer. Phansidewa has 37% (about 77 thousand) population engaged in either main or marginal works. 51% male and 24% female population are working population. 43% of total male population are main (full time) workers and 8% are marginal (part time) workers. For women 15% of total female population are main and 9% are marginal workers. (see Table 5.14).

**Table 5.14: Work Participation for Main workers and Marginal workers**

	Total	Male	Female
	59,468	44,510	14,958
Cultivators	7,917	7,229	688
Agriculture Labourer	9,725	7,632	2,093
Household Industries	931	739	192
Other Workers	40,895	28,910	11,985
Marginal Workers	17,093	8,089	9,004
Non-Working	127,961	51,120	76,841

### A. Bidhan Nagar 1 Gram Panchayat

**Table 5.15: Population of Bidhan Nagar 1 Gram Panchayat as per Census 2001 and 2011**

			2001						2011					
Sl. No	Name of Mouza	Jl. No.	Male	Female	SC	ST	Gen	Total	Male	Female	SC	ST	Gen	Total
1	ChotaPikpara	103	352	360	197	358	157	712	376	612	226	458	304	988
2	Lahugaoan	104	5144	4807	2819	630	6502	9951	5793	5189	3514	723	6745	10982
3	Dhakpara	105	1366	1316	1154	148	1380	2682	1812	2712	1526	245	2753	4524
4	Budharugaoan	106	2752	2553	932	806	3567	5305	3542	3827	1716	1218	4435	7369
5	PurbaMadati	108	3269	3293	1397	4318	847	6562	3869	4132	1961	5261	779	80001
<b>Total Population</b>			<b>12883</b>	<b>12329</b>	<b>6499</b>	<b>6260</b>	<b>12453</b>	<b>25121</b>	<b>15392</b>	<b>16472</b>	<b>8943</b>	<b>7905</b>	<b>15016</b>	<b>31864</b>

Source: office of the Bidhan Nagar 1 Gram Panchayat, Bidhannagar, Darjeeling

The above table (5.15) shows that in 2001 the total population was 25121 which increased to 31864 in 2011. That means there is an increase of population by 6743. Again the SC population was 6499 which increased to 8943 and ST population was 6260 which came to 7905 according to 2011 Census. It is interesting to see female population outnumbering the male population by 1080 in 2011 Census.

### **B. Bidhan Nagar II Gram Panchayat**

Boundary of the Gram panchayat- West: Bihar State, East: Bidhannagar-I G.P & Phansidewa G.P., North: Sorounded by Ghoshpukur G.P, South: Bidhannagar-I G.P.

Total Population of the G.P. : 27061 (as per Census 2001)

Male : 13609, Female : 13452, SC : 7847, ST : 13530, OBC : 4059

Total BPL Family : 1908 nos., Total family in G.P.: 5500 no. Total Tax-Payee: 2744

Number of Mouzas:-  
 1) Bara Paikpara J.L.:- 102  
 2) Mandilajha J.L.:- 101  
 3) PashimMadati J.L.:- 100

Nos. of Villages: 45 nos.

No. of Tea Garden: 03 nos.

No. of Commercial Bank: 1) Uttar BangaKshetriaGramin Bank (Sahadargachh)  
 2) Canara Bank (Bhimbhar Hat)

No. of Post office: 1) Madati Post Office

Name and number of Hat  
 1) BhimbharHar,  
 2) Dangapara Hat,  
 3) Bukdhola  
 4) Kumdangi Hat  
 5) Kagigachh  
 6) Bagmara

No. of Electric Power Sub-Station:  
 1) Bijlimoni 1100k.v. Power Sub-Station.

No. of Tea Factory:-  
 1) Motidhar Tea Factory (with seed)  
 2) Bijlimoni New Tea Factory (with seed)  
 3) Mount view Tea Factory (Bottle Leaf)  
 4) Dalmia Tea Factory (Bottle Leaf)  
 5) Top-Line Tea Factory (Bottle Leaf)  
 6) Brajedra Tea Factory (Bottle Leaf)  
 7) Bijlimoni Tea Factory (with seed)  
 8) Sayedabad Tea Factory (with seed)  
 9) Shakti Tea Factory (Bottle Leaf)  
 10) Mono Kamana Tea Factory  
 11) SreeRupa Tea Factory (Bottle Leaf)  
 12) Nulsur Tea Factory (Bottle Leaf)

Other Factories: 1) BijlimoniAnnant Shree Polymer Factory

- 2) Anantshree poly Feb. Factory
- 3) Balaji Stone Crasher
- 4) NH 31 Toll Plaza

Petrol Pump-

- 1) Filco Station
- 2) Reliance Pump
- 3) Dangapara Pump
- 4) Bijlimoni Five Star

Name and Number of Primary School:	Name & Number of High School
1) ChowdhuriagachhPry.School	1) Madati High School
2) Satbil Pry. School	2) Rupramgachh M.S.K. Centre
3) Kharubbangi Pry. School	
4) Bijlimoni T.E. Pry. School	
5) Madati Welfare Pry. School	Name & Numberr of SSK Centre
6) Bijlimoni Village Pry. School	1) Chowdhuriagachh SSK
7) Motiddhar T.E. Pry. School	2) Bel-Line SSK
8) Pathuria Pry. School	3) Sal- Line SSK
9) Sayedabad T.E. Pry. School	4) Poulush Line SSK
10) Bagmara Pry. School	5) Baraghoria SSK
11) Bidhannagar Pry. School	6) Kouniavita SSK
12) Kumartuli Pry. School	7) Kanagachh SSK
13) SahadargachhNetaji Pry. School	8) Jhoraline SSK
14) Malagachh Pry. School	9) Kuchiyagachh SSK
15) Mejmangachh Pry. School	10) Bogilagachh SSK
16) Bukola Pry. School	11) Debidangi SSK
17) Rupramgachh Pry. School	12) Gangdhani SSK
	13) Gourigachh SSK
	14) Hiragachh SSK

Other Private Educational Institution:

- 1) Father Leb-Lond School (English Medium Boarding School)
- 2) Olivia Enlightened English School
- 3) Bhimbhar Blind School

### **C. Phansidewa Bansgoan Kismat Gram Panchayat**

Boundary of the Gram panchayat- West: Ghoshpukur and Bidhannagar- II G.P, East: Mahananda River and Bangladesh, North: J alas Nizam tara G.P., South: ChathatBasgoan G.P. There are ten (10) Mouzas and sixty (60) villages under this Gram Panchayat. The total population is 20818 according to Census 2011 where 10659 are male and 10159 are female. There are 8743 (SCs), 1665 (STs), 7910 (OBCs) and 2500 fall under other category. The land and house tax is paid by 4791 persons.

Other offices in the G.P.-

- 1- Central Bank of India (1 Phansidewa)
- 2- BDO Office (1 Phansidewa)
- 3- Electricity Office (1 Phansidewa)
- 4- RI Office (1 Phansidewa)

- 5- BLRO Office (1Phansidewa)
- 6- Telephone Exchange (1 Phnasidewa)
- 7- Police Station (1 Phansidewa)
- 8- PHE Pump House (2 Phansidewa)
- 9- Bandhan Bank (1Phansidewa)
- 10- Forest Bit office (1 Phansidewa)
- 11- Post Office (3 Phansidewa, Kantiveta, Nizbari)

**Table 5.16: Phansidewa Bansgaon Kismat G.P. Population according to Census 2011.**

Sl. No.	JL.No.	Name of the Mouza	Male	Female	Total Population
1	91	Sahananda	718	688	1406
2	94	Bandargachh	2010	1881	3891
3	89	Dhamnagachh	1216	1140	2356
4	90	Kadmi	627	628	1255
5	88	Mahipal	946	941	1887
6	86	Lembutari	396	380	776
7	96	Uttar Basgoan	2590	2474	5064
8	95	PurbaBasgoan	1135	1049	2184
9	99	PaschimBasgoan	830	814	1644
10	97	Kantivita	191	164	355
<b>Total</b>			<b>10659</b>	<b>10159</b>	<b>20818</b>

#### **Child Education Centre- 16**

1. Manbhokjot
2. JaigirGachh,
3. GoyalGachh,
4. KamargachhSawtal Para,
5. BoroSudamagachh,
6. Fatamari,
7. Chakchaki,
8. Karan Gachh,
9. PurbaBangagachh,
10. BangagachhShivmandir,
11. Baghavita,
12. Goyaltuli,
13. Dhamnagachh,
14. Daspara,
15. Tambari,
16. PurbaDundyajot.

#### **Education Related Information:-**

1. Child Education Centre-16,
2. Health and Child Development Centre-42,
3. Primary School No. – 13,
4. Madhayamik Educational Centre-1 (Nizbari),
5. Higher Secondary School-3,
6. Junior High School- 1,
7. Gramin Pathagar-1 (Phansidewa).

#### **Primary School- 15**

- 1) Phansidewa Junior Basic School,
- 2) Phansidewa Girls Primary School,
- 3) Jyotinagar Primary School,
- 4) Mahipal Primary School,
- 5) Hari Singh Primary School,
- 6) Palpara Primary School,
- 7) Lembutari Junior Basic School,
- 8) Dhaman Primary School,
- 9) KadmiAdarsh Pry. School,
- 10) KadmiJote Pry. School,
- 11) Nikargachh Pry. School,
- 12) Helagachh Pry. School,
- 13) Sudamgachh Pry. School,
- 14) RanjanPrava Pry. School,
- 15) Balaigachh Pry. School.

#### **Gram Sansad- 16**

- 1) Phansidewa-1,
- 2) Phansidewa-2,
- 3) Phansidewa-3,
- 4) Phansidewa- 4,
- 5) Sahananda,
- 6) Kadmi,
- 7) Lembutari,
- 8) Jyotinagar-1,
- 9) Jyotinagar -2,
- 10) Mahipal,
- 11) Nikargachh,
- 12) Helagachh,
- 13) Sudamgachh,
- 14) Sudamgachh-2,
- 15) RanjanPrava,
- 16) Balaigachh.

### D. Jalas Nizam Tara Gram Panchayat

**Table 5.17: The population of Jalasnizam Tara G.P. as per census 2001 and 2011**

Year	Male	Female	Total	SC	ST	Minority
2001	19803	13626	33429	18285	285	13984
2011	21981	15125	37106	20296	316	15522

### E. Ghoshpukur Gram Panchayat

Boundary of the Gram panchayat- West: Kharibari/Buraganj G.P, East: PhansidewaBansgaonKismat G.P., North: Hatighisa / Hetmuri-Singhij G.P., South: Bidhannagar G.P. There are 24 Mouzas under Ghoshpukur Gram Panchayat. The total number of villages is 44 and the number of household is 2274. The total population is 31695 where 15918 are male and 15781 are female under 2011 Census of India.

**Table 5.18: Name of the Mouzas under Ghoshpukur Gram Panchayat**

Sl. No.	Name of Mouza	Total pop.	Male	Female	SC	ST	%
1	Aambari	1371	721	650	761	06	84.75
2	Valomansi	2951	1507	1444	79	1740	74.10
3	Churaman	842	417	417	87	517	69.15
4	Dandrajhar	1050	513	513	688	339	56.42
5	Dhaknagachh	184	88	88	0	167	52.83
6	Dhamvita	728	370	370	527	44	66.03
7	Fakirdip	948	491	491	0	224	44.09
8	Farabari	1405	719	719	661	468	71.42
9	Foudigachh	787	395	395	644	134	62.16
10	Fulbar	1279	617	617	03	1227	65.83
11	Hawdavita	736	371	371	202	434	81.62
12	Harivita	1042	533	533	421	09	64.37
13	Jogivita	2221	1109	1109	158	1827	65.73
14	Kaduvita	205	106	106	04	201	65.93
15	Kantivita	645	347	347	463	85	79.65
16	Kuchia	1360	659	659	876	403	73.24
17	Lachuvita	1260	650	650	627	481	66.21
18	Madhavita	1090	552	552	220	597	63.86
19	Mohanlal chat	307	145	145	52	140	65.93
20	Patharharihria	502	257	257	25	319	53.55
21	Patharharihria	4039	1971	1971	113	3541	60.39
22	Sustagachh	634	310	310	0	625	45.16
23	Tetulguri	916	453	453	109	798	61.52
24	thakurganj	2571	1289	1289	145	2005	72.48

Source: The Secretary, Ghoshpukur Gram Panchayat, Ghoshpukur.

### **Other Informations of the Ghospukur Gram Panchayat**

1. Number of Primary Schools- 18
2. Number of Madhayamik and Higher Secondary Schools- 04
3. Health and Child Development Service Centre- 91
4. UttarbangaKhetriaGramin bank -01
5. RI Office – 01
6. SIF School Office – 01
7. Ration Shop- 04
8. Land Ragistration Office- 01
9. KishanMandi- 01
10. College – 01
11. SSK School- 11

### **F. Chathat-Bansgoan Gram Panchayat**

The name of the Gram Panchayat is Chathat-Bansgoan Gram Panchayat under Phansidewa Block and Siligri Mahakuma Parishad, District Darjeeling. The Gram Panchayat is situated near the Chathat Bus Stand. The Gram Panchayat is surrounded by West- Bidhan Nagar, South -North Dinajpur, East- Bangladesh, and North -Phnasidewa GP.

**Table 5.19: Showing the Population , number of households and literacy rate of the GP**

Population of the GP	29098
Male population	14921
Female population	14177
Number of Household	5751
Number of SC households	1484
Number of ST Households	1200
Number of Minority Households	3067
Number of BPL households	3465
Literacy Rate (%)	60%
Literacy Rate (%)	30%

### **G. Hetmuri-Singhijhora Gram Panchayat**

Under Hetmuri - Singhijhora Gram panchayat there are 24 Sansad under which total number of household is 7257. The total population according to the Census 2011 is 34520 where 17091 is the total male population and 17419 is the total female population for the GP. (See Table 5.20)

**Table 5.20: Sansad-wise Household of Hetmuri-Singhijhora gram Panchayat under Phansidewa Block**

Sl. No	Name of the Sansad	No. of Households	Total Population	Total Male	Total Female
1.	Chowpukuria	386	1764	905	859
2.	Singhijhora&Sanyasithan T.E	389	1855	895	960
3.	Nunujote	432	2053	1014	1039
4.	Bagdogra T.E	235	1206	592	614
5.	Moonee T.E	319	1501	717	784
6.	Vesty	291	1474	758	716
7.	Taipoo T.E.1	265	1335	654	681
8.	Taipoo T.E. 2	219	1103	540	563
9.	Chowpukuria 2	136	638	322	316
10.	Halal	290	1511	757	754
11.	Dhemal	453	2150	1079	1071
12.	Gungaram T.E (Tarabari)	63	289	138	151
13.	Gungaram T.E	617	2793	1354	1439
14.	Toonah	224	1070	523	547
15.	Hansqua T.E 1 (Facory Line)	190	840	419	420
16.	Hansqua T.E (Bandijote)	217	969	479	481
17.	Bandi	576	2662	1267	1395
18.	Sarkargach	355	1899	921	978
19.	Bawkali	381	1842	939	903
20.	Tarbandha	335	1415	730	685
21.	PanchimDanagach	167	794	402	392
22.	PurbaDanagach	300	1448	738	710
23.	Bhojnarayan T.E.1	217	993	493	500
24.	Bhojnarayan T.E. 2	200	916	455	461
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>7257</b>	<b>34520</b>	<b>17091</b>	<b>17419</b>

## CASE STUDY OF VILLAGES

### A. Siril Line- Kamala Bagan

There are 100 households in the village and the total population of the village is 600. The villagers are all Christian by faith. We interviewed Silbrius Ekka (35), Christian by faith is the agent of LIC and the member of RCM (Right Concept Market). His wife is a permanent worker of the Kamala tea garden. He is 10<sup>th</sup> pass and his wife is 9<sup>th</sup> class pass. His wife is from this village. His is a love marriage. (When we reached his house his wife was getting ready to go to the market with her friends therefore we could not interview her. He was there looking after his two kids.) His father was illiterate and permanent worker in the garden. They are five brothers and sisters. He appeared for Madhyamik exam and got back result in the science group therefore left the school. He has two children. The eldest is 8 years old and is going to Hindi medium school and younger son

is going to Bengali medium school. He could not afford to send his children to English medium school as the fee structure is very high.

In the village the girls outnumber the boys. Women are going for ligation after 2-3 children. Earlier most of the deliveries took place at home but now the women are becoming conscious about their health and hygiene and have began to go to the garden hospital for delivery. Some women who are well off still visit private doctors. The garden doctor writes the prescription and the workers have to buy the medicines from outside. The get married normally after the age of 22-23 years. There are 4-5 families which are not depended at all on tea garden. They have 4-5 *bighas* of land of their own where they grow paddy. There are also some families who work at the garden and also have two to three *bighas* of land where they grow paddy after their leisure from the garden. Kamala tea garden was closed last year (2007) for 20 days. There are 10 service holders in the village who are mainly working in the SSB, CRPF, BSF, Police and Army. Those who do not have work in the garden work as daily wage labourer and are engaged in highway road construction work where crushing of stone is mainly done by the boys and girls.

In the village there is not a single graduate. There only 3-4 girls and boys who are up to Higher Secondary. Two to three children who are 6 years of age are not going to school due to family financial problem. There is a Rafel Hindi Medium School which is run by the missionaries which is one kilo meter away from this place. Another reputed school is St. Peter's Higher Secondary School at Gayaganga which is 3km. Madati School-6-7km. They do not get any help from the missionary's school. After Madhyamik the children are leaving the school the reason behind this is mainly financial.

Fee structure: 1-3 class- Rs. 70 per month

4 class- 100 per month

5 class and above- 125 per month

Raymond Minj is the worker in the garden and member of the Naxalite party. his competition was with the Congress candidate. The villagers are mostly Congress supporters but the other group which is Kanu supporter is coming up very fast and gaining popularity in the locality. Women participation in the garden is almost negligible. The decisions in the house are mainly taken by the male members/head of the family.

### **Panchayat Development Programmes for Tribals (in brief)**

- Formation of SHGs.
- Rural road construction programme under NREGS.
- Drinking water facilities-well and deep tube wells.
- Old Age Pension for the people above 60 years of age.
- Stipend for the students.
- Self employment generation scheme.
- Through SHG you make people financially reliant.
- Generate a sense of cooperation or collective spirit.
- You make them aware of their rights and entitlements.
- You train them to come up with small scale and collective enterprises.

Normally 10-12 members make one SHG. One village can have more than one SHG if the number of members crosses 12. To maintain link with the *panchayat* the *panchayat* has appointed two female Resource Persons. These RPs have been drawn from the active members of SHG. They are paid Rs. 1400 per month each.

#### **B. HELAGOJ VILLAGE**

On 1 April 2008 we visited Helagoj, Picshala and Rakhalgoj villages, which are situated on the bank of river Pichla. First we visited a tribal village called **Helagoj** which is inhabited by some 22 Oraon families. In the east of the village there is Nicorgoj village, in the west Nayabari village, in the north it's a Bangladesh border and in the south river Pischla is there. The village is one km away from the pacca road. The village has linear structure. The houses have tin roof and fencing boundary.

We talked to AmrushEkka (50 yrs), Yakub Lakra (48 yrs), Daud Kujur (45 yrs), Rajen Lakra (24 yrs), Johan Lakra (65 yrs), and about 15 men and women who had gathered around us from that village. It took the shape of a group discussion, where each question was being answered by at least three or four persons. The answers thus turned out to be consensus answers; where one's answer was substantiated by others who had more precise information on the subject.

There are around 22 families in the village among which 5-6 families are Christian families and the rest are Hindus in the village. This village is Oroan dominated village.

The male- female ratio is 50:40. The villagers are mostly illiterate. There was only one boy who is Madhyamik pass. Not a single girl in the village has studied up to class 10. There was only a girl who has studied upto 8<sup>th</sup> standard. There are two primary schools (Bengali medium) in the nearby villages where the children of this village go to study. One primary school is 3 km away and the other one is 2 km away from this village. The children go walking to the school. All the children go to school but only up to primary level they could study and they leave the school. The parents complain that they make sure that their children go to the school but one doesn't know whether the children have reached school or not.

The villagers are mostly agricultural labourers. They have land of their own. Some have 1 bigha and the person who has the big land is 5 bighas. Some villagers go to work in the tea garden which is small in size. They work for 3-4 days in the garden. Mostly women go to the garden while boys work in the land cultivating seasonal vegetables and other crops. During season time boys too are engaged in the garden. They get Rs.40 as their hajira. No one in the village is permanent labourer in the garden. Everybody works on temporary basis. A man in the village has 30 bighaland but this land is to be divided among his six brothers.

There is one house given through Indira AwasYojona (IAY). It was decided by the villagers that the house should be given to the person in the village who is very poor. After the death of his first wife he has remarried another lady. Pichla River is near by and this river is used for bathing, washing cloths and for many other purposes. There is no latrine and bathroom in the village. There is no health centre in the village. In case of treatment they go to Phansidewa hospital. If the case is more serious they are referred to Medical at North Bengal Medical College.

The people of the village do not believe in the witchcraft. They do not have so called ojha. They prefer to take medicine in case of any kind of sickness rather than going to the ojha. There is not a single case of inter-caste marriage in the village. The villagers have kinship ties. People are observing the family planning methods. After 2 to 3 children the women go for operation at Phansidewa hospital even if they have 3 daughters. There is not much of boy child preference among the tribals of this village.

We interviewed the following persons:

AmrushEkka (50 yrs), Yakub Lakra (48 yrs), Daud Kujur (45 yrs), Rajen Lakra (24 yrs), Johan Lakra (65 yrs), Chandmuni Lakra (35 yrs), FulmaniToppo (32 yrs), Ganga Kujur (31 yrs), SonatiLakra (25 yrs), Radha Ekka (26 yrs), Aloti Ekka (25 yrs), Rupani Ekka (35 yrs), and Podo Kujur (30 yrs)

The villagers are not being paid any of the facility from government regarding electricity and other kind of facilities. There is no SHGs in the village. But it is there in the other nearby villages. The villagers are aware that if the SHGs had been in the village it would have helped the women get economically strong.

Since the Oraons practice tribal endogamy and clan exogamy all the families in the village are bound by some kind of kinship ties. The common religion binds them together. The Church and the Church-centric religious activities bind the families together. Earlier, they used to receive many gifts from the Church but that flow of gifts has stopped in recent years. The villagers in general feel that Christianity has made their life better. They maintain a clear boundary with the Hindu Oraons and Protestant tribals. They do not intermarry nor do they maintain in social relation with them. Christians from this village go to Chathat Church every Sunday. They maintain a clear boundary with the Hindu Oraons and Protestant tribals. They do not intermarry but they maintain good social relation with them. In case the girl is Hindu and the boy is Christian the girl has to be Christian. For marriage the Christians go to Chathat Church and their marriage is blessed by the priest. But there is no Hindu priest to perform such marriage ceremonies for the Hindus. The family head or the groom's father performs all the ceremonies related to marriage. There is not a particular Hindu priest for the Hindus of this village.

In the village everybody has the voter card and they are regular voters. In this area CPI(M) is the ruling party. Until 4 years now CPI(M) has come to power in this constituency. Earlier all the villagers were supporters of Congress party but very recently some of them have joined the left front. Before voting the villagers gather together to decide whom to vote. One particular candidate is selected and everybody decides to vote him. But that's only in theory. In reality people have their own choice for the candidate and they vote for the person whomever they feel like. And this is very much visible that in the village there are two groups one which supports the Congress and the other is the

supporter of CPI(M). (the people we interviewed they themselves told us that “I support Congress and he is my cousin who votes for the CPI(M) and it seemed that there was not much of rivalry between them on party basis). But in a family everyone is the supporter of the same party. If the husband is for Congress naturally the whole family will be supporting the same party.

There is no Adivasi leader in the village. The CPI(M) is the ruling party here. Some are supporters of Congress and some are of CPI(M). As mentioned above there is no electricity in the village. Party leaders asked the villagers to collect some money to buy poll but the villagers are not able to because of lack of money. Electricity is in the nearby villages. There is no pacca road going to the village. There is another tribal village nearby which is Santhal dominated where 150 voters are there. This village is named Bara Helagoj. The people from Helagoj have good interaction with them but they avoid inter caste marriage with the Santhals.

Bengali is fluently spoken by the people of this village. They could very well interact in Bengali. But among themselves they use Oroan language. Children were playing close by and they talked in Bengali among themselves. We didn't find any case of child marriage. The marriage age for girls is 18 -19 years. They don't pay dowry. If they wish they can give some gifts to the groom. But now we could notice the influence of Hindu high caste marriage on them. Sometimes there is a demand from boy's side asking for bicycle, watch and so on. And it becomes obligatory on the part of bride side to fulfill the demand of the groom. Sometimes they have to sell their land. And the people who do not have land they face the heavy burden of debt on their shoulder. However, the villagers denied of having any kind of indebtedness to anyone for whatsoever reason.

### **C. Pischla Village**

We went to the village on 1 April 2008 and spent the whole day talking to the people of this village. The following persons were interviewed:

Anjulus Kindo (80 yrs), Martha Toppo (70 yrs), Bharoti Lakra (Xalxo) 25 yrs, Monica Kindo (14 yrs), Celestina Xalxo (40 yrs), Golo Xalxo (25 yrs), Kiran Toppo (18 yrs), and Mercila Ekka (30 yrs).

There are 35 families in the village mostly Oroan dominated. The estimated population is near about 175 aprox. The male female ratio is 60:40. There are 7 families who are totally landless and work on the others land for their survival. The land is washed away by the river Pischla. The villagers said that it is very difficult to get work here in the area as most of the people are landless and those who have land work themselves in their own land.

The villagers have shifted to this place very recently. Earlier this village was at Bangladesh border. But they had settled here as former place was taken by the military for the purpose of border security force. Many of the families are still to get some money from the government but villagers think that they will never receive any help from the government. We could see only 3-4 houses which were pacca houses newly made by the government. Some houses were still under construction. The rest were staying in the mud house with tin roof.

The villagers don't like to stay at this place as they have start their life and settle everything from the beginning. They liked the earlier place where they could earn more as the river Mahananda was close by and they could do fishing and sell the fish for their daily survival. But here they don't have any other means of livelihood therefore they also have to starve.

The village falls under Jahanara panchayat which is Congress dominated. The people have voters card. In every election they vote. This year their candidate lost his seat and Congress came to power. They are the supporters of CPI(M) party. They are continuous supporters of "lal" party but they complained that party didn't provide any facility to them and to their village. The villagers said that these pacca houses were given through panchayat. There is not a single pacca well through panchayat. The people of this village have arranged themselves for the well. No health centre in village and not even in the approachable distance. For any kind of sickness they go to Phansidewa which is 8 km away from this place. Villagers are also scared of being theft from the other side of the border as the village is very close to the Bangladesh border area. They complained that since there is no electricity the burglar's take advantage of this. The man we interviewed said that the burglars stole his ox (bull) not less than three times and he worn-out buying the ox. These people very much depend on the ox for the agriculture purpose.

Children go to Chathat School which is 3 km away from the village. They go by walking. Only 3-4 girls from this village who are Madhyamik pass and rest are all drop outs after 6-7 class. There is only one HS pass named Sanjay Tirkey who is supposed to go to Army as the villagers told us. There is no tribal leader in this village. The village is divided on the ground of party. Some are supporters of CPI(M) and others are Congress. There are no other parties except for these two. The villagers admit that there is no unity among themselves on party basis therefore there is no development so far in the village. Had they been united and voted for one party alone they would benefit. There is no general meeting before the election. It's the individual wish to vote whomever one likes. Before election the party leaders make thousands of promises but after winning they disappear from the scene. In a family the members support the same party. The people in this village have not much of rivalry among themselves. There has been no big conflict until now.

People do not believe in the so-called *ojha* or *jharphuk*. Earlier they did believe but now with the coming of Church and with the spread of Christianity among tribals that they don't have faith in superstition of this type. But this is an outside story. Still now these people believe in *ojha* and other type of superstition. The pregnant women are regular visitors of the health centre at Chat Hat. To clarify this we asked two ladies standing they said that they went to hospital for delivery. After two or three children the ladies go for ligation/operation. Earlier church helped people with medicine, rice, wheat and dal. But recently this sort of help has been stopped from the church authorities. Now these medicines are distributed by the missionaries at Mailanijote and at Jesu Ashram. Ladies are the members of SHG and they collect money. In a group there are 10 members.

#### **D. Rakhalgoj village**

We went to the village spent the whole day talking to the people of this village. There are 13 families in the village who are Christians there are 13 Munda tribal families who are non-Christians living in the Reshamgoj village which is adjacent to the former village. The total population of the village excluding Reshamgoj is about 80. The male female ratio is 40:60 respectively.

People of this village have land of their own. Every family has minimum 1 and half *bighas* of land. The highest land owner is the *panchayat* member (DorothiaTurkey) of the village who has 5 acres of land. Her husband bought some land from other villagers. This village falls under Chat hat *panchayat*. There were two candidates from the same village in opposition to each other. But the Congress candidate defeated the opposition party candidate (Ratna Kujur) from CPI (M) party with 13 votes difference only. Except for these two women who stood for *panchayat* election no other women member is active in politics.

We could interact with the lady who lost her seat in the election. Her name is Ratna Kujur who is a CPI (M) candidate. she is class 8<sup>th</sup> pass. She felt very bad after she was defeated. She was not interested in the party but the local leader and the *Pradhan* of Phansidewa block forced her to stand against the Congress candidate. But she has kinship ties with the rivalry candidate. Even after she has lost the seat they have good relation with the present *panchayat* member of the village and for any problem they go to her seeking solution. Now she is working in the ICDS and cooks food for the ICDS children. She goes to Nijbari everyday for her work. There are four helpers under her. For the party purpose the village is divided between two groups. The one supports congress and the second follow the CPIM rules. But they all have good relation among them when it is the matter of social and religious issues. There are only 3 BPL families in this village who are landless. The *panchayat* has constructed the *kaccha* road which leads to the village from the main pitch road.

People who are no land go to work for other on daily basis. They are paid Rs. 50 per day and the one time meal. But the labourers who work in the near by small gardens are paid only Rs. 40 per day. When there is no work in the garden or in the land there is no other means of livelihood for these people. They sometimes have to starve. There is only one boy who is higher secondary pass. And now working as para teacher in the near by school. Not a single girl has reached up to *Madhyamik* level. There is one girl doing nurse at Siliguri who is 8<sup>th</sup> pass.

## **A RETROSPECTIVE COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE DIVERGENT AREAS OF DOOARS AND TERAI**

In context of my studies spanning across the Dooars and Terai region which have been earlier enumerated in Chapter VI , I have tried to have a comparative analysis amongst the tribal women population in Dooars and Terai region. The tribal population in Dooars at large comprises of tea garden workers, reside in far flung localities. Though a substantial percentage of tribal population is employed in tea gardens in Terai region, there still remains a majority of this population who have chosen to have their independent socio-economic status, seconded by their agricultural activities. This tribal population in Terai region are thus not at the mercy of far flung and remotely located tea gardens for generations of their livelihood. This makes the tribal population in Terai to be much more in tune with the main stream social network. This fact is reflected in my studies as there is a significantly large population of tribal women who can claim to have effective and meaningful political participation within the Terai region vis-a-vis their Dooars counterparts. However the fact remains that, spread across these two divergent societies the tribal people and tribal women at large still continue to be amongst the lowest stratas of their respective societies.

The situation of tribal population does not really change relatively, as irrespective of whichever society they are part of they continue to always bring up the rear guard. Measures aimed towards upliftment of tribal population at large have thus to be initiated, spanning across all the social spectrum that they are part of. Although I have had a separate statistical analysis amongst the tribal population of Dooars and Terai region, it yet brings the basic fact to the forefront that tribal population, spanning across divergent social cauldrons still continue to remain amongst the most socially deprived and exploited strata of the society. A thorough perusal of my studies, reflected in the following tables will bear testimony to my aforesaid observation. I have also endeavoured to analyse the demographics of the constituent tribal population in Dooars and Terai region and tried to extrapolate my various observations and inferences in the backdrop of this demography.

The tribal population is definitely more in Phansidewa block as compared with the Matelli region of Dooars. However, the tribals comprise a higher percentage of total population in Matelli block as compared to that of Phansidewa block. (see Table 5.21).

This is a fact that the Matelli block in Dooars can claim to have a better male-female ratio as compared with the terai region. (see Table 5.22)

**Table 5.21 -Total Population, ST and SC Population and their proportion to Total Population, 2011**

	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>ST Population</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SC Population</b>	<b>%</b>
Phansidewa	204501	62595	30.6	60704	29.7
Matiali	117540	51789	44.1	17622	14.9

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Table 5.22- Population table showing Sex Ratio, 2011**

	<b>Population</b>			<b>ST</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>Sex Ratio</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	
Phansidewa	204522	103719	100803	62595	60704	972
Matiali	117540	53472	52434	51789	15965	992

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Table 5.23-ST Literacy Rate by Sex and Gender Gap in Literacy Rate**

	<b>Population</b>		<b>Literacy Rate</b>		<b>Gender Gap in Literacy</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
Darjeeling	102,287	101,880	65.1	45.8	19.2
Jalpaiguri	324,250	317,438	54.2	30.7	23.6
Phansidewa	87,945	83,563	62.2	37.7	24.5
Matiali	53,472	52,434	67.1	41.6	25.5

Source: Census of India, 2011

Darjeeling as district can claim to have a least gap between the educational standards of male and female. Comparatively Jalpaiguri district (which comprises of my areas of study) has a much more male preponderance in education. Thus at large the tribal women

in Jalpaiguri district always face a socio-education handicap as compared with their neighbouring district as Darjeeling.(see table 5.23). Compared within my areas of study Matelli block (situated in Dooars) has a higher rate of literacy as compared with the Phansidewa block in Terai region. (see table 5.24).

**Table 5.24- Number of literates and literacy rate by sex**

	Literates			Literacy rate		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Phansidewa	70004	44539	25465	50.3	62.2	37.7
Matiali	49029	30469	18560	54.4	67.1	41.6

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Table 5.25-Distribution of Population by Worker and Non-worker**

Districts / Blocks	Population			Total Workers (Main+Marginal)			Non-Workers		
	Persons	Male	Females	Persons	Male	Females	Persons	Male	Females
Darjeeling	1609172	830644	778528	5694420	402970	166472	1039730	427674	612056
Jalpaiguri	3401173	1751145	1650028	1303136	915400	387736	2098037	835745	1262292
Phansidewa	171508	87945	83563	62208	43483	18725	109300	44462	64838
Matiali	105906	53472	52434	43356	26130	17226	62550	27342	35208

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Table 5.26- Number of Workers and Work Participation Rate by Sex**

Districts/ Blocks	Population			Number of Workers (Main+Marginal)			Work Participation Rate (Main+Marginal)		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Females	Persons	Male	Females
Darjeeling	1609172	830644	778528	5694420	402970	166472	35.4	48.5	21.4
Jalpaiguri	3401173	1751145	1650028	1303136	915400	387736	38.3	52.3	23.5
Phansidewa	171508	87945	83563	62208	43483	18725	36.3	49.4	22.4
Matiali	105906	53472	52434	43356	26130	17226	40.9	48.9	32.9

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Table 5.27- Percentage distribution of Total Workers by Main and Marginal category**

	Number of Total Workers			Main Workers %			Marginal workers %		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Darjeeling	569442	402970	166472	29.8	43.2	15.4	5.6	5.3	6.0
Jalpaiguri	1303136	915400	387736	30.1	46.6	12.7	8.2	5.6	10.8
Phansidewa	62208	43483	18725	30.1	44.1	15.4	6.1	5.3	7.0
Matiali	43356	26130	17226	31.6	41.0	22.0	9.3	7.8	10.9

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Table 5.28- Distribution of Total Workers by category in Percentage**

	Cultivators %			Agricultural Labourers %		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Darjeeling	15.5	14.4	18.2	10.2	8.9	13.4
Jalpaiguri	20.7	22.2	17.3	17.7	14.2	25.7
Phansidewa	15.7	18.7	8.9	21.3	22.1	19.2
Matiali	8.3	9.8	6.0	6.3	6.6	5.8

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Table 5.29- Distribution of Total Workers by category in HHI and other workers by Sex**

	Workers in HHI %			Other Workers %		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Darjeeling	2.8	2.5	3.6	71.5	74.3	64.8
Jalpaiguri	2.1	1.6	3.1	59.6	62.0	53.9
Phansidewa	1.7	1.6	2.0	61.3	57.6	69.9
Matiali	1.1	1.1	1.1	84.3	82.5	87.1

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Table 5.30- Percentage distribution of Main Workers by Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers**

	No. of Main Workers			Cultivators %			Agricultural Labourers %		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Darjeeling	478851	359110	119741	14.3	14.0	15.3	6.5	6.6	6.2
Jalpaiguri	1025433	816528	208905	20.5	22.7	11.7	13.1	12.6	15.1
Phansidewa	51690	38780	12910	16.9	19.7	8.4	18.1	20.5	11.0
Matiali	33460	21939	11521	7.6	9.9	3.4	4.3	5.5	2.1

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Table 5.31- Distribution of Marginal Workers by category in percentage**

	No. of Marginal Workers			Cultivators %			Agricultural Labourers %		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Darjeeling	90591	43860	46731	21.6	17.2	25.7	29.9	27.6	32.0
Jalpaiguri	277703	98872	178831	21.6	17.8	23.8	34.5	27.8	38.2
Phansidewa	10518	4703	5815	10.1	10.2	10.0	36.7	35.7	37.5
Matiali	9896	4191	5705	10.3	9.3	11.1	13.1	12.7	13.3

Source: Census of India, 2001

**Table 6.32- Distribution of Marginal Workers by category in percentage**

	Workers in HHI %			Other Workers %		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Darjeeling	5.4	4.7	6.1	43.1	50.5	36.2
Jalpaiguri	2.9	1.8	3.5	41.0	52.6	34.6
Phansidewa	1.4	1.1	1.5	51.9	52.9	51.0
Matiali	1.6	1.2	1.9	75.0	76.8	73.6

The above tables are a reflection on a few of my observations based on statistics.

## CHAPTER VI

### TRIBAL WOMEN AND THE DECISION-MAKING

#### **PARTICIPATION PROCESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL POLITICS- ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND EFFECTIVENESS**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment of 1993 has given local government a constitutional status introducing new institutions into the working of Indian democracy through several significant innovations, such as reservations of seats for marginal groups, women, Dalits, and Adivasis; creation of a decentralized planning mechanism; establishment of state election commissions to oversee local elections and state finance commissions to prepare a blueprint for sharing of state revenues; and institutionalization of the village assembly (*gram sabha*).

In its effort to be more participatory and people oriented Indian democracy has made an elaborate arrangement to facilitate participation of the hitherto excluded populations, the weaker sections like the SCs, STs and women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution (1992) have been a landmark in this direction. Indian Constitution now makes it mandatory to hold the regular election to the bodies of local self-government and reserve at least 33 per cent of the total seats for the women in all bodies.

The varied issues that influence proper and effective participation of women at the grass roots levels are sought to be analysed and put into proper perspective in this chapter. It is heartening to note that while there were quite a substantial percentage of women who caved into pressure from local political satraps, there is an equal number of women who stuck their neck out on their own to be a part of the political process. These women bear testimony to the fact that there is an inherent (though largely subdued) desire amongst the women who make a meaningful social impact through effective participation at the grass root political levels.

Although interested observers were sceptical about the future of the move recent reports from different parts of the country record developments that are encouraging. There has been a growing popular consensus that Indian democracy cannot simply be without the active participation of the women, who have been excluded so long from the political

space of the country. I have been working for the last few years on the participation of tribal women in the bodies of local self-government and in trade unions in the *Terai* and *Dooars* regions of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of North Bengal. It is difficult to trace nearly 1.5 million tribal people (49.60 per cent of whom are women) in six districts of North Bengal in development map of the state since they constitute the marginalized, the “poorest of the poor”.

After the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act in 1993 the scope for participation of the members of the backward communities, particularly the women, has significantly risen. In North Bengal there are 717 Gram Panchayats, 61 Panchayat Samities, 6 Zilla Parisads and one Mahakuma Parisad (Table 6.1). So far as the tribal representation is concerned, in the GPs in North Bengal there are 792 male (or 11.51 per cent of the total male members) 479 female members (11.89 per cent of the total female members). In the Panchayat Samities there are 125 male and 72 female members, and in the Zilla Parisads and Mahakuma Parisad together there are 31 male and 21 female ST members. Thus in all the *panchayat* bodies taken together, there are as many as 556 tribal women members who in North Bengal who would constitute the population for the present study (Table 6.2). It is significant to note that the percentage share of tribal male and female representation to the local bodies exceeds their share of the total population in the State or in North Bengal. This bears testimony to the fact that the dominant sections or the order are prepared to grant some political space to the hitherto marginalized communities. The participation of a sizable section of tribal women in politics indicates to a socio-political transformation of great significance for the tribal communities as well as for the Indian democracy and this precisely constitutes the subject matter of the present study.

In North Bengal there are 717 Gram Panchayatas with 10,902 members, 61 Panchayat Samities with 333 members and 6 Zilla Parisads and one Mahakuma Parisad with 720 members. In GPs among the male members there are 792 (or 11.51 per cent of the total members) ST members and among the female members there are 479 ST members (11.89 per cent of the total female members). In the Panchayat Samities there are 125 male ST members and 72 female members, and in the Zilla Parisad and Mahakuma Parisad together there are 31 male and 21 female ST members. Thus at the three levels of

panchayat bodies there are as many as 556 women members who represent different scheduled tribes of the region (Table 6.2, 6.3& 6.4).

**Table 6.1: Local Self-Governments in North Bengal and West Bengal at a Glance (Panchayat Elections, 2003)**

Name of District	No. of Gram Sansads	No. of Gram Panchayats	No. of Seats/ Members in GP	No. of Panchayat Samiti	No. of Seats/ Members in PS	No. of Seats/Members in ZP/MP
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Coochbehar	1703	128	1905	12	339	26
Jalpaiguri	2075	146	2241	13	374	31
Darjeeling	1043	112	1597	X	x	x
Siliguri	359	22	405	04	64	07
D.Dinajpur	929	65	993	08	179	15
U.Dinajpur	1422	98	1529	09	263	21
Malda	2008	146	2232	15	388	33
<b>NB TOTAL</b>	<b>9539</b>	<b>717</b>	<b>10902</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>1607</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>WB TOTAL</b>	<b>45,245</b>	<b>3354</b>	<b>51,142</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>8,564</b>	<b>720</b>

**Source:** District Office of NIC (National Information Centre), Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts. Jan. 2006. West Bengal total figures have been collected from AUN India Sponsored initiative based on UNICEF Database, 2006. Office of the Registrar General, India, New Delhi.

**Table 6.2: Community Breakup of the Directly Elected Male and Female Members of Gram Panchayats (after 2003 Election)**

Name of District	Male Members				Female Members			
	SC	ST	GEN	Total	SC	ST	GEN	Total
Coochbehar	710	05	513	1228	386	01	290	677
Jalpaiguri	638	315	468	1421	360	177	283	820
Darjeeling	73	110	843	1026	43	76	452	571
Siliguri	154	99	11	264	52	41	48	141
D. Dinajpur	215	115	300	630	122	87	154	363
U. Dinajpur	334	55	555	944	226	43	316	585
Malda	285	93	985	1363	192	54	623	869
<b>NB TOTAL</b>	<b>2409</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>3675</b>	<b>6876</b>	<b>1381</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>2166</b>	<b>4026</b>
<b>WB Total</b>	<b>8951</b>	<b>2318</b>	<b>21,152</b>	<b>32,421</b>	<b>5657</b>	<b>1496</b>	<b>11,568</b>	<b>18,721</b>

**Source:** District Office of NIC (National Information Centre), Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts. Jan. 2006. West Bengal total figures have been collected from AUN India Sponsored initiative based on UNICEF Database, 2006. Office of the Registrar General, India, New Delhi.

**Table 6.3: Community Breakup of the Directly Elected Male and Female Members of Panchayat Samiti (after 2003 Election)**

Name of District	Male Members				Female Members			
	SC	ST	GEN	Total	SC	ST	GEN	Total
Coochbehar	136	01	86	223	65	X	51	116
Jalpaiguri	115	70	57	242	57	28	47	132
Darjeeling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Siliguri	23	15	04	42	07	07	08	22
D. Dinajpur	40	18	49	107	26	17	29	72
U. Dinajpur	60	09	98	167	37	08	51	96
Malda	48	12	192	252	25	12	99	136
<b>NB TOTAL</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>1033</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>574</b>
WB Total	1545	409	3578	5532	923	228	1881	3032

**Source:** District Office of NIC (National Information Centre), Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts. Jan. 2006. West Bengal total figures have been collected from AUN India Sponsored initiative based on UNICEF Database, 2006. Office of the Registrar General, India, New Delhi.

**Table 6.4: Community Breakup of the Directly Elected Male and Female Members of Zilla Parishad (after 2003 Election)**

Name of District	Male Members				Female Members			
	SC	ST	GEN	Total	SC	ST	GEN	Total
Coochbehar	04	X	13	17	05	X	04	09
Jalpaiguri	07	06	07	20	05	02	04	11
Darjeeling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Siliguri	01	X	03	04	01	01	01	03
D. Dinajpur	03	02	05	10	02	01	02	05
U. Dinajpur	05	01	09	15	02	X	04	06
Malda	04	01	17	22	02	01	08	11
<b>NB TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>45</b>
WB TOTAL	127	31	316	474	66	21	159	246

**Source:** District Office of NIC (National Information Centre), Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts. Jan. 2006. West Bengal total figures have been collected from AUN India Sponsored initiative based on UNICEF Database, 2006. Office of the Registrar General, India, New Delhi.

The participation of tribal women in the political process, especially in North Bengal has grown manifolds. This has much to do with reservation of seats for tribal women, right from the *panchayats* to *Lok Sabha* elections. Under these conditions the political parties are legitimately bound to appoint tribal women as their candidate for elections ranging from the basic *panchayat* levels up to election of highest echelons of power that is the *Lok Sabha*. During the course of my numerous interactions with tribal women who have been elected under the *panchayat* scheme of things or *Lok Sabha*, it has primarily stood out

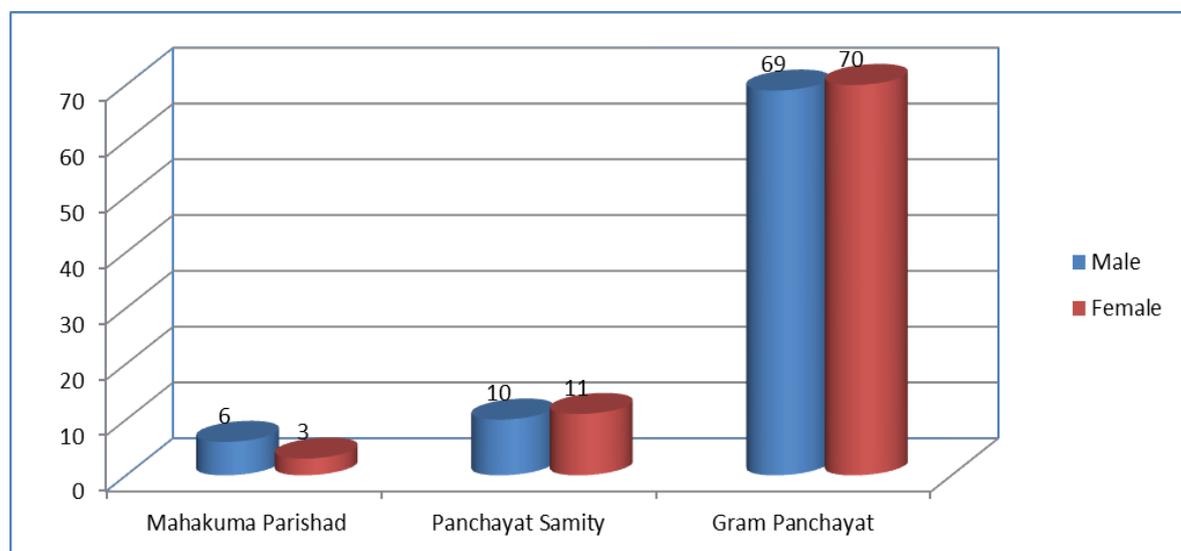
that amongst the majority of these tribal women representatives, most of them continue to be just a shield. It is predominantly the menfolk who still govern the decision making process, though the elected representatives may be amongst the womenfolk of tribal population. A vast majority of these tribal women thrown into the political field have little say as far as political decision making is concerned.

**Table 6.5- Number of Elected Members in Local level bodies in Phansidewa Block (2004 & 2015 Election)**

	Male	Female	Total
Mahakuma Parishad	6	3	09
Panchayat Samity	10	11	21
Gram Panchayat	69	70	139
<b>Total</b>	<b>N=85</b>	<b>N=84</b>	<b>N=169</b>
<b>Year 2004 Total</b>	<b>N=88</b>	<b>N=55</b>	<b>N=143</b>

Source: Block Development Officer, Phansidewa Block Development.

**Chart No. 9- Showing Number of Elected Representatives in Panchayat Bodies**



The above table shows that out of 169 elected members 139 are gram panchayat members, 21 members are panchayat samity members and only 9 are in mahakuma Parishad. Women representatives outnumber the male members by 1 in gram panchayat and panchayat samity. (see Table 6.5). In gram panchayat the SCs elected members are higher in number than STs and OBCs. Altogether the minorities in the local bodies are 84

in number where there number in GP is 70. In Panchayat Samity and Mahakuma Parishad their presence is 11 and 3 respectively. (see Table 6. 6 & Chart No. 9)

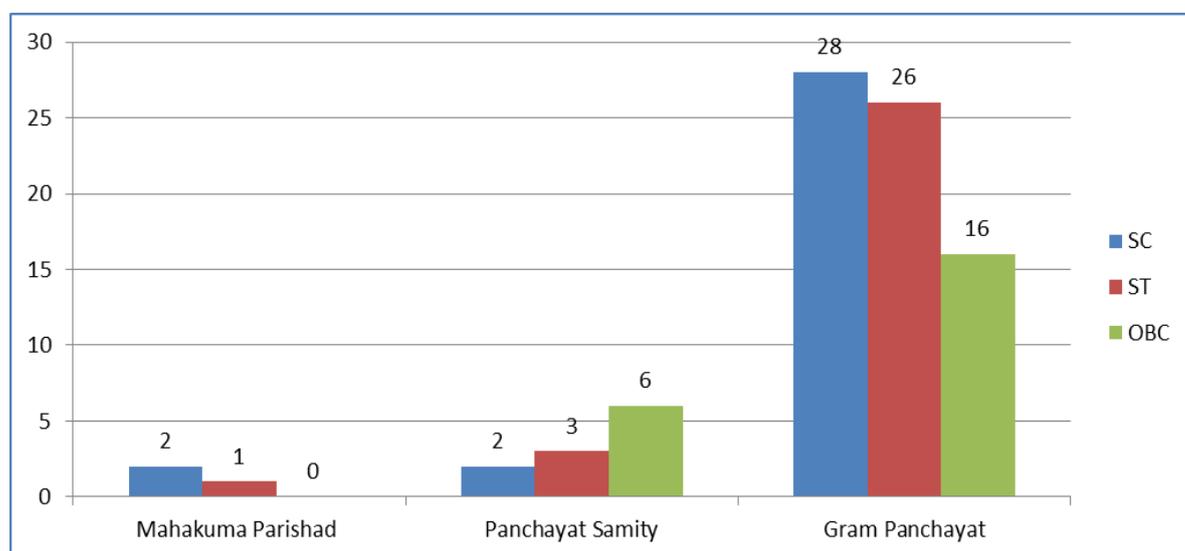
Thus the majority of these tribal womenfolk endured with carrying out political agendas principally meant for betterment of the tribal women, are not able contribute meaningfully towards the very basic reason of election to these posts. In majority of cases, they still remain just a means of exploitation by the political parties whereby their election to political positions are just a face. Upon their election into these importance decision making political bodies, they are not able to assert their political wherewithal in a positive manner. Thereby rendering the men-folk, be it their husband or father, to undertake and enjoy the privilege of political power.

**Table 6.6- Number of Women Elected Representatives in Local Bodies by Caste**

	<b>Mahakuma Parishad</b>	<b>Panchayat Samity</b>	<b>Gram Panchayat</b>
SC	2 (66%)	2 (18%)	28 (40%)
ST	1 (33%)	3 (27%)	26 (37%)
OBC	-	6 (54%)	16 (22%)
Total	<b>N= 03</b>	<b>N= 11</b>	<b>N= 70</b>

Source: Field Survey

**Chart No. 10 – Showing number of Elected Representatives in Local Bodies by Caste**



Despite reservation for women, effective participation in *panchayat raj* institutions is a myth. This is particularly true amongst the tribal belt in *Dooars* where the female elected representatives continue to be just a tool in the hands of the political parties. Jha (2004) opines that despite reservation for women, effective participation in *panchayati raj*

*institutions* have failed due to misuse and manipulation by local power brokers. Ignorance of women about their rights and procedures and about their potential and responsibilities have kept them far behind men in local bodies. Jha sincerely believes that mere increase in number of reserved seats for women in local bodies is likely to increase participation of women unless structural changes are brought about and sincere effort is made to educate women and the power structures existing in rural areas are neutralized, nothing can be achieved.

It however came upon me during my numerous interactions with these tribal women political representatives, that there has been, though miniscule, a percentage amongst these tribal women who have managed to stand their ground and assert themselves politically. There are numerous examples where these tribal women coming from divergent background have managed to hold their own and have thereby worked meaningfully and contributed in their capacity as elected representatives, for betterment of the tribal population as whole and tribal women in particular. This spans across the tribal population residing in *dooars* and *terai*. This of course is very heartening and welcome trend amongst the tribal womenfolk, trying to assert positively their socio-economic and political identity. Examples are numerous spanning across elected political representatives like Panchami Lohar in Chulsa Tea Garden to women like Rina Ekka in terai region who works under the local *panchayats*. This assertion of the womenfolk of the downtrodden tribal population is a welcome trend which of course augurs well for the tribal women population at large.

There are myriads of tribal women who bear testimony to the fact that meaningful and effective participation of tribal women in the process of political decision making is not totally a myth. There remain quite a substantial percentage of tribal women who have risen to positions of political power at the grass root level represented by the *panchayats*. Many amongst them have started their political journey riding upon the fact that the Constitution guarantees reservations for the tribal women in certain seats, right from the grass root *panchayat* levels up to the *lok sabha*. Many of these avenues were propelled to political limelight because of these reservations. While it still remains a fact that it is the men who control the strings of these tribal women candidates and these women are often rendered defunct, there is quite an appreciable percentage of these women who have successfully tried to assert their own free will and hold their ground.

In a predominantly male dominated society like ours, legislations aimed towards empowerment of women of this underprivileged class of society, though a right step forward, often failed to get the desired result. It however needs to be appreciated that under the aiges of this legislations several women are by force thrown into the political spectrum of our society. Quite an appreciable number of women, having been elected as political representatives do manage to successfully negotiate the tricky path of the male dominated society. These women though having started off as an offshoot of socio-economic reservations, have over a period of time managed to insulate themselves from the political designs of the political parties, of which they are representatives. It is heartening to note that many amongst these groups of women have successfully managed to put agendas of social importance to the forefront. These women have managed to successfully transgress the political divide at their place of work and contribute to the wholesome development of their immediate society, many a times overcoming male prejudices.

Empowerment of women of the fringe social groups still remains a challenge, as majority of tribal women continue to be exploited by political parties for furtherance of electoral gains. True empowerment of these women, even after sixty years of independent still largely remains a myth. Positivity's that can be drawn from actions such as reservations for tribal women right at the grass root level, though insufficient, are still enough to substantiate this socio-economic initiative. Many of these elected tribal women folk have over the course of time managed to stand their own authority. It is welcome to note that women, who are, a product of measures under taken to have gender equality, have managed to assert their political agendas. Two of the examples quoted by me bear testimony to the fact that empowering women of the downtrodden society, often has quite a positive social impact.

While there has been quite a substantial progress towards empowerment of women belonging to the downtrodden class of society, the fact that much more needs to be done cannot be over emphasized. Constitution and the numerous positive amendments therein have been directed towards grating and securing political and decision-making platforms for the women folk of the underprivileged section of the society. Though there is heartening example of women from this section of society who have come forward and

managed to have meaningful contributions at the grass root level of democracy, the percentage of such women still remains miniscule.

Majority of women, though being elected representative thereby bestowed with all the decision-making powers, still eventually end up being just ornamental posts. Under majority of conditions, Constitutional guarantee towards protecting and nurturing the women power at grass-root levels is miss-utilised. In vast majority of cases these women are just propped up as candidates for local body elections, but the actual power is often with the men-folk of the family. Women thus end up being in important positions of decision-making at the grass-root levels just for the namesake. Majority of political parties often try to get around the constitutionally laid down guidelines for empowering women by electing women candidates just to fulfil constitutional obligations. The real power amongst the majority of these posts is wielded by either the political parties or by the male members of family the elected women representative. Lack of education amongst the women of this section primarily contributes to this plight. It thus suffices to surmise that the only means to guarantee that true women empowerment at the grass-root levels will always remain a myth, unless and until backed up by a strong drive to educate these women, thereby making them conscious towards their right. Constitutional reservations, though a welcome step forward, are rendered futile without an educated and socially conscious women part of the society.

The primary emphasis thus needs to be towards providing with compulsory and meaningful education to women. vast majority of this socially backward section of society in North Bengal is primarily employed as tea garden labourers. The remote and often socially ostracized nature of tea gardens makes it extremely difficult and challenging to reach educational, social and health related government programmes to infiltrate into these societies. Furthermore, women of these societies often bear the brunt of socio-economic constraints, thereby getting deprived of basic human rights like education and health. Thus, any initiative, though constitutionally guaranteed for upliftment of these tribal women, will continue to meet with extremely limited success, unless backed up with means to further the educational status of these women.

Endeavors principally aimed at educational empowerment of women of this section of the society have definitely to be initiated at the grass root levels. It is a fact that majority of

tribal population in North Bengal earn their living as employees in the tea garden industry. Thus, initiative aimed at providing education to these tribal women cannot bear fruit if the tea gardens are neglected. While there have been progress in the form of setting up of primary schools within the tea garden premises in quite a number of tea gardens, social constraints still result in quite a substantial percentage of school dropouts within the girl populations. A multipronged approach encompassing the socio-economic plethora is definitely the need of the hour. Various social schemes, mainly under the edges of local self-government bodies have to be initiated to counter the social attitude of neglect of girl child. It is primarily engrained in the Indian social make up to celebrate and further the cause of a boy child. It remains a fact that even amongst the higher social structures of human society in India, birth of a male child still remains an occasion of rejoicing.

Though the tribal society at large does not have this stigma attached to the girl child, social obligations are the forerunners, which thus play an important part in deprivation of educational facilities to the girl child. Majority of tribal families employed as tea garden workers have both the husband and wife employed in tea garden. Upon birth of their children a girl child is always bestowed with the responsibility of looking after her siblings and the family at large during the period of absence of the parents. This contributes to the substantial number of school drop outs amongst the girls in tea gardens. Deprived of education, a substantial majority of these girls are left with no other choice than to get themselves tied in nuptial bond at the earliest. And this vicious cycle continues through ages. Lack of education renders these women vulnerable to the whims and fancies of men-folk and political parties. Thus reforms aimed at political empowerment of these tribal women are often rendered futile as majority of this tribal women political representatives end up as just a face, the actual power wielded by the men and political parties.

Government initiatives should primarily target upon social awareness towards the benefits of an educated girl for the society at large. In the society like the tribal society which can rightfully boast of far less sex based discrimination, it should not be a very cumbersome task. Sincere endeavours by government in conjunction with other agencies will definitely help to tie over these socio-economic hurdles. Once the educational upliftment of the tribal girl child is ensured, true political empowerment of tribal women can definitely be

attained. This will go a long way towards empowerment of women at the grass root levels. It is heartening to note that even under the present scenario, where there are huge constraints, educated tribal women when endowed with political and decision making power have done exceedingly well. They have often been able to transgress political divides and have successfully worked towards betterment of their fellow women and the society at large.

In our interaction with multitude of such educated tribal elected tribal women representatives, numerous praiseworthy examples have come to the fore. There however remain quite a substantial percentage of tribal women, who though bestowed with political powers, could contribute extremely little towards furtherance of the cause of tribal women. Lack of education was a principle hindrance, which laid them vulnerable to manoeuvres by the men and political parties at large, whose principle aims are just to further their political cause. Bereft educational empowerment of tribal women, political empowerment is just a mirage.

While it cannot be contended that education amongst tribal women has definitely been on an upswing, after more than sixty years of independence much more was expected. The Constitutional makers and subsequent amendments have tried to inculcate tribal women into the democratic decision-making process. But the ground reality is far from satisfactory. Abysmal educational standards amongst the majority of tribal women population still remains a huge hindrance towards true appreciation of various endeavours aimed at upliftment of the tribal women. It is thus of paramount importance to provide basic and meaningful education to tribal women, whereby they can do true justice to their elected posts as tribal women representatives at the grass root level.

It is rampant amongst the men-folk of the tribal population to indulge in alcohol abuse. Use of alcohol, in their crudest form, is a part of social structure of a tribal society. It thus compounds into an economic constraint for these tribal population. The role of the tribal women employed as a tea garden worker is thus manifold. On the one hand they have to actively get involved in overcoming problems arising out of unbridled liquor consumption by the men-folk of the society, extending up to striking a balance between their economic obligations as tea garden workers and trying to provide socio-economic security for their families.

Granting of reservations for these women, principally aimed at improvement of their socio-economic status has huge social hurdles. My interaction with quite a substantial percentage of these tribal women has repeatedly drawn me to conclude that educational empowerment of these tribal women is of paramount importance. An educated tribal woman can go a long way to positively break down regressive social norms principally aimed at depriving the women, the right to education.

Financial constraints are huge hindrance towards proper functioning and implementation of various government schemes at the grass root levels. Though the intentions of many elected tribal representatives at the *panchayat* level may be very benevolent, lack of financial resources is often a major obstacle. Devolution of funds, though a constitutional responsibility of the state government, often not adhered to proper percolation of funds primarily aimed at implementation of various developmental projects at the grass root level is a must for proper political empowerment of government bodies at the *panchayati raj* institutions. Availability of funds coupled with improved educational levels will definitely go a long way to strengthen grass root democratic institutions. These two primary issues that is education of the fringe tribal women population and providence of financial funds necessary for developmental activities at the grass root levels have to be addressed seriously. Though there has been quite a substantial progress on these two fronts, much more still needs to be done.

Another major impact is lack of social health related meaningful schemes. Implementations of such basic health schemes as universal immunization programme for children is yet to boast of hundred percentage coverage. Traditional and age old beliefs, under major circumstances, still have a large influence. Lack of education of the women of this part of society does definitely have a detrimental effect. This huge social barrier continues to be a hindrance towards development of this society at large. The answer towards successful overcoming this obstacle definitely lies with providing these tribal women with meaningful and substantial education. It is disheartening to note that quite a majority of pregnant women of this class of society still shun. Institutionalized health care, thereby preferring to give birth to their offspring's at home. The poor economic conditions render this to be an extremely cumbersome procedure. Thereby, the maternal mortality rate amongst this class of human society still remains alarmingly high.

Though various programmes aimed towards spreading of health awareness have infiltrated into this society, it has definitely not succeeded in overcoming the traditional-social beliefs. Thus, even the basic immunization programme for children runs into a huge obstacle. An educated women populace will certainly go a long way in integration of this society into modern and scientific health care system. Provision of education for the girl child, though prevalent, has still not been able to fully break away from traditional social beliefs. Adding to this is the problem of the custom of early marriage of the girl child. This therefore curtails their scope to avail of any meaningful education. The future generation is thus rendered brazenly open to be usurped by traditional social beliefs. An uneducated mother can contribute precious little towards inculcating proper and scientific thinking for her offspring.

My numerous interaction with various successful tribal women at the grass root level have led me to conclude that education definitely contributes towards wholesome development of family at large, whereby they can become instrumental in successful implementation of various health related schemes, particularly relating to proper scientific care of pregnant women and immunization of the young children. If the vast majority of women of this society are provided with proper and meaningful education, numerous health related issues prevalent in the society can be successfully and positively tackled. Another big menace in the form of alcohol abuse can definitely be subjugated by an educated and socially aware women population.

Many of the tea gardens bear testimony to the fact that educated women have often formed social groups to successfully counter the issue of alcohol. Thus the advantages of an educated and socially aware women population are manifold, spanning across various socio-economic domains, to positively mould the society at large.

Mark Robinson (2005) in his article *A Decade of Panchayati Raj Reforms: The Challenge of Democratic Decentralization in India* opines that constitutional provision for reserved seats for women and tribes distinguishes the current phase of *panchayati raj* reforms from earlier initiatives. The absence of affirmative action ensured a high level of elite dominance in earlier decentralization efforts, since local vested interests played a critical role in *panchayat* affairs reflective of their superior socioeconomic and political status. In the new constitutional dispensation, seat reservations for women scheduled castes and

tribes provide opportunities for formal representation that more closely approximate population shares, but the effectiveness of these provisions is very uneven. On the one hand, seat reservations have provided underprivileged groups with increased visibility and an opportunity to influence local affairs. There are many instances where women have managed to generate modest local development dividends by marshalling financial resources and lobbying bureaucrats and politicians at higher levels. On the other hand, elite dominance continues to prevail in most *panchayats* with the result that traditional caste leaders and landed elites dominate decision making by proxy or manipulation. Influential male relatives influence decision making and control resources. Outspoken scheduled caste and female representatives have often had to contend with violence, ostracism or no cooperation from dominant interests.

Robinson (2005) remarks that elected women representatives often face considerable opposition in seeking to carry out the duties of office in a responsible manner from male relatives who resent their public role and from vested interests who are opposed to affirmative action. More common is the tendency by influential men to pressure elected *panchayat* members into supporting a no-confidence motion that can unseat women gram *panchayat* presidents. These responses are magnified for scheduled castes and tribal women who face social ostracism and no cooperation by virtue of their gender and caste status. Robinson opines that political commitment alone cannot ensure well-functioning *panchayati raj institutions* in the absence of transfer of sufficient powers, responsibilities and resources to the lower tiers of government. Moreover, the resources available for social welfare programmes in the form of subsidized housing and employment generation are spread very thinly with the result that only a handful of individuals receive these benefits each year in the average gram *panchayat*. Without a much greater devolution of financial resources, the potential development impact of decentralization will remain limited; a marked localized effect on poverty levels is therefore highly unlikely under such restrictive conditions. Similarly, the fact that health and education remain subject to highly centralized forms of provision means that elected representatives have little influence over service delivery at the local level.

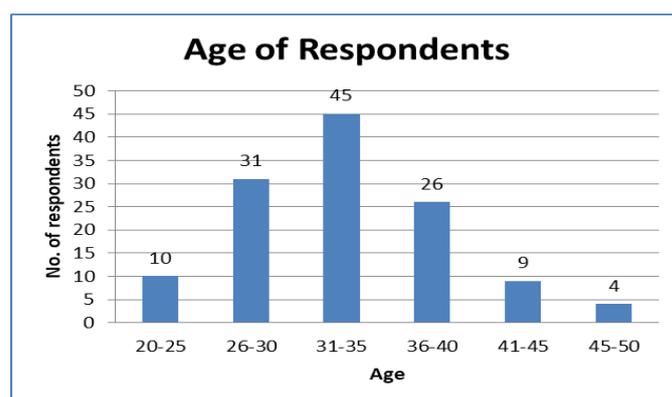
## INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The numerous data that I have collected through my personal interactions with tribal women representatives spanning across Dooars and Terai regions of North Bengal have been put into a tabulated form in the following tables and charts. These observations of mine have been a result of a standard questionnaire-cum-scheduled that I have design to throw light upon the various aspects that have a primary bearance upon their present political stature as representatives of tribal population at large and specifically as tribal women. I have, through my questionnaire-cum-schedule attempted to address all the relevant issues that have contributed towards propelling these tribal women of North Bengal to positions of power. There has also been a sincere endeavour towards addressal of the various problems that these women face as grass root political leaders. A sincere effort has been made to delve upon the various socio-economic paraphernalia that contribute towards success or failure of these tribal women, who are in positions of power.

The sample size of our study comprises of 125 respondents, who are evely disggtributed amongst the two areas of study. We have taken care to have a fair representation of the population through random selection of our samples, which can claim to reflect a fair representation of the population as a whole. Specifically in Matelli block of Jalpaiguri district, the far flung and remote locations of tea gardens were a huge deterrence. This therefore was an economic constrains which we have tried tto minimize by givingample representation to the remote and far flung ea gardens under Matelli block. A sample size of 125 respondents (which comprise the universe of our study) has had a truly propotional representation spanning across all the divergent population within the area of the our study. Increasing the sample size more would definetly have 1) diluted the propotional nature of our sample and 2) placed undue economic constrains for our studies.

**Table No.6.7: Age of respondents**

Age	No.	%
20-25	10	8
26-30	31	24.8
31-35	45	36
36-40	26	20.8



41-45	9	7.2
45-50	4	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

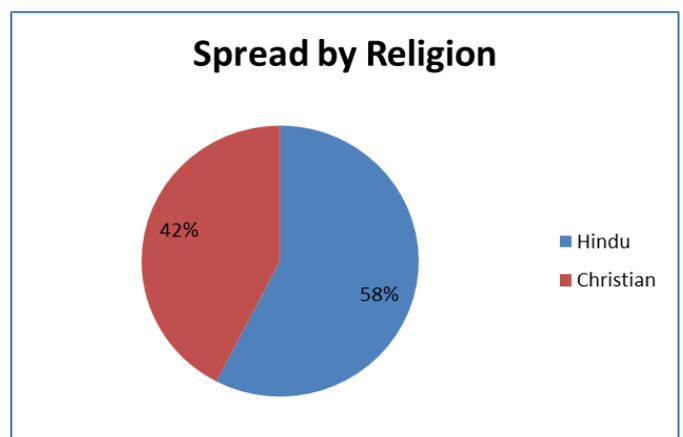
Source: Field Survey

The above table shows that out of 125 tribal women representatives 45 belong to the age group of 31-35 and 31 belong to the age group of 26-30. In other words 36 percent women are of the age group of 31-35 years. Out of 125 women representative 4 are of the age group of 41-45 years. (Table 6.7). Table 6.8 shows the religion of respondents where Hindus are in majority in this region.

**Table 6.8- Religion of Respondents**

Religion	Number	Percentage
Hindu	72	41.3
Christian	53	58.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

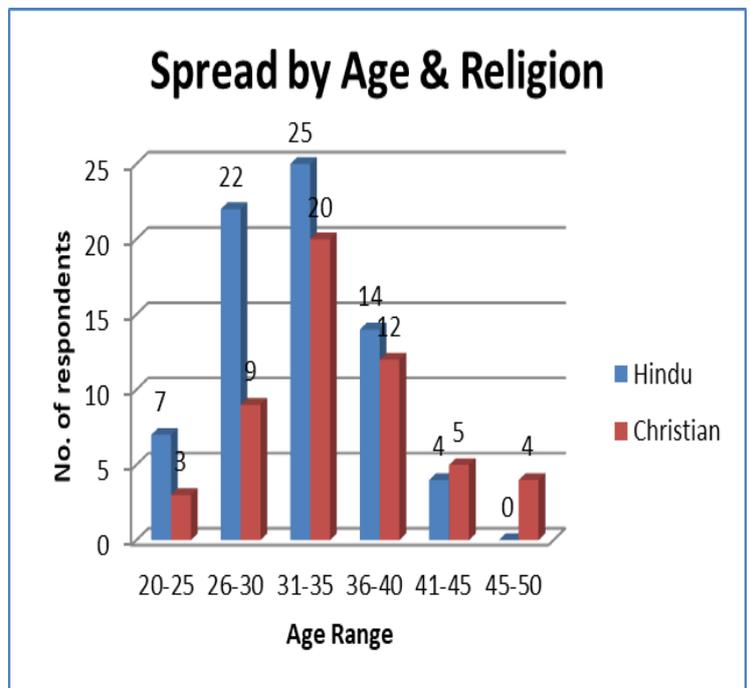
Source: Field Survey



**Table 6.9- Age & Religion of respondents**

Age	Hindu	Christia n	Total
20-25	7	3	10
26-30	22	9	31
31-35	25	20	45
36-40	14	12	26
41-45	4	5	9
45-50	0	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>125</b>

Source: Source: Field Survey

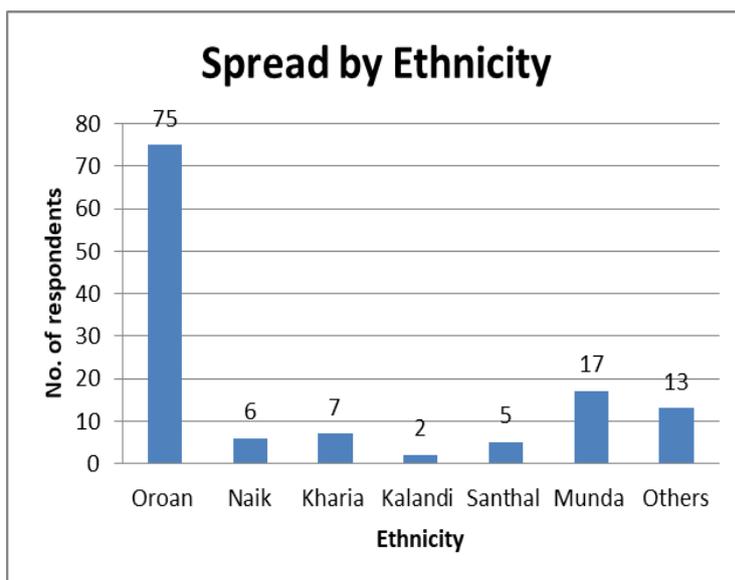


The below two table show that the ethnicity of the respondents. The table 6.10 shows that the Oroans are majority in this region which gets reflected in the number of women respondents. The Munda tribe respondents are second in number. Table 7.11 shows respondents belonging to ethnicity following different religion. Out of 75 Oroan women respondents 40 follow the Hindu religion and 35 are Christian. Munda who are second in number, Hindus women respondents are 10 and 7 are Christians.

**Table 6.10- Ethnicity of the respondents**

Ethnicity	No.	%
Oroan	75	69.2
Naik	6	1.9
Kharia	7	4.8
Kalandi	2	1.9
Santhal	5	4.8
Munda	17	10.6
Others (Lohar, Nagasia, Tanti, Malpare, Naik)	13	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

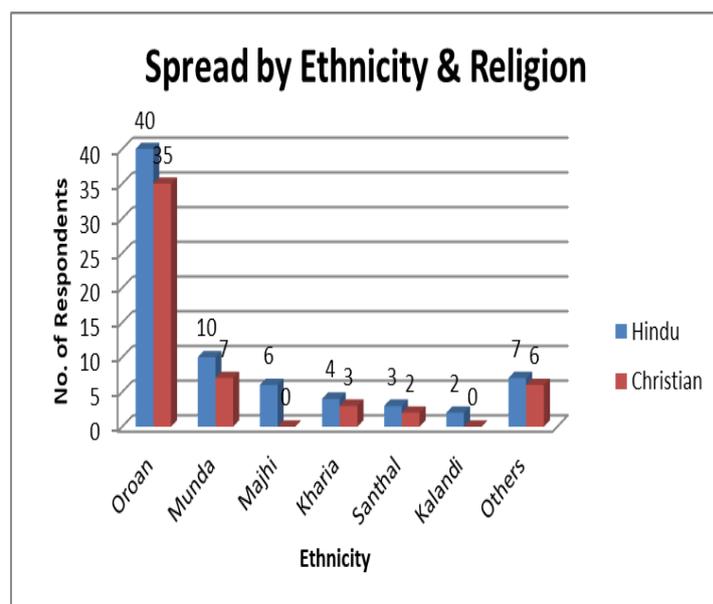
Source: Source: Field Survey



**Table 6.11- Ethnicity & Religion of respondents**

Ethnicity	Hindu	Christian	Total
Oroan	40	35	75
Munda	10	07	17
Majhi	6	0	06
Kharia	4	3	07
Santhal	3	2	05
Kalandi	2	0	02
Others	7	6	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>125</b>

Source: Field Survey

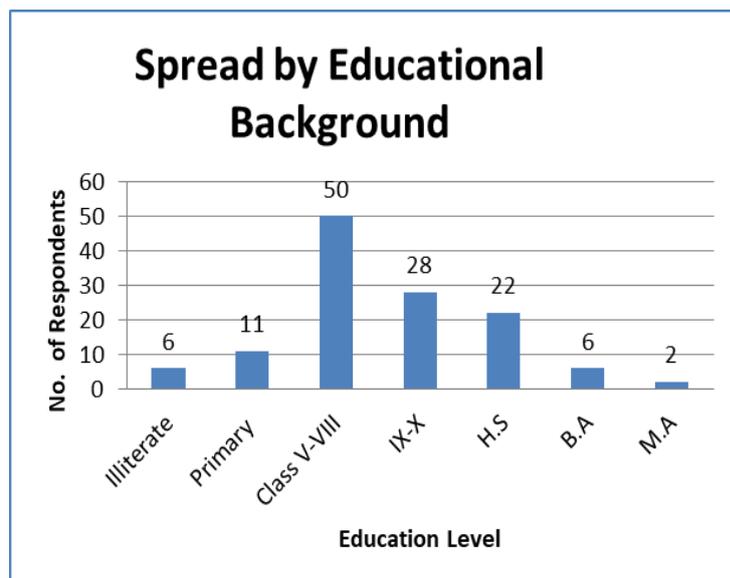


**Table 6.12- Educational Background of the Respondents**

Background	No.	%
Illiterate	6	8
Primary	11	9.6
Class V-VIII	50	12
IX-X	28	31.2
H.S	22	16
B.A	6	16.8
M.A	2	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

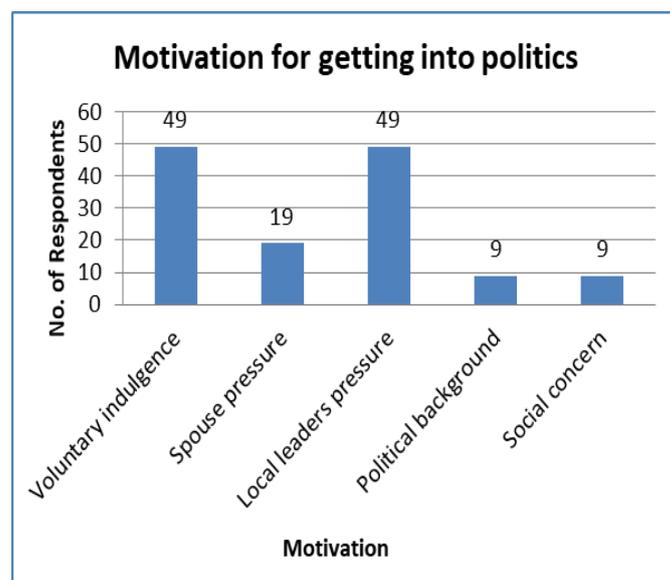
The above table (6.12) shows the educational background of the women respondents. Out of 125 women elected representatives the maximum number of women has the education background between class V-VIII followed by class V-VIII. We can see only two respondents with the education upto M.A and 6 of them having graduation. Table 6.13 shows that the women respondents aged between 36-40 have the higher education. Women who are graduates fall under 4 of them fall under the category of 26-30 years and 2 under 31-35. Out of 22 respondents falling under the educational level upto higher secondary 7 are of the age 26-30 and 6 31-35. Out of 28 who have the educational level class IX-X, 11 of them are between age 36-40, 8 are 31-35, 4 are 20-25 and 3 are 41-45 age group. Out of 6 illiterates 2 are 41-45 and another 2 are 46-50 years of age. (see table 6.13).



**Table 6.13- Motivation for getting inducted into politics**

Motivation for getting inducted into politics	No.	%
Voluntary indulgence	49	39.2
Spouse pressure	19	15.2
Pressure from local leaders	49	39.2
Political background	09	7.2
Social concern	09	7.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

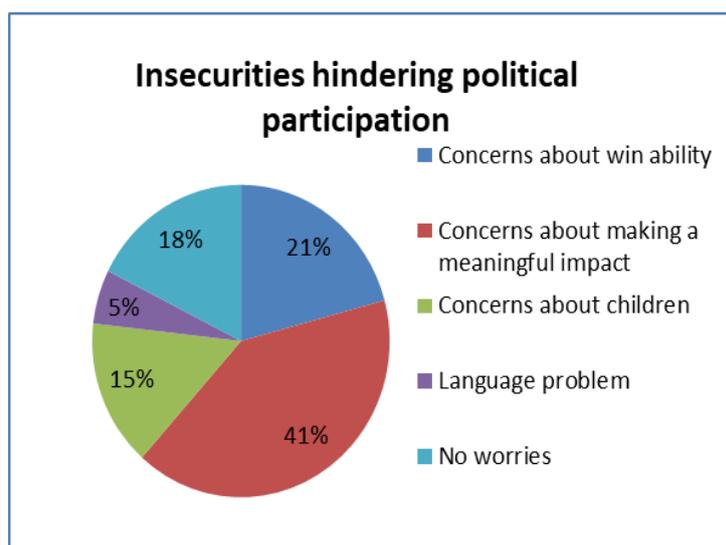


The above table shows that out of 125 women panchayat representatives 39.2 per cent were voluntarily motivated to enter into the political arena. An equal percentage of women succumbed to political pressure, thereby taking the political plunge. Quite a substantial percentage of these women political representatives were driven by spouse pressure thereby entering into the political fold. A miniscule percentage of these women panchayat representatives (7.2%) caved into external political pressures and to the compulsions of their social backgrounds.

The below table shows that the concerns about being able to make a meaningful and worth-while socio-political impact as a women political representative was the driving force for reluctance to take the political plunge amongst the majority of these tribal elected women (40.8%). Another important criteria for denial to agree for candidature was the lack in belief (20.8%) that they could actually end up winning the elections. (Table 6.14).

**Table 6.14- Insecurities hindering political participation**

Insecurities hindering political participation	No.	%
Concerns about win ability	26	20.8
Concerns about making a meaningful impact	51	40.8
Concerns about children	19	15.2
Language problem	07	5.6
No worries	22	17.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>



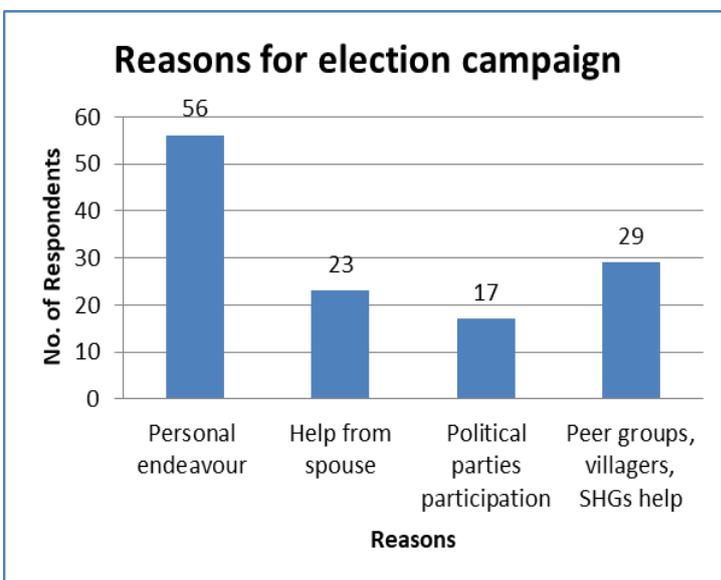
Source: Field Survey

It is heartening to note that certain percentage amongst these elected women political representatives were not bowed down by any socio-familial-political exigencies and thus were able to independently curve out their own socio-political destiny. A further cause of concern for these down trodden, mostly uneducated women representatives is the lacunae of proper linguistic expertise which can be a serious impediment towards meaningful discharging of duties consummating with their political positions. Familial worries

specially bordering on children being neglected, owing to pressures of being in political positions was another cause of non-reluctance towards political participation.

**Table 6.15-Campaign for election**

Reasons	No.	%
Personal endeavour	56	44.8
Help from spouse	23	18.4
Participation from political parties	17	13.6
Help from peer groups/villagers/S HGs	29	23.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

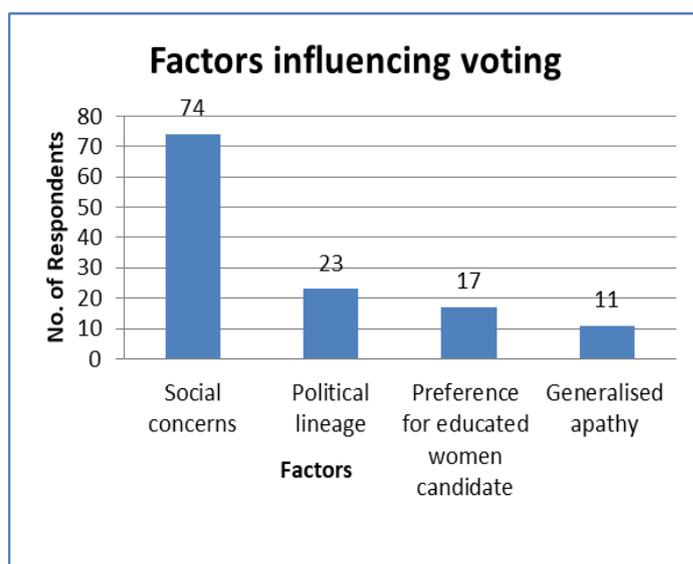


The above table shows that 44.8 percentage of women representatives claim to have managed their campaigning on their own. They took active interest and were the primary driving force for their political campaigns. 23.2 percentage of women were backed up by their peers and various village community groups which substantially aided them to further their campaign. Familial help, predominantly help from spouse, was a primary factor for some of (18.4%) these women. A few of these women (13.6%) did rely on the might of the political parties under whose banner they were fighting the elections.

**Table 6.16- Factors influencing voting**

Factors	No.	%
Social concerns/development	74	59.2
Political lineage	23	18.4
Preference for educated women candidate	17	13.6
Generalised apathy	11	8.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

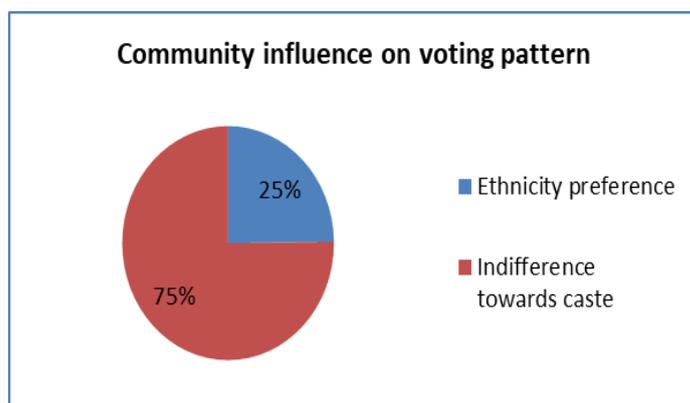


The above table shows that the amongst the major factors that had a telling effect on voting the predominant factor was concern for social issues and positive impact on the development (59.2%). Another substantial percentage of the voting population (18.4%) was swayed by their political lineage nurtured over generations. They were thus unable to think beyond their age old political convictions. Some of the voting populace (13.6) did unequivocally put forward their preference for prospective candidates who have educational qualifications that they deemed to be an important factor for effective discharging of their political duties.

**Table 6.17- Community influence on voting pattern**

<b>Community influence on voting pattern</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Ethnicity preference	31	24.8
Indifference towards caste	94	75.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

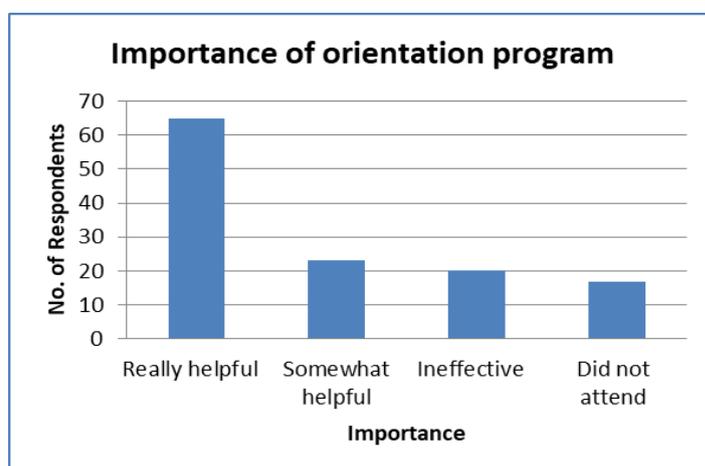
Source: Field Survey



An apathy towards the political process as a whole, thereby being totally unbothered about the contesting candidates and their credentials in any way was a noticeable features amongst few of the voters. A perspective analysis by the elected representatives about the influence of caste factor on voting reveals that majority of the voters were not dominated by caste, thereby choosing to vote for the most eligible candidate irrespective of their caste (75.2%). Caste consideration was however predisposing factor for a minority of voters (24.8%), thereby choosing to vote for candidates belonging to their caste, despite other factors being not so favourable. (see table 6.17).

**Table 6.18- Importance of Orientation Program**

<b>Importance of orientation programme</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Really helpful	65	52
Somewhat helpful	23	18.4
Ineffective	20	16
Did not attend	17	13.6



<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>
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Source: Field Survey

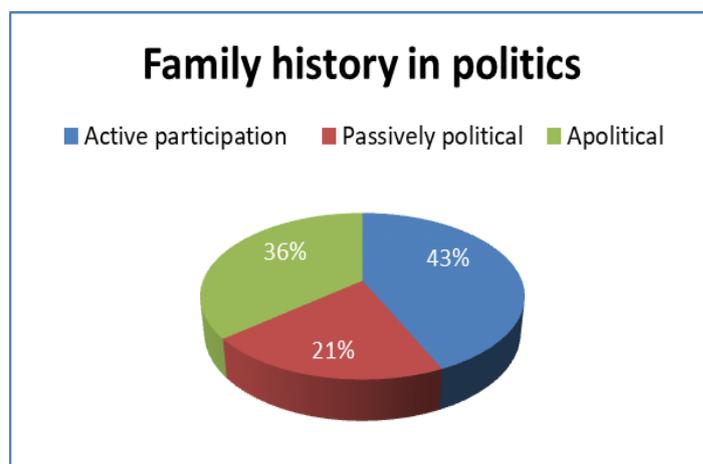
The above table shows that when confronted with judging the efficacy of training programme, which are under taken prior to their assuming office as elected representatives, majority of them (52%) were of the opinion that these training programmes really helped them to orient themselves towards requirements of their potential roles. Thus they were able to be more effective and meaningful in performance of their duties. Some of these women representatives (18.4%) were however of the view that they were not greatly benefited by these training programmes and that these programmes had a non-significant role. A few of these representatives (16%) were forthright in totally dismissing the need and effectiveness of these programmes. A few members were forced by various compulsions to skip these training sessions, thereby not being in a position to comment upon the effectiveness or otherwise of these programmes (13.6%). (see Table 6.18)

Majority of these women political representatives (43.2%) have taken the plunge into political arena because of their strong familial political background. Some of these women political representatives were devoid of previous political convictions (36%). They had been largely apolitical up to the point of getting involved in the election process. Yet a few number of tribal women (20.8%) had a passive political allegiance, although they had not been an active part of any political organisation. (Table 6.19).

**Table 6.19- Family history in politics**

<b>Family history in politics</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Active participation	54	43.2
Passively political	26	20.8
Apolitical	45	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

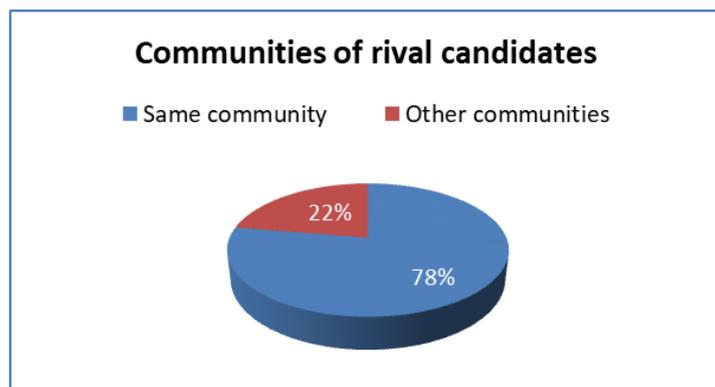
Source: Field Survey



**Table 6.20- Communities of rival Candidates**

<b>Communities of rival candidates</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Same community	97	77.6
Other communities	28	22.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

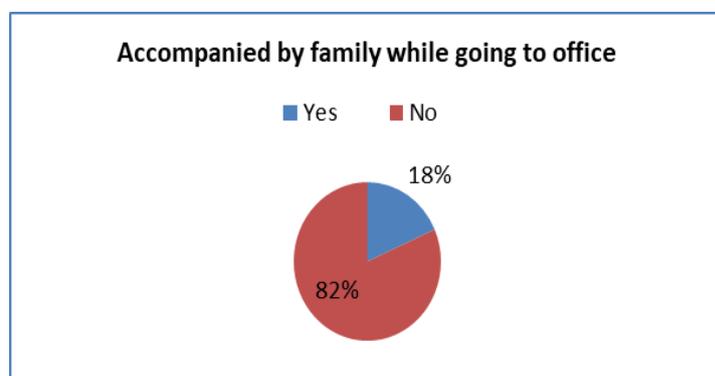


The above table (6.20) shows that the majority of the contesting candidates amongst the particular constituencies belong to the same caste (77.6%). Amongst a few constituencies however, contesting candidates belong to divers castes, thereby bringing caste equations to forefront.

**Table 6.21- Whether accompanied by the family members while going to office**

<b>Whether accompanied by the family members while going to office</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	23	18.4
No	102	81.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

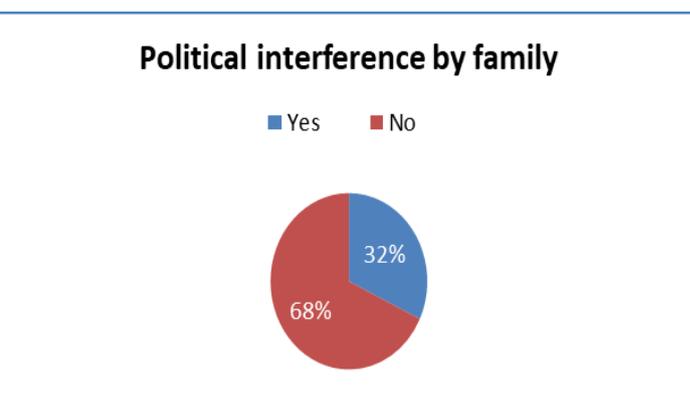


When asked to comment about whether they were accompanied by their spouses or family members to their work place after being elected as member, majority of i.e 81.6% of these women claim to have trodden the path from their home to their workplaces on their own, unaided by their family members. Some of these women (18.4%) do admit that their spouses stood by them and even accompanied them to and forth from their work places, and thus they had little to worry about despite odd working hours. (see Tble 6.21).

**Table 6.22- Political interference by family members**

<b>Political interference by family members</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	40	32
No	85	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	

Source: Field Survey

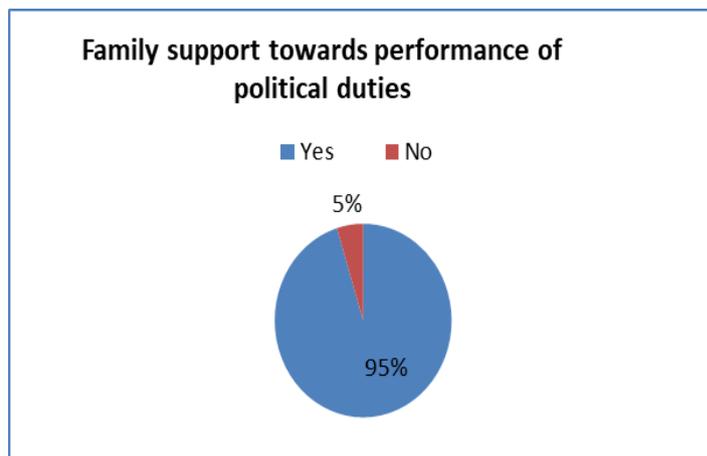


The above table 6.22 shows that majority of these women elected representatives (68%) deny any political interference from their family members. They thus claim to have an independent political framework devoid of any familial political lineage at their workplace. Few of this members however claim to have succumbed to their political family views, thereby surrendering their independent thinking.

**Table 6.23- Familial support towards performance of political duties**

<b>Familial support towards performance of political duties</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	119	95.2
No	06	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

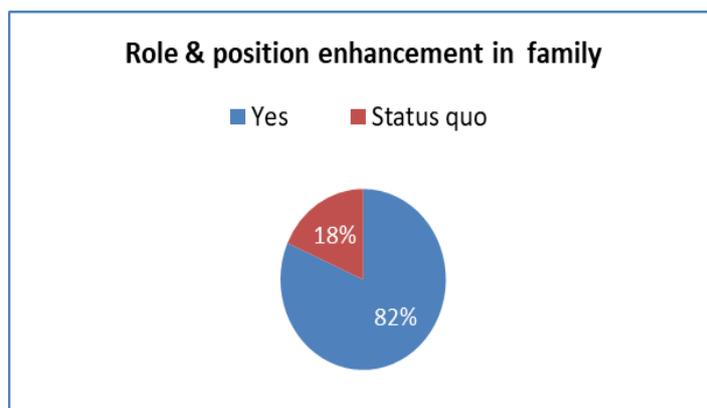


Majority of this women whole heartedly acknowledge the positive support of their families towards fulfilling of their political duties as elected women political representatives. A small percentage of women however claim to have little or insignificant familial support, thereby rendering them incapacitated whereby they had to wage a lone battle towards performing their political duties. (Table 6.23).

**Table 6.24- Enhancement of role and position in the family**

<b>Enhancement of role and position in the family</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	102	81.6
Status quo	23	18.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

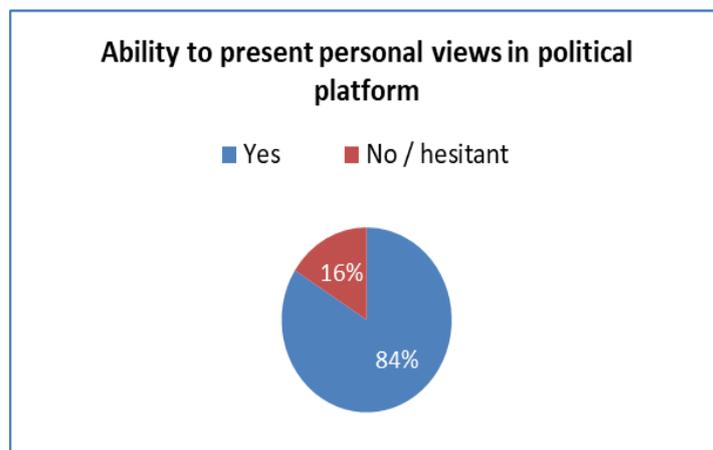


The above table 6.24 shows that being at the threshold of political power after getting elected as representatives did enhance and upgrade their status in the family structure, thereby they were acknowledge as important voices within their family and immediate neighbourhood. Some of them however opine that being in positions of power did not alter their status and position within the family and thus they were not able to appreciate any positive noticeable change vis-à-vis their family status.

**Table 6.25- Ability to bring forth personal views in political platform**

<b>Ability to bring forth personal views in political platform</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	105	84
No / hesitant	20	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

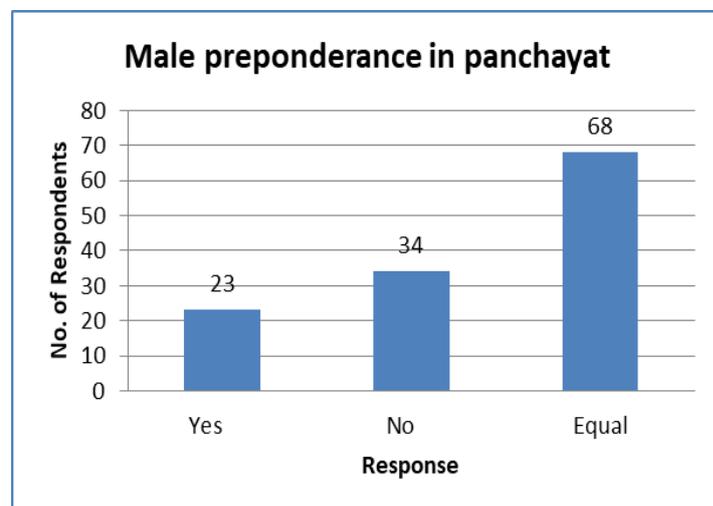


Substantial percentage of these women claim to have forceful and path defining narratives in the political scheme of thing. Thereby they claim to have played an influencing role towards political discourse at large. A small percentage of these women however were not able to engage in a forceful political dialogue, primarily because of their hesitancy to bring forth their political views on table. They thus claim to have played little or no role in shaping of political agendas. (Table 6.25).

**Table 6.26- Male preponderance in the panchayat bodies**

<b>Male preponderance in panchayat bodies</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	23	18.4
No	34	27.2
Equal	68	54.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

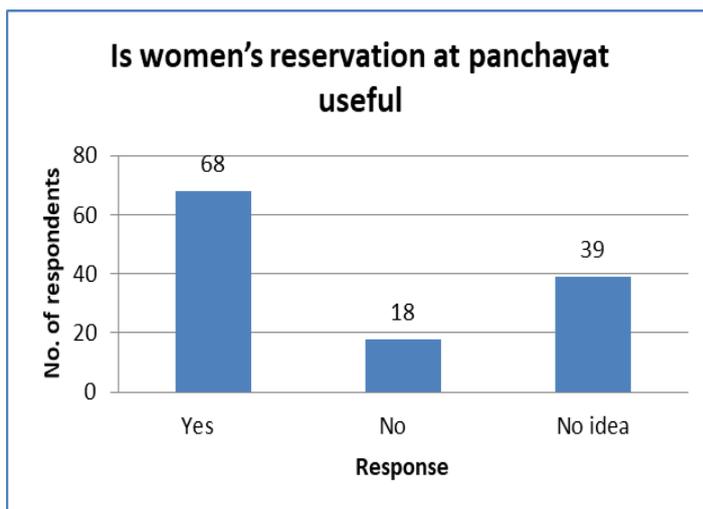


Majority amongst these women (54.4%) are of the opinion that there is a gender equality within these grass root political bodies. Some of these women do go the extent of proclaiming a positive female gender bias which has led them to work in an environment which is not overwhelmed by the presence of males. 18.4% of women however are of the view that male preponderance has been a defining factor which has handicapped their ability to function.

**Table 6.27- Is women's reservation at panchayat body level useful**

<b>Is women's reservation at panchayat body level useful</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	68	54.4
<b>No</b>	18	14.4
<b>No idea</b>	39	31.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

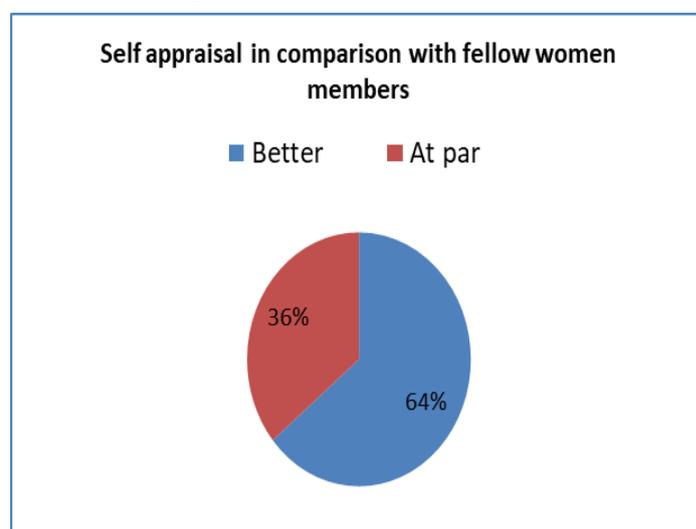


A substantial percentage of (54%) do these women do acknowledge that the reservation for women candidates at local panchayats have been a primary driving force towards empowerment of women at the grass root level, thereby enabling them to embark upon meaningful and effective political journey is. They claim to have reason to defining political positions from oblivion due to these reservations for women. Some percentage of these women are however non-committal, thereby reserving their opinions as to the effectiveness of these women reservation policies. Another section of them feel that these reservations has contributed nothing towards actual empowerment of women.

**Table 6.28- Self appraisal in comparison with fellow women members**

<b>Self appraisal in comparison with fellow women members</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Better</b>	80	64
<b>At par</b>	45	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

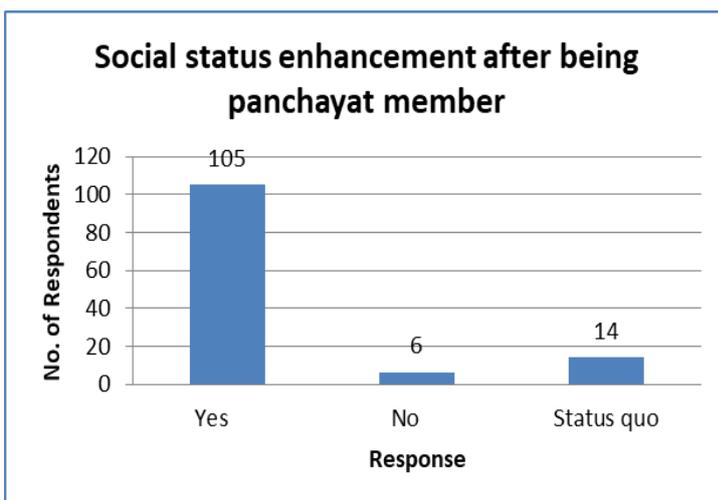


64 per cent of these women do rate their performance as elected representative in a positive light, thereby claiming to have out-shown their female colleagues in similar positions. 36 percentage of these women however evaluate their performance to be at par with their other female counterpart, thereby envisaging that women representatives across the political spectrum have manage to have positive and meaningful impact.

**Table 6.29- Enhancement of social status after being a panchayat member**

<b>Enhancement of social status after being panchayat member</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	105	84
<b>No</b>	06	4.8
<b>Status quo</b>	14	11.2
<b>Total no. of respondents</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

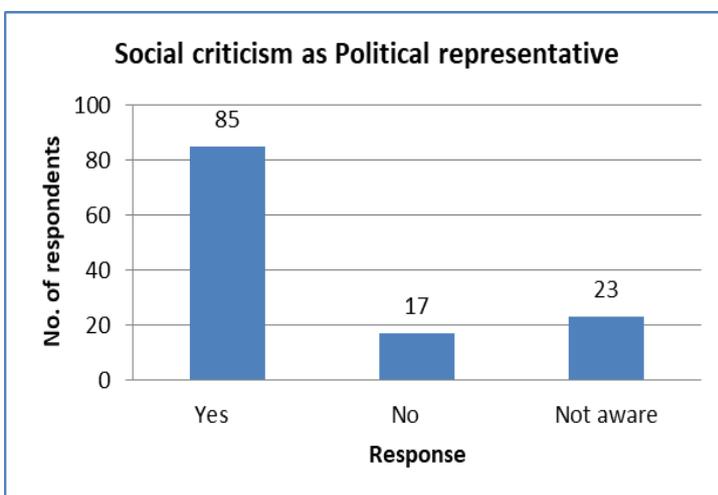


Majority of these women feel that there has been enhancement and improvement in their social status after being elected as political representatives. Some of these women appreciate no substantial difference in their status, thus being of the opinion that it is a factor that is immaterial to their social status. A small percentage of these women however fail to see any change even after being in positions of power.

**Table 6.30- Social criticism as a political representative**

<b>Social criticism as Political representative</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	85	68
<b>No</b>	17	13.6
<b>Not aware</b>	23	18.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

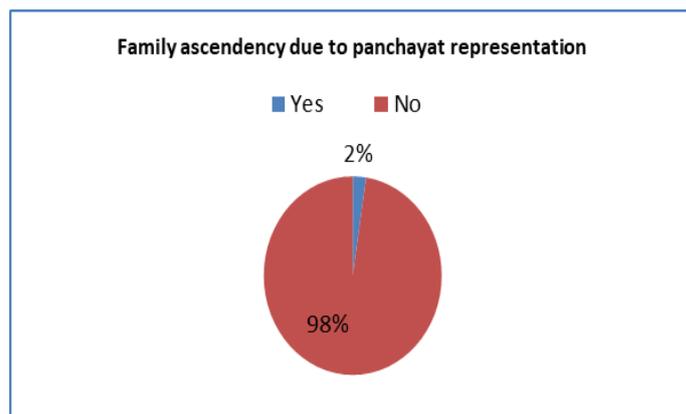


Despite their sincerest of efforts a substantial percentage of these women are of the opinion that there is criticism from their immediate society towards their endeavours. Few of these members are not aware of any such condemnation. A small percentage of these women do deny being privy to any criticisms.

**Table 6.31- Being Panchayat representative has contributed to family ascendency**

<b>Family ascendency due to panchayat representation</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	03	2.4
No	122	97.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

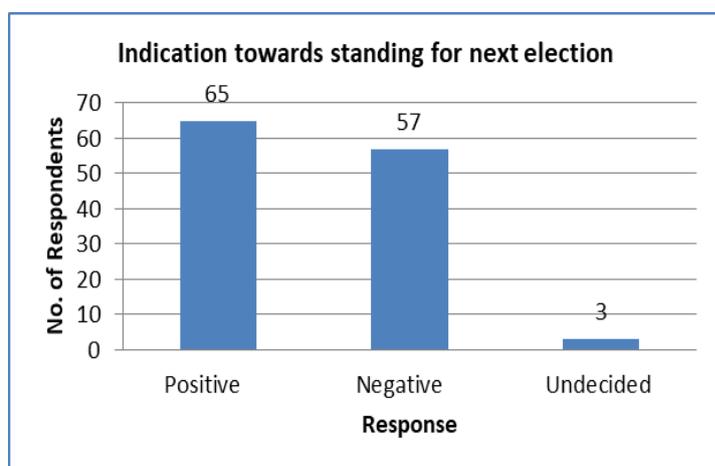
Source: Field Survey



**Table 6.32- Indication towards standing for next election**

<b>Indication towards standing for next election</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Positive	65	52
Negative	57	45.6
Undecided	03	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey



A substantial majority of these women are of the opinion that being elected representative has not contributed to the upliftment of their family. A very meagre percentage of them however do acknowledge that their family has gained as a result of they being in positions of power. (Table 6.31). Majority of these women harbour a positive outlook towards participation in next electoral process, thereby being willing to contest as candidates again. Some of them are however vehemently deny any such ambition thereby dissociating themselves from further electoral politics. Some of them are yet not able to decide on this issue, thereby waiting for the unfolding of political scenario before taking a plunge into the process again. (Table 6.32).

The below table shows the age and rate of participation of the respondents. The women belonging to the age group of 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40 have the high rate of participation. Whereas the above table shows the tendency of low participation of the women belonging to the age group of 45-50 years. Rate of participation for the women of 20-25 and 41-45 belong to medium category. (Table 6.33).

**Table 6.33- Age and Rate of Participation**

Age in years	Rate of participation			Number
	Low	Medium	High	
20-25		✓		10
26-30			✓	32
31-35			✓	38
36-40			✓	33
41-45		✓		11
45-50	✓			1
<b>Total</b>				<b>N= 125</b>

Source: Field Survey

**Table 6.34- Marital Status and Rate of Participation**

Marital Status	Rate of Participation			No.
	Low	Medium	High	
Married			✓	108
Unmarried	✓			17
<b>Total</b>				<b>N= 125</b>

Source: Field Survey

The above table (6.34) shows the marital status and rate of participation of the respondents. The majority of women respondents who were married have high rate of participation in the local bodies. Women who are unmarried have low rate of participation. Table no 6.35 indicates the nature of family and rate of participation of the respondents. Out of 125 women respondents 109 women belong to the nuclear family and their rate of participation is high as compared with the women who have joint family.

**Table 6.35- Nature of Family and rate of participation**

Nature of Family	Rate of Participation			No.
	Low	Medium	High	
Joint Family	✓			16
Nuclear Family			✓	109
<b>Total</b>				<b>N= 125</b>

Source: Field Survey

**Table 6.36- Ethnicity and rate of participation**

Ethnicity	Rate of Participation			No.
	Low	Medium	High	
Oroan			✓	75
Naik		✓		6
Kharia		✓		7
Kalandi	✓			2
Santhal	✓			5
Munda		✓		17
Others (Lohar, Nagasia, Tanti, Malpare, Naik)	✓			13
<b>Total</b>				<b>N= 125</b>

Source: Field Survey

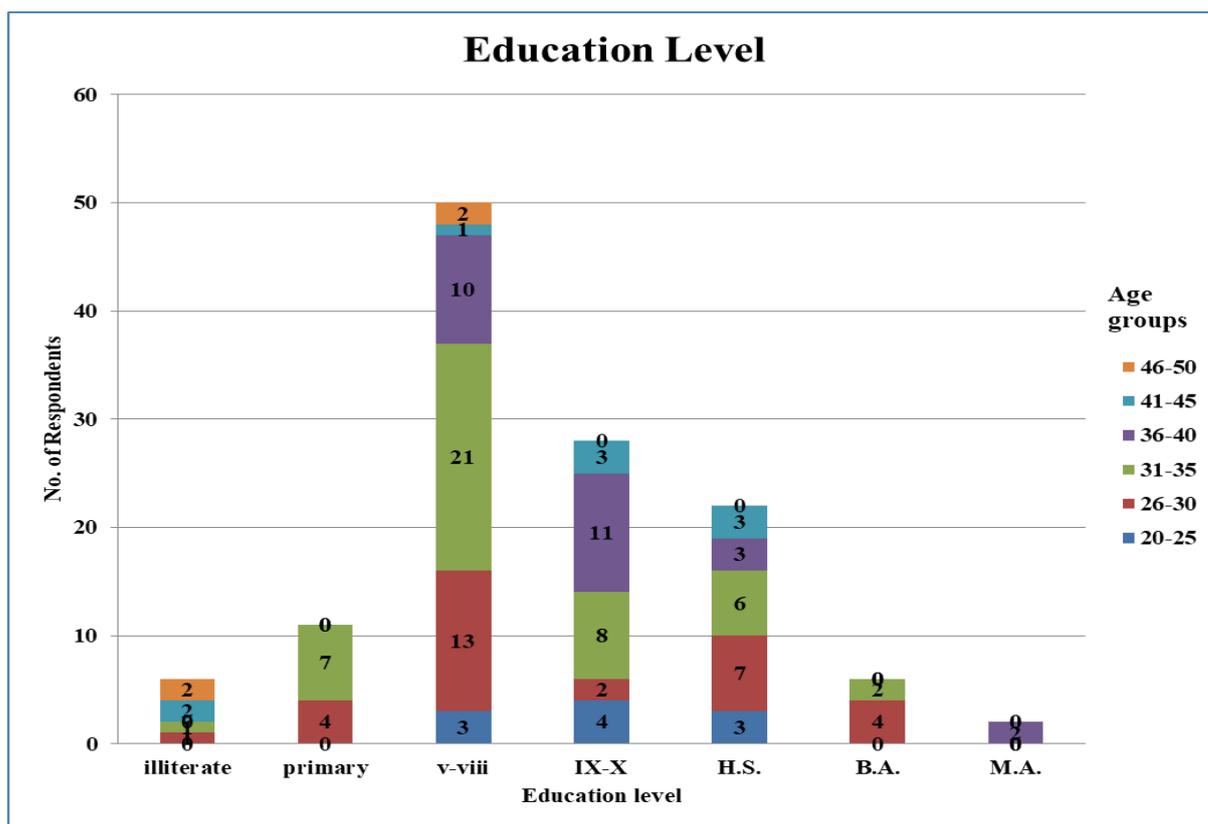
Since according to the data found the Oroan out number other tribal groups. It is therefore apparent that tribes belonging to Oroan ethnicity have high rate of participation in local bodies. Naik, Kharia and Munda have medium rate of participation whereas Kalandi, Santhal and others like Lohar, Nagasia, Tanti, Malpare and Naik have low rate of participation. (Table 6.36). 2 Women having the age group 36-40 have the educational degree of masters. Out of 6 women respondents who are graduates belong to the age group of 26-30 and 31-35. Out of 22 respondents who have studied upto higher secondary level 7 belong to 26-30 age group and 6 are 31-35. The maximum number of respondents who are educated between class V-VIII, 21 are 31-35 years of age. (Table 6.37).

**Table 6.37- Educational level and Age of the Respondents**

Age	EDUCATIONAL LEVEL							TOTAL
	Illiterate	Primary	v-viii	IX-X	H.S.	B.A.	M.A.	
20-25	0	0	3	4	3	0	0	10
26-30	1	4	13	2	7	4	0	31
31-35	1	7	21	8	6	2	0	45
36-40	0	0	10	11	3	0	2	26
41-45	2	0	1	3	3	0	0	9
46-50	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>N= 125</b>

Source: Field Survey

**Chart showing Motivation for getting inducted into Politics and age of the respondents**

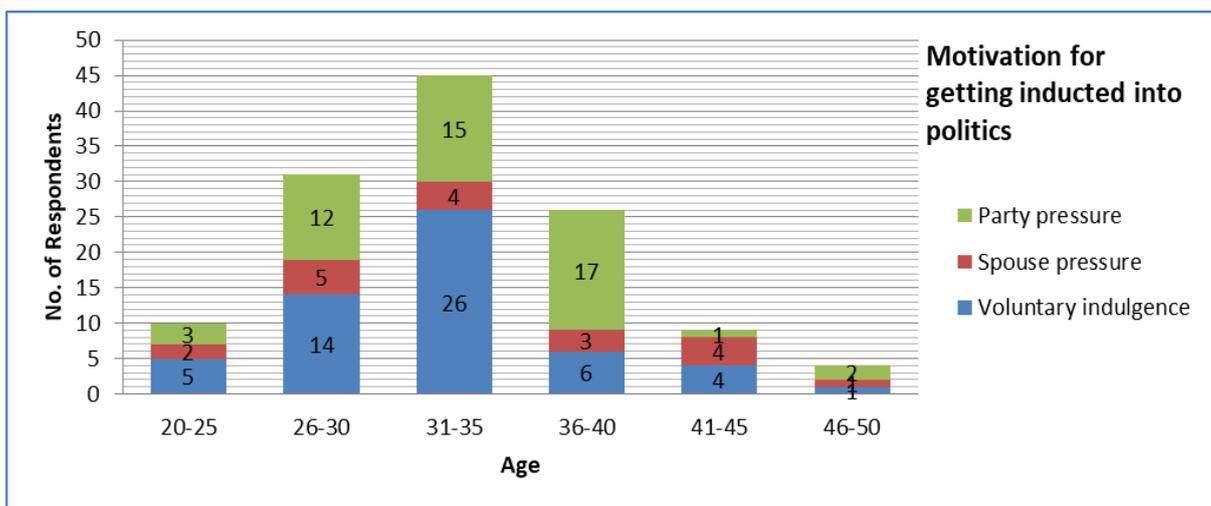


**Table 6.38- Motivation for getting inducted into Politics and age of the respondents**

Age	Voluntary indulgence	Spouse pressure	Party pressure	Total
20-25	5	2	3	10
26-30	14	5	12	31
31-35	26	4	15	45
36-40	6	3	17	26
41-45	4	4	1	9
46-50	1	1	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>N= 56</b>	<b>N= 19</b>	<b>N= 50</b>	<b>N= 125</b>

Source: Field Survey

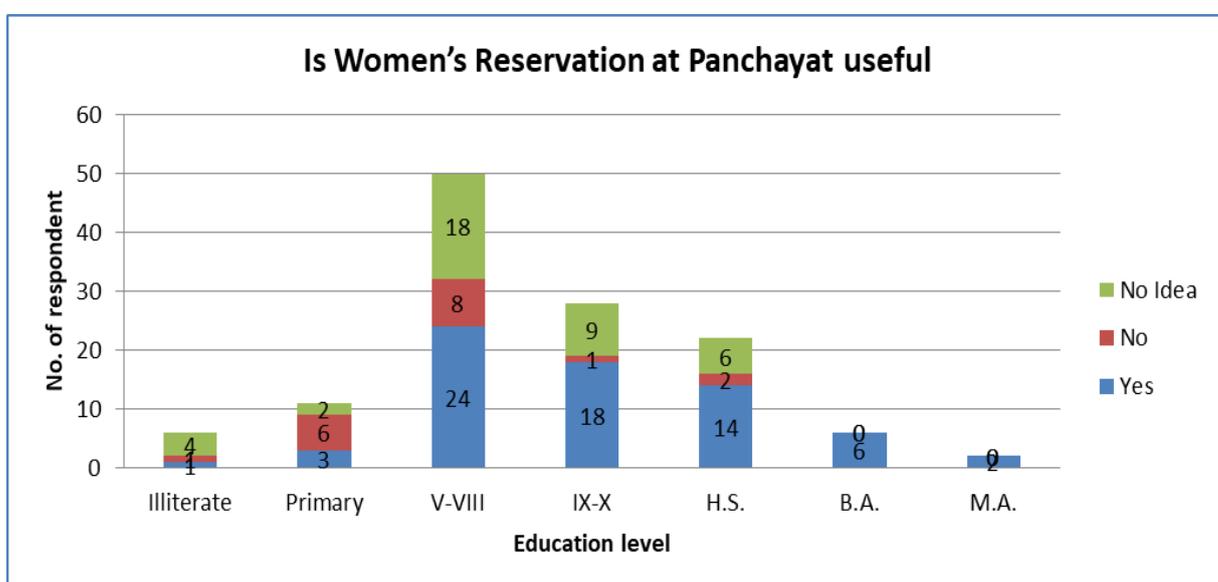
The above table (6.38) shows the age of respondents and the reasons for motivation for getting inducted into politics. Out of 125 women respondents 56 women have been inducted voluntarily. Out of these 56 women 26 belong to 31-35, 14 belong to 26-30, 6 are from 36-40, 5 women from 20-25, 4 are 41-45 and 1 belongs to 46-50 age group. 19 women say that there is spouse pressure for getting inducted into politics. 50 women respondents say that there is party pressure which motivated them into politics.



**Table 6.39- Is Women’s Reservation at Panchayat Body level useful**

Educational Level	Is Women’s Reservation at Panchayat Body level useful			
	Yes	No	No Idea	Total
Illiterate	1	1	4	6
Primary	3	6	2	11
V-VIII	24	8	18	50
IX-X	18	1	9	28
H.S.	14	2	6	22
B.A.	6	0	0	6
M.A.	2	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>N= 68</b>	<b>N= 18</b>	<b>N= 39</b>	<b>N= 125</b>

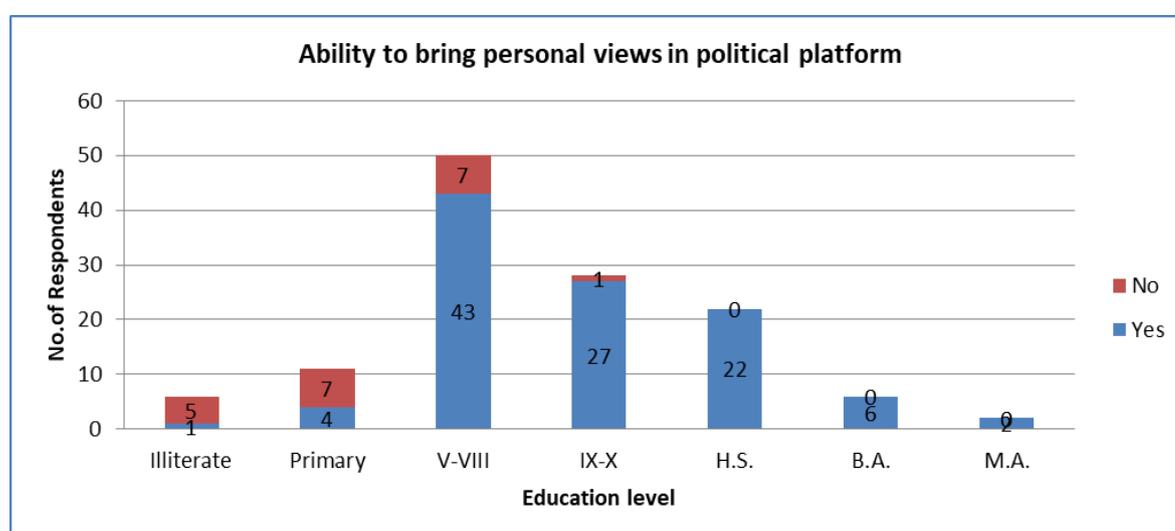
Source: Field Survey



**Table 6.40- Ability to bring forth personal views in political platform**

Educational Level	Ability to bring forth personal views in political platform		
	Yes	No	Total
Illiterate	1	5	6
Primary	4	7	11
V-VIII	43	7	50
IX-X	27	1	28
H.S.	22	0	22
B.A.	6	0	6
M.A.	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>N= 105</b>	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>N= 125</b>

Source: Field Survey



The table (6.39) shows that out of 125 women respondents 68 women agree that reservation policy at the panchayat body level is useful. 18 say no and 39 have no idea about the women's reservation at panchayat body level. Women who have higher level of education have positive answer regarding the women's reservation at the panchayat body level.

The above table (6.40) shows the level of education and the ability to bring forth personal views in political platform. It is seen that the women having higher education level have much more confidence to bring for the one's personal ideas to the forefront than compared with the less educated women. Out of 125 elected women representatives 105 have the ability to bring forth personal views in political platform. Whereas 20 women say they are not able to express their views in front of others. The above table is the clear indication of educational value to boost up confidence.

**STATISTICAL EXPLANATION** to substantiate my null hypothesis:

The following three hypothesis were put forward during my introductory chapter.

- 1) India's democratic process has created open space for the wider participation of women, mainly tribal women in the political functioning of the country.
- 2) Lack of adequate knowledge about the political system of the country stands in the way for greater participation of the tribal women in the political process.
- 3) Without adequate participation of the tribal women in this region, a social equilibrium may not be easy to achieve.

**Hypothesis #1-** The quantitative study thus indicate a larger participation of women (specially amongst the tribal population) in the grass root political level. As compared to the data of 2004 (which envisages a women participation of 2.6%), there is 4.3% of women participation as per statistic of 2015 data. Within a span of a decade there has been a 60% rise in political participation of tribal women. This is a welcome trend and bears testimony to the fact that women's reservation (particularly for tribal women) has definitely resulted in enhanced tribal women representation. It is thus a forgone conclusion that participation of tribal women in the democratic process has definitely increased the tribal women participation in grass root democratic levels. A P value of 0.14 is definitely a strong measure for substantiating my hypothesis that as compared to previous social infrastructure tribal women have surely managed to eke out a political space for themselves.

(Degrees of freedom =  $n-1$  "where  $n$ " is the number of categories or variables.

Here  $n = 2$  (as we have chosen two years 2004 and 2015 as the year of reference).

Thus, in this study we have  $2-1 = 1$  degree of freedom.

Chi square =

$$X^2 = \sum ((o-e)^2/e)$$

Where  $o$  is the observed value (which is 4.3% of women participation I the year 2015) and  $e$  is the expected value (which according to previous census data, puts women participation at 2.6 percent).

Thus, calculation of chi square gives a result of 2.8. The significance level which I have chosen is 0.05.

This gives a final P value of 0.14 (which is of much more significance than the expected cut off value of 0.05 to reject a hypothesis). Thus my null hypothesis that there has been a significant rise in tribal women political participation stands.

**Hypothesis #2-** The study about the educational standards of elected women representatives, vis-à-vis those having higher education and basic primary education leads to a P value of 0.40. This goes on to prove the huge dearth amongst the educational standards of these tribal women political representatives. Such a P value definitely has a strong representation towards the need of proper educational levels amongst the tribal women, prior to being effective instruments of socio-political change. There is a huge lacunae in, the expected educational standards amongst the tribal women. A very high P score further enhances my observation that without proper education, these tribal women can never endeavour to be the harbinger of ushering the forces of socio-political change. This compromised P score which is a pointer towards the largely uneducated status of tribal women political leaders is further backed up by the meaningful and positive performance of educated tribal women. It is therefore hypothesized that education of tribal women is of prime importance so that they can be groomed into effective tribal leaders.

**Hypothesis #3-** Through the ages there has been a large male preponderance towards the socio-political scenario. The women have thus been confined to a situation where there active participation in political activities has always been restricted. This applies to the tribal society as well. With the promulgation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment there has been endeavour to effectively redress this gender bias. The present study, which take into account the levels of tribal women population in political activities, vis-à-vis the scenario prevalent only a decade back, points to a larger women's participation. Comparative statistical data between the years 2004 to 2015 are a definite pointer towards increased participation of tribal women at panchayat levels. A quantitative study aimed to analyze the increase tribal women participation at grass root levels leads to a favorable P values of 1.65, which bears a significant statistical importance. This therefore corroborates the inferences of the present study that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment has largely successful in narrowing down the gender bias.

(Degrees of freedom = n-1

Here n = 4 (as we have chosen 4 categories, namely female, male and two years, 2004 and 2015).

Thus, we have  $4-1 = 3$  degree of freedom.

Chi square and significance level (which I have chosen as 0.05) gives a final P value of 0.75.

This again corroborates my null hypothesis that the gender bias (which was significantly in favor of males) has started to be addressed with increase in number of tribal women's participation in recent past, the gender inequality is in the process of being breached.

Conjuring upon our three primary hypothesis we would like to draw the following conclusions:

1. It cannot be denied that the participation of tribal women, especially at the grass root political level, has definitely increased due to State measures like reservations for tribal women.
2. The largely uneducated status of tribal women remains a huge obstacle towards unlocking of the true potential of these women.
3. While statistical analyses goes on to prove that the largely predominant male gender bias has been addressed, without initialization of state sponsored initiatives aimed towards addressal of primarily health and education related problems faced by women, true empowerment of tribal women will continue to remain a distant dream.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present study aims to analyse political participation of the underprivileged tribal women residing in Dooars and Terai region of North Bengal. Tribal women of these region have been, over the ages, been largely socio-politically subjugated. Certain measures such as reservations for these women have been instruments of change whereby an attempt has been made to incorporate these women into positions of effective political decision making process. These measures have definitely put women in political positions. But my study aims to judge and comment upon truly effective political participation of these tribal women.

Present study aims to analyse the positive influences emerging out of socio-political reservation primarily aimed at encouraging the voices of tribal women and the effectiveness of such measures. It is an attempt at critical analysis of the prowess of the neo-tribal women leaders. It is also a study directed towards actual effectiveness of reservations which through up new tribal women to the forefront. The various hindrances that these women evolving women representatives face towards making an effective space has been included in my narrative.

we have, during the course of study utilise numerous personal interactions, statistical data and an analysis of an effective government measures for critical appraisal of the ground scenario. The data for the present study have been drawn from historical sources and from primary as well as secondary sources. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been made use of. Collection of information has been done from the references of historical materials from secondary sources, Census Reports, documents, Government Reports, Government Offices records, published materials and the manuscripts.

The basic principle of democracy rides upon the fact that the most weakest strata of the society are representative in the frame work of democratic process. No democracy can succeed without the most vulnerable sections of it social setup. Women are by far the most compromised sections of the Indian political scenario tribal women constitute a section of society that remain amongst the most backward and unrepresented part of the

Indian demography. Empowerment of this section of the society is therefore a primary requisite for true political representation. There should be an encouragement for all measures which are aimed at empowerment of tribal women. Though there remain hindrances towards bestowing of true political power to the tribal women, measures aimed at empowerment of tribal women should always remain the priority for realisation of democratic credential of a pluralistic social setup as India. It cannot be denied these women have not ripped the benefits of reservations at large, there still remain a substantial populace amongst these tribal women who have managed to give true and positive philip towards furthering of the causes of women upliftment at large. There remain quite a population of tribal women who, when empowered with positions of decision-making have managed to bring forth their independent and positive views which have contributed towards women empowerment. These women have managed to cut across political lines and solely have managed to give a direction towards powerful and effective measures for women upliftment. Patriarchal and political influences have always endeavoured to downplay the role of these tribal women representatives. But it remains a credit to these women folk who have pride relentlessly to put the social agendas to the forefront, thereby carving a niche for themselves and their society at large.

Women's role in positive participation in local governance is yet an evolving process in Indian society. Certain Amendments which were instituted largely to further women's participation in local governance have definitely resulted in a positive paradigm shift. In the socio-political set-up of a country like India which has been through the ages predominantly a patriarchal society, it is necessary to introduce political measures aimed at giving women their own voice at local governance.

The Constitutional Amendments which were initiated to encourage political involvement at the grass root levels through panchayati raj system were given a further flip by measures such as women's reservations and particularly so for the women belonging to marginalised and under privileged sections of our society. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution was primarily brought forth to further this motive. While there can be no contest about the fact that measures such as these have definitely helped to push women of these socially handicapped background to the forefront, actual women empowerment still remains a far flung dream in a predominantly patriarchal society like India. Moreover, despite efforts, panchayati raj system is yet to evolve as a politically

independent structure in India, whereby powerful political parties wield a dominant influence, thus stripping the panchayati raj movement of its primarily a political nature.

However, it is heartening to note that quite a substantial percentage of elected women political representatives at the grassroots level have endeavoured to bring their own independent political agendas to the fore, thereby contributing positively towards meaningful and effective political participation.

We have tried to analyse the socio-political credentials of elected women members specially belonging to the tribal community thereby attempting to have a analysis vis-à-vis the progress that these women have made versus the lacunae that still remains to be filled. There are particular fields through which I have tried to formulate my inferences regarding these tribal women representatives; those being their educational status, socio-political background, avenues for expressing their social concerns, political interference, family and spouse support towards rendering of their duties as representatives, their own zeal to pursue their respective social perspectives and their motivation to further enhance their future political participation for completion of their unachieved social goals.

### **Education**

Education is one of the forerunners for election of tribal women representatives. There is no denying the fact that educational levels amongst the tribal women are at an abysmal low level in spite of more than half a century of independence. A woman deprived of basic education definitely lacks a broader socio-political understanding, thereby not being able to have a positive influence towards furtherance of their immediate society. Majority of women whom I interviewed during the course of my studies boast of at least a middle school education, which remains a dream for quite a substantial population of tribal girls. While there are a miniscule percentage of these elected tribal women representatives who have gone to pursue higher education, a middle school educational status still holds a dominant and influencing force which is enough to sway the voters. It is my conclusion that investing in tribal women education will yield positive result and produce more competent tribal women political representatives. Thus the primary endeavour should be directed towards educating the tribal girl child so that they can grow into effective political leaders in the future. There is no dearth of talent amongst these women, the only lacuna is proper political wherewithal to further and nourish education of the tribal

girl. This investment of the nation as a whole will only help to strengthen the weakest sections of the society, thereby cementing a strong socio-political basis for building of our nation as a whole.

Majority of the tribal women political representatives when I interviewed though being only middle school educated, have left no stone unturned towards their zeal to bring about a social change. Imagine the scenario when these tribal women leaders are empowered with education, whereby they are ready to bring forth really strong credentials towards fulfilment of their socio-political dreams. I again emphasize the need to educate the tribal girl is of paramount and vehement need. If backed up by a strong educational background they can take full advantage of political amendments such as the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, to have a forceful and strong contribution towards nation-building.

#### Social deprivation of the girl child

While the social deprivation of the girl child spans across the whole of Indian society, the impact is much more profound for the societies which are socio-economically challenged. In tribal societies, primarily amongst the tea gardens, it is the common phenomena where the girl child's educational rights are compromised so that the male child can have a better go at pursuing his education. In a society like the tea gardens where in majority of the households men and women both end up working, the girl child is often deprived of any education and pushed towards the role of looking after her siblings and family while her parents are engaged in their duties. There remain very few families who take the extra step and employ measures so that the girl child is not deprived of her family and society at large.

In the modern dynamics of rapidly developing society, influenced by globalisation, lack of education is a primary hindrance towards any meaningful socio-political contributions.

#### **Health**

It remains a fact that in Indian society women are largely the under privileged sector. They are repeatedly made to feel as “second-class” citizens, spanning across all social spectrums, more so amongst the tribal society. Right from their birth the female child are deprived in every spectra of life. A robust health care system primarily targeted towards upliftment of the underprivileged women section of the society is the primary need of the

hour. Women being socio-economically compromised seldom reap the benefits of health schemes. Thus their health status is largely at loggerheads vis-à-vis the social functions that they are expected to perform. A strong woman political representative can never evolve out of a health system which is primarily prejudiced against women at large. Primary and basic health care thus have to be made available to the women population. Devoid of such measures, the women populace will always be handicapped.

A healthy woman can contribute towards a healthy family and a healthy society at large. Thus, emphasis towards nourishing of female health status is a primary requisite towards formulation of a healthy and productive society.

Majority of tribal women population in North Bengal, specially in Dooars and Terai region, are employed as tea garden workers. It is pathetic to note that majority of these tea gardens seek to deprive their women workers of rights towards health. These include deprivation of such rights such as rights to crèche facility for new borns, proper antenatal and post natal care for women, proper education towards nutritional requirement of pregnant women and providing pregnant women with adequate antenatal medical care.

Amongst this vast population of tribal women the priorities of a girl child is still at an abysmal low level. Their primary utility is still largely predefined by the service that they can provide for looking after and nurturing the family in absence of the girl child's parents. Their own socio-educational upliftment always takes a backburner. Proper emphasis towards health issues of tribal women is thus a necessary measure to inculcate a sense of positivity amongst the tribal women population. Without the redressal of issues pertaining to the overall health of tribal women, it is impossible to see the emergence of strong tribal leaders. Primary health care starting from a robust antenatal programme spilling over to measures such as proper facilities for the new born child in terms of effective crèche care will go a long way towards instilling a sense of security amongst the tribal women folk.

Another issue which needs an effective and immediate redressal amongst all tea gardens is the issue of provision of portable water. Large population of tribes engaged as workers in tea gardens still are deprived of avenues to avail a safe portable source of water.

Traditionally, the male tribal tea garden workers are susceptible to hazards such as rampant consumption of alcohol. Appreciably the tribal women workers have managed to form groups which have tried to educate the male working population towards the ill effects of drinking, thereby trying to bring a semblance of positive social influence.

To conclude, there has been a positive influence of elected tribal women representatives towards redressing of these health issues. The result is an emergence of a large number of women self-help groups spanning across the multitude of tea gardens in North Bengal who have undertaken measures to guarantee a better crèche facilities, better antenatal care, proper implementation of universal immunisation programmes for neonatal and reduction in the alcohol related hazards. While there still remains scope of improvement, these women self-help groups sprouting across the tribal diaspora is definitely a leap forward.

#### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE**

It has to be admitted that bareoft reservations, the tribal women could never have gone into political leadership position. The down trodden women could never have found a platform for expression of their socio-political narratives. In a predominantly male dominated patriarchal society like India, males from even the tribal societies, are unwilling to forego their dominance over the women folk. But for the reservations for women, it would have been extremely difficult to unearth talents amongst the tribal women folk. These elected tribal women representatives are subjected to constant levels of scrutiny. Despite the best of their efforts to inculcate positive attitudes amongst the tribal women population, the majority of these tribal women representatives confess to the fact that their untiring efforts to bring about a social change is largely undermined by political influence of the ruling party.

Furthermore, as my study includes, a substantial percentage of these tribal women confess to have entered the political arena just to passively make use of women reservation policies. They are thus elected as candidates just for fulfilling the constitutional obligations. The primary thrust to encourage political involvement comes from their family. In many cases, these tribal women political leaders confess to the fact that the actual powers are bestowed in their political capacity are largely manipulated by the men folk of their society like husband's fathers and brothers.

Indian social scenario seldom allows the proliferation of an independent voice. It is however heartening to note that there remain a substantial percentage of these women political representatives who have managed to put their social agendas to the forefront and have thus managed to override the predominantly male gender bias. Tribal women at large have two predominantly important battles to fight- 1) being from a tribal community and 2) being women. While it remains a fact that there has been rampant misuse of reservations for tribal women candidates, it has still to be accepted that a percentage of tribal women leaders who are a product of this reservation policy have managed to acknowledge a positive and influencing agenda aimed primarily towards empowerment of the tribal women. It cannot however be denied that the patriarchal social setup aims to miss utilise provisions of these reservations so that the actual power remains within the male social setup.

Through the process of reservations, sections of underprivileged women have been brought to the forefront. Though, these novice women tribal leaders are largely enveloped by the patriarchal nature of our society, it is heartening to note that few of these women leaders have managed to brake the patriarchal setup, thereby envisaging a paradigm shift. Positive and socially encompassing measures by such leaders have put the political participation of these tribal women into a positive perspective. Measures such as ensuring seats for the tribal women aimed primarily at uplifting the participation of tribal women in the primary democratic process, is definitely a welcome step forward. The fact cannot be denied that many amongst these groups of tribal women are endowed with their capacity to emerge into effective social roles. Capacitated with measures such as reservations, these tribal women are bestowed with measures which can help to enhance their free, independent and effective socio-political endeavours. It is heartening to note that quite a substantial percentage of these tribal women have managed to overcome socio-political constraints and have endeavoured to work for true upliftment of their social clan.

Primary issues affecting the progress of tribal women political leaders in local bodies:

- Patriarchal bias: as in majority of Indian population, the tribes largely remain a predominantly patriarchal society. For a woman to rise and make a socio-political impact, there remain a huge gender obstacle which they have surmount. Though measures like reservation of seats for tribal women are a welcome steps, the

ground reality is that they are often reduced to being stooges for the male members of their society. Unless and until gender equality is brought into practical realm, such reservations will continue to be ornamental measures only.

- Education: a woman deprived of education can never endeavour to surmount all the negativities that are primarily directed towards excluding her from political participation. Tribal women education has to be the driving force towards empowering women so that they can have a meaningful and balanced outlook towards positive deliverance of the problems that encompasses their society. The present study, spread across the spectrum of these women tribal elected representatives in the local bodies brings forth the fact that majority of them have not been able to transgress into higher educational standards. A few of them however have claim to university education. If endowed with proper higher educational levels, it is my firm believe that these tribal women representatives have it in them to have a much more strong and positive socio-political impact. Furthermore, an educated female member of the society definitely can claim to have a much more forceful impact spanning across a familial-socio-political environ.
  
- Familial support towards performance of political duties:the present study found that a predominant majority of women claim to have the support of their families. This includes the support of their spouses whereby they claim to have the support of their husbands in commuting to their places of work. Their erratic work schedules have been amply understood by their family members. They claim to have active and effective familial support towards discharging of their political duties. A miniscule percentage of these women however claim to have no support from their families. Being the gram panchayat member the pressures of discharging their duties where solely and wholly borne by themselves, devoid of any constructive help from their immediate families. It is heartening to note that majority of these tribal panchayat members have had the fortune of having an active family backup.
  
- Financial constraints: though these elected panchayat member at grass root political level are guaranteed certain economic remunerations, a vast majority of

these tribal poor women complain of either the inadequacy of their remuneration or the delay in providing of their legitimate financial rights. This is huge hindrance for involvement of tribal women into the political process as they feel lack of socio-economic incentives which will propel them towards enthusiastic political participation. The present study found out that the majority of these women are thus impelled towards considering their positions as grass root political representatives as more of a social work rather than position that entitles them towards financial gains. Measures need to be undertaken so that the legitimate financial rights of these poor downtrodden women are protected so that the zeal of these women for political participation is not compromised. It is heartening to note that majority of these women have not ventured out into the political field with the purpose of enhancing their financial status. But the basic financial remuneration that is bestowed upon them as being political leaders has to be taken care of.

- Role of reservations towards encouraging tribal women participation at grass root level: majority of these women accept the fact that, devoid of reservations, it would not have been feasible for them to be elected and rise up to the level of influencing political platforms. Patriarchal nature of the Indian society at large would never have given them the space for expression of their socio-political views. Their emergence as effective political personnel owes a lot to the reservations, aimed primarily at securing the political voices of the downtrodden women. Without the aid of these complimentary reservation policies, it would not be possible to reach up to the path breaking levels of political leadership, as they have achieved. Thus these effective political measures have definitely gone a long way towards encouraging the underprivileged women towards political participation. It still remains a fact that primarily reserving certain seats for the tribal women at the grass root level is not sufficient. A primarily patriarchal society as in India has managed to effectively go round across such measures thereby initiating ways of bypassing the effects of such reservations. It is a tendency of menfolk, cutting across political lands, to promote women within their families to these posts, so that the ultimate political prowess still remains in their hands.

- Women as ‘rubber stamp’ or proxy: it remains a fact that tribal women have managed to adorn positions of political power only courtesy of reservation policies. The ground reality is these reservations have forced the hands of the men to relinquish their vice-like grip on politics. The fact remains that these men, used to being harbingers of political prowess for generations together are extremely reluctant to relinquish these positions for the women folk. Thus, arises a scenario whereby these men have tended to choose women amongst their kith and kins, so that the power still continues to remain in their hands. Thus, at the ground level local bodies a substantial percentage of these tribal women are reduced to being occupying just ornamental posts, whereas the men still continue to wield the actual power.
  
- Balancing act between socio-familial and political duties: a vast majority amongst the tribal women representatives in local bodies emerge out of the widely littered tea gardens across this region. The present study observed that majority of these women is also employed as workers in tea gardens. Once elected as political leaders, they are forced at times to choose between attending political initiatives as political members and their domain as tea garden workers. The harsh reality is that attending meetings as elected panchayat representatives many a times robs them of their basic livelihood which they earn as being tea garden workers. This economic consideration has a large role to play towards their prioritization of their roles. This scenario is further complicated by the fact that the majority of these tribal women a family to look after. Thus, it is extremely difficult for these women to participate whole heartedly into the political process, keeping their socio-familial status at stake.
  
- Subjugated tribal women being indirectly privy to corruption: the fact of the matter is that corruption is still widely prevalent amongst the Indian bureaucracy. Though faced with concrete evidences of corruption these tribal women remain novices thereby portrayed as being handy accomplices for furtherance of corruption. These tribal women often are made to be the unwilling accomplices for furtherance of corruption by the powers that be. Any social initiatives being undertaken by the political dispensation are always magnamised by economically powerful houses. These tribal women being from backwards classes are always

forced to tow the line. These women thus end up being unwilling accomplices towards perpetuation of corrupt practices. The tribal women have little say towards measures aimed at implementation of social schemes. The powerful upper caste smothers them and gets their unwilling nod for getting their head into grass roots social projects.

- Political interference: none of these tribal women can claim to have an ascendancy into power without a political patronage. The economic and manual prowess of a political party does play an important role in their upliftment towards their elevation at levels of political positions. They thus remain indebted to these political parties. They are unable to break the shackles of these political parties whom they represent, ultimately ending up as being stooges to this political overload. Independent voices of these tribal elected leaders thus get smothered by overwhelming influence of the political parties that they represent. They have therefore no other options but to tow the line of their respective political parties, even though they may at times be contrary to their socio-political believes

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

Despite the numerous problems that the tribal women face towards effective performance of their political duties, it is heartening to note that quite a substantial promotion of these women have managed to welcome the various obstacle and have managed to put forth a positive stride forward. A study into how these women have managed to positively overcome the various hurdles is actually the way forward for effective and positive participation of tribal women at the grass roots political levels. The way forward has to be definitely derived from examples of these successful tribal women who have managed to overcome all odds and carved out a niche for themselves.

- ❖ Stress on Education: the fact cannot be contested that women empowered with education definitely have an edge when confronted with the question of deliverance as political representatives. The present study have confirmed this fact as majority of these tribal women who are successful in harnessing their potentials as prospective political leader, do have a strong educational background to fall back upon. Education creates an ambience for critical understanding of the overall socio-political spectrum. Creation of a genre of vibrant and intelligent tribal

women leaders can only be made into a reality if proper emphasis upon education of the tribal women is made a reality. Measures such as caste reservations can only bear fruit they are coupled by endeavours to enhance the educational standards of tribal women. Government efforts have to be set into motion, which are directed primarily at providing means of education for these women of the tea gardens. Mere reservations will ultimately turn out to be symbolic and hollow instruments for women empowerment if not backed up by efforts at the educational fronts. The fact cannot be contested that an educated woman brings a much more positive aspect to the table towards dealing with socio-economic problem that her society, at large faces. Prioritizing of education has to be a major government initiative, devoid of which, caste reservations for underprivileged women, will never be able to meet its true potential.

In the specific context of North Bengal majority of the tribal population is here working in tea garden. Quite a substantial portion of these tea gardens are located in remote and far flung areas. Thereby, they are often cut off from areas of society which provide basic schooling facilities. It is therefore of utmost importance that these tea gardens are provided with atleast primary school facilities within their premises is that the children of these tea garden workers can avail of basic schooling. The unpalatable fact of the matter is that quite a majority of these tea gardens do not have these basic schooling requirements for the families of their workers. It is here that government schemes abated by social NGOs have a huge role to play towards ensuring that basic education is reached to this tribal population. Social programmes aimed towards enlightening the tribal population towards the benefits of education are a must.

- ❖ Way forward to overcome demerits of Panchayat Act of West Bengal (1993) – the measures under the 1993 Panchayat Act of West Bengal were primarily aimed at diversifying the effects of reservations, so that they are reached amongst a wider spectrum of these populations. It was proposed that seats reserved for tribal women will rotate among the populace so that a more substantial percentage of these women can be incorporated into the political system. While this has its own merits, my interactions with various tribal women representatives have brought forth the fact that, devoid of the assurance of representing the same constituencies,

which they have nurtured through their tenure, the desire to work meaningfully towards betterment of their dependent communities is definitely diminished. The present study has found that there is a need for these tribal women to feel entrenched to their constituencies so that they can carry forward their impetus, unhindered by the concerns about the fact that whether they will be able to retain these constituencies. A fair run has to be ensured so that the socio-political visions of these tribal women representatives are given enough time-frame to succeed. My studies portray the fact that majority of these tribal women start up as novices. These women largely complain about the fact that a period of five years is just about sufficient to learn about the intricacies of the bureaucratic political functioning. By the time they are in tune with the nitty-gritties of the political system at large, their term draws to a close. My opinion is that an extended run for these tribal women in political positions has to be ensured so that they can do justice to their socio-political aspirations of bringing about a positive change.

- ❖ Measures aimed at ensuring health of tribal women- women spanning across all social background can never rise to meaningful social positions if they are devoid of primary health facilities. Women, ultimately being a mother, require a comprehensive health coverage whereby she is covered primarily during her prenatal and antenatal periods of lives. In the context of tribal women residing in North Bengal majority of whom are employed as tea garden workers, effective antenatal, prenatal, and post natal medical coverage is of prime importance. Proper knowledge about importance of various vaccination schedules for the neonatals is of essential importance, which has to be imparted to the would be mothers. Without the involvement of the tribal women towards various health initiatives, an enlightened women cadre can never be built. Empowered with the knowledge of modern medicine, tribal women can not only ensure a trouble-free pregnancy, but also can go a long towards bringing forth a healthy future population by effective participation in child immunisation programme. An enlightened tribal woman representative can go a huge step forward toward ensuring better health parameter for her family and immediate society. A welcome initiative amongst many of the North Bengal tea gardens is the emergence of organisations such as “Mother’s Club” which are primarily aimed towards addressing the various health related issues confronting the tribal society at large.

Measures aimed at strengthening and propagating such measures as initiation of institutions such as mothers club are definitely an effective and indigenous means to positive propagation of health related ethos amongst the tribal populations. These groups not only help to ensure coverage of the tribal population by modern medicine, but also play an important role in redressal of rampant social nemeses such as alcoholism and women abuse. The present study recommends that institutions like Mother's Club should be strengthened by effective political measures so that they can perform a path breaking role towards betterment of the tribal society at large.

- ❖ Socio-political backdrop: the fact of the matter is, even in tribal societies, which in various positions can claim to be more lenient towards women at large, it is a fact that absorbing the political powers to the women folk is still not a pleasant way forward for most of the tribal societies in North Bengal. Being forced to play their hands straight, through reservation policies, a majority of the tribal male population are still unable to look towards a scenario where the womenfolk of their society can be encouraged to have independent political voices. Thus, there is a propensity for the men of these tribes to use womenfolk as political rubberstamps, thereby the actual power still remain bestowed with the men. Thus, many of these entrenched male tribal leaders end up projecting women candidates within their own familial set up so that they can wield active political influence. Women tribal political representatives are thus rendered to being nothing but political slaves, who are largely dictated and controlled by males, subserviently. True empowerment of these tribal women aimed primarily towards providing them with measures targeted towards freedom from male dominance area primary requisite. Various socio-political scheme should be aimed towards creation of a women populace, laced with the actual socio-political capabilities. While it is imperative that the strong political parties predominantly aimed towards inhalation of a social set up, whereby the actual power remains vested within the men folk, measures aimed towards sustenance of socially active tribal women should be the primary way forward. Just caste link reservations for these tribal women, can never be the blue print for social change. The utopian thought of a panchayati raj system devoid of political influence, has to be made a reality. Specific measures have to be true empowerment of these women tribal

representatives have to be initiated, so that they can be insulated from the influence of political parties.

- ❖ Positive bureaucratic involvement: quite a substantial number of these tribal women representatives at the grass roots democracy meetings scheduled for the ground level political organisations as gram panchayats are not convened within the time frame. Though these representatives have effective points towards way forward, devoid of proper political platforms, their views are often not put to the forefront. The way forward is bestowed upon the bureaucracy so that they can increase the frequency of meetings which will provide avenue for these women to air their views on a much more frequent basis. Majority of these women feel that if such meetings could be convened on a weekly basis, it would really help them to put forward their agendas much more effectively. The onus therefore lies with the bureaucracy so that measures to increase the frequency of needs of the political representatives are met with.
  
- ❖ Measures to increase finances of local government bodies: it remains a fact that local grass roots level political bodies still remain deprived of financial funds to implement their socio-political schemes. Though with certain constitutional measures they are entitled to political positions, it remains a fact that they are still highly dependent upon state government for release of finances. The way forward will be to initiate measures so that these grass roots levels political institutions can be financially independent. Certain proportion of the revenues earned by the state government have to be channalised into these local government institutions so that they can function as financially strengthen individual bodies.
  
- ❖ Basic training facilities: devoid of measures towards enhancing of the quality of tribal women representatives, enhancing of the financial spectrum will not serve the purpose. Various government initiatives backed up by the NGOs, have to be in force so that proper training is provided for these women so as to enhance their working potential. A woman encompassed with effective training can definitely contribute much more effectively towards realisations of the socio-political goals aimed towards empowerment of the backward strata of the society.

- ❖ Addressal of corrupt practices keeping into the panchayat bodies: it is a fact that being a panchayat member is not economically lucrative proposition. It is a fact that majority of these tribal people come from economically deprived sections of the society. The remuneration that they get as the panchayat member is miniscule. Being panchayat members, they are confronted regularly with situations that require them to invest economically. Furthermore, being in panchayat often leads them to compromised with their bread earning professions. Thus the economic hardships that they encounter are further compounded by their political positions. This thus paves the way for corruptions. During my field studies, I came across a classic example of this where there is rampant corruption up to the grass roots levels of panchayatcentreing around projects aimed towards allocations of housing facilities under IndraAwasYojnafor the poor. The way forward to overcome this obstacle will be to provide adequate socio-economic compensation to the panchayat members so that the tendency towards becoming corrupt can be arrested.
  
- ❖ Measures aimed ensuring political participation of the weakest strata of the society: though constitutionally guarantee reservation for the tribal women are in place, it remains a fact that even after so many years the desired levels of participation are yet to be achieved. The reasons are many fold. The only way forward to bring about an effective and comprehensive political participation of the lowest and socially most deprived sections of the society is through initiation of incentives under various fields. There can be measures aimed at rewarding those panchayat bodies that are primarily represented by tribal women, based on their performance. These measures will derive them towards trying to fulfil their potentials.
  
- ❖ Stress upon utilising technological platforms: in the modern world that is powered by technology, e-governance is rapidly coming to the forefront. Panchayati raj institutions, unless propelled to new levels technological expertise, will tend to lag behind. For a successful transition to the advent of technology, it is imperative that panchayat members are brought in sync with these modern developments. The way forward should be to integrate the panchayat bodies with the newest

technological break-throughs. But this can never be achieved without measures aimed towards technological up gradation of individual panchayat members. Government policies here have a huge role to play, so that they are channelized towards providing modern technological for the panchayat members at grass root levels.

- ❖ Creation of awareness towards various developmental projects: it is a fact that majority the developmental projects initiated at the top most echelons of power do not trickle down to the grass root panchayat bodies. My study reflects this stark reality that majority of the tribal women in positions of power are not aware of the various projects that are aimed towards upliftment of their society. Means to achieve synchronisation amongst various stratas of the political set up has to be the way forward so that the panchayat members are also aware of existence of various developmental projects.
  
- ❖ Financial Implication affecting the proper functioning of panchayat bodies: panchayat as grass roots hermits of power existed in Indian society for long. The idea to institutionalise and give it constitutional credence was first mooted by rajcagnadhi. In the history of panchayati raj in India, on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1993, the constitutional (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act 1992) came into force to provide constitutional status to panchayati raj institutions. The provision of finances to these panchayati raj institutions so that they can carry out their social agendas has been a constant source of debate. Various amendments have thence been past to empower these panchayat bodies economically. They have ranged from specific demarcation of the levies that can be collected by the stat governments and the panchayats. These measures have been largely aimed at providing the panchayat bodies with economic independence, whereby they don't have to be always at the mercy of state and central governments for implementation of their various schemes. The ground reality as exposed by my studies still reflects a scenario that the panchayat bodies continue to be under the influence of state governments for allocations of various funds. The way forward would be to strictly enforce the various guidelines laid down to guarantee financial independent for the panchayat bodies. Thus they can be truly rid of the influences of political parties.

- ❖ Proper conduct of panchayat election process: in the present Indian political scenario, the fact cannot be denied that control of grass roots level panchayat bodies is an important step towards affecting the electoral process for elections of higher bodies such as state legislative and national elections. Therefore, there is an active political battle which is endorsed by the various political parties so that active measures are taken by these parties to influence upon the panchayat election. It is extremely difficult for individual political representatives to rise above the political platforms created by various political parties. The way forward can only be promulgation of measures aimed at insulating the grass roots political elections from forced means by political parties of the day to have an influence on these elections. While it cannot be denied that while it cannot be denied that panchayat election process cannot be insulated from political influence altogether, measures have to be initiated so that the predominant political influence of powerful parties can be reduced to the minimum

To conclude it cannot be denied that granting of constitutional status to panchayati raj furthered by reserving seats for the socio-economically deprived women have definitely paved the way forward for empowerment of tribal women. The tribal women of North Bengal have definitely reaped the benefits of these strategies. There however remain a lot of lacunae towards realisation of the goal for real empowerment of women of these backwards strata of society. During the course of my study I have sincerely tried to highlight issues which, if addressed earnestly, will go a long way forward towards realisation of this goal.

It thus goes to suffice that when armed with proper political and legislative backing, tribal women can dare to venture out into the hitherto male dominated bastion of politics and contribute positively towards bringing forth a social change. Despite prevalent socio-political constrains, they dare to venture out into uncharted territories thereby reflecting a strong desire to have a say in the socio-political set-up at the grass roots levels. Various measures such as reservations for women candidates percolating down at the micro level has undoubtedly heralded a social revolution of sorts.

These measures have to be further strengthen during coming years so that tribal women feel embolden to participate in the political process. Effective implementation of these women reservations scheme is a primary pre-requisite for effective empowerment of

tribal women. Though there has been a progress in terms of granting constitutional legitimacy to these women reservation policies, there still remain lacunae which result from the struggle to dismantle a largely patriarchal socio-familial set-up.

It still remains a fact that under the garb of tribal women representatives, quite a substantial percentage of these seats end up as projecting women faces as just stooges, whereby the actual power continues to be wielded by the men. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult for these tribal women to take a stand which is different from the political dispensation of the state. Independence of these panchayat bodies is thus under question as individual tribal women representatives do not have the power and wherewithal to fight against the political party in power at the state level. The various positive social agendas that these women may have are thus diluted by various socio-political pressures. Many of these women thus disenchanted with the whole panchayati raj system, thereby becoming reluctant to pursue their relevant political agendas. It cannot be denied that these tribal women largely belong to economically deprived sections of the society, thereby being gullible to economic corruption which the bureaucracy uses to subvert their well thought out social initiative.

The present study finds out that if such reservation policies are not coupled with measures towards educating and empowering the girl child, the actual purpose of these reservations can never be realised. There is no dearth of intellectually capable women amongst this tribal society who can really work as a catalyst for upliftment of their society. But without proper government initiative aimed towards propelling these women to new heights, these tribal women can never reach their true potential. Primary emphasis thus has to be on protection of the girl child, measures aimed at providing equal opportunities to the girl child and measures aimed at largely treasuring the girl child as a whole. Devoid of such measures, merely reserving seats for the backward women can never bring forth a meaningful social change. It has to be accepted that owing to reservations, quite a substantial percentage of the tribal women have been imbibed into the political process. But the point of contention is whether such participation is just of ornamental value or is capable of bringing forth a forceful and positive social change. Government of any day, whether it be a national or a state government cannot wash away its responsibilities to ensure effective political empowerment of these tribal women. Owing to the extreme backwardness of these tribal women, especially in the area of North Bengal, this remain a

challenging task, which can only be overcome by genuine measures by the political parties entrenched in power. Without a wholesome socio-political approach, proper progress and effective political participation of these tribal women will continue to remain a distant dream.

This whole scenario acquires a different proposition amongst the tribal women of North Bengal primarily because the tribal population in this area is largely working in tea gardens which are primarily located in remote and far flung areas. Any truly effective government measures aimed towards upliftment of the tribal women of this area are at large difficult to percolate down to the grass roots level. Thus, measures aimed at upliftment of tribal women of North Bengal have to be cushioned by active involvement of various non-governmental organisations, that work in sync with various government initiatives so that government programmes can be effectively reached up to the far flung and remote locations of North Bengal. This unique geography of North Bengal causes problems that require an innovative approach. Mere implementation of benevolent government measures may not be sufficient to touch the lives of the tribal women residing in North Bengal. The predominantly tea garden dependent tribal population has its unique sets of problems which can only be solved through specifically directed initiatives aimed towards betterment of this society.

The fact cannot be denied that West Bengal was one of the first states to implement Panchayati raj at the grass roots level. But over the course of time extreme political indulgence by the various political parties that are in power have resulted in viciation of the grass roots political atmosphere. A crucial issue to be considered in describing the various political processes at work in panchayati raj institutions relates to the role of political parties in these institutions. According to Jay Prakash Narayan a distinction must be made between the parliamentary and panchayati raj system. To the pointed and straight question of whether panchayati raj was devised to facilitate and further the interests of political parties or those of the people, he opines that the political parties should find other ways of influencing the political spectrum rather than exploiting panchayati raj for party ends. There of course is a counter view wherein EMS Nambrudipal, of the CPI(M) argues that in the name of non-partisanship at any cost, it disarms the common people in their fight against the local gentry who would thus transform the panchayati raj into their instrument. HC Mathur who was member of administrative commission of India, while

accepting that the panchayat samities and zilla parishads may function on the party lines because it would be difficult to keep politics out of these bodies, pleads that the panchayats atleast should not be drawn into the vernapool of politics.

The fact cannot be denied that for the majority of the political parties control of grass roots political institutions like the panchayati raj bodies is an essential means to further their political cloud to in hingher echelons of power. While it cannot be denied that devoid of political patronage, it would be extremely difficult for the panchayati raj instituions to function effectively, over indulgence of political parties in these institutions may also prove to be detrimental towards inndependent functioning of the panchayats. Thus a fine line has to be drawn whereby extreme political indulgence is not allowed to subvert effective and indepent functioning of the panchayati raj institutions. Ideally, freed from influences of political parties, panchayats may really trun out to be tools to bring about social development at the grass roots levvel. The way forward is to be encouraged measures aimed at furthering avenues to reduce political influence at panchayat levels so that the true potential of panchayati raj insititutions can be realised.

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## **APPENDIX- A**

### **The Plantation Labour (Amendment) Act, 2010**

(Original Act, 1951)

#### **The Chief Clauses:**

##### **18A. Safety-**

- (1) - In every plantation, effect arrangement shall be made by the employer to provide for the safety of workers in connection with the use, handling, storage and transport of insecticides, chemicals and toxic substances.
- (2) - The State Government may make rules for prohibiting or, restricting employment of women or adolescents in using or handling hazardous chemicals.
- (5) - Every worker who is exposed to insecticides, chemicals and toxic substances shall be medically examined periodically, by the state government.
- (6) - Every employer shall maintain health record of every worker who is exposed to insecticides, chemicals and toxic substances which are used, handled, stored or transported in a plantation, and every such worker shall have access to such records.
- (7) Every employer shall provide-
  - a. washing, bathing and clock room facilities; and
  - b. protective clothing and equipment, to every worker engaged in handling insecticides, chemicals or toxic substances in such manner as may be prescribed by the State Government.

#### **Provisions to Health**

(8) Drinking water- In every plantation effective management shall be made by the employer to provide and maintain at convenient places in the plantation a sufficient supply of wholesome drinking water for all workers.

(9) Conservancy- (1) There shall be provided separately for males and females in every plantation a sufficient number of latrines and urinals of prescribed types so situated as to be convenient and accessible to workers employed therein.

(2) All latrines and urinal provided under sub-section (1) shall be maintained in clean and sanitary condition.

(8) Medical Facilities-

(1) In every plantation there shall be provided and maintained so as to be readily available such medical facilities for the workers (and their families) as may be prescribed by the State Government.

(2) If in any plantation medical facilities are not provided and maintained as required by subsection (1), the Chief Inspector may cause to be provided and maintained therein such medical facilities, and recover the cost thereof from the defaulting employer.

### **Welfare**

(11) Canteens-

(1) The State Government may make rules requiring that in every plantation wherein one hundred and fifty workers are ordinarily employed, one or more canteens shall be provided and maintained by the employer for the use of the workers.

(12) Creches-

(1) In every plantation wherein fifty or more women workers (including women workers employed by any contractor) are employed or more employed on any day of the proceeding twelve months, or where the number of children of women workers (including women workers employed by any contractor) is twenty or more, there shall be provided and maintained by the employer suitable rooms for the use of children of such women workers.

(1-A) Notwithstanding anything contained in subsection (1), if in respect of any plantation wherein less than fifty women workers (including women workers employed by any contractor) are employed or were employed on any day of the proceeding twelve months, or where the number of children of such women workers is less than twenty, the State Government, having regard to the number of children of such women workers deems if necessary that suitable rooms for the use of such children should be provided and maintained by the employer, it may, by order, direct the employer to provide and maintain such rooms and thereupon the employer shall be bound to comply with such direction.

(2) The rooms referred to in sub-section (1) or sub-section (1-A), shall-

- (a) Provide adequate accommodation;
- (b) Be adequately lighted and ventilated;
- (c) Be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition; and
- (d) Be under the charge of a woman trained in the care of children and infants.

(13) Recreational Facilities- The State Government may make rules requiring every employer to make provision in his plantation for such recreational facilities for the workers and children employed therein as may be prescribed.

(14) Education Facilities- Where the children between the ages of six and twelve of workers employed in any plantation exceed twenty-five in number, the State Government may make rules, requiring every employer to provide educational facilities for the children in such manner and of such standard as may be prescribed.

(15) Housing Facilities- It shall be the duty of every employer to provide and maintain necessary housing accommodation-

a). For every worker (including his family) residing in the plantation;

b). For every worker (including his family) residing outside the plantation, who has put in six months of continuous service in such plantation and who has expressed a desire in writing to reside in the plantation.

Provide that the requirement of continuous service of six months under this clause shall not a worker, who is a member of the family, of a deceased worker who, immediately before his death, was residing in the plantation.

16-A- Liability of employer in respect of accident resulting from collapse of houses provided by him-

- (1) If death or injury is caused to any worker or a member of his family as a result of the collapse of a house provided under section 15, and the collapse is not solely and directly attributable to a fault on the part of any occupant of the house or to a natural calamity, the employer shall be liable to any compensation. (The amount of compensation payable to a workman are governed by the Workman's Compensation Act, 1923).

17. Other Facilities- The State Government may make rules requiring that in every plantation the employer shall provide the workers with such number and type of umbrellas, blankets, rain coat or other amenities for the protection of workers from rain or cold as may be prescribed.

## 18. Welfare Offices-

(1) In every plantation wherein three hundred or more workers are ordinarily employed the employer shall employ such number of welfare offices as may be prescribed.

(2) The State Government may prescribe the duties, qualifications and conditions of service of employers under sub-section (1).

### **State Amendment**

Kerala- In section 18, after subsection (1) add the following :

(1-A) If in any plantation, welfare officers are not employed as required by the rules made under sub-section (1), the Chief Inspector may appoint the required number of welfare officers and thereupon such officers shall be deemed to have been employed by employer under sub-section (1):

Provided that before appointing welfare officers under this sub-section the employer shall be given an opportunity of being heard.

### Section 18-A

Kerala- After section 18 the following section : 18-A, “Chief inspector to provide facilities or default by employer- (1) It in any plantation, facilities are not provided or maintained by employer as required by section 8 or section 9 or section 12 or section 15 or the rules under section 11 or section 14 or section 17, the Chief inspector may cause to be provided or maintained therein such facilities and recover the cost thereof from the defaulting employer :

Provided that before providing or maintaining such facilities the employer shall be given an opportunity of being heard.

- (a) For the purpose of all recovery, of the cost under sub-section (1), the Chief inspector may certify the amount to be recovered to the collector, who may thereupon recover such amount as an arrear of land revenue.

### **Hours and limitation of employment**

#### 19. Weekly Hours-

(1) Such as otherwise expressly provided in this Act, no adult worker shall be required or allowed to work on any plantation in excess of forty eight hours a week and no adolescent or child for more than twenty seven hours a week.

(2) Where an adult worker in any plantation or any day in excess of the number of hours consisting a normal working day or for more than forty eight hours in any week, he shall, in respect of such overtime work, be entitled to twice the rates of ordinary wages: Provided that no worker shall be allowed to work for more than nine hours on any day and any week.

(3) For any work done on any closed holiday in the plantation or on any day of rest, a worker shall be entitled to twice the rates of ordinary wages as in case of overtime work.

#### 20. Weekly Holidays-

(1) The State Government may by rules made in this behalf-

(a) Provide for a day of rest, in every period of seven days which shall be allowed to all workers;

(b) Provide for the conditions subject to which, and the circumstances in which,

an adult worker may be required or allowed to work overtime.

(2) Notwithstanding anything contained in Clause (a) of sub section (1) where a worker is willing to work on any day of rest which is not a closed holiday in the plantation, nothing contained in this section shall prevent him from doing so:

Provided that in doing so a worker does not work for more than ten days consecutively without a holiday for a whole day intervening.

#### 21. Daily intervals for rest-

The period of work on each day shall be so fixed that no period shall exceed five hours before he has had an interval for rest for at least half an hour.

22. Spread over- The period of work of an adult worker in a plantation shall be so arranged that inclusive, of his interval for section (21) it shall not spread over more than twelve hours including the time spent in waiting for work in any day.

#### 23. Notice of period of work-

(1) There shall, be displayed and correctly maintained in every plantation on a notice of periods of work in such form and manner as such be prescribed showing clearly for everyday the periods during which the workers may be required to work.

(2) Subject to the other provisions contained in this Act, no worker shall be required or allowed to work in any plantation other than in accordance with the notice of periods of work displayed in the plantation.

(3) An employer may refuse to employ a worker for any day if on that day he turns up for work more than half an hour after the time fixed for the commencement of the day's work.

25. Right work for women and children- Except with the permission of the State Government, no women or child worker shall be employed in any plantation otherwise than between the hours of 6am and 7pm.

Provided that nothing in this section shall be deemed to apply to mid-wives and nurses employed as such in any plantation.

26. Non-adult workers to carry tokens- No child and no adolescent shall be required or allowed to work in any plantation rules-

(a) A certificate of fitness granted with the reference to him under section 27 is in the custody of the employer; and

(b) Such child or adolescent carries with him while is at work a token giving a reference to such certificate.

**27. Certificate of fitness-**

(1) A certifying surgeon, shall, on the application of any young person or his parent or guardian accompanied by a document signed by the employer or any, other person on his behalf of such persons shall be employed in the plantation if certified to be fit for work, or on the application of the employer or any other person on his behalf with reference to any young person intending to work with such person and ascertain his fitness for work as a child or as an adolescent.

(2) A certificate of fitness granted under this section shall be valid for a period of twelve months from the date thereof, but may be renewed.

(3) Any fee payable for a certificate under this section shall be paid by the employer and shall be paid by the employer and shall not be recoverable from the young person, his parents or guardians.

28. Power to require medical examination- An inspector may if he thinks necessary so to do, cause an young person employed in, a plantation to be examined by a certifying surgeon, leave with wages.

29. Application of chapter- The provisions of this chapter shall not operate to the prejudice of any rights to which a worker may be entitled under any other law or under the terms of any award, agreement, or contract of service:

Provided that where such award, agreement or contract of service provides for a longer leave with wages than provided in this chapter the worker shall be entitled only to such longer leave.

Explanation- For the purpose of this chapter leave shall not, except as provided in section 30, include weekly holiday or holidays for festivals or other similar occasions.

30. Annual leave with wage-

1. Every worker shall be allowed leave with wages for a number of days calculated at the rate of –

- a. If an adult, one day for every twenty days of work performed by him and
- b. If a young person, one day for every fifteen days of work performed by him.

31. Wages during leave period-

1. For the leave allowed to a worker under section 30, he shall be paid-

a. If employed wholly on a time-rate basis, at a rate equal to the daily wage payable to him immediately before the commencement of such leave under any law or under the terms by any, award, agreement or context of service, and

b. In other cases, including cases where he is, during the preceding twelve calendar months, paid –partly on a, time rate basis and partly on a price rate basis, at the rate of the average daily wage calculated over the preceding twelve calendar months.

32. Sickness and maternity benefits-

1. Subject to any rules that may be made in this behalf, every worker shall be entitled to obtain from his employer-

a. In the case of sickness certified by a qualified medical practitioner, sickness allowance and

b. If a woman, in case of confinement or expected confinement, maternity allowance, at such rate, for such period and at such intervals as may be prescribed.

2. The State Government may make rules regulating the payment of sickness or maternity allowance and such rules may specify the circumstances in which such allowance shall not be payable or shall cease to be payable and in framing any rules under, this section the State Government shall have due regard to the medical facilities that may be provided by the employer in any plantation.

## **Accidents**

32- A: Notice of Accident- wherein occurs which causes death or which causes any reason of which the worker injured is prevented from working for a period of forty-eight hours or more immediately following the accident, or which is of such a nature as may be excribed in this behalf, the employer thereof shall send notice thereof to such authorities, in such form, and within such time, as may be prescribed.

32-B: Register of accidents- the employer shall maintain a register of all accidents, which occur in, the plantation in such form and in such manner as may be prescribed.

35. Contravention of provisions regarding employment of labour-whoever, except as otherwise permitted any or under this Act, contravenes any provision of this Act or of any rules made there under, prohibiting, restrict in a regulating the employment of persons in a plantation, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine which may extend to five hundred rupees, or with both.

43. General power to make rule-

1. The State Government may, subject to the condition of previous publication, make rules to carry out the purposes of this Act.

## APPENDIX- B

### Mouzawise Population of Census – 2001& 2011 (Matelli Block)

Name of the G.P.: Matialli Hat Block: Matialli Development Block District: Darjeeling

Sl no.	Name of Mouza	J.L. No.	Part No.	Male	Female	Total
1.	Samsing Tea Garden	8	18/122	610	691	1301
			18/123	450	465	915
			18/124	516	500	1016
			18/125	502	575	1077
			18/126	554	4499	953
			18/127	458	475	933
<b>2001 -Total :</b>				<b>2990</b>	<b>3205</b>	<b>6195</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>3299</b>	<b>3415</b>	<b>6714</b>
2.	Yongtong Tea Garden	9	18/128	669	734	1403
			18/129	557	587	1144
<b>2001-Total:</b>				<b>1226</b>	<b>1321</b>	<b>2547</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>1330</b>	<b>1476</b>	<b>2806</b>
3.	Matelli Tea Garden	10	18/130	708	720	1428
			18/131	576	594	1170
			18/132	525	496	1021
			18/133	239	230	469
			18/134	1024	980	2004
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>3072</b>	<b>3020</b>	<b>6092</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>3171</b>	<b>3211</b>	<b>6382</b>
4.	Chalouni Tea Garden	7	18/135	497	527	1024
			18/136	582	615	1197
			18/137	623	645	1268
			18/138	322	307	629
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2024</b>	<b>2094</b>	<b>4118</b>
<b>2011-Total:</b>				<b>2117</b>	<b>2178</b>	<b>4295</b>
5.	CHHUT	11				
6.	Matialli Hat	12	18/151	466	422	888
				405	372	777
<b>2001-Total population of Matialli Hat GP:</b>				<b>9778</b>	<b>10062</b>	<b>19480</b>
<b>2011- Total population of Matialli Hat GP:</b>				<b>10322</b>	<b>10652</b>	<b>20974</b>

**Mouzawise Population of Census – 2001 & 2011**

Name of the G.P.: IndongMatialli Block: Matialli Development Block District: Darjeeling

Sl no.	Name of Mouza	J.L. No.	Part No.	Male	Female	Total
1.	<b>Engo Tea Garden</b>	1	18/139	498	505	1003
<b>2011- Total:</b>				1695	1776	3471
2.	<b>ZuranteeTea Garden</b>	2	18/140	801	845	1646
			18/141	957	964	1921
			18/142	493	518	1011
			18/143	420	425	845
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2671</b>	<b>2752</b>	<b>5423</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>1446</b>	<b>1541</b>	<b>2987</b>
3.	<b>Nagaisuree Tea Garden</b>	6	18/144	556	532	1088
			18/145	587	637	1224
			18/146	342	394	736
			18/147	750	766	1516
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2235</b>	<b>2329</b>	<b>4564</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2340</b>	<b>2471</b>	<b>4811</b>
4.	<b>Matialli Hat</b>	12	18/148	1354	1278	2632
			18/149	590	523	1113
			18/150	630	530	1160
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2574</b>	<b>2331</b>	<b>4905</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>1789</b>	<b>1650</b>	<b>3439</b>
5.	<b>Chulsa</b>	13	18/152	663	667	1330
			18/153	981	939	1920
			18/154	513	486	999
<b>Total:</b>				<b>2157</b>	<b>2092</b>	<b>4249</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2325</b>	<b>2276</b>	<b>4601</b>
6.	<b>Indong Tea Garden</b>	14	18/155	687	700	1387
			18/156	857	795	1652
			18/157	595	609	1204
<b>Total:</b>				<b>2139</b>	<b>2104</b>	<b>4243</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>3228</b>	<b>3211</b>	<b>6439</b>
<b>2001-Total population ofIndongMatialli GP:</b>				<b>12274</b>	<b>12113</b>	<b>24387</b>
<b>2011-Total population ofIndongMatialli GP:</b>				<b>12823</b>	<b>12925</b>	<b>25748</b>

## Mouzawise Population of Census – 2001 & 2011

Name of the G.P.: MatialliBatabariNo.I Block: Matialli Development Block District: Darjeeling

Sl no.	Name of Mouza	J.L. No.	Part No.	Male	Female	Total
1.	KillkoteTea Garden	15	18/158	951	953	1904
			18/159	960	924	1884
<b>2001-Total:</b>				<b>1911</b>	<b>1877</b>	<b>3788</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2024</b>	<b>2059</b>	<b>4083</b>
2.	AibheelTea Garden	5	18/160	611	584	1195
			18/161	571	580	1151
			18/162	889	853	1742
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2071</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>4088</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2084</b>	<b>2102</b>	<b>4186</b>
3.	SathaiyaTea Garden	18	18/168	850	838	1688
			18/169	506	498	1004
			18/170	878	860	1738
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2234</b>	<b>2196</b>	<b>4430</b>
<b>2011- Total</b>				<b>2269</b>	<b>2257</b>	<b>4526</b>
4.	ChalsaMahabari	16	18/171	705	690	1395
			18/172	903	937	1840
			18/173	728	726	1454
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2336</b>	<b>2353</b>	<b>4689</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2456</b>	<b>2517</b>	<b>4973</b>
5.	Mangalbari	17	18/174	639	609	1248
			18/175	592	547	1139
			18/176	588	595	1183
			18/177	800	722	1522
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2619</b>	<b>2473</b>	<b>5092</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2983</b>	<b>2944</b>	<b>5927</b>
6.	Batabari Tea Garden	25	18/184	671	688	1359
			18/185	616	614	1230
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>1287</b>	<b>1302</b>	<b>2589</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>1277</b>	<b>1367</b>	<b>2644</b>
7.	Khariar Bandar	19	18/186	351	306	657
<b>2001- Total Population ofMatialliBatabariNo.I GP:</b>				<b>12809</b>	<b>12524</b>	<b>25333</b>
<b>2011- Total Population ofMatialliBatabariNo.I GP:</b>				<b>13554</b>	<b>13653</b>	<b>27207</b>

## Mouzawise Population of Census – 2001 & 2011

Name of the G.P.: Bidhan Nagar Block: Matiali Development Block District: Darjeeling

Sl no.	Name of Mouza	J.L. No.	Part No.	Male	Female	Total
1.	Nakhatee Tea Garden	3	18/163	668	751	1419
			18/164	522	530	1052
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>1190</b>	<b>1281</b>	<b>2471</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>1192</b>	<b>1285</b>	<b>2477</b>
2.	Soonagachhi Tea Garden	4	18/165	652	646	1298
			18/166	811	821	1632
			18/167	718	723	1441
<b>2001-Total:</b>				<b>2181</b>	<b>2190</b>	<b>4371</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2305</b>	<b>2271</b>	<b>4576</b>
3.	NeoraMajhiali	20	18/187	919	929	1848
			18/188	844	781	1625
<b>2001-Total:</b>				<b>1763</b>	<b>1710</b>	<b>3473</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2173</b>	<b>2091</b>	<b>4264</b>
4.	Salbari	21	18/189	798	794	1592
			18/190	470	441	911
			18/191	970	888	1858
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2238</b>	<b>2123</b>	<b>4361</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2707</b>	<b>2499</b>	<b>5206</b>
5.	Mathachulka	22	18/192	624	591	1215
			18/193	301	237	538
			18/194	691607	1298	999
<b>2001Total:</b>				<b>1616</b>	<b>1435</b>	<b>3051</b>
<b>2011Total:</b>				<b>1742</b>	<b>1610</b>	<b>3352</b>
6.	BaradighiBasti	23	<b>2001Total:</b>	254	2111	465
			<b>2011Total:</b>	283	285	568
7.	PaschimBatabari	24	<b>2001Total:</b>	139	143	282
			<b>2011Total:</b>	151	146	297
<b>2001- Total Population Bidhan Nagar GP:</b>				<b>9381</b>	<b>9093</b>	<b>18474</b>
<b>2011- Total Population Bidhan Nagar GP:</b>				<b>10553</b>	<b>10187</b>	<b>20740</b>

## Mouzawise Population of Census – 2001 & 2011

Name of the G.P.: MatialliBatabari No. II. Block: Matialli Development Block District: Darjeeling

Sl no.	Name of Mouza	J.L. No.	Part No.	Male	Female	Total
1.	Uttar Dhupjhora	27	18/178	912	842	1754
			18/179	901	865	1766
<b>2001-Total:</b>				<b>1813</b>	<b>1707</b>	<b>3520</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2193</b>	<b>2150</b>	<b>4343</b>
2.	DakshinDhupjhora	28	18/180	811	707	1518
			18/181	852	842	1694
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>1663</b>	<b>1549</b>	<b>3212</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>1909</b>	<b>1783</b>	<b>3692</b>
3.	PurbaBatabari	26	18/182	1053	996	2049
			18/183	708	678	1386
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>1761</b>	<b>1674</b>	<b>3435</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>1999</b>	<b>1915</b>	<b>3914</b>
4.	Baradighi Tea Garden	29	18/195	699	658	1357
			18/196	650	642	1292
			18/197	813	765	1578
			18/198	774	717	1491
<b>2001- Total:</b>				<b>2936</b>	<b>2782</b>	<b>5718</b>
<b>2011- Total:</b>				<b>2809</b>	<b>2838</b>	<b>5647</b>
5.	Chawafelly	30	18/199	265	231	496
				307	287	594
6.	Lower Tandu Forest	31	18/200	785	661	1446
				426	372	798
<b>2001- Total population ofMatialliBatabariNo.II. GP:</b>				<b>9223</b>	<b>8604</b>	<b>17827</b>
<b>2011- Total population ofMatialliBatabariNo.II. GP:</b>				<b>9643</b>	<b>9345</b>	<b>113657</b>

**Gram panchayats and Mouzawise Literate population of Census- 2001**

Block: Matelli

District: Jalpaiguri

Name of G.P.	Name of Mouza	Part No.	Male	Female	Total	
M A T I A L L I  H A T	Samsing Tea Garden	18/122	490	401	891	
		18/123	388	296	684	
		18/124	415	284	699	
		18/125	396	339	735	
		18/126	284	167	451	
		18/127	334	255	589	
		<b>Total :</b>		<b>2307</b>	<b>1742</b>	<b>4049</b>
	Yongton Tea Garden	18/128	445	327	772	
		18/129	319	194	513	
		<b>Total:</b>		<b>764</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>1285</b>
	Matelli Tea Garden	18/130	422	240	662	
		18/131	341	160	501	
		18/132	373	206	579	
		18/133	139	99	238	
		18/134	466	353	819	
		<b>Total:</b>		<b>1741</b>	<b>1058</b>	<b>2799</b>
	Chalouni Tea Garden	18/135	344	239	583	
		18/136	453	306	759	
		18/137	424	245	669	
		18/138	230	131	361	
		<b>Total:</b>		<b>1451</b>	<b>921</b>	<b>2372</b>
Matialli Hat	18/151	377	277	654		
	<b>Grand Total:</b>		<b>6640</b>	<b>4519</b>	<b>11159</b>	

Source: Block Development Office, Matialli Development Block Census of India: 2001

**Gram panchayats and Mouzawise Literate population of Census- 2001**

**Block: Matelli**

**District: Jalpaiguri**

<b>Name of G.P.</b>	<b>Name of Mouza</b>	<b>Part No.</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>I N D O N G M A T I A L L I</b>	<b>Engo Tea Garden</b>	18/139	296	169	465
	<b>Zurantee Tea Garden</b>	18/140	392	224	616
		18/141	550	326	876
		18/142	309	176	485
		18/143	232	153	385
		<b>Total :</b>	<b>1483</b>	<b>879</b>	<b>2362</b>
	<b>Nagaisuree Tea Garden</b>	18/144	313	130	443
		18/145	346	135	481
		18/146	108	32	140
		18/147	498	244	742
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1265</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>1806</b>
	<b>MatelliHat</b>	18/150	511	371	882
	<b>Chulsa Tea Garden</b>	18/149	443	314	757
		18/148	968	695	1663
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1922</b>	<b>1380</b>	<b>3302</b>
		18/152	378	209	587
		18/153	503	248	751
		18/154	256	135	391
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1137</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>1729</b>
	<b>Matialli Hat</b>	18/155	342	199	541
		18/156	381	159	540
	18/157	244	126	370	
	Total:	967	484	1451	
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>7070</b>	<b>4045</b>	<b>11115</b>	

Source: Block Development Office, Matialli Development Block Census of India: 2001.

**Gram Panchayat and Mouzawise Literate Population of Census- 2001**

Block: Matelli

District: Jalpaiguri

Name of G.P.	Name of Mouza	Part No.	Male	Female	Total	
<b>M A T E L L I</b>	<b>Killkote Tea Garden</b>	18/158	357	156	513	
		18/159	431	193	624	
		<b>Total :</b>	<b>788</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>1137</b>	
<b>B A T A B A R I</b>	<b>Aibheel Tea Garden</b>	18/160	258	127	385	
		18/161	297	142	429	
		18/162	551	330	881	
			<b>Total:</b>	<b>1106</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>1705</b>
	<b>Sathkaiya Tea Garden</b>	18/168	440	221	661	
		18/169	267	184	451	
18/170		442	199	641		
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1149</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>1753</b>	
<b>N O : 1</b>	<b>ChalsaMahabari</b>	18/171	578	498	1076	
		18/172	530	429	959	
		18/173	437	317	754	
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1545</b>	<b>1244</b>	<b>2789</b>	
<b>Mangal Bari</b>	18/174	444	308	752		
	18/175	404	327	731		
	18/176	298	182	480		
	18/177	544	338	882		
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1690</b>	<b>1155</b>	<b>2845</b>	
<b>Batabari Tea Garden</b>	18/184	149	58	297		
	18/185	303	185	488		
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>695</b>	
<b>KhariarBondar</b>	18/186	218	118	336		
		<b>Grand Total:</b>	<b>6948</b>	<b>4312</b>	<b>11260</b>	

Source: Block Development Office, Matialli Development Block Census of India: 2001

**Gram Panchayat and Mouzawise Literate Population of Census- 2001**

Block: Matelli

District: Jalpaiguri

Name of G.P.	Name of Mouza	Part No.	Male	Female	Total
B I D H A N  N A G A R	NakhatiTea Garden	18/163	263	136	399
		18/164	268	155	423
		<b>Total :</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>822</b>
	SoongachhiTea Garden	18/165	175	79	254
		18/166	458	270	728
		18/167	249	81	330
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>1312</b>
	NeoraMajhiali	18/187	667	547	1214
		18/188	353	199	552
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1020</b>	<b>746</b>	<b>1766</b>
	Salbari	18/189	386	252	644
		18/190	297	140	437
		18/191	634	362	996
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1317</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>2077</b>
	Mathachulka	18/192	324	188	512
	Baradighi	18/193	339	147	486
	PaschimBatabari	18/194	284	177	461
		<b>Grand Total:</b>	<b>4697</b>	<b>2739</b>	<b>7436</b>

Source: Block Development Office, Matialli Development Block Census of India: 2001

**Gram Panchayat and Mouzawise Literate Population of Census- 2001**

Block: Matelli

District: Jalpaiguri

Name of G.P.	Name of Mouza	Part No.	Male	Female	Total
B I D H A N  N A G A R	Uttar Dhupjhora	18/178	571	340	911
		18/179	497	287	784
		<b>Total :</b>	<b>1068</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>1695</b>
	D/ Dhupjhora	18/180	555	357	912
		18/181	545	364	909
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1100</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>1821</b>
	PurbaBatabari	18/182	595	442	1037
		18/183	482	320	802
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1077</b>	<b>762</b>	<b>1839</b>
	Baradighi Tea Garden	18/195	354	165	519
		18/196	309	202	511
		18/197	425	208	633
		18/198	372	212	584
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1460</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>2247</b>
Chawafelly	18/199	91	38	129	
LowarTandu Forest	18/200	381	257	638	
	<b>Grand Total:</b>	<b>5177</b>	<b>3192</b>	<b>8369</b>	

Source: Block Development Office, Matialli Development Block Census of India: 2001

## APPENDIX- C

### LIST OF PANCHAYAT MEMBERS OF PHANSIDEWA BLOCK (AS PER 2004 & 2015 ELECTION)

#### 1. BIDHANNAGAR II GRAM PANCHAYAT

2004		2015	
BHOLA NATH MANDAL		NAVIN MANJHI (PRADHAN)	
GABRIEL TIRKEY-	ST	HAMINA KHATU	
BISWANATH PAHAN	ST	ALISHA TIRKEY	ST
SUNDAR KISKU	ST	NIREN CHANDRA SINGHA	
PAKLU MARDI	ST	JHARNA SARKAR	
MD. ALIMUDDIN		SUKLA BAKSHI	
SUBASH SINGH		MD NASIRUDDIN	
SANGETA KERKETTA	ST	SIMA DUTTA	
TERESHA HANSDA	ST	NANDI TIGGA	ST
ELESIUS LAKRA	ST	KUMODINI TOPPO	ST
PLACIDIUS TOPPO	ST	PHILIP BECK	ST
URMILA LAKRA	ST	RAKHI SINGHA	
ANITA SINGHA		ALBINUS MINJ	ST
ANAND TOPPO	ST	SUSHIL KUJUR	ST
PRISCA LAKRA EKKA	ST	RISHUKA SINGHA	
RABILAL SINGHA		ALOK EKKA	ST
BASANT TIRKEY(PS)	ST	PRITI MUNDA	ST
SURENDRANATH BARMAN (PS)		KRISHNA KANTA MANDAL (PS)	
IGNESIUS LAKRA (PS)	ST	SUSHMA KUJUR (PS)	
		MD SAHID HUSSAIN (PS)	

#### 2. GHOSHPUKUR GRAM PANCHAYAT

2004		2015	
IRNUSH BECK	ST	NARAYAN SINGHA (PRADHAN)	
JATIN ROY		SANGEETA MINJ	ST
GOLAPI KUJUR	ST	MAHANTI TOPPO	ST
KARLUSH LAKRA	ST	RAJEN KUJUR	ST
DURGA TAMANG		DIPA SAKUNTALA EKKA	ST
JASINTA TOPPO (SINGHA)	ST	PATRAS HANSDA	ST
RUPAN EKKA	ST	SURESH MURMU(UP-PRADHANST	
HARIPADA SINGHA		LIPIKA KARMAKAR	
NYATI SINGHA ROY		CALCIA XAXA	ST
RAMPRASAD NAGESIA	ST	PRIYANKA TOPNO	ST
MD. NIJAMUDDIN HUSSEIN HAQUE		SURESH GAGRAI	
RINA LOHAR TOPPNO	ST	KISHORI KERKETTA	ST
REMAND MINJ	ST	JOTIN ROY	
LAXMI KAMI	ST	RESHMA TETE	ST
PETER KUJUR	ST	BIMLA KUJUR	ST
EKHNESIA RITA	ST	BEJETA EKKA	ST
SUNIL TIRKEY	ST	ARUN KUMAR ROY	
SIPROUS MINJ	ST	MANJU SINGHA	
ROSHNA MINJ-	ST	HARINATH SINGHA	
SUJATA TIRKEY (PS)	ST	LILA LAKRA	ST
ASHOK XALXO- (PS)	ST	MUKESH KERKETTA	ST
RUBEN XALXO- (PS)	ST	ANUP KUMAR SAURIA	
		NISTAR LAKRA (PS)	ST
		BINA SAHA (PS)	
		PRITIMALA EKKA (PS)	ST

### 3. HETMURI SINGHIJHORA GRAM PANCHAYAT

2004		2015	
SONAMOTI SINGH		SCHOLASTICA TIGGA	ST
SATYAJIT ROY		JENI TIGGA	ST
EANTER KERKETTA	ST	SANTOSH MINJ	ST
BINOD BARA	ST	MANTU TOPPO	ST
KALU TIGGA	ST	PALITA BARMAN	
VICTORIA TIRKEY	ST	DIPANTA SINGHA	
ARBIN OROAN	ST	PINKEY CHIKBARAIK	ST
MOSE MURMU	ST	JIWANTI TIGGA	ST
MONOTI ROY		SEVERIUS MINJ	ST
ASHWINEE BARMAN		SNATOSH CHHETRI	
ASHMA KHATUN		MANISHA LAKRA	ST
TEJRAM BESRA	ST	GOURAV TIRKEY	ST
SARITA KACHHAP (EKKA)	ST	LAWLINA TOPPO	ST
PRAVAT TOPPO	ST	KAMAL MUNDA	ST
FRANCIS BARA	ST	MAJERA KHATUN	
RAJEN SABAR	ST	ASHOKE BENG	ST
PUSHPA KUJUR	ST	SHIRMIT BARAIK	ST
IGNETIA KUJUR	ST	DEWAN LIMBU	
MAHESH CHHETRI		JAYNAB KHATUN	
JEPHRAINSH LAKRA	ST	KABITA ROY	
FRANCIS EKKA	ST	KAILASH BARMAN	
TANISHLAS TIRKEY	ST	SHANTA LAKRA	ST
NILIMA ROY (P S)		BIRENDRA BARA	ST
DOYTO SABHOR (PS)	ST	DILIP KERKETTA	ST
MUNIRAM ROY (PS)		DHANMANTI KERKETTA (PS)	ST
		BIJOY KR EKKA (PS)	
		PUSHPA SINGHA (PS)	

### 4. JALAS NIJAMTARA GRAM PANCHAYAT

LAL BAHADUR BARMAN	
JITEN BARMAN	
BALRAJ SAHANI	
MIMALA BISWAS	
PRABIR SINGHA	
PRAFULLA SINGHA	
SHASHI SINGHA	
RENU MANDAL	
SARLA ROY	
KHOKA SINGHA	
SUSHENA NAGESIA-	ST
DHIREN SINGHA	
VINSARI OROAN-	ST
CHIHARULAL SINGHA	
PUSHPA XALXO-	ST
KALICHARAN ROY	
RUKHSANARA BEGUM	
LAXMI ROY	
PATRIC KUJUR-	ST
DIPALI ROY (P S)	
RAMEN KR. SINGHA (PS)	
MIRA ROY (PS)	

**5. PHANSIDEWA BANSGOAN KISMAT GP****2004**

DHRENDRANATH SINGHA  
 KABITA BARAI  
 KUNJAMOHAN PAL  
 KRISHANAKANTA SINGHA  
 CHAIA TIRKEY ST  
 BIMAL BISWAS  
 SUDHI NECHA ST  
 AINUL HAQUE  
 SHANTI DAS  
 SOUMEN ROY  
 HEMANTI SINGHA  
 SALEMA KHATUN  
 HARIMOHAN ROY  
 DINDAYAL SINGHA  
 KALYAN PAL (PS)  
 VIKASH CHANDRA SAHA (PS)  
 AFAZUDDIN MD. (PS)

**2015**

SAHANARA BEGUM (PRADHAN)  
 AJAY BISWAS (Up-PRADHAN)  
 ARCHANA DEBNATH  
 DIPALI ROY  
 PRATIMA SINGHA  
 SHYAMOLI DAS  
 SWARUP BARAI  
 NIROD SINGHA  
 MD. AFILUDDIN  
 MANISHA ROYCHOUDHURI  
 LOTIKA PODDAR BISWAS  
 RUPNI EKKA ST  
 NIRMAL ROY  
 SUSHANTA SINGHA  
 SWADESH SINGHA  
 AKAASH SAHA

**6. CHATHAT BANSGOAN GP****2004**

DARTHIA TIRKEY ST  
 PASHIR MD.  
 BASIR MD.  
 JAHANARA BEGUM  
 RABINDRANATH ROY  
 AJIHUL HAQUE MD.  
 JARINA KHATUN  
 MD. MAHIRUDDIN  
 MD. ALI  
 MASSAMMAT ISMETARA KHATUN  
 NAVAKUMAR SINGHA  
 CHABI SINGHA  
 SURESH CHANDRA SINGHA  
 DIVYA KUJUR ST  
 BASNATISWARI SINGHA  
 ASHEMA KHATUN (P S)  
 RAJKUMAR JAJODIA (RAJU) (PS)  
 SAM MARDI (PS) ST

**2015**

SEFALI KHALKO (PRADHAN) ST  
 SAJRUL HAQUE (UP- PRADHAN)  
 AJINA BEGUM  
 TARJAMA BEGAM  
 SHAYAMA BANU  
 MD. SAMIRUL  
 MD. JIARUL HAQUE  
 SANERA KHATUN  
 BELMOTI SINGHA  
 ROBERT MURMU ST  
 SUMAN TOPPO ST  
 GANESH SINGHA  
 SUMITRA ROY  
 MONUARA BEGUM  
 MD. SALIM  
 MD REJABUL  
 MINI BEGUM  
 MD BASIR (PS)  
 LUCKY AKHTARA BANU(PS)  
 MD. JALALUDDIN (PS)

**7. BIDHANNAGAR I GRAM PANCHAYAT****2004**

SOMARI OROAN ST  
 NAREN SINGHA  
 MD. ABDUL HAFIZ  
 MD. JAMIRUDDIN  
 RUMPA DAS  
 MANORANJAN ROY  
 KAMLESHWARI SINGHA  
 NIHARANJAN PURAKAYASTHA  
 UMESH SARKAR  
 USHA RANI SINGHA  
 DEEPAK EKKA ST  
 MD. NIJAMUDDIN  
 MAMTA SARKAR  
 THAKUR MARDI ST  
 BISTU INDWAR ST

**2015**

ANJALI SINGHA  
 KESTOLAL SINGHA  
 MANIKA HANSDA ST  
 SALEHA KHATUN  
 GUNANANDA SINGHA  
 TULTULI SARKAR  
 MAHAMUDA BANU  
 MD. SHUKUE SEKH  
 PRATIMA SARKAR  
 SABITA SINGHA ROY  
 PIJUSH SINGH  
 SANJIB PAHAN  
 SUCHITRA GANESH PAUL  
 MD MINAJUDDIN  
 BAIJAN HEMBROM ST

KUSHAL TIRU	ST	KURNIKA OROAN	ST
URMILA MINJ	ST	ANUP KUMAR KINDO	ST
BANANT TRIKEY (PS)	ST	MARANUSH MINJ	ST
JAYANTI MONDAL (PS)		SUSHIL TOPPO	ST
ZAHEDA KHATUN (PS)		RANU PAUL (PS)	
		BISWAJIT NANDI (PS)	
		MAMLA KUJUR (PS)	ST

## LIST OF PANCHAYAT MEMBERS OF MATELLI BLOCK (2015 ELECTION)

### MATIALI GRAM PANCHAYAT

Sl no.	Name of the member	Name & No. of Constituency	Elected or ex-officio
1	Anjana Tamang	Matiali Hat –I/1	Elected
2	Rabi Mangar	Matiali Hat –II/2	Elected
3	Indira Mangar	Matiali Hat –III/3	Elected
4	Anjila Marandi	Matiali Hat –IV/4	Elected
5	Bhanubhakta Sharma	Matiali Hat –V/5	Elected
6	Amrita Munda	Matiali Hat –VI/6	Elected
7	Renu Naik	Matiali Hat –VII/7	Elected
8	Rohit Barhi	Matiali Hat –VIII/8	Elected
9	Anjana Toppo	Matiali Hat –IX/9	Elected
10	Sashikala Lakra	Matiali Hat –X/10	Elected
11	Kiran Kachhua	Matiali Hat –XI/11	Elected
12	Najir Khan	Matiali Hat –XII/12	Elected
13	Aimit Pradhan	Matiali Hat –XIII/13	Elected
14	Dolma Tamang	Matiali Hat –XIV/14	Elected
15	July Naik	Matiali Hat –XV/15	Elected
16	Sabir Oroan	Matiali Hat –XVI/16	Elected
etc	Manajina Bhujel		Ex-officio
etc	Sudarsan Kujur		Ex-officio
etc	Suchita Bhagwar		Ex-officio

### INDONG MATIALI GRAM PANCHAYAT

Sl no.	Name of the member	Name & No. of Constituency	Elected or ex-officio
1	Nilima Oroan	Indong Matiali Hat –I/1	Elected
2	Asrita Munda	Indong Matiali Hat –II/2	Elected
3	Bali Munda	Indong Matiali Hat –III/3	Elected
4	Punam Rajput	Indong Matiali Hat –IV/4	Elected
5	Sanicharwa Oroan	Indong Matiali Hat –V/5	Elected
6	Sabita Kalandi	Indong Matiali Hat –VI/6	Elected
7	Tarun Mahali	Indong Matiali Hat –VII/7	Elected
8	Chameli Tirkey	Indong Matiali Hat –VIII/8	Elected
9	Swaraj Das	Indong Matiali Hat –IX/9	Elected

10	Subhra Mahato	Indong Matiali Hat –X/10	Elected
11	Subhendu Dutta	Indong Matiali Hat –XI/11	Elected
12	Mani Roy	Indong Matiali Hat –XII/12	Elected
13	Geeta Majhi	Indong Matiali Hat – XIII/13	Elected
14	Binu Oroan	Indong Matiali Hat – XIV/14	Elected
15	Bitu Naik	Indong Matiali Hat –XV/15	Elected
16	Etowa Bhokta	Indong Matiali Hat – XVI/16	Elected
17	Sinu Munda	Indong Matiali Hat – XVII/17	Elected
18	Indradeo Oroan	Indong Matiali Hat – XVIII/18	Elected
etc	Snowmita Kalandi		Ex-officio
etc	Mustak Mohamad		Ex-officio
etc	Bishnath Baraik		Ex-officio

#### **MATIALI BATABARI-I GRAM PANCHAYAT**

Sl no.	Name of the member	Name & No. of Constituency	Elected or ex-officio
1	Jaya Kachuwa	Matiali Batabari-1I/1	Elected
2	Sanicharowa Mahali	Matiali Batabari-1II/2	Elected
3	Rita Lakra	Matiali Batabari-1III/3	Elected
4	Sarita Oroan	Matiali Batabari-1IV/4	Elected
5	Sujit Kharia	Matiali Batabari-1V/5	Elected
6	Birpesh Kujur	Matiali Batabari-1VI/6	Elected
7	Chari Toppo	Matiali Batabari-1VII/7	Elected
8	Shampa Kharia	Matiali Batabari-1VIII/8	Elected
9	Soma Majumdar	Matiali Batabari-1IX/9	Elected
10	Bijli Bhowmik	Matiali Batabari-1X/10	Elected
11	Dipak Bhujel	Matiali Batabari-1XI/11	Elected
12	Chenima Ya Lama	Matiali Batabari-1XII/12	Elected
13	Anil Murmu	Matiali Batabari-1XIII/13	Elected
14	Babli Barman	Matiali Batabari-1XIV/14	Elected
15	Ashish Kundu	Matiali Batabari-1XV/15	Elected
16	Mina Mijar	Matiali Batabari-1XVI/16	Elected
17	Monoj Roy	Matiali Batabari-1XVII/17	Elected
18	Gargi Mahali	Matiali Batabari-1XVIII/18	Elected
19	Binod Oroan	Matiali Batabari-1XIX/19	Elected
20	Avtar Lama	Matiali Batabari-1XX/20	Elected
etc	Sangita Bhengra		Ex-officio
etc	Sudha Ray Kujur		Ex-officio
etc	Nabakanta Roy		Ex-officio

**BIDHAN NAGAR GRAM PANCHAYAT**

Sl no.	Name of the member	Name & No. of Constituency	Elected or ex-officio
1	Sukra Munda	Bidhan Nagar I/1	Elected
2	Binod Mardi	Bidhan Nagar II/2	Elected
3	Rinku Sabar	Bidhan Nagar III/3	Elected
4	Khushboo Porja	Bidhan Nagar IV/4	Elected
5	Putul Oroan	Bidhan Nagar V/5	Elected
6	Sudipta Sutradhar	Bidhan Nagar VI/6	Elected
7	Niten Roy	Bidhan Nagar VII/7	Elected
8	Lufta Begam	Bidhan Nagar VIII/8	Elected
9	Sunny Deol Oroan	Bidhan Nagar IX/9	Elected
10	Kabita Roy Adhikari	Bidhan Nagar X/10	Elected
11	Abdul Chhattar	Bidhan Nagar XI/11	Elected
12	Dulal Oroan	Bidhan Nagar XII/12	Elected
13	Hiremba Barman	Bidhan Nagar XIII/13	Elected
14	Ranjit Oroan	Bidhan Nagar XIV/14	Elected
etc	Parwati Mahali		Ex-officio
etc	Safiruddin Ahmed		Ex-officio
etc	Jyotsna Begum		Ex-officio

**MATIALI BATABARI-II GRAM PANCHAYAT**

Sl no.	Name of the member	Name & No. of Constituency	Elected or ex-officio
1	Manika Begum	Bidhan Nagar I/1	Elected
2	Anjuma Begum	Bidhan Nagar II/2	Elected
3	Mampi Roy	Bidhan Nagar III/3	Elected
4	Sabana Eazmin	Bidhan Nagar IV/4	Elected
5	Fulmani Oroan	Bidhan Nagar V/5	Elected
6	Abdar Rahman	Bidhan Nagar VI/6	Elected
7	Dipali Roy	Bidhan Nagar VII/7	Elected
8	Lilima Kharia	Bidhan Nagar VIII/8	Elected
9	Parashram Mahali	Bidhan Nagar IX/9	Elected
10	Jolen Barla	Bidhan Nagar X/10	Elected
11	Sushil Hembrom	Bidhan Nagar XI/11	Elected
12	Debate Oroan	Bidhan Nagar XII/12	Elected
13	Dhiran Kora	Bidhan Nagar XIII/13	Elected
etc	Hossain Habibul Hasan		Ex-officio
etc	Bipul Roy		Ex-officio
etc	Dibas Barua		Ex-officio

## APPENDIX-D QUESTIONNAIRE-CUM-SCHEDULE

### To Interview persons in the following categories

- A. Elected tribal members (men and women) to all democratic bodies
- B. Other local party workers
- C. Leaders of the opposition parties
- D. Common villagers/voters
- E. Case study of local movements/agitation

### A. Women Panchayat Leaders – Elected Members

### B. Background Information/Identity of the Informant

- a.) Name.....
- b.) Residence.....
- c.) Age.....
- b) Religion.....
- e) Educational Qualification.....
- f) Ethnicity.....
- g) Occupation.....
- h) Land owned.....
- i) Income.....
- j) Composition of the family .....
- k) No. of children studying (classes).....
- l) No. of children dropped out (classes).....
- .....

### B. Party Related Information

- a) To which Party you are associated with.....
- b) For how long.....
- c) When and how did you get in touch with the party?
- d) How did you get the idea of becoming Panchayat Representative (PR).....
- e) Was it voluntary or was there any kind of pressure on you?
- f) What were your worries before becoming Panchayat Representative?.....
- g) How did you campaign for election?
- h) How did your party, family members, community members help you during the campaign?
- i) What are the difficulties you had to face during campaign?
- j) How did you counter the arguments of the rival candidates?
- k) What did you say to the voters to convince them?
- l) What was the margin of your victory?
- m) Which communities voted for you and which didn't?
- n) How did you feel after the victory?
- o) What kind of orientation programmes have you undergone?
- p) What do you think are the duties and responsibilities of a PR?

- q) Is any other member of the family is associated with the party/different party.....
- r) Did your rival candidate belong to your community?
- s) If not, which community did he/she belong to?
- t) Do you think all the members of your fellow community voted for you? Yes/No
- u) If, no, what could be the reasons?
- v) Do you think the party based panchayat election has affected the community solidarity? Yes/No
- w) If yes, how?
- x) Do you think that political rivalry within the community has affected the intra-community solidarity?
- y) If yes, how?
- z) What are the activities you do as member of the panchayat? [ In the office and outside]
- aa) Give an outline of your daily routine.
- bb) What the organizational activities you have to do? [During election and in normal times]
- cc) Whether accompanied by the other family members while coming to an office/meeting [particularly in late hours and outside the office].....
- dd) Is there any interference from family in decision making at the panchayat? Yes/No.....
- ee) If yes, how?
- ff) Are you able to express your opinion/ideas during meetings?.....
- gg) Do you think that panchayat bodies are male dominated?
- hh) What kind of influence the local party/leader exerts on the panchayat and on the panchayat members?
- ii) Do you think that the panchayat women members are capable of exerting their idea?
- jj) What in your opinion are the benefits of reservation for women in panchayat bodies?
- kk) How do you assess your performance vis-à-vis the performance of other women members?
- ll) How did the family members support you after you became a PR?.....
- mm) Do you think that people in the community look at you with respect.....
- nn) What are the specific benefits you have brought to your village/community?
- oo) Are you aware of any criticism against you? Yes/No
- pp) If yes, what are they?
- qq) Do you think you have helped your family by being a PR? How?
- rr) Do you think that your role and position in the family have changed after you became a PR? How?
- ss) Would you be interested to stand in the next election too?
- tt) Why would you be interested?

### **C. Other local party workers**

Identify the local level women leaders and know about

- a) the nature of their political activities
- b) the nature of their association with the frontal organization
- c) What motivates them to work for the party?
- d) the nature of benefits they have drawn by working for the party
- e) their assessment of the performance of the women members of the panchayat and other bodies
- f) How do they identify the problems of political participation of women?
- g) How do they justify women's participation in politics?

### **D. Leaders of the opposition parties**

- a) Identify the tribal women leaders who are locally active in the opposition parties.
- b) Ascertain their nature of political participation
- c) Identify the factors that motivate them to work for the party
- d) What do they think of the women tribal leaders of the ruling party?
- e) What kind of adjustments they have to make in their family life?
- f) How are they looked at by the fellow community members?
- g) Whether their political participation has elevated their status in the society.

### **E. Common villagers/voters**

- a) How many women leaders are there in the village/constituency?
- b) Name them, their party background.
- c) Do they belong to your community/village/other village?
- d) Whom did you vote? Why?
- e) How is she as a person?
- f) How is she as a leader?
- g) How is she doing as a panchayat member/ pradhan etc.?
- h) How do you support of the idea of women's participation in politics?
- i) Do you think that the women members are better/same/worse compared to the male members?
- j) Justify your opinion.

### **Case study of local movements/agitation**



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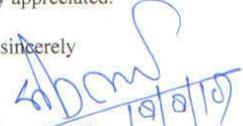
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# **TRIBAL WOMEN IN TEA PLANTATION: A PROCESS OF EMPOWERMENT IN TERAI REGION OF NORTH BENGAL**

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**Assistant Professor in Political Science**  
**Siliguri Mahila Mahavidyalaya**

## **ABSTRACT**

An even predisposition amongst sexes is a primary requisite for development of strong, effective and vibrant political set-up. In Indian scenario, participation of women in political and sociological decision making warrants their active participation at the grass root level. It is in this context that this paper makes an attempt to analyse the role of women in panchayats. There has to be a serious paradigm shift in the social thought process vis-à-vis women and their role in a broader social and political perspective. Though there are many encouraging trends, there is still enormous scope to further strengthen women's role and make them realize their true potential.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Women's empowerment means privilege of women to have and enjoy power over their lives both as individuals and members of social system. The empowerment process embraces several mutually reinforcing components but begins with and supported by economic and political independence. In defining the empowerment of women, factors such as role in the decision-making power in the family and community, their educational status, their participation in social and political activities, their position in various professions play an important role. The methodology to women's empowerment should be wide-ranging and incorporated in nature. The Constitution has passed the 73rd Amendment Act in order to revise the existing Panchayati raj Institutions with its structural and functional inadequate. This Act makes it on the part the states to reserve a minimum of 33, 1/3 % of seats to women in the panchayat so as to involve them actively in the decision making process. The statutory reservation of seats for women in Panchayatraj bodies has provided an opportunity for their formal involvement in the development and political process at the grass root level there by enabling them to influence the decision making process in local government.

Since Independence India has been ensuing the path of popular democracy and it can claim of being the leading democracy in the world, population wise. Although lopsided towards liberal

democracy there has never been any thoughtful challenge to the democratic order because the democratic values are powerfully entrenched in the Indian society and culture. In decentralization the principle of subsidiarity often is entreated. It holds that the lowest or least centralized authority which is capable of addressing an issue effectively should do so. According to one definition: "Decentralization, or decentralizing governance, refers to the restructuring or reorganization of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between organisations of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the power, right and capabilities of sub-national levels."

India is a vast population and a conglomeration of diverse cultural traditions, and the lifeline of the unity and prosperity of the country is its democratic tradition that acknowledges diversity as an asset rather than a problem. Free India already has a 58-year old democratic tradition and the challenge before the nation is further consolidation of the democratic tradition. For realizing this objective systemic and constitutional arrangements have been made to ensure an all-round participation of its people and promote responsible and active citizenship. Making the average people conscious of their democratic rights and responsibilities is the only means to strengthening the democratic foundation of Indian society.

The prime objective behind the constitution of the Local Self Governments (LSGs) is to strengthen the foundations of a democratic system by ensuring the participation of the otherwise neglected and backward sections (such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the women) of the society in the running of these bodies. While participating in these local bodies the average citizens of a locality become aware of their rights and responsibilities and learn to articulate their demands and grievances and thus gradually become active, empowered and conscious agents of the democratic social order and bearers of democratic values. By actively participating in the implementation of the developmental programmes the people can effectively overcome the bureaucratic bottlenecks and can maximize the benefits of the programmes. People in the local communities, irrespective of their class, caste or religion learn to work together on the local bodies and develop a sense of fraternity. The average citizens elect the representatives of their choice; they can keep vigilance on the performance of the elected representatives, and can put forward their suggestions in tapping the local resources in matters of development.

The panchayats in West Bengal are unique in many respects. The foremost of them is the holding of regular elections to the three-tier panchayats on party lines since 1978. The gram panchayat members live very close to the people in comparison to the other functionaries in development sector. In West Bengal, on an average, a gram panchayat consists of 10 to 20 villages (in some cases there are exceptions also) with the population of 10 to 20 thousand. A gram panchayat member broadly has to look after 1000 people in his or her constituency.

Decentralization Commission and the government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 further strengthened the urban local institutions both in terms of functions as well as their popular base. Generally, there are four types of urban local bodies in India namely Municipal Corporations, Municipal Committees, Notified Area Committees and Cantonment Boards. For rural areas, the two institutions that took shape in stages were the District Board and the Village Panchayat.

The village panchayat was another institution with a long history in rural India, with reference to the tradition of panchayats in ancient 'village republics'. the role of these panchayats was mainly to settle disputes, where 'caste panchayats' existed quite visibly. Decentralization Commission Report was more emphatic '...it is most desirable, alike in the interests of decentralization and in order to associate the people with local tasks of administration that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop Village Panchayats for the administration of local village affairs.' Many provinces introduced village panchayats with limited functions and coverage. The institution got willing support from the leaders of the freedom movement and became an integral part of Gandhian ideology.

In 1931 itself, Gandhiji, emphasized 'that the reconstruction and development of the Indian nation would not be possible without full participation of women as equal partners.' Jain in his edited book *Decentralization and Local Governance* opines that since we came into our own in 1947, we have buried Gandhiji's advice five fathoms deep. Conditions have not been created in over the past fifty years either for full participation of women or for them to be equal partners. (Pp. 1)

The varied issues that influence proper and effective participation of women at the grass roots levels are sought to be analysed and put into proper perspective in this chapter. It is heartening to

note that while there were quite a substantial percentage of women who caved into pressure from local political satraps, there is an equal number of women who stuck their neck out on their own to be a part of the political process. These women bear testimony to the fact that there is an inherent (though largely subdued) desire amongst the women who make a meaningful social impact through effective participation at the grass root political levels.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment of 1993 has given local government a constitutional status introducing new institutions into the working of Indian democracy through several significant innovations, such as reservations of seats for marginal groups, women, Dalits, and Adivasis; creation of a decentralized planning mechanism; establishment of state election commissions to oversee local elections and state finance commissions to prepare a blueprint for sharing of state revenues; and institutionalization of the village assembly (*gram sabha*).

In its effort to be more participatory and people oriented Indian democracy has made an elaborate arrangement to facilitate participation of the hitherto excluded populations, the weaker sections like the SCs, STs and women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution (1992) have been a landmark in this direction. Indian Constitution now makes it mandatory to hold the regular election to the bodies of local self-government and reserve at least 33 per cent of the total seats for the women in all bodies.

The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be the scheduled Tribes (STs) for the purposes of this Constitution". In Article 342, the procedure to be followed for specification of a scheduled tribe is prescribed. However, it does not contain the criterion for the specification of any community as scheduled tribe. The Scheduled tribe community live in cloistered, exclusive, remote and inhospitable areas such as hills and forests. Their livelihood is based on primitive agriculture, a low-value closed economy with a low level of technology that leads to their poverty. They have low levels of literacy and health.

### **Tribes of North Bengal:**

There are about 700 Scheduled Tribe communities in India with a population of nearly 83 million, or 8.2 percent of the total population. In West Bengal tribal population constitute 4.5 million and in six districts of North Bengal tribal population number 1.5 million.

In North Bengal, there is more than 14.5 lakh tribal population, of which 49.6 per cent are women. Tribal population in North Bengal constitutes 33 per cent of the total tribal population in the State. Among the North Bengal districts tribal population in Cooch Behar is 14246, which is the smallest in a single district, whereas Jalpaiguri has the largest size of tribal population at 64,1688. Tribal population in Cooch Behar constitutes only 0.32 per cent of the total population in the district, but in Jalpaiguri district the percentage share of tribal population to total population is 14.56. Among other districts the percentage share of tribal population to total population is 5.51 in South Dinajpur, 5.15 in Malda, 4.60 in Darjeeling, and 2.84 in North Dinajpur.

**Table 1: Percent wise ST population in West Bengal**

<b>Sl.no.</b>	<b>Scheduled Tribe</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of the total ST population</b>
1.	Santal	2,280, 540	51.8
2.	Oraon	617,138	14.0
3.	Munda	341,542	7.8
4.	Bhumij	336,436	7.6
5.	Kora	142,789	3.2
6.	Lodha	84,966	1.9
7.	Mahali	76,102	1.7
8.	Bhutia	60,091	1.4
9.	Bedia	55,979	1.3
10.	Sa bar	43,599	1

	Total	40,39,192	100.00%
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Source: Census of India, 2001

From the above table, it is clearly shown that Santal, Oraon, Munda, Bhumij, Kora, Lodha, Mahalli, Bhutia, Bedia and Sabar concentration in the state of West Bengal are 51.8 per cent, 14.0 per cent, 7.8 per cent, 7.6 per cent, 3.2 per cent, 1.9 per cent, 1.7 per cent 1.4 per cent, 1.3 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. The over all sex ratio of the ST population in West Bengal is 982 which is higher than their national average of 987. The child sex ratio among them is 981 and this is much 111 better (0 - 6 years) as compared to the national average of 973 among the STs according to 2001 Census. (see Table1).

**Table 2: Tribal population in West Bengal and North Bengal in 2001 and 2011**

	2001			2011		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
West Bengal	440,6794	2223924	2182870	5,296,953	2,649,974	2,646,979
%		50.47%	49.53%			
North Bengal	145,4330	733064	721266	731,733	365,239	366,494
%		50.40%	49.60%			
Percentage of NB ST pop. to State ST pop.	33.00%	32.96%	33.04%	13.81%	13.78%	13.84%

Source: Census of India, 2001, 2011

The above table (2) shows that the tribal population according the Census 2011, comprise of 13.81 per cent of the total West Bengal population. Substantial part of this resides in North Bengal primarily employed as tea garden workers and in various agricultural activities. Since my area of work is in North Bengal, it provides a huge scope for the effect of various government initiatives to enhance this tribal population which are potential beneficiaries of all government schemes. Percentage of ST population is substantially higher in Jalpaiguri district when compared with other districts. This is largely because of the various tea gardens which are scattered across the district, which primarily boast of tribal population as the predominant working force (see Table 3) north Bengal thus provides for the fertile ground for the analysis of impact of socio-political measures primarily aimed towards empowerment of tribal population.

**Table 3: Tribal population in North Bengal districts according to 2001 and 2011 Census**

State/ District	ST Population						% of ST Population to District total pop.		
	2001			2011			Total	Male	Female
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female			
Cooch Behar	14246	7425	6821	4,654	2,585	2,069	0.32	0.33	0.31
Jalpaiguri	641688	324250	317438	5,740	2,902	2,838	14.56	14.58	14.54
Darjeeling	204167	102287	101880	397,389	197,251	200,138	4.63	4.60	4.67
Uttar Dinajpur	124865	63123	61742	3,441	1,736	1,705	2.83	2.84	2.83
DakshinDinajpur	242317	122442	119875	6,525	3,237	3,288	5.50	5.51	5.49
Malda	227047	113537	113510	3,13,984	1,57,528	1,56,456	5.15	5.11	5.20

Source: Census of India, 2001& 2011.

**Table 4: Sex Ratio: Tribe and Non-Tribe Compared (2001, 2011)**

State / District	Total Population				Tribal Population	
	Total		0-6 group		Total	0-6 group
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2001
India	933	943	927	919	978	973
West Bengal	934	950	960	956	982	981
Darjeeling	937	970	962	953	996	1001
Jalpaiguri	942	953	969	955	979	991
Kooch Behar	949	942	964	948	919	898
U. Dinajpur	938	939	965	953	978	973
D. Dinajpur	951	956	966	957	979	981
Malda	948	944	964	950	1000	985

Source: Census of India, 2001, 2011

## **Empowerment Issues, Problems and Effectiveness**

The participation of tribal women in the political process, especially in North Bengal has grown manifold. This has much to do with reservation of seats for tribal women, right from the *panchayats* to *Lok Sabha* elections. Under these conditions the political parties are legitimately bound to appoint tribal women as their candidate for elections ranging from the basic *panchayat* levels up to election of highest echelons of power that is the *Lok Sabha*. During the course of my numerous interactions with tribal women who have been elected under the *panchayat* scheme of things or *Lok Sabha*, it has primarily stood out that amongst the majority of these tribal women representatives, most of them continue to be just a shield. It is predominantly the menfolk who still govern the decision making process, though the elected representatives may be amongst the womenfolk of tribal population. A vast majority of these tribal women thrown into the political field have little say as far as political decision making is concerned.

Thus the majority of these tribal womenfolk endured with carrying out political agendas principally meant for betterment of the tribal women, are not able contribute meaningfully towards the very basic reason of election to these posts. In majority of cases, they still remain just a means of exploitation by the political parties whereby their election to political positions are just a face. Upon their election into these importance decision making political bodies, they are not able to assert their political wherewithal in a positive manner. Thereby rendering the menfolk, be it their husband or father, to undertake and enjoy the privilege of political power.

Despite reservation for women, effective participation in *panchayat raj* institutions. This is particularly true amongst the tribal belt in *Terai* where the female elected representatives continue to be just a tool in the hands of the political parties. Jha (2004) opines that despite reservation for women, effective participation in *panchayati raj institutions* have failed due to misuse and manipulation by local power brokers. Ignorance of women about their rights and procedures and about their potential and responsibilities have kept them far behind men in local bodies. Jha sincerely believes that mere increase in number of reserved seats for women in local bodies is likely to increase participation of women unless structural changes are brought about and sincere effort is made to educate women and the power structures existing in rural areas are neutralized, nothing can be achieved.

There are myriads of tribal women who bear testimony to the fact that meaningful and effective participation of tribal women in the process of political decision making is not totally a myth. There remain quite a substantial percentage of tribal women who have risen to positions of political power at the grass root level represented by the *panchayats*. Many amongst them have started their political journey riding upon the fact that the Constitution guarantees reservations for the tribal women in certain seats, right from the grass root *panchayat* levels up to the *lok sabha*. Many of these avenues were propelled to political limelight because of these reservations. While it still remains a fact that it is the men who control the strings of these tribal women candidates and these women are often rendered defunct, there is quite an appreciable percentage of these women who have successfully tried to assert their own free will and hold their ground.

In a predominantly male dominated society like ours, legislations aimed towards empowerment of women of this underprivileged class of society, though a right step forward, often failed to get the desired result. It however needs to be appreciated that under the aiges of this legislations several women are by force thrown into the political spectrum of our society. Quite an appreciable number of women, having been elected as political representatives do manage to successfully negotiate the tricky path of the male dominated society. These women though having started off as an offshoot of socio-economic reservations, have over a period of time managed to insulate themselves from the political designs of the political parties, of which they are representatives. It is heartening to note that many amongst these groups of women have successfully managed to put agendas of social importance to the forefront. These women have managed to successfully transgress the political divide at their place of work and contribute to the wholesome development of their immediate society, many a times overcoming male prejudices.

Empowerment of women of the fringe social groups still remains a challenge, as majority of tribal women continue to be exploited by political parties for furtherance of electoral gains. True empowerment of these women, even after sixty years of independent still largely remains a myth. Positivity's that can be drawn from actions such as reservations for tribal women right at the grass root level, though insufficient, are still enough to substantiate this socio-economic

initiative. Many of these elected tribal women folk have over the course of time managed to stand their own authority. It is welcome to note that women, who are, a product of measures under taken to have gender equality, have managed to assert their political agendas. Two of the examples quoted by me bear testimony to the fact that empowering women of the downtrodden society, often has quite a positive social impact.

While there has been quite a substantial progress towards empowerment of women belonging to the downtrodden class of society, the fact that much more needs to be done cannot be over emphasized. Constitution and the numerous positive amendments therein have been directed towards grating and securing political and decision-making platforms for the women folk of the underprivileged section of the society. Though there is heartening example of women from this section of society who have come forward and managed to have meaningful contributions at the grass root level of democracy, the percentage of such women still remains miniscule.

Majority of women, though being elected representative thereby bestowed with all the decision-making powers, still eventually end up being just ornamental posts. Under majority of conditions, Constitutional guarantee towards protecting and nurturing the women power at grass-root levels is mis-utilised. In vast majority of cases these women are just propped up as candidates for local body elections, but the actual power is often with the menfolk of the family. Women thus end up being in important positions of decision-making at the grass-root levels just for the namesake. Majority of political parties often try to get around the constitutionally laid down guidelines for empowering women by electing women candidates just to fulfill constitutional obligations. The real power amongst the majority of these posts is wielded by either the political parties or by the male members of family the elected women representative. Lack of education amongst the women of this section primarily contributes to this plight. It thus suffices to surmise that the only means to guarantee that true women empowerment at the grass-root levels will always remain a myth, unless and until backed up by a strong drive to educate these women, thereby making them conscious towards their right. Constitutional reservations, though a welcome step forward, are rendered futile without an educated and socially conscious women part of the society.

The primary emphasis thus needs to be towards providing with compulsory and meaningful education to women. vast majority of this socially backward section of society in North Bengali is primarily employed as tea garden laborers. The remote and often socially ostracized nature of tea gardens makes it extremely difficult and challenging to reach educational, social and health related government programmes to infiltrate into these societies. Furthermore, women of these societies often bear the brunt of socio-economic constrains, thereby getting deprive of basic human rights like education and health. Thus, any initiative, though constitutionally guaranteed for upliftment of these tribal women, will continue to meet with extremely limited success, unless backed up with means to further the educational status of these women.

Endeavors principally aimed at educational empowerment of women of this section of the society have definitely to be initiated at the grass root levels. It is a fact that majority of tribal population in North Bengal earn their living as employees in the tea garden industry. Thus, initiative aimed at proving education to these tribal women cannot bear fruit if the tea gardens are neglected. While there have been progress in the form of setting up of primary schools within the tea garden premises in quite a number of tea gardens, social constrains still result in quite a substantial percentage of school dropouts within the girl populations. A multipronged approach encompassing the socio-economic plethora is definitely the need of the hour. Various social schemes, mainly under the edges of local self-government bodies have to be initiated to counter the social attitude of neglect of girl child. It is primarily engrained in the Indian social make up to celebrate and further the cause of a boy child. It remains a fact that even amongst the higher social structures of human society in India, birth of a male child still remains an occasion of rejoicement.

Though the tribal society at large does not have this stigma attached to the girl child, social obligations are the forerunner, which thus play an important part in deprivation of educational facilities to the girl child. Majority of tribal families employed as tea garden workers have both the husband and wife employed in tea garden. Upon birth of their children a girl child is always bestowed with the responsibility of looking after her siblings and the family at large during the period of absence of the parents. This contributes to the substantial number of school drop outs amongst the girls in tea gardens. Deprived of education, a substantial majority of these girls are left with no other choice than to get themselves tied in nuptial bond at the earliest. And this

vicious cycle continues through ages. Lack of education renders these women vulnerable to the whims and fancies of menfolk and political parties. Thus reforms aimed at political empowerment of these tribal women are often rendered futile as majority of this tribal women political representatives end up as just a face, the actual power wielded by the men and political parties.

Government initiatives should primarily target upon social awareness towards the benefits of an educated girl for the society at large. In the society like the tribal society which can rightfully boast of far less sex based discrimination, it should not be a very cumbersome task. Sincere endeavors by government in conjunction with other agencies will definitely help to tied over these socio-economic hurdles. Once the educational upliftment of the tribal girl child is ensured, true political empowerment of tribal women can definitely be attained. This will go a long way towards empowerment of women at the grass root levels. It is heartening to note that even under the present scenario, where there are huge constrains, educated tribal women when endured with political and decision making power have done exceeding well. They have often been able to transgress political divides and have successfully worked towards betterment of their fellow women and the society at large.

In my interaction with multitude of such educated tribal elected tribal women representatives, numerous praiseworthy examples have come to the fore. There however remain quite a substantial percentage of tribal women, who though bestowed with political powers, could contribute extremely little towards furtherance of the cause of tribal women. Lack of education was a principle hindrance, which laid them vulnerable to maneuvers by the men and political parties at large, whose principle aims are just to further their political cause. Bereft educational empowerment of tribal women, political empowerment is just a mirage.

While it cannot be contended that education amongst tribal women has definitely been on an upswing, after more than sixty years of independence much more was expected. The Constitutional makers and subsequent amendments have tried to inculcate tribal women into the democratic decision-making process. But the ground reality is far from satisfactory. Abysmal educational standards amongst the majority of tribal women population still remains a huge

hindrance towards true appreciation of various endeavors aimed at upliftment of the tribal women. It is thus of paramount importance to provide basic and meaningful education to tribal women, whereby they can do true justice to their elected posts as tribal women representatives at the grass root level.

It is rampant amongst the menfolk of the tribal population to indulge in alcohol abuse. Use of alcohol, in their crudest form, is a part of social structure of a tribal society. It thus compounds into an economic constrains for these tribal population. The role of the tribal women employed as a tea garden worker is thus manifold. On the one hand they have to actively get involved in overcoming problems arising out of unbridled liquor consumption by the menfolk of the society, extending up to striking a balance between their economic obligations as tea garden workers and trying to provide socio-economic security for their families.

Granting of reservations for these women, principally aimed at improvement of their socio-economic status has huge social hurdles. My interaction with quite a substantial percentage of these tribal women has repeatedly drawn me to conclude that educational empowerment of these tribal women is of paramount importance. An educated tribal woman can go a long way to positively break down regressive social norms principally aimed at depriving the women, the right to education.

Financial constraints are huge hindrance towards proper functioning and implementation of various government schemes at the grass root levels. Though the intentions of many elected tribal representatives at the *panchayat* level may be very benevolent, lack of financial resources is often a major obstacle. Devolution of funds, though a constitutional responsibility of the state government, often not adhered to proper percolation of funds primarily aimed at implementation of various developmental projects at the grass root level is a must for proper political empowerment of government bodies at the *panchayati raj* institutions. Availability of funds coupled with improved educational levels will definitely go a long way to strengthen grass root democratic institutions. These two primary issues that is education of the fringe tribal women population and providence of financial funds necessary for developmental activities at the grass

root levels have to be addressed seriously. Though there has been quite a substantial progress on these two fronts, much more still needs to be done.

My numerous interaction with various successful tribal women at the grass root level have led me to conclude that education definitely contributes towards wholesome development of family at large, whereby they can become instrumental in successful implementation of various health related schemes, particularly relating to proper scientific care of pregnant women and immunization of the young children. If the vast majority of women of this society are provided with proper and meaningful education, numerous health related issues prevalent in the society can be successfully and positively tackled. Another big menace in the form of alcohol abuse can definitely be subjugated by an educated and socially aware women population.

Many of the tribal women in *terai* regions of North Bengal bear testimony to the fact that educated women have often formed social groups to successfully counter the issue of alcohol. Thus the advantages of an educated and socially aware women population are manifold, spanning across various socio-economic domains, to positively mould the society at large.

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# Interrogating the Status of Tribal Women in Tea Plantation System: a case of Marginalisation or Empowerment!

Renuca Rajni Beck

## Introduction

There are about 700 Scheduled Tribe communities in India with a population of nearly 83 million, or 8.2 percent of the total population. In West Bengal tribal population constitute 4.5 million and in six districts of North Bengal tribal population number 1.5 million.

Going by their socio-economic-political standing the tribal population is described with adjectives like the 'marginal', 'exploited', 'most backward' 'subaltern', 'deprived' section of Indian society that is still waiting to be 'developed' and integrated into the 'mainstream'. Although not a homogenous and organized force tribal communities express their anger and frustration in sporadic protest movements asserting their rights for autonomy and even for independence. The state and organs of civil society, on the other hand, want more and more development for the tribal communities for the sake of 'peace', 'amity' and national integration.

There is little doubt that the development efforts in the post-independence period have met only with partial success. The policy of protective discrimination in the form of reservation in education and jobs, the ITDP, the provision of devolution in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules have contributed to the creation of a neo-elite among the tribal population and to the creation of new internal divisions, while little has been done to free the large majority of the tribal population from the wretched condition.

Against such a backdrop I would attempt to take a look at the Nehruvian policy of tribal development, which was constructed in his foreword to Verrier Elwin's *A Philosophy of NEFA* (1958), and examine the areas of deviation from the 'PanchSheel' that he laid down for tribal development. Drawing illustrations from tribal development experience in West Bengal (and particularly in North Bengal) I would explore some areas of unfulfilled dreams of the architect of modern democratic India. The present paper also locates the *adivasis* of North Bengal against the backdrop of their migration history, their struggle for livelihood, their control over resources, material and human, the history of

solidarity movement – all in the wider context of the liberal market and the state which work hand in gloves to integrate and subordinate the 'fringe-people' into the order. The paper argues that the organs of 'bio-power' (the state and market) work to achieve the integration function for the liberal-democratic order but fail to contain the 'subaltern' forces in search of a greater space within the existing politico-economic frame in order to redefine their rights and self.

It is not difficult to notice that in living in the ecological, economic, social, political, demographic and cultural setup of North Bengal the tribals are faced with the problem of retaining their distinctive cultural identities, while, at the same time, trying to be a part of one common tribal identity. While dealing with the question of culture and identity of the tribes of North Bengal one can examine the concepts of 'melting pot' and 'beyond melting pot'.

Sandwiched in the power-struggle between the Nepalese of Darjeeling striving for a separate state of Gorkhaland and the mainstream political forces which are out to integrate the marginalised into the 'order' and oppose any division of the state, nearly one million *adivasis* in the Dooars and Terai of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts, who are highly dissatisfied with the treatment received from the liberal-democratic order and its organs, are now engaged in a tribal solidarity movement under the banner of the ABAVP with the objective of finding their own identity and political right over a territory following the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The movement promises formation of a civil society of the otherwise voiceless *adivasis* of the region in ethnic line, which strives to free the community from the control of the organs of the mainstream political parties, although maintaining the solidarity and achieving its political goal might prove to be very difficult in the face of the integrationist efforts and strategies of the systemic forces.

In its effort to be more participatory and people oriented Indian democracy has made an elaborate arrangement to facilitate participation of the hitherto excluded

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populations, the weaker sections like the SCs, STs and women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution (1992) have been a landmark in this direction. Indian Constitution now makes it mandatory to hold the regular election to the bodies of local self government and reserve at least 33 percent of the total seats for the women in all bodies. Although interested observers were sceptical about the future of the move recent reports from different parts of the country record developments that are encouraging. There has been a growing popular consensus that Indian democracy cannot simply be without the active participation of the women, who have been excluded so long from the politico space of the country.

Foucault explains the development of *biopolitics* as the necessity to assure any strategic coordination of forces, rather than as the organisation of a unilateral power relation. Foucault argues that the problem that arises from the relation between politics and economy in capitalism is resolved by techniques and motivations that come from neither. This 'outside other' which Foucault interrogates is named 'the government of men'. Government is a 'human technology' that the modern state has inherited from the Christian pastoral technique. To govern means to ask the question of how to conduct the conduct of others; to act upon subjects who ought to be considered free (Lazzarato 2010b: 1). In the liberal state the men are reduced to economic men, guided by interests, at the cost of their political rights. They are now subjected to the control of the order. Modern liberalism invents new techniques (of government) which largely operate through civil society, by continuously reproducing the ideologies and elements of culture that would corroborate the capitalist order. Foucault has elaborated this idea of control and discipline by continuously creating the new knowledge forms by the powerful in all his writings, namely, *The Order of Things* (1970), *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) *The Birth of a Clinic* (1973), and so on.

Enterprises, the market and labour, Foucault argues, are not spontaneous powers, but rather constitute what liberal government must make possible and real. The market, for instance, is an economic and social general regulator, yet it is not a natural mechanism found at the foundation of the society, as Marxists and classical liberals had thought. On the contrary, the mechanisms of the market (prices, laws of demand and supply) are fragile. Favourable conditions must be continuously created for these fragile mechanisms to function. The prime objective of intervention is to make competition, the action of prices and the calculation and demand

possible. As the German Ordo liberals say, the state intervention that we get to see is not on the market, but for the market. According to German liberals action must not be taken on what is directly economic, but on the conditions that make market economy possible. The government must intervene in the society itself in its web of thickness. The 'politics of society', as they call it, has to take charge and account for social processes, and within them make room for the market mechanism. In order for the market to be possible, the general framework must be acted upon: demography, techniques, property rights, social and cultural conditions, education, juridical regulations etc. (Lazzarato 2010b: 5) and the state does this.

A brief journey into the theories of modern state-market nexus in the Western capitalist world was necessary to place the state-market relationship in India in perspective. Power or governance in India is fast taking the shape of biopower and the market is reproduced in the social and cultural spheres, as Foucault has argued. In this arrangement the state is turning out to be the facilitator for the advance of the national and global capital. It is task the state penetrates into the social and cultural spheres and also in the individual and social psyche, appropriates the cultural symbols and creates new symbols. It is, therefore, absolutely essential to understand the changing equation between economy and power or the rules to 'biopower' in order to explore the integrationist mechanisms of the liberal-democratic Indian state.

India in post-War II period pursued welfarism of a kind and at the same time increasingly performed the function of reproduction of the order and the damage-repairing work by periodically coming up with welfare programmes to support the victims of exploitation, and even by coming up with bail-out packages for the 'capital-in-crisis' in the line prescribed by Keynes. In the Nehruvian model of national development, which was also followed by the latter regimes until early eighties, the state, at least theoretically, had a firm control over the market. The Indian state in the pre-globalisation period combined capitalist growth with 'welfare packages' for the vulnerable in order to defer the legitimisation crisis.

The liberal-democratic order in India has made an elaborate arrangement for the integration of its otherwise 'excluded' and marginalised sections into the order through schemes like democratic decentralisation, land reforms, capacity building programmes, right to education, Forest Rights Act, tribal

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sub-plan, the policy of protective discrimination, granting of regional autonomy and formation of regional development authority', special welfare programmes for the marginalised and poor people including the SCs and STs and so on. This is clearly in line with the liberal model of development where (a) the state makes arrangements for the protection of the victims of the market forces, (b) reproduces and prepares the labour force for the market, and (c) ensures peace and stability to facilitate smooth sailing of the manufacturing and business activities. In the recent years one can see that the Indian state is adopting a kind of 'rights-based approach' by recognising 'right to employment' enshrined in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), the right to information enshrined in the RTI Act, being now succeeded by the Right to Education Bill, a Right to Health Bill waiting in the wings and a Right to Food Bill, which is under consideration (See Patnaik 2010: 35). But such rights acts are argued to be merely 'eye wash' and the state does not take any serious measure to make them effective organs of empowerment. As Patnaik argues '...while the government talks about conferring 'rights', they are not 'rights' in the true sense of the term' (*ibid.*: 35).

As opposed to this pro-poor, pro-people approach, the Indian state since the 1990s has turned aggressive by withdrawing much of its 'welfare packages' and thereby leaving the victims of capitalist exploitation to the mercy of the national and global capital. During this new phase of 'market globalism', it has been striving for a growth-oriented model of development, which has been termed by Patnaik (2010: 34) as the 'means-based approach' (which runs on the premise that the growth in GDP and taxation of rich will generate resources in the public exchequer which is to be spent on the welfare of the poor and the workers). The equation has turned so much in favour of capital that the state has passed on much of its responsibility to the market. And the market has grown so autonomous and powerful that it does eat up much of the advantages meant for the masses via the welfare programmes. The growing market leaves a negative impact on the welfare character of the state and its ability to arrest the resulting exclusion and marginalization, particularly of the vulnerable sections like the *adivasis* who have very little control over material resources and skills. When the market rules reign supreme the *adivasis* who have not experienced much of capacity building stand the risk of further exclusion.

## 2. Tribes of North Bengal

Tribes are a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups claimed to be the aboriginal population of India. They comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India. Adivasi societies are particularly present in the Indian Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and some northeastern states, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The so-called Tea-tribes were brought in by the colonial planters (British) as indentured labourers from the Chhota Nagpur Plateau region.

In India, opposition to usage of the term is varied, and it has been argued that the "original inhabitant" contention is based on dubious claims and that the *adivâsi* - non *adivasi* divide that has been created is artificial.[8] It should also be noted that in Northeast India, the term *Adivâsi* applies only to the Tea-tribes imported from Central India during colonial times, while all tribal groups refer collectively to themselves by using the English word "tribes".

Tribals belonging to more than 30 different communities are found in six districts of North Bengal. Greater concentration of the population could be found in the district of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, South Dinajpur, North Dinajpur and Malda while their presence in Cooch Behar district is negligible. Of the tribal communities Santhal, Munda and Oraon are numerically dominant; Santhal and Munda are present in greater numbers in the three agricultural districts of South and North Dinajpur and Malda while the Oraon outnumber them in the two tea districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling.

In West Bengal, according to 2001 Census, tribal population is more than 44 lakh of which 49.53 per cent constitute women. In North Bengal, the tribal population is more than 14.5 lakh, of which 49.6 per cent are women. Tribal population in six North Bengal districts constitutes 33 per cent of the total tribal population in the State. Among the North Bengal districts tribal population in Cooch Behar is 14246, which is the smallest in a single district, whereas Jalpaiguri has the largest size of tribal population at 64,1688. Tribal population in Cooch Behar constitutes only 0.32 per cent of the total population in the district, but in Jalpaiguri district the percentage share of tribal population to total population is 14.56. Among other districts the percentage share of tribal population to

total population is 5.51 in South Dinajpur, 5.15 in Malda, 4.60 in Darjeeling, and 2.84 in North Dinajpur. Sex ratio in the tribal population is much higher compared to that of the total population. According to 2001 census whereas the sex ratio for the total population in West Bengal is 934, for the tribal population it is 982. In the districts where the concentration of tribal population is high, i.e., in Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, South Dinajpur and Malda sex ratio is always more than 980. Whereas the sex ratio for the total population is falling in almost all parts of the country the tribal population in North Bengal do not show any such trend at least in 2001.

census (see Tables 1, 2 & 3).

Table 1: Tribal population in West Bengal and North Bengal in 2001

	Persons	Male	Female
West Bengal	4401794	2221004	2180790
%		50.47%	49.53%
North Bengal	1434390	713164	721226
%		50.00%	49.00%
Percentage of NH ST pop. to State ST pop.	33.00%	33.00%	33.00%

Source: Census of India, 2001

Table 2: Tribal population in North Bengal districts according to 2001 census

Percentage of ST pop. to district total pop.

	Total Population		Tribal Population	
	Total	0-6 group	Total	0-6 group
India	933	923	978	973
West Bengal	934	960	982	981
Darjeeling	937	962	996	1003
Jalpaiguri	942	969	979	991
Kooch Behar	949	964	919	898
E. Dinajpur	936	963	976	973
S. Dinajpur	951	966	979	981
Malda	948	964	1000	985

Source: Census of India, 2001

The tribes of North Bengal are no homogenous category. Tribes with distinct identities and backgrounds had come to the sparsely populated North Bengal region in different historical times. The largest stream of migrants had come in the early nineteenth century when newly cleared land was being brought under cultivation and revenue zones (under *zamindari* and *rayotwari* systems) and then in the tea gardens of Dooars and Tarai regions in the second half of nineteenth and first half of twentieth century.

The zamindars wanted the members of the agricultural tribes to be settled as tenants. The members of the agricultural tribes had come from the Chotanagpur region, where they were attached to land in various capacities. The labour contractors were instrumental in bringing the tribal labourers from the Chaotanagpur region and supply them to the tea gardens and rail companies. With the growth of demographic pressure and in order to avoid the atrocities of the garden management many tribals had spread outside the gardens, in course of time, to set up villages just by clearing jungles in the land with undefined titles or forest land. The settlers in the tribal *bastis* in Tarai and Dooars have gradually been conferred land titles and the right to inheritance.

Table 3: Sex Ratio: Tribe and Non-Tribe Compared (2001)

	Total Population		Tribal Population	
	Total	0-6 group	Total	0-6 group
India	933	927	978	973
West Bengal	934	960	982	981
Darjeeling	937	962	996	1001
Jalpaiguri	942	969	979	991
Kooch Behar	949	964	919	898
E. Dinajpur	936	963	976	973
S. Dinajpur	951	966	979	981
Malda	948	964	1000	985

Source: Census of India, 2001

The *adivasi* (tribal) population in North Bengal is largely constituted of the migrants from the Chotanagpur region of central India, who moved out of their original abode in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of exploitation by the *dikus* (aliens), land loss, loss of forest rights, imposition of land rent, and the colonial oppression, particularly in the post-Santhal rebellion period. The expanding tea gardens in the Dooars and Terai regions (along with parts of Assam) offered them livelihood although they found themselves in another exploitative and oppressive economic and power arrangement. The expanding *zamindari* estates in the districts of the region, particularly in Malda, and Dinajpur districts in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the twentieth century also accommodated these migrants, primarily as tenant-cultivators. The expansion of rail links later also encouraged migration of tribal labour force from central India. The migration flow stopped by 1940s when the tea gardens stopped.

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expanding and as the land management system underwent major transformation after the abolition of the *zamindari* system in the 1950s. In the Dooars and Terai the surplus labour force, ejected from the tea gardens, took hold of the fallow land or cleared forest land and took to settled cultivation. Lack of access to material resources or education (and skill) made them depend on agriculture and tea almost exclusively.

### 1. Socio-economic condition

So far as **tribal economy** is concerned the tribes of North Bengal are dependent primarily on **tea gardens** (in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling district) and on **agriculture** (in other four districts). In the agricultural districts they are primarily engaged as cultivators and agricultural labourers. Both among the main workers and marginal workers the share of cultivators is fast declining and this is a clear indication of land loss. This means that the number of workers having land is declining over the years because of inheritance related fragmentation and land alienation. Alongside this, the number of agricultural labourers is steadily growing both in the main and marginal worker categories. Census data show that over the years the percentage share of cultivators (owning cultivators) has declined sharply in these districts with corresponding rise in the number of agricultural labourers. Reading these two trends together one can discern the massive land alienation the tribal population in the region has experienced. And this has happened despite the government efforts to protection of tribal land and despite the much acclaimed redistribution of land among the landless *adivasis*, as a part of land reform programmes (See, Roy 2008: 41-42; Roy 2009).

In the absence of education and technical skill and in a situation when the traditional crafts are losing relevance the tribal workforce is left with no option but to work as labourers, agricultural or otherwise (particularly in the construction and transport industries, which do not require much skill or education). A growing **feminization** of agricultural labourers is another feature of tribal economy in the region.

The newly growing **small tea gardens** have contributed to **alienation of tribal land**; the owners of these gardens have lured the tribal land owners with jobs and money and usurped their land while converting them into garden workers on casual basis. The **market** is another force that has caused land alienation; the better off and cleverer neighbours have resorted to both legal and illegal means to take control of the tribal land. The

general belief across the communities is that once a tribal villager accepts money he will never reclaim his land; he is hardly aware of the legal protection against alienation of tribal land. In the tribal villages leasing out of land is a very common problem. Once leased out the impoverished tribal owner is unlikely to get his land back. Besides, there is the practice of land lease for a cropping seasons.

Another trend in tribal economy has been a decline in significance of household industry over the years. In the districts the share of the 'main workers' engaged in household industries hover around 0.5 to one per cent in 2001 (Roy 2008: 42). The 'other workers' category, that includes jobs in the tea gardens, in the offices or other organised sector, did not grow expectedly. Interestingly, such growth is higher only in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts where the *adivasi* work force is primarily engaged as tea garden workers; the growth of jobs in other districts has been less than 0.5 per cent per annum. Even in Jalpaiguri district which accommodates most of the tea gardens, the growth of jobs has been only by 16 per cent in four decades.

The **tea garden economy** and its ability to support the tribal population are on the decline. There has been a sharp fall in the actual number of permanent workers and the gardens have gone for massive **casualization** of workforce. The feminization and casualization of workforce are the time tested management strategies to intensify exploitation and profit maximization. Besides, there has been sharp cut in the other benefits (such as subsidized ration, free fuel wood, retirement benefits, bonus, etc.) which constitute the entitlements of the workers according to Plantation Labour Act. While working in the gardens the tribal workers had developed a total dependence syndrome on the garden owners. They never had any understanding of the 'coming crisis' that was in the making in the garden. They never prepared the younger generation by providing them education and technical skill so that they could move out of the gardens looking for alternative avenues of subsistence. As a matter of fact their total dependence on the garden (incidentally, the owners also wanted this so that they are never short of labour supply) has been the major reason behind large-scale dropout of the tribal children at the junior high school level. Because, it was around 14-16 years of age that the tribal boys and girls were (and still are) inducted in the garden as casual workers.

Both in the agricultural and tea garden sectors the tribals are trapped in a **subsistence economy**. In

comparative terms the tribal families who earn their livelihood working solely as agricultural labourers are worse off. The tea workers are relatively better off. This is evident from the fact that the work participation rate in the tea districts is lower compared to the agricultural districts (a gap of at least 10-15 per cent). The subsistence economy demands greater work participation of family members.

The decline of traditional crafts (such as basket making of the Mahalis) has not done any good to tribal economy. The women in the traditional setup could always fall back upon these home-based crafts during their spare times and substantiate family income. With the penetration of the modern market forces the traditional tribal crafts have vanished making the tribal communities economically more vulnerable. However, one craft, largely controlled by the tribal women, survives the challenge of the market and that is the craft of liquor (Haria) making which has a ready and growing market in the rural areas. Incidentally, the habit of Haria consumption is on the rise in rural North Bengal with the rise in food production.

The other impediment in the way to economic development has been educational backwardness, which is manifest in high rate of illiteracy, large-scale drop-out from schools, and almost total absence of higher education and technical education. With improved access to education and skill the tribal youth could have found alternative avenues of employment. Being in subsistence economy the tribals in general cannot accumulate any surplus. Besides, they do not have necessary courage or confidence to go for small-scale entrepreneurship. This is a general problem that binds them to poverty and they cannot even utilize the loans that are available for them in various self-employment schemes (such as ITDP) undertaken by the government and the *panchayats*.

In the agricultural sector the tribal population mostly constitutes the landless, small- and marginal farmers. Thus it is rather difficult for them to take the advantage of agricultural development that has taken place in the districts of North Bengal over the years. When the tribal population grows and there is growing pressure on land a section of tribal labour force is forced to move out of the region. Being in subsistence economy the tribal population of North Bengal cannot save money to explore income opportunities in the expanding rural and semi urban markets of the region. Similarly, the tea gardens, which have provided subsistence to most of the tribes in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts, are facing

either stagnation or gradual decline in recent years. Casualization of labour force and downsizing of labour force, seasonal closure of gardens have added to the hardship of the tribal labour force that have depended on the gardens over the generations and have not equipped themselves to face such a sudden crisis. As a means to fight this crisis a large section of tribal men and women are leaving the tea garden bases in Terai and Dooars and this has been reflected in the declining tribal population in some parts of North Bengal in the 2001 census. The intensifying economic crisis in tribal life in the region has shaken their life and it would therefore be interesting to examine how the tribal men and women use political participation to sort out the economic and other problems of their life.

## 2. Development Schemes and the Ground Reality

The developmental schemes undertaken for the tribal population in the region of North Bengal, along with other parts of West Bengal, could be summed up as follows:

1. The reservation of seats in education and government jobs.
2. Financial support schemes (stipend) for the students beyond primary level, old-age pension, housing schemes under Indira Awas Yojna.
3. Self-employment scheme under the ITDP (Integrated Tribal Development Project), which was introduced in 1980 (under the Sixth Five Year Plan) in blocks with tribal population as the majority.
4. Acts preventing alienation of tribal land by the non-tribals.
5. Reservation of seats in all elected bodies of the Local Self Government, the State Legislature and the national Parliament; reservation of seats for the women in Local bodies.
6. Besides, under the ITDP there are provisions for infrastructure development in the tribal Mouzas and in tribal areas; such schemes include construction of schools, health centres, roads, drinking water facility, and so on. In the district of Jalpaiguri alone there are 315 ITDP Mouzas.

Some of the government-run developmental schemes are directed to infrastructure development to address the basic needs of life, in the areas of shelter, drinking water, health and education, and employment generation

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while some other schemes are aimed at making provisions for their participation in the democratic bodies. In the post-independence years ten five year plans have elapsed and millions of rupees have been spend, several administrative strategies have been tried out but the researchers find it difficult to identify any perceptible improvement in the quality of life of the tribals or in the area of capacity building.

In connection with my Ph.D. work and a couple of research projects I had to visit a good number of tribal villages in the Dooars of Jalpaiguri, the Terai of Darjeeling plains, and villages in North Dinajpur district and from such visits I could draw some understanding of the ground-realities of tribal life in the region. With a view to give a picture of how I have understood the problems of development of tribes in the region I would recall from what I have observed during my recent visits to the tribal villages.

1. About **economic life and livelihood** I have already given a brief account. To add to what I have narrated above, one can mention about the incidents of labour migration from the close tea gardens and from the tribal villages. They migrate to distant places to find income opportunities primarily in the urban informal sector. Although it is difficult to assess the intensity of the problem, it is a matter of commonsense knowledge that the young tribal girls are being trafficked in large numbers for flesh trade in the metros by the gangs of criminals. I came to know about this fact when I was conducting a study on the closed tea gardens in the Dooars. One can also refer, in this context, to a recent study conducted by the CWS of North Bengal University.
2. The tribal villagers have been benefitted under the ITDP schemes in the areas of infrastructure building; they now have approach roads, primary schools and primary health centres, drinking water, better houses, power connection in some cases, and so on. I also came across people receiving old-age pension and students receiving education stipend. But the employment generation schemes are a major flop and I could see rampant poverty in most tribal houses. The situation is so appalling that the women have to run the illegal trade of making and selling Haria and the young boys and girls have to take up the job of casual labour in tea gardens, and wage labour in agriculture and construction along side their studies. The distribution of BPL card and the

associated benefits are often messed up by the local administration and the *panchayat* bodies. Although some health benefits, particularly in the area of mother-child care have reached the villagers there is a lot to be done. A large number of villages still go without power and this makes a mockery of the rural electrification programme. The villagers complain that the process of electrification is expensive, time-consuming and complicated.

3. I came to learn that a large majority of the tribal people is without ST certificate and many do not even know about the reservation in education and job. While probing why they are not given the ST certificate I came to know that most of the tribal men and women do not have birth certificate and other supporting papers, they do not have interest or energy to visit offices and pursue with the office people to procure their certificates. Since a large majority of the tribal boys and girls leave school at early stages they do not give much value to the reservation facilities; only an insignificant section of them manage to find secure jobs in the organized sector.
4. **Higher education** followed by secure organized sector jobs could have the surest way to bring about a qualitative change in the life of the tribals in North Bengal. The Christian missions, particularly the Catholic organizations, are doing some good work in the field of tribal education. The Mission organizations have set up good schools and a couple of colleges in North Bengal; they admit the tribal students with priority, and subsidize their education substantially. Some such tribal youth have secured good jobs after completing their college and university level education with missionary support. The average tribal youth are being motivated to pursue education seeing such successful cases of upward movement. The missionaries also help the tribals in the areas of health and housing and extend material support in other forms.
5. The **reservation of seats in *panchayat*** bodies for the tribals in general and for the tribal women in particular has generated a great degree of enthusiasm among the tribals to participate in the local bodies. Although initially they face a lot of problems in being useful in decision making bodies after gaining some experience they learn the art

of playing a responsible part in the decision making bodies. They gain in confidence and become conscious of their rights and entitlements. Some tribal youth use such opportunities to the full and establish themselves as party leaders in the locality; some even manage to become members of state legislature and the Parliament. Such leaders soon acquire all the qualities of the **neo-elite** and their families and close kin experience some perceptible economic and social mobility. But the question to be probed is how much these leaders use their power for the benefit of the total tribal communities in the region.

6. Some major common problems that face the tribal communities are in the areas of **religion, language, culture and identity**. At the time of migration to the region most of the tribal people were semi-Hindu but unintegrated into the Hindu social order. Their traditional religion or animism was not resourceful or organized enough to sustain itself. Faced with this vacuum in the area of faith the tribals are now being attracted to Christianity. Each of the thirty plus tribal communities in the region had a distinct language, although no script, at the place of their origin. But most of the tribal habitations in the region are now mixed up; the tribals therefore have to fall back upon Sadri as the lingua franca. And when they go to school they have to study in a language (English, Hindi or Bengali) which is neither their mother tongue nor the lingua franca. Being uprooted from their place of origin and while living alongside other tribal and non-tribal communities in North Bengal the tribal communities have lost many of the traits of their original culture; many have lost their traditional **tribal panchayats** and the **customary laws** that were associated with them; their traditional songs and dance forms and the musical instruments for which they were reputed. The culture and the artifacts that were associated with their traditional crafts have also vanished with the decline of the traditional crafts. The mediated culture of the dominant communities now penetrates into their houses and culture space, thanks to their growing access to television and videos.

### Conclusion

Four factors are primarily responsible for the economic plight of the *adivasis* in the region: a) meagre control

over material and human resources, b) their incapacity to take advantages of the market opportunities, c) inadequate state support, and d) exploitative penetration of the market forces and the groups which control them. The increase of control over the material and human resources could have enhanced their 'capacity' to take greater advantage of the market opportunities and to thwart the penetration of the more powerful exploitative forces. But what the state has done so far is to initiate some relief-work here and there and some reservation which have failed to enhance the quality of tribal life. The low rate of literacy (while total ST literacy is 43.4%, ST female literacy is only 29.15% in West Bengal in 2001), high rate of dropout at the school level and very little spread of higher and technical education have hampered the process of human resource development over these years (See Roy 2008: 26-27). The penetration of the outsiders into the tribal belt with the spread of communication and including market forces have contributed to land alienation and economic marginalisation of the *adivasis*. The artificial crisis created by the tea garden owners including a distinct strategy of casualisation and the threat of closure as a measure to deprive the tea workers and weaken the trade union movement have conversely brought miseries for the *adivasis*.

When the 'protector' state is in a mood to recede and the market on the rampage it is quite natural that the powerless and voiceless people who live on the margin would find themselves more vulnerable. Being a part of the neo-liberal market the *adivasis*, with minimal control over material and human resources and culture capital, are engaged in fierce survival battle as the dominant sections with much greater control over resources not only do not give them much economic and socio-political space but often intrude into whatever small space they occupy. With very little effort to human resource development initiative, the *adivasis* cannot reap the benefits of the policy of protective discrimination or the special-development initiatives of the State. The corrupt yet inefficient bureaucracy and the *panchayat* functionaries come in the way to their reaping the benefits of development initiatives. The over-exploitative arrangement in tea gardens and loss of land (because of division of holdings among the heirs and alienation by the manipulative and resourceful neighbours) perpetuate their marginalised existence in the region. The market uncertainty, the penetration of the forces of globalisation and crisis in the tea gardens make them even more vulnerable as a social category.

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Notwithstanding spread of literacy in recent decades and the penetration of the exogenous forces the tribal communities still retain some of the traditional elements of their culture. One such irrational cultural practice is witchcraft and witch hunting. A casual visitor to the areas where the tribals still follow this practice would assume that all the members of the community support this. But a serious probe into such cases would reveal that a section of the community is against this inhuman practice and at times they put up some resistance to the moves of witch-hunting. It is this force from within that can bring about a positive change in the tribal consciousness.

**Identities** are constructed both from within and without. Looked at from within, an Oraon would know that she is Oraon, a Santhal would know she is Santhal; from within they maintain the inter-tribal distinctions both in perception and praxis. However, for the outsiders, all the tribal communities have one identity; i.e., they are all tribals. For the administration and the government too they are all tribals; the internal distinctiveness does not bear any significance. In movements too, such as in one that is going on in the Dooars, they constitute one identity.

The basic problem of development of the tribals of North Bengal is that they operate in a liberal democratic order with little control over material and human resources; they have to compete in all walks of life with the non-tribal neighbours who have greater control of both forms of resources. While competing with better equipped neighbours they get further marginalized. The continued alienation of tribal land, the neglect they are meted out in the tea gardens, and their gradual transformation into wage labour sums up the saga of their marginalization.

Nehruvian idea of capacity building, protection of their cultural rights, rights to land and forest, and improving the quality of life are far from being visible least in the context of North Bengal tribes. The government-run developmental schemes, the reservation of seats in *panchayat* bodies, the recently introduced self-help groups carry some signs of hope but one has to remember that the market forces and the order of free competition run havoc to marginalize the tribal population in the region.

One would have thought that the tribals who had come from the Chotanagpur region and from the North-East in different historical periods would forget about their original cultural forms and assume a new culture of the

region, something along the argument of the 'melting pot' thesis. But this has not been the case, so far as the trend of culture change is concerned. One could definitely find some significant changes in the areas of religion, language, political structure, traditional arts, and even in the perception and ways of life. However, no one can say that the tribes of the region constitute one homogenous culture; what we see in reality conforms to the thesis of '**beyond melting pot**'. Little has been done to protect and preserve the original cultural forms of the tribal communities, something Nehru would have very much wanted. The irony is that the consumer culture and the mediated culture of the dominant are out to swallow the elements of tribal values and institutions and norms that they had evolved from nature from their own 'lifeworld'. The neglect of the 1.5 million tribal population of the region and their continued marginalization is now finding expression in distorted ethnic movements, which could threaten the amity and harmony of the region and which could earn new stigma for the tribal communities. It is high time that we all concerned take note of the threatening trends and treat the tribals as a resource to India's tradition of democracy and diversity and not treat them as a problem.

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