

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4. SITUATING TRIBAL PROBLEMS IN THE DOOARS AND THE ROLE OF THE NGOS IN ADDRESSING THEM.

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter tries to situate the problems of tribal development in the study area and assess the role of the non-governmental organizations in bringing about development of the scheduled tribes of the area. This indicates the gradual entry of the thesis from macro level understanding to a compact and solidified micro level understanding of the study area. This chapter is very significant because it provides the readers with an insight of the Dooars region and in turn prepares them to contextualize the idea of tribal development from the grassroots level. We begin the chapter by introducing the area of study in section (4.2). The historical background of the Dooars region is provided in section (4.2.1) followed by its geographical features that has been pointed out in section (4.2.2). We then move forward with a scholarly idea about the area of research that is presented in section (4.2.3) and also make an attempt to problematize the research area in section (4.2.4). An ethnographic study of some of the major tribes of the Dooars region is presented in section (4.2.5). We have made an attempt to provide a list of some of the non-governmental organizations working in the Dooars in section (4.3) which shall be interviewed in our field survey in Chapter 5.

The idea of development as a body of thinking and practice addressing the core questions of poverty and the reasons behind its prolonged existence alongside the tools of its eradication stand to be relatively new in the human history. It is largely believed that the development era is said to have been launched by President Truman in 1949 with the establishment of the renowned agencies of development during this period. ‘As it became better understood that the causes of poverty and vulnerability were structural, and not natural so it became part of NGO lore that development was the best form of disaster prevention, and that a developmental rather than a “derring do” response was more appropriate in emergencies’ Eade, & Pearce, (2005). Irrespective of the fact that whether the NGOS adopted a structural change or the basic needs approach, the eradication of stubborn poverty required a class above strategy than simple humanitarian relief approach. The non-governmental organizations started delivering not only the aids to development but in turn got equated with the idea of development itself.

The reason behind the rise in the position of the NGOs as serious agents of development are – **firstly**, the structural adjustment programmes that were brought about in the South as an expression of the implementation of the neo liberal projects like that of the North, required a cut down on the state spending and investment on the social sectors. In this situation, the non-governmental organizations as private voluntary agencies could participate and delve deeper into the alleviation of poverty and curb the ill effects of the structural adjustment programmes. The NGOs were encouraged to present themselves as appropriate channels of aid to the poorest. **Secondly**, after the break of the Soviet block and the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989, a large group of people's organization in the form of unions, church based groups, professional bodies and the NGOs emerged. 'The idea of autonomous civil society organizations holding governments accountable, and at the same time, pushing forward a democratization agenda, was appealing to observers from different points in the political spectrum, pragmatists and romantics alike' Eade, & Pearce, (2005). Apart from this, the NGOs played a vital role in acting as an alternative vision of society. Therefore, the role and importance of the non-governmental organizations especially after the 1990s have increased manifold because the dichotomy between global development and the rise of global poverty increased side by side. The report of the United Nations Development Programme of 1997 states the fact that between 1987 and 1993, the number of people with an income of less than US\$1 a day increased by almost 100 million to 1.3 billion people, equivalent to one third of the population of the developing world.

The globe witnessed a rise in the growth of the non-governmental organizations at a rampant scale all of which aimed to bring about global economic equality followed by the achievement of human rights and dignity of all, using the techniques of sustainable development. Since the year 1991 onwards the area of study i.e. the Dooars region of North Bengal has also witnessed the mushrooming of the non-governmental organizations working in different areas from health services to empowerment of the grass root people of the area. This chapter intends to probe into the meaning and understanding of the non-governmental organization, its differentiation from the voluntary sector, the changing role played by it in the contemporary era, the reasons behind its growth in number etc. We have made a serious attempt to understand the area of study i.e. the Dooars region of North Bengal by providing some of the major conceptual clarifications involved in it, its geographical location, the rationale behind the selection of the area etc. Furthermore, we have also provided a general over view of the types of non-governmental organizations working in the area.

## 4.2. AREA OF STUDY: DOOARS REGION OF NORTH BENGAL

Dooars or Duar refers to the doorway connecting both the foreign land of Bhutan and the rest of North East India with that of the mainland nation (in the contemporary terminology). The Dooars region in itself occupies a vast geographical area covering three massive districts of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar. From amongst the three districts, Alipurduar happens to be one which is a home to diverse scheduled tribe communities. As a matter of fact the variety of landscapes alongside the forest and faunas that this district has to offer also serves as a house of research in itself. It is interesting to point out that there are some tribes which are found only in some isolated zones of this district alone. This cultural diversity of the scheduled tribes of the area compels the researcher to focus on this zone of the Dooars region significantly.

We intend to look into the Dooars zone of North Bengal as our area of study which spreads its political map from the plains of Darjeeling district, the whole of Jalpaiguri district and Alipurduar district, and the upper region of Coochbehar districts in West Bengal and in Assam, it comprises up of the districts of Kokrajhar, Dhubri, BARPETA, Goalpara, and Bongaigaon. However, it is to be noted that we shall only be focusing upon the Dooars of West Bengal leaving out on the areas of Assam because this would then make it a Herculean task. In northern West Bengal, the major river is the Teesta besides many others like the Jaldhaka, Murti, Torsha, Sankosh, Dyna, Karatoya, Raidak and Kaljanirivers also add beauty to the area.

### 4.2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DOOARS REGION

Prior to the formation of the district of Jalpaiguri in 1869, the western Dooars also known as Bengal Dooars was not well defined with regard to its territorial boundaries stretching from the Teesta to the Sankosh. The region was marked by its peculiarity of giving a pass-way to the Bhutanese zone thereby making western Dooars an enclave that had never come under the British policy of Permanent Settlement Scheme till 1950. Due to the vast forest, wild Himalayan rivers and rivulets along with the shifting cultivators commonly referred to as Jhumias, this zone was regarded as a government Khashmahal. The Jhumias comprised up of different tribes such as the *Koch, Mech, Garo, Rabha, Dukpa, Toto, Tharu, Limbu, Rai* and *Dhimal* giving it a unique social ecology. 'Most of the regional academic encounters with the

Dooars peasantry were made on the basis of its relatively new emergence as a part of the Bengali District of Jalpaiguri, which however took its shape only in 1869. This kind of Bengalisation, in turn awarded an advanced a hitherto tolerable mythological spirit into the historical prospective of the region and uprooted the indigenous dimension of the peasant history.'(Bhattacharya, 2007). The newly created district of Jalpaiguri which marked a transformation phase of Dooars into Jalpaiguri, comprised up of three ecological zones of **i.** The southern plain land, **ii.** The north-east jungles, **iii.** The Teesta Mahananda basin. Although Dooars belonged to *Kochbehar*, however it became a Bhutan ruled land later on. The Bengal Dooars in the colonial context comprised up of three zones, each carrying a distinctive feature of its own. The extreme northern patch that was dominated by the indigenous *Meches*, *Garos*, *Rabhas*, *Totos* and the *Dukpas* portrayed a shifting cultivating zone. The newly Hinduised *Koches* or the *Rajbansis* inhabited the southern narrow strip of land and basically practiced settled cultivation. The third system was a mixture of both settled and shifting cultivation thereby representing a mixed pattern.

The *Rabha*, *Garo* and *Mech* people used to produce cotton that was locally known as *Khun* or *Foon* thereby making weaving an integral practice amongst them. The cotton country Dooars was outnumbered by tea plantations over a period of time thereby making it a tea country. 'This crop (cotton) is grown chiefly by the *Garos* and *Meches* on highlands ..... the plant is not seen at all now, owing to the opening of tea gardens, and very soon it may disappear altogether, as tea is taking its place all along the northern parts of the Dooars.' D.H.E. Sunder, (1895). The British settlement in the Dooars virtually jeopardized the natural pattern of living of the native people which can be seen from the establishment of several tribal reserves (1895) during the colonial era, the necessity of which was created because of the beginning of large scale migration from Bihar in order to satisfy the labour hunger created by an expansion of tea plantation and reserved forests. The immigration of labour from outside was encouraged by the opening up of new tea gardens and the creation of new labour markets. By the year 1888 Western Dooars possessed fifty thousand tea plantation labourers. The second important reason for such large scale immigration was because of the fact that the local indigenous tribes did not prefer to work as labourers in the market oriented tea plantations. This gave an easy access to the immigrant people like *Oraon*, *Munda*, *Kharia* to enter the region and furthermore disturb the existing social ecology.

Between 1865 and 1900, i.e. the dawn of twentieth century Dooars witnessed the destruction of the native tribal peasantry and the commission of new colonial structure in the area.

Capital market was introduced in the area because of the marketing of tea and timber thereby completely curbing on the livelihood of the cotton cultivators and the weavers who had no association or an access to new market based economy.

By the independence era, Dooars was categorized into three economic compartments. 'The extreme north zone of Dooars now consists of forests where only the two Mongoloid groups of the Totos and Dukpas form the core. This zone could be considered the exclusive Nepali speaking zone of Dooars. The midland region is the virtual tea zone and a country of multi ethnic groups dominated by Bihar based Adivasis under the new order while the southern most part is the zone dominated by the Rajbansis and other Bengali caste' (Bhattacharya, 2007).

Having historically analysed the area, the Garos, Totos, Dukpas, Rabhas and the Mechescan be considered to be the sons of the soil or the indigenous tribes of the Dooars region. However, the Dooars no longer remains a home to the above mentioned Indo-Mongoloid tribes alone but on the other hand a large number of the Austrics and Dravidian people (Oraons, Mundas, Santhals, Kharias) are found in the area.

#### **4.2.2. GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE DOOARS REGION**

Towards the northern region of the Dooars (Bengal Dooars) bordering Bhutan is present the Sinchula range of mountains. Below the Sinchula mountains roughly about 10 kilometers at around a height of 1659 to 2457 feet lies the Buxa Duar that was once an important pass to Bhutan and Tibet. Today, this part of hill is included within the Buxa Tiger Reserve which happens to be one amongst the eight such reserves of the nation.

A collection of eighty small and big rivers flow through the Dooars region not to forget the streams and streamlets. These rivers have their origin in Sikkim, Bhutan and Darjeeling hills with some that flow even into Tibet.

Alluvial soil covers a major portion of the Dooars region with coarse gravels near the hills and sandy loams towards the southern part. In between Teesta and Jaldhaka, one can even find patches of black clay soil.

4000 mm (4136 mm) is the average rainfall of the area per year and April to October marks the major season for frequent rainfalls. Due to the existence of forest belts the summer season

is not harsh with an average day temperature varying from 6 degree Celsius to 33 degree Celsius.

The greenery of the area is beautified furthermore by the major reserve forests of the region like the *Garumara, Jaldapara, Chilapata, Nilpara, Buxa and the Chapramari forest zones*. This is very crucial because it acts as a major point of tourist attraction not only from the rest of West Bengal but also from the entire country and abroad. However, inspite of the constant attempt by the government of West Bengal, the due recognition to Dooars as a hub of eco tourism has not been achieved. This requires a centralized approach both on the part of the government and the non governmental agencies in order to get the due share. There are a large number of resorts, lodges, guest houses and hotels that attract the tourists all throughout the year excluding the monsoon season. The nearby local residents produce handmade bamboo products that are sold in the local markets via a middleman because of which the producer often remains underpaid.

The Dooars, as the name itself suggests, means a door or an entry point. Therefore, it is to be mentioned here that the Dooars is well connected with the rest of the state with proper motor able national highways and also with the mighty Indian railways that connects the rest of North East with the mainland by cutting deep inside the forest zones. Since the Dooars occupies a strategic location, both as a connectivity point of North Eastern states and a foreign land of Bhutan, it houses a strong team of ever vigilant Army (Banarhaat, ), Air Force (Hashimara) and the SashtraSeema Bal (Jaigoan), apart from the smaller units of the armed forces scattered around entire Dooars region..

### **4.2.3. AREA OF RESEARCH**

The geographical area of study that we will be conducting our research is in Dooars of North Bengal. As has been mentioned earlier, contemporary Dooars (of West Bengal and not that of Assam) comprises up of the foothills of the Darjeeling district once again excluding the Terai region (North Bengal is divided into three geographical zones of the Pahad/ hills, Terai and the Dooars), Jalpaiguri district, Alipurduar District and Coochbehar district. Therefore conducting a micro level research in four large districts of the state would not bear a fruitful result because then it would be something general, abstract and vague. Therefore, we will conduct our research in some of the areas of Alipurduar district and the Jalpaiguri district.

For conducting the surveys to get the answers to our research queries, we will be selecting the following areas –

- i. Totopara, Madharihat Block, Alipurduar District (Former Jalpaiguri District).
- ii. Uttar and Madhya Mendibari, NimtiChowk, Kalchini Block, Alipurduar District.
- iii. Buxa Fort/ Dara goan, Lapchakha, Buxa Tiger Reserve, Alipurduar District.
- iv. Mechia Busty inside Torsha Tea Garden, Jaigaon, Alipurduar District.
- v. Mechpara Tea Garden, Kalchini Block, Alipurduar District.
- vi. Uttar and Madhya Haldibari of Kumargram Block, Alipurduar District.

The **rationale behind the selection of the area** has a strong argument to support it. Dooars today is a home to a variety of multi lingual and multi cultural tribes, both the indigenous and the immigrant (who were brought to the area to serve in the tea plantations) apart from the Hinduised caste groups, the Islamic peasantry and not to forget the Bihari, Nepali and Bengali communities. Dooarshas become a salad bowl with the existence of a variety of multi cultural diversities, list of religious beliefs and practices right from Animism and Totemism practiced in the interiors by the indigenous people, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and also different Bhakti cults, alongside the understanding of diverse languages such as a variety of adivasi dialects like Santhali, Sadri, Maithali, along with Nepali, Bihari, Bhojpuri, Bengali and Hindi.

The selection of the survey area has been chosen with utmost care and responsibility to look into and differentiate the diverse developmental level experienced by the scheduled tribes of both the sections i.e. the Adivasis and the Jhumias. In some of the above selected areas, we find the dominance of the Madhesia Scheduled Tribes predominantly working in the tea garden belts such as Mechpara Tea Garden, Bhatkhawa Tea Garden and Rajabhat Tea Garden. On the other hand in other areas such as Uttar Mendibari, Madhya Mendibari, Buxa Tiger Reserve, Totopara and Mechia Busty, we find the purity of race maintained by the indigenous Scheduled Tribes such as the Meches, Drukpas, Totos, Rabhas, Garos etc. These communities still live in isolated zones very close to the forests, hills and at times even separated by riverbeds etc. We have also made an effort to study such areas where we find the existence of mixed scheduled tribe population alongside the mainland people. Shivkatha, Panbari, Gadodhar, Madhya and Uttar Haldibari are the areas where we find mixed

settlements of the indigenous people, the Madhesia Adivasis, the Scheduled Castes and also some Bihari, Bengali and Nepali households.

#### 4.2.4. PROBLEMATISATION OF THE RESEARCH AREA

The above mentioned lines have already made it clear that going by the historical fact, Dooars in the pre and post colonial era comprised up of the indigenous shifting tribal cultivators such as the Meches, Garos, Rabhas, Totos, Dukpas in the North and the Hinduised Koches or the Rajbansis who practiced advanced settled cultivation in the South. 'Between 1765 and 1865 for a long hundred years, Dooars literally belonged to the Kochbehar state. But because of the weakness of the Koch kings, the region was virtually ruled by the neighbouring Bhutias'. Bhattacharya, (2007). When the *cotton country* was transformed into a *tea country* particularly after 1895 and with the serious attempt by the British rule to introduce a unified settlement system in Dooars like in other parts of Bengal followed by a growing capitalistic market for tea, the indigenous tribes ( Totos, Garos, Meches, Dukpas, Rabhas, etc.) were literally disturbed and depopulated by the immigrant tribes (Santhals, Oraons, Mundas, Lohars, etc.) brought all the way from Bihar and Chotanagpur region to work as labourers. These immigrant tribes gradually settled down in the area faithfully working for the owners of the tea plantations thereby replacing the indigenous shifting cultivators. Therefore the title of Sons of the Soil/ Bhumiputra/Indigenous tribes changed hands from the shifting cultivators to the settled tea plantation workers.

Post independence era witnessed a drastic change in the socio- economic and administrative set up of the country. Although the debate between indigenous and immigrant tribes stand to be null and void in the present day context as all of the above mentioned groups have been mentioned in the list of the scheduled tribe population yet the researcher is inquisitive to inquire more about the present day condition of the indigenous tribes of the Dooars.

Another important fact that must be kept in mind is that the immigrant tribes have settled down as tea plantation labourers clubbing themselves in a single economic framework because the wage in all the tea gardens is more or less the same. Therefore the ideas of cultural diversity amongst them have lost their essence. The spread of Christian missionaries along with the process of sanskritization in an attempt to acculturate themselves to the modern society have left them bewildered in the rural interiors of the Dooars.

However, the indigenous tribes of Dooars are not under the practice of the same profession thereby succeeding in maintaining their cultural, linguistic and economic heterogeneity. This gives the researcher a platform to conduct an indepth study unfolding questions and answers to a variety of unraveled research areas. However, this research work is not an ethnographic one because of which we shall be primarily focusing on the different dimensions of development from the socio economic and political point of view, not confining it to an ethnographic research.

The influx of the immigrant tribes from Chotanagpur and Bihar for the purpose of clearing the forests for tea plantations and in turn working as wage labourers in the plantation itself thoroughly led to the outnumbering of the indigenous tribes of the region. The danger of complete extinction of the local inhabitants was sensed by the British officials and they were regarded to be as the dispensable group. To counter this danger, that was created by the act of the British of bringing the non-local workers to the area, special Tribal Reserves was set up to protect the cultural diversity of some of the native indigenous tribes. 'In 1895, a reserve was set up in the *Alipur* Sub-Division to provide a refuse to the *Meches* and the *Garos*. But by the turn of the century their immigration towards Assam had become an established pattern'. Bhattacharya, (2007). A separate colony was provided in the form of the reserves in order to protect them from the exploitation in the hands of the more intelligent neighbours whereby they were at the danger of losing their land and in turn their very existence. The Mech and Garo colony was situated towards the east of Torshariver and south of Rajabhatkhawa, with 766 Jotes covering an area of 90,593.66 acres (District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri: 1981: 2010). However, the policy of the British rule proved to be futile because the land allotted to the Mech and Garo population in the form of a colony was transferred to the newly arrived tea plantation labourers of Chotanagpur and Bihar because technically even these communities of people fell under the Scheduled Tribe category. The irony being witnessed in the form of the opening up of the Mechpara Tea Estate and the Garopara (Rajabhat) Tea Estate bearing names of the colony but in practice bearing very few people of the colony because these tea gardens are full of migratory tribes from Bihar since their coming into being.

The Tribal Reserve effort was not confined to the Mech and Garo colony alone. Totopara, a colony of the Toto Tribe, which is situated towards the south-east of Titli Forest in Madarihath and in the banks of the Torsha river of Alipurduar District was also created intentionally as a Tribal Reserve. Similarly, a Santhal colony or a Tribal Reserve for the Santhal tribes was

created for the Santhal peasantry of Samuktala which has also been encroached by other communities with the passage of time.

Therefore, this makes it clear that the British authorities were well aware about the rich heterogeneity of the indigenous Jhumia tribes which made them work for the preservation, protection and upgradation of these sons of the soil. Today, after 70<sup>th</sup> year of Indian independence, we witness the Dooars region to be a home to a diverse variety of Scheduled Tribe population. More than fifty percent of the total Scheduled Tribe communities of West Bengal are settled in the Dooars zone of North Bengal. Therefore, a study on the tribal development of West Bengal in particular and India at large would remain incomplete without analyzing the developmental level of the Scheduled Tribes of the Dooars region.

The Government of India through both its Central and State level efforts on the lines of the Nehruvian approach to tribal development have made serious efforts right from the initial year of Indian independence to promote, upgrade, protect and develop the Scheduled Tribes of the country, Dooars being one of the prominent tribal regions of the nation. However, inspite of the efforts of the government for seven long decades the meadow of tribal development does not appear to be green. The irony of tribal development in the area happens to be such that it tries to homogenize the largely heterogeneous communities as Scheduled Tribes completely devaluing their cultural diversities and in turn detribalizing the tribals of the area. This research work tries to understand the model of development that is implemented on the tribals of the Dooars region of North Bengal and furthermore intends to find out the meaning of development from the point of view of the beneficiaries that is the tribals themselves so that the ideas of the state and the public (Scheduled Tribes in this case) meet at a common platform.

The 1990's has witnessed a change in the role of the state with the implementation of the policies of liberalisation, privatization and globalization that firmly believes in market oriented approach to development. The economic term Laissez-faire has strongly restricted the role of the state but this has also been curtailed by the implementation of the term *Socialist* in the preamble with the help of 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Act thereby transforming the role of the state from a police state to a welfare state. However, to what extent has the state been able to act for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribe communities is left open for scholars to debate on. Due to this, a third sector in the name of the non-governmental organizations have mushroomed in the area of study i.e. the Dooars region of North Bengal. Most of them

portray to be the protagonist and staunch advocates of tribal welfare and development. It is interesting to note that from a laymans' point of view these NGOs have been working with serious dedication for the upliftment of the Scheduled Tribes of the area, but the picture in reality portrays a completely different story altogether. This will be clarified with the help of case studies of different non-governmental organizations working in the area of study.

With regard to the geographical location of the area of our research, we intend to enquire into the level and condition of development on the lines of the High Level Task Force of the UN that will be an enquiry on 'the right of peoples and individuals to the constant improvement of their wellbeing and to a national and global enabling environment conducive to just, equitable, participatory and human centered development respectful of all human rights'. Vandanbogaerde (2017); which in turn would mean on the lines of Right To Development and the role played by the non-governmental organizations in achieving this target.

The selection of the area clearly reveals a collaboration of both the Jhumia tribes and the Non-Jhumia (from Bihar and Chotanagpur) tribes. Here we intend to look into the core questions of development from the social, economic and political perspectives and try to look into the working of the major NGOs in the area by critically studying their strength and flaws in achieving the target of empowering the Scheduled Tribe communities of the selected areas. We will be presenting a detailed case study analysis of the major NGOs in each of the above areas working for the development of the Scheduled Tribes of the area and come up with an answer as to whether these NGOs are really playing the role of a third sector in enhancing and empowering the capabilities of the Scheduled Tribes of the selected areas or are they simply playing the blame game being a bogus unit in themselves.

#### **4.2.5. SOME OF THE MAJOR TRIBES STUDIED IN THE AREA**

The researcher intends to study the level of development of the Scheduled Tribes in some of the selected areas of the Dooars region of North Bengal by basing it on the lines of the Right to Development as a Human Right propagated by the United Nations Organization. For achieving the target of an egalitarian development of the Scheduled Tribes, the role of the non-governmental organizations present in the field shall be critically analyzed. The research being conducted from a socio-economic and political perspective, the cultural ethnography will not be taken up in a detailed format. However, at the same time one cannot consider all the different groups of the Scheduled Tribe communities to belong to a single homogenous

category. Each tribal group has its own unique cultural, lingual, religious and economic diversities that need to be paid attention to. Keeping this background in mind, we have tried to study and bring forth an account of some of the major tribes inhabiting the selected area of study. These can be listed as follows –

- i. **Garó** – According to the census of 1991, the Garó tribes of West Bengal have a very small population of around 3,673 people who are scattered in and around Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts of North Bengal. It is believed that depending upon the ecological environment, the Garós who have basically migrated from Garó hills of Meghalaya and Mymansingha of Bangladesh are divided into two groups, namely the Forest Villagers and the Village Garós. In West Bengal, the majority of the Garó communities practice agriculture as their primary source of income. However, a large section of them still live in the forest villages of Dooars as forest labourers. Due to the rampant spread of Christianity by the Christian missionaries, a considerable portion of the Garó tribes have been converted to Christianity thereby dividing the tribe into Christians and non-Christians.
- ii. **Rabha** – The Rabha tribe is considered to be one of the most colourful tribe of North-East India bearing Indo-Mongoloid race. The Rabhas in West Bengal are generally found in Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts, especially in the areas very much close to Assam, thereby housing about ninety percent of the total Rabha population of West Bengal. The Rabhas practiced a number of professions such as farming, business, service sectors and a large chunk of them work as daily-casual labourers. A section of the Rabha tribe in North Bengal have been categorized as forest labourers because of their inhabitation of the forest zones of the area. With regard to their religious composition, the Rabhas are categorically divided into two groups of the Christian Rabhas and the non-Christian Rabhas. Those that fall under the second category practice animism and ancient traditional Hindu practices. The existence of 15,204 Rabhapopulations have been certified to exist in West Bengal by the 1991 census, who are chiefly identified by their colourful lifestyles.
- iii. **Toto** – The Toto tribe that belongs to the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group happens to be one of the most primitive tribes that are found to be settled only in Totopara

which is a tiny village in the valley of Tading hill in the Indo-Bhutan border of Alipurduar district in North Bengal. Due to their tribal nature of inland settlement as shifting cultivators in the ancient era, it is very rare to locate Toto migration outside their demarcated area – the picture however is seen to be gradually changing. It is interesting to note that this endangered tribal community is not found in any part of the world apart from Totopara which is a home to approximately sixteen hundred Toto tribes. However, due to the rise in the Nepali speaking immigrants into the land after the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950's, the Totos are gradually becoming a minority in their own homeland with fifteen hundred non-Toto Nepali speaking people happily settled in the area. The impact of this outnumbering is seen in the dialect that is used in the area where Nepali language has become the lingua franca of the area used by both the communities. The Toto tribes largely depend upon beetle nut cultivation for their livelihood.

- iv. **Meche/ Mechia** – The Mechias tribes are sometimes synonymously understood as the Bodo tribes that are believed to have migrated to through the Patkai Hills to Assam and West Bengal region of India. The Meches belong to the Mongoloid race and their lingua franca is the Bodo language which is a form of the Tibeto-Burmoid language. These groups of people are known as the Bodos in Assam and the Mechias in North Bengal. The Mechias were believed to practice Jhum cultivation characterized by the slashing of the forests and burning of the area, cultivation of some vegetables and crops and then moving on with their folks after the loss of the fertility of the selected land. The Bodo tribe that settled along the Mechi river of the Terai were termed as the Mechias.
- v. **Drukpa** – The term Drukpa denotes the inhabitants of Land of Thunder Dragon which in other words mean the settlers of Bhutan. The Drukpa tribe traces their origin to the Indo-Mongoloid race with Buddhism as their prime religion of worship. In West Bengal the Drukpa tribes have largely settled in the Buxa hills of Alipurduar district along with a hand few in Kalimpong and Darjeeling hills denoted by the surname Bhutia or Drukpa. The Drukpas are primarily agricultural tribes that are renowned for their hard work and physical endurance. The major language of communication of the Drukpa tribes is Dzonkha but they are also well versed in Nepali. In the Dooars region of North Bengal, the Drukpas are settled in

Daragaon, Lapchakha and Rupang valley of the Buxa Tiger Reserve because of which their primary source of income happens to be derived from eco-tourism.

- vi. **Santal** –The Santals are regarded to be the third largest tribe of India with Proto-australoid origin. According to the 1991 census, the Santals comprised up of a population of roughly two million in West Bengal alone, making it to be the largest tribe of the state. They are basically concentrated in the districts of Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia, Medinipur, Bardhaman, Malda, North and South Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling. The primary source of Santal livelihood happens to be agriculture; prior to which they enjoyed a nomadic life for a long time. In West Bengal, the Santals are occupied in the tea plantation sector as labourers in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, as skilled coal mine workers in Bardhaman, as brick manufacturing labourers towards the southern part of the state and as farmers in rest of West Bengal. However, a good number of the Santals have also secured jobs in the government as well as private sectors.
- vii. **Oraon** – The Oraons are tribes of Dravidian origin that are found in many states of India such as Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Tripura, Western Coasts and the Deccan Plateau. The Oraons of the Dooars region is believed to have migrated from Chhotonagpur to work as tea plantation labourers and railway labourers because of economic hardships in their native land. After the Santals, it is the Oraons tribe that occupies the second largest position in terms of population in North Bengal with 5, 36,919 people in 1991. Sadri which happens to be a common lingua franca for most of the Chhotonagpur based tribes in the tea gardens of North Bengal, the Oraons also share this language apart from their own Dravidian dialect called Kurukh. The Oraons tribes have been largely influenced by Hinduism so much so that an alarming rate of acculturation in the Hindu hierarchical structure has taken place, not to forget a large chunk of which has been converted to Christianity in the Dooars.
- viii. **Munda** – The Munda tribe with a population of 2,89,091 in the 1991 census occupy the third largest tribal population group in West Bengal apart from the Oraons. Spread around Jalpaiguri, Medinipur, Purulia and South 24 Parganans, the Munda tribe is basically an agricultural community that migrated from the

Chhottonagpur region in search of better life opportunities. The chief dialect of the Munda tribe is Mundari, but in North Bengal most of the tribes of the Chhottonagpur region share the sadari language. The great Munda revolt of 1899-1901 under the leadership of Bhagawan Birsha Munda has earned them the title of a revolutionary tribe.

- ix. **Mahali** – The Mahali tribe belongs to the Proto-Austroloid group with a population of 69,542 people in West Bengal as according to the 1991 census. The Mahalis work as tea plantation labourers in the Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts of North Bengal and apart from these areas they are also found in Medinipur and Birbhum districts. Interestingly, the Mahali community is in itself a heterogeneous unit that originated as an offshoot of different tribes i.e. Santal, Munda, Oraon and Kol tribes (as in case of West Bengal). Four major types of Mahalis are found in the state of West Bengal namely – i. Mahalis, ii. Mahali Munda, iii. OraonMahali and iv. Kol Mahali. The primary occupation of the Mahali tribes happens to be bamboo based works like basket making and trading it with the other neighboring areas. It is believed that the Mahali tribes were brought to West Bengal from the Chhottonagpur region to work as indigo planters by the Britishers.
- x. **Chik Baraik** - the Chik Baraik tribes have been known to have originated from Bihar and are commonly referred to as *Madhesia* or the *Adivasi* people and are found very little in West Bengal. The 1991 census counted 16,030 Chik Baraik population in West Bengal who are majorly settled in Jalpaiguri district. This tribe bears a proto-australoid racial origin and are well versed in the Nagpuri and Indo-aryan languages, but as stated earlier Sadri happens to be the unifying language of the people originating from Chhottonagpur plateau region. Prior to their coming to North Bengal, the Chik Baraik tribe shared a historical legacy as a community of weavers. Today, this tribe is seen to have settled down in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts mainly as tea garden labourers and the rest being engaged in peasantry. Like the other tribal communities of the region, Christianity has taken a strong hold in the Chik Baraik community as well with a division of religious diversity being witnessed between the Hindu Chik Baraiks and the Christian Chik Baraiks.

- xi. **Bhumij** – The Bhumij tribe of West Bengal happens to be an offshoot of the Munda tribe of Ranchi. Districts like Purulia, Bankura, Medinipur in South Bengal and Jalpaiguri of Dooars in North Bengal homes the Bhumij tribe. 2, 91,808 Bhumij tribes were registered in the 1991 census with 1,017 in Jalpaiguri district alone. In the Dooars region, the Bhumij tribes are engaged as tea plantation labourers for their sustenance. The major Bhumij rebellion of 1832-33 commonly referred to as Ganganarayani Hungama under the leadership of Ganga Narayan Singh has made them on the title of a rebellious tribe.

The tea plantations of Dooars demanding a labour oriented market has no doubt successfully provided employment to people of the tribal communities especially to those that have been brought to the area on purpose for working in the gardens. A close survey reveals the fact that in almost all the tea gardens of Dooars, the wage labourers generally belong to the Scheduled Tribe communities who are referred to as the Adivasis alongside the Nepali communities, with an insignificant proportion of the Scheduled Caste communities as well. Focusing on the Scheduled Tribes, it is a well known fact that they have to a large extent being clubbed together under a single economic contour earning the same wage structure. Interpreting it from the Marxian point of view that the base decides the superstructure, likewise the cultural superstructure has been overshadowed by the economic base of these communities. In theory, the constitution of India guarantees many safeguards for protecting, promoting and developing the Scheduled Tribe communities. The International Labour Organization also guarantees them protection, promotion and welfare policies to live a life of dignity. Apart from these, there is the existence the third mega-sector called the non-governmental organizations that act as the protagonist of welfare, development and empowerment of the marginalized Scheduled Tribe communities of the Dooars region.

To trace the reality and to analyze whether these above mentioned safeguards and promises have been fulfilled or not, one needs to delve deeper into the question and idea of development, its implementation and the loopholes that need to be addressed by conducting an in depth study for collaborating these efforts into reality. The socio-economic and political profile of the selected areas of study shall be presented in the following chapter that will be based on case study method because giving a general idea of such a profile in a combined format would be a mistake in itself disrespecting the heterogeneity of the tribal communities of the Dooars region of North Bengal.

### **4.3. THE NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN DOOARS**

In the Dooars, it can be pointed out that the non-governmental organizations basically bear features of the local level organization although there is the prevalence of the regional level as well as the national level NGOs in the area. Mention must also be made of some of the international non-governmental organizations working for the development of the people of the Dooars region. The role of the Christian missionaries or the Christian NGOs for the development of the Scheduled Tribes of the rural interiors of the Dooars region is very much strategic. No doubt, such NGOs have been working with commitment, passion and voluntarism, it must not be forgotten that in turn many of the poor and marginalized Scheduled Tribe families have been converted to Christianity. Probably, the religious voluntary organizations exist with the ultimate goal of converting people from a particular faith to their religion. Some of the important sectors in which the non-governmental organizations of the Dooars region have been portrayed to be working in stand to be as follows –

- i. Child Welfare
- ii. Women's Welfare and Anti-trafficking
- iii. Community Development
- iv. Environmental Protection
- v. Welfare of the Disabled/ Handicapped people
- vi. Better Health Care Facilities
- vii. Training of Rural Youths
- viii. Non-formal Education
- ix. Relief and Charity
- x. Tribal Development

The tenth point that talks about Tribal Development is actually an interesting area of research. When an inquiry is made about what kind of tribal development issues are entertained by such NGOs, most of them either talk about an overall development (which in itself fails to draw any meaning) or regard charity to be the core idea of tribal development. These issues shall be discussed in the case studies that will be presented in following chapter.

We can site some of the non-governmental organizations working in North Bengal and their area of attention in order to clarify the diverse fields that the NGOs of West Bengal and that of the Dooars region in particular. This should not be confused with the case studies that we

will be presenting later on because those NGOs shall strictly confine its activities to the development of the Scheduled Tribes of the Dooars region. On the other hand, the list of NGOs that is being provided here presents the general characteristics, features and varieties of the NGOs working in the area not particularly on the Schedule Tribe agenda. A general list may be provided as follows –

**Vir Birsha Munda Memorial Educational & Development Society of India, Jalpaiguri –**

Purpose: Child sponsorship and school projects in Dooars tribal area.

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: Educational, economic, cultural, social and child sponsorship.

**Vasundhara Enviro-Welfare Society, Jalpaiguri –**

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: A society where every people will be self-reliant and free from all sorts of exploitation irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion and just environment which upholds the potential among rural people.

**Sulkapara Nagrakata Janakalyan Society, Jalpaiguri –**

Purpose: Social development in terms of education, health, environment, drinking water, agriculture, distribution of seeds, manures etc.

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: Maximum percentage of literacy, pure and clean drinking water, health and hygiene consciousness etc.

**Sristee, Jalpaiguri –**

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: Social justice, Women empowerment, Social documentation, catering to Right to Information, marching to fight against social evils like child labour, trafficking.

**Niswarth, Jalpaiguri –**

Purpose: Niswarth is at present providing training, employment and financial support to a number of physically challenged and underprivileged persons.

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: The key focus area for this organization is the empowerment of Physically Challenged and Underprivileged persons irrespective of religion, sex, caste, creed or social status.

**Manglabarey Ideal Adibasi Educational Society, Jalpaiguri –**

Purpose: Education

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: To provide the all round education to all specially backward and poor people of the regions.

**Jalpaiguri Hriday –**

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: To make a society where people will enjoy a good healthy life, a better educational environment, social and economic justices, freedom and democratic rights, meaningful co-existence with nature and environment and work for continuous development. To raise the social consciousness of the people especially of the downtrodden of the society and to work for their comprehensive sustainable development.

**First Opportunity Human Representation Welfare Society, Jalpaiguri –**

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: Human (man-woman-child-consumer-labour) rights, plantation, education, insurance, finance, health awareness, news collection-editing-printing etc.

**Uniproscuf, Cooch Behar –**

Purpose: Working for the cause and care of needy humanity.

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: Improving the standards of life of disadvantaged sector for their all-round development.

**Tufanganj Anwasha Welfare Society, Cooch Behar –**

Purpose: TAWS is a non-profit, secular, voluntary, public and charitable social service organisation.

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: To upgrade all members of the society above the poverty line by way of undertaking socio-economic programs. To make a society free from the clutches of poverty, ill health, illiteracy, caste and class, superstitions for all round and equitable sustainable development of people and environment with their active participation.

**SPEAK – Society for People Empowerment & Action of Kochbehar, Cooch Behar –**

Purpose: Rural Development

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: Sustainable development for the community, agriculture, livelihood.

**SECRET – Society for Educational & Cultural Experties & Training, Cooch Behar –**

Purpose: Educational training.

Aims/ Objectives/ Mission: To carry on child education, adult education, female education and vocational training. (<http://west-bengal.ngosindia.com> , 2017)

The purpose and aims of most of the non-governmental organizations mentioned above stands to be very vague in nature, the clarity of which shall only be gained by conducting a case study in each of the NGOs. The researcher intends to use the inductive method of survey for which we shall visit the area that has been mentioned above in section 4.3.3, and then trace the major NGOs working for the Scheduled Tribe development in the area. This is because if we follow a deductive method completely relying on snowball sampling then it becomes very difficult to get concrete ideas about the questions intended to be answered by the research as none of the NGOs of the Dooars region have its objectives solely dedicated towards the Scheduled Tribe communities of the area. The mixture of a variety of work areas furthermore complicates this issue.

**4.4. CONCLUSION**

The chapter bearing the title ‘Situating Tribal Problems in the Dooars and the Role of the Non-Governmental Organizations in addressing it’ tries to probe into the basic idea about the non-governmental organizations, the reasons for its historic origin and its rise especially after the 1990’s in the global arena. A detailed historical analysis of the area of study i.e. the Dooars region of North Bengal has been provided for a better understanding about the location. An attempt has been made to collaborate the non-governmental organizations working in the area within the Dooars region.

The chapter begins with an introduction where a strong argument is placed behind the emergence and the role of the non-governmental organizations from a historical point of

view. With this backdrop, we have tried to put the case of the Dooars in the global map and have provided a rationale behind the emergence and rise of the NGO sector in the area of study.

This is followed by the meaning of the non-governmental organizations which is very difficult to arrive at because of its multiple functions and a wide range of activities that it takes up. Depending upon the area of specialization, a variety of the NGOs is provided not to forget the source of its funding and maintenance. It has been found out that the areas of work of the NGOs have increased especially after the 1990's.

A serious attempt has been made to delineate the non-governmental organizations from the voluntary organizations following the lines of Stephen Hatch. This has been done by addressing the chief characteristic features of the voluntary organizations such as the non-payment of salary to its workers, its charitable nature, its absence of profit maximization policy etc. The in detail analysis of the features of the voluntary organizations automatically addresses its difference from the non-governmental organizations.

The chapter tries to address the changing nature and the types of the non-governmental organizations. It has been found out that both the state and the non-governmental organizations have undergone a change in their nature. The state has changed its objectives from policing to welfare activities. Similarly, the objectives of the non-governmental organizations have also witnessed change from charity and relief measures to empowerment. To have a clear idea about the different types of NGOs, we have formulated a manual chart to help us understand better about its typology.

The researcher has tried to study the non-governmental organization from a global point of view that has its presence felt on a universal scale as a universal phenomenon without confining it to a particular country. In an attempt of the South to develop on the lines of the North, multi-mega organizations such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization etc. have come into existence. The multi-lateral economic schools such as the New Right School and the Chicago School with market oriented development process advocated the protection of the interests of the disadvantaged people thereby demanding the presence of the NGOs on a global basis.

The chapter then looks into the area of study i.e. the Dooars region of North Bengal by discussing in detail the historical background of the area thereby providing some conceptual

clarifications on it. An argument between the indigenous tribes of the Dooars region who were commonly referred to as the Jhumias and the immigrant tribes of the Chhotonagpur region has been provided in a detailed format. This has been followed by the geographical features of the area and a list of selected zones within the Dooars region has also been highlighted where the research work would be conducted.

The creation of tribal reserves because of the fear of the Jhumias being outnumbered by Chhotonagpuria tribes provides the basis of the problematization of the research area. A brief account has been provided about some of the major tribes that have been studied such as Garo, Santal, Rabha, Oraon, Munda, Mahali, Chikbaraik and the Bhumij tribes. It is very interesting to note the fact that most of the Scheduled Tribes that have entered the area to work as tea plantation labourers have been bound by a single contour guided by the same economic strata; while the Jhumias have maintained their unique economic characteristics because, as stated by Bhattacharya, they refused to enter the capitalist forum by working as labourers in the tea garden.

The following chapter will focus on the field based data that will be primarily dedicated to the working of the non-governmental organizations for the development of the Scheduled Tribe people of the Dooars region since 1991 on the lines provided by the United Nations Organisation of Right to Development as a Human Right.