

# **SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF TRIBAL POPULATION OF DAKSHIN DINAJPUR DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL**

## **Abstract**

Tribes are regarded as the most backward community of the country. Hence, for their upliftment, different constitutional provisions and safeguards are provided. The Government of India has undertaken different welfare measures during the successive planning periods and allotted funds for those developmental schemes. Though the result is not very encouraging, rather it emphasises the need of taking this issue more sincerely and find out the right way to bring an effective change in the present situation of the tribes. Previously, several studies have been conducted on this problem but most of them are at macro level. But, the problems and priorities of tribal people vary from one area to another depending on the situation of local area. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct the micro level studies widely to identify and quantify the socio-economic factors which are responsible for the backwardness of the tribal people of an area.

In Dakshin Dinajpur, more than 16% of its total population belongs to the Scheduled Tribe group. But proper information about their present situation is almost lacking as they have received very little attention. Hence, there is a need to conduct a research study on them to know the present condition of the tribes of this district and provide a guideline for their development. Therefore, the present research work has attempted to focus on the tribal people of this district. This study is supported by the use of both primary and secondary data which are further analysed with the help of relevant statistical techniques.

This study mainly concentrates on the social, economic and health condition of the tribal people as these are the three pillars which help to assess their present condition properly. The study also aims to find out the socio-economic gap among the major tribal communities of this district. The seven major tribal groups have been selected for the present study. They are Santal, Munda, Oraon, Bedia, Mahali, Mal Pahariya and Lohara which together comprise around 94% of the district's total tribal population. Their social condition is studied considering certain social parameters. The study reveals that presently the tribal people of this district are losing their cultural distinctiveness, for example they have started to shift from their traditional mother tongue to the regional non-tribal

language. Education is considered as the key to the development for the backward community. Unfortunately, the tribes of this district are very backward in educational attainment. Comparatively, the Bedias are in better situation in terms of their educational attainment. The quality of the dwelling places shows their poor condition which further established by the study of their economic condition. In spite of the higher work participation rate, the monthly income of 78% families is not above Rs. 10,000. Actually, majority of the workers work as wage labourer who do not have any fixed income. Those working as cultivator are also not in much better condition as more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total sample household have no agricultural land and those who have land, majority of them have small landholdings. So, most of the families are in debt, even to maintain daily expenditure. The poor economic condition of the tribes of this district adversely affects their overall level of living. The health status of this people is comparatively better than their social and economic condition. The occurrences of illness are still more among the tribes. But, they have started to accept the modern health care facilities apart from their traditional healing system. Finally, combining the social, economic and health conditions, the level of overall development of the tribal people of this district is assessed. For this, the Development Index is prepared on the basis of some selected variables, which reveals that 70.24% of the tribal people are still at the lower level of development. Besides, there is significant difference among the seven selected tribal communities regarding their level of overall development. Comparatively, the Bedias are in better condition and Mal Pahariyas are at the lowest level of socio-economic development. Considering the entire study, it can be concluded that this district is far away from the target of development of all the tribal people of this area, which implies that wide gap exists between the policies for tribal development and their implementation. Actually, mere development plans, policies, constitutional provisions and safeguards are not sufficient for the development of tribal people; rather emphasis should be laid on their proper implementation. Only then the tribal people may really develop in the true sense of the term and join the mainstream to participate in the country's journey towards development.