

## **Abstract**

The term 'Adivasi' is derived from the Hindi language and is used to refer to the indigenous peoples of India. The term is broadly used to refer to a range of tribal peoples, such as the Santals, Mundas, Oraons, and other related peoples. The Dooars and Terai region of North Bengal is home to a large number of Adivasi peoples. The Adivasis came in this region through the colonial tea plantation and eventually settled here but gradually they became outnumbered by other immigrants as days went by. They have been marginalized and excluded from traditional power structures due to their poor economic and social status. Historically, the Adivasi communities of this region have faced extreme forms of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. The growing sickness of tea gardens forced many, particularly the menfolk, to migrate to other states in search of other occupations making this area a point in the chain of trafficking. Lack of education and employment combined with forces of cultural assimilation and political marginalization made them look for remedy, first through NGO formation, and finally as an important sub regional political player.

Our study, spread over three tribal blocks, involving both field survey with structured questions and intensive interviews of leaders, has helped understanding the Adivasi Movement represented by ABAVP as having a political context and also the consequences. The ABAVP started as a NGO in Dooars and Terai, but gradually it changed the nature of movement for the tribal people in this area. Instead of just voicing demands it emerged as a political player and negotiated with the political parties. The tribal leaders while leading the movements tried to capture the power and when the leaders achieved their goal the movement lost its militancy. The educated tribal leadership steered the movement through controlling organization. Though the ordinary tribal population participated in the movement they did not have must organizational representation. The resurgence of the Gorkhaland Movement from 2007 end onwards brought the plantations tribals of Dooars and Terai into the thick of state politics but it also made a section of tribal leaders alive to the grim threat that political splits along party line in practice meant that they must be marginalized in terms of the socio-cultural, ethnic, economic and political fronts. In these background, a very interesting shift in the

region's politics started taking shape after the formation of ABAVP as an NGO. During current political regime in West Bengal the tribal movement as led by ABAVP is largely institutionalized in the sense that the leaders initially sided with the movement for Gorkhaland but eventually got divided for and against the inclusion of tribal mauzas under Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. Some leaders of ABAVP have got some avenues of power through Tribal Development Board and many of the demands have been fulfilled. The movement is now institutionalized in the sense that they have taken a political turn, some aligning with regional/national parties.

The research work highlighted that the economic and education condition of the people in this society are very poor. Most of the Adivasi people in Dooars and Terai live as tea garden workers. The research survey also observed that the maximum number of tribal people are fully dependent on the tea garden and live in tea garden areas of the garden quarters. It is also revealed from the study that education is important determinant for establishing a responsible and conducive healthcare regime in the region. The study shows that the Adivasi people in this region are highly illiterate. It has also been noticed during survey in different blocks that Adivasi people are not informed and updated about the govt. policies and programmes which have been implemented by the govt. ABAVP as an organization has also been subordinate to the national level and state level leadership and common local tribal population do not hold any significant position. They are not getting a chance to contest an election as a candidate; they are used as a crowd by the other leaders. Most of the Adivasis people are guided by the local leaders, and the leaders decide whom to cast their vote to, and sometimes it is done forcefully.

The NGO movement in Dooars and Terai reveals a dichotomy, a contrast between groups pursuing identity-based politics and those engaged in constructive development. In this sense, the NGO provides a platform to respond to developmental needs and political assertions of the tribal front in the Dooars and Terai plantation sectors. The new leaders of ABAVP have been trying to emphasize developmental activism in place of advocacy for political activities. Nevertheless, there is a lack of clarity among the tribal people about aspects of conservation of tribal tradition and forces of assimilation, something that may be the price for political institutionalization of a tribal movement in democratic process.