Evaluation of socioeconomic landscape in Tribal Communities: A Case Study of Majhua Busty, Jalpaiguri District, North Bengal

Aabriti Sonar,

Assistant Professor(W.B.E.S),Dept. of Economics, APC Roy Govt. College, WB

Abstract: *Indian tribal community's livelihood is a multifaceted phenomenon with a dynamic and complex nature. North Bengal region has been home to numerous primitive tribal communities since Colonial regime. Studying the North Bengal Tribal Population , with its unique customs, rituals and economic activities , is crucial. The purpose of this study is to analyse the socio-economic status and livelihood concerns of the Tribal community of Majhua Busty, Jalpaiguri district, North Bengal. The study revealed that the Mech and Santali communities in Majhua busty are in deplorable state in terms of various parameters namely poor education, poor sanitation and drinking water facility, lack of permanent source of income. The study endeavours to suggest measures to address socio-economic challenges faced by Tribal communities.*

Key word: Tribal Community, socio economic, Meche, Santhal

Introduction:

The Tribal communities in India have existed since the ancient times. They have their own unique culture, tradition and economic practices. The Majority of the tribal communities in North Bengal reside in Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Darjeeling and Cooch Bihar districts. North Bengal is not as well developed as other parts of west Bengal in terms of infrastructure, civic amenities and human development indicators. North Bengal is the home of different ethnic groups like the Rajbansis, Koches, Gorkhas, adivasis for over a long period as a result of colonial rule, growth of the tea industry and Partition in 1947. However, the condition of the primitive tribe of North Bengal has been dismal in spite of the government efforts. Therefore it is necessary to study the living conditions, educational status and source of income of these tribal communities. This study is designed to study the livelihood pattern and the socio-economic condition of the primitive tribe of North Bengal and identifying the suitable strategy for further advancement.

Literature review:

The livelihood of Tribal community in India is a multidimensional phenomenon which has dynamic and complex nature. Since ages, tribal people have been residing into the lap of the forest as well as nature. Their culture, tradition and even economy are associated with nature, which has also kept tribal societies under isolation as compared to the mainstream societies. Several studies have showed that in India the main source of tribal livelihood is agriculture, especially forest-based, which plays vital role in national economy. Elahee (2013) studied that Tribal people identify themselves as aborigines in our country. It is a vulnerable section of our society who lives in a natural and unspoilt environment, far from civilization, with its values, customs and beliefs. Tribal groups with pre-agricultural stage development and very low literacy population are defined as primitive tribal groups. Sarker (2014) reported that Tribal populations are very friendly with nature for cattle and food. Nature is revealed to have enough resources for tribal. Deka (2016) has studied the rates and living standards of tribal literacy communities are very low compared to other communities. Oraon (2012) reported that livelihoods based on small and marginal land farmers are increasingly unsustainable, which compelled them to look alternative means of subsistence. Sarker (2014) reported that Tribal populations are very friendly with nature for cattle and food. Awais (2011) has presented his study that agriculture is still primary occupation which has been the reason for their backwardness. Kulkarni (1980) has presented the problems of tribals in Maharashtra vary from tribe to tribe and from region to region. Most of the tribal workers are

farmers and the tenant workers and the rate of economic development of all the tribal communities have been extremely low in spite of special programmes for them. Moreover the proportion of income derived from agricultural activity decreased and there is tendency of migration and non-farm activity (Deb et al., 2002).

Tribal people of West Bengal are facing a large scale economic and livelihood insecurity due to the lack of employment opportunities in villages. There are numerous issues of sustainable livelihood among the scheduled tribe population in this region. Ongoing pressure on forest resources is leading to a decline in their traditional occupation. Government control and the exchange of forest land are weakening valuable tribal land. (Mallik, 2013) study highlighted that there have been less number of the institutional opportunities given by the government to upgrade their income opportunities. Forest degradation, Institutional disappointments, absence of government strategies, poor communication, absence of social services like health care, education, employment, etc have cut down the livelihood options quickly expanding poverty. So, from the above discussion it can be said that livelihood options and opportunities are very less for sustaining a meaningful living.

Research Gap:

Several studies have investigated on sustainable livelihood and livelihood strategy of Tribal Communities. However, not enough work has been done to understand the indigenous population's livelihood possibilities at the micro-household level. Studies examining the livelihood elements in relationship to the geographic region are lacking. What are the livelihood strategies? How stable is the income of the tribal household? Some of these questions are intended to be addressed by this study.

Research Objectives:

1. To study the pattern and primary source of livelihood of the tribal community of Majhua Busty
2. To investigate the available livelihood options among the tribal households.
3. To identify the areas where the tribal community lags behind
4. To study the pattern of medical health services by the tribal community
5. To find out whether the community is aware of government initiative to promote indigenous art, culture , language and knowledge

Methodology & Study Area:

The study is based on Questionnaire based Primary Survey. A total of 50 samples have been collected from the respondents through direct interview method to serve the purpose of the study. The study has used both primary and secondary data. The secondary data has been collected from WB government reports and census 2011, periodical journals, etc. In this study Microsoft excels has used to analysis the data. The study area has been selected on the basis of location and accessibility of the Tribal community. The Mujhau Busty, Dabgram -I, Jalpaiguri District has been selected for the study. The sample of size of 50 households in total has been taken for intrinsic study of the tribal community. The selection of the sample has been on the basis of Simple Random Sampling.

Results and Findings:

Several studies have shown that tribal communities are secluded society having their own Culture, tradition and socio-economic practices. They live in isolated region far-off from the mainstream society, close to forest area. In fact they rely mostly on forest, nature and agriculture for sustaining their livelihood. In order to understand the livelihood pattern of the tribal community of Majhua busty following indicator have been taken into consideration for the study.

Demographic Profile:

In order to get the insight of the livelihood pattern of the Tribal households, general household information were asked on family size, age structure, marital status, education status, earning status, current working members in the household, sources of income, source of drinking water ,etc.

Table No.1
Demographic Profile of the Sample Households

Demographic Profile	Tribal Households
Household Sex composition: 1. Male 2. Female	1. 140 (51%) 2. 135 (49%)
Size of Dependent tribal population: 1. Dependent (Below 18 years) 2. Elderly Dependent (Above 60 Years)	1. 57(21%) 2. 13(5%)
Ethnic Composition of the Households: 1. Meches 2. Santals	1. 34(67%) 2. 16(33%)
Size of the Households(Number of household members) 1. Small Size(2-4) 2. Medium Size(5-7) 3. Large Size(8-10)	1. 12 (24%) 2. 32 (64%) 3. 6 (12%)
Number of Earning Members: 1. 1 Earning Member 2. 2 Earning Members 3. 3 Earning Members 4. 4 Earning Members 5. 5 Earning Members 6. 6 Earning Members	1. 15 (30%) 2. 20 (40%) 3. 13 (26%) 4. 0 (0%) 5. 1 (2%) 6. 1 (2%)

Source: Field Survey

According to the Table No. 1, the tribal households of Majhua busty had higher proportion of males compared to females. The ethnic composition of the surveyed area comprised of two tribal communities namely Meches and Santhals and the languages spoken by both the communities included Bodo, Santali, Sadri, Nepali and Hindi. Majority of the households of Majhua busty had on an average medium family size consisting of 5 to 7 members. Furthermore as compared to the family size, 40 percent of the households had only two earning members, with most of them working at the river site. Only 26 percent of the population was dependent, with majority of them being under 18 years old and only 5 percent being dependent over 60 years old.

Characteristic of the Majhua households:

TABLE No. 2 Characteristics of Tribal Households

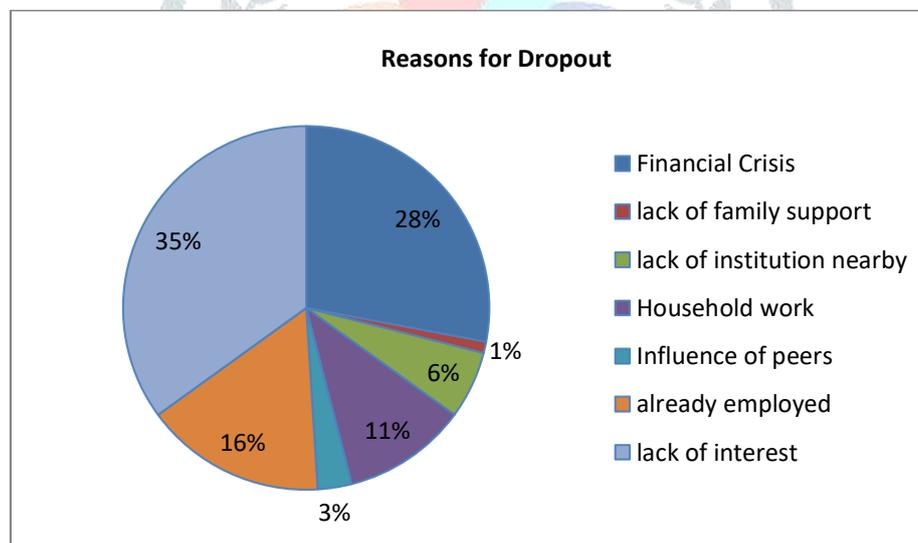| Characteristic of the HH	Male	Female	Total
AGE Structure:			
Below 5	10	3	13
5 to 15	18	12	30
15 to 30	63	61	124
30 to 45	21	28	49
45 to 60	21	27	48
Above 60	4 7	2 4	11
	140		
Total		135	275
Marital Status			
Never Married	43	54	97 (35%)
Currently Married	87	81	168 (61%)
Widowed	3	0	3(1%)
Separated	7		7(3%)
Total	140	135	275(100%)
Education level:			
Illiterates	28	36	64 (23%)
Below Primary level	48	49	97(35%)
Primary Level	36	16	52 (19%)
Secondary Level	18	19	37 (13%)
Senior Secondary	3	7	10 (3.6%)
Level	0	4	4 (1.4%)
Graduation	7	4	11 (4%)
NA			
	140	135	275 (100%)
Total			

Source: Primary Survey

Age & Marital Status:

According to the Table No. 2, The Tribal community of Majhua busty comprises a young population, with 46 percent of the population under the age of 15 to 30 years old. Majority of the tribal population were married. The Santhal Community had a higher rate of early marriage than the Mech community. Among Santhal tribe early age of marriage seen was 15 years of age whereas for Mech Community age of marriage seen was 18 years of age. School dropouts or financial crisis in the household led to early marriage among both Santhal and Mech tribes.

Education Status:

The overall development of the society is greatly influenced by education, but according to a field study conducted at Majhua busty, there is a significant lack of education among the Mech and Santhal Tribes. With 35 percent of the population has education level below primary level and 23 percent are still illiterate. Moreover the dropout rate was very high post primary level of schooling. The reasons for dropout as shown in Table No.3 was mostly due to lack of interest among the youngsters to pursue education since they were the first generation learners followed by financial crisis in the family due to which they prefer taking up meager jobs or help family with household chores. Lack of nearby education institution and peer influence have demotivated students from pursing higher education.

Table No 3: Reason for Drop Outs

Reasons for Dropout

- Financial Crisis — 28%
- lack of family support — 1%
- lack of institution nearby — 6%
- Household work — 11%
- Influence of peers — 3%
- already employed — 16%
- lack of interest — 35%

Source: Primary Survey

Housing Condition:

Thirty-three percent of Majhua Busty's tribal households have pucca houses, 33 percent have semi-pucca homes with tin roofs, and 13 percent of Meche households have kutcha homes with mud floors and thatched roofs. The majority of families (70%) have one toilet, regardless of the number of family members, and 23% of those toilets were built by the government as part of the Swach Bharat Mission. These toilets are in poor condition, with shattered pots and ripped roofs. 60% of households lack bathrooms and must take their baths outside, whilst the remaining 40% of families have an attached bathroom with a toilet.

Drinking water facility:

According to the field study drinking water facility in Majhua busty has been very poor. For majority of the households groundwater sources are major source of drinking water. Primary source of drinking water are

from tube wells. Around 30 percent of the households have to fetch it from far-off places. 33 percent have to borrow water from the relative's house or from neighbors who have the PHE water connection. 17 percent have hand pumps at their own premise. Only 23 percent avail drinking water from the State Public Health Engineering (PHE) Water Facility.

Food and Health habit:

Majority of the households had separate Kitchen made of mud floor and thatched roof. Around 47 percent prefer using both Gas and firewood for cooking whereas 37 percent still prefers using wood usually purchased at Rs.450 per cycle which according to them is more affordable than the cylinder gas. Majority of the household consumes thrice a day, diet includes green veggies grown on farm with consumption of meat thrice a week and no dairy product. The Consumption of home brewed alcohol is of normal practice.

The Majhua Busty tribal population has relatively limited access to public hospitals and healthcare facilities. Hospitals and health centers are 15 kilometres from the village. For the treatment of any sickness, the majority of the household favors using indigenous techniques or indigenous/herbal remedies. Only 10% of the families have a health card, but they have never used the service. In reality, only 14% of people preferred visiting hospitals whenever they were ill, compared to 36% who chose praying to their ancestral deity and using herbal treatments for recovery.

Occupational Structure:

Table 4. Occupation of the tribal households

Occupation	Population (%)
labour	67%
Army	8%
Government Job	3%
Business	13%
Wood sale	5%

Source: Primary Survey

The tribal household's occupational structure revealed that 67 percent of the earning members were employed as daily wage workers. Out of the labor force paid on a daily basis, 85 percent of the workers were employed sand miners for loading and unloading soil for building houses in the Siliguri vicinity; These were primarily male labours; remaining 25 percent were either domestic maids or laborers on construction sites. Merely 13 percent of the studied population ran small enterprises like as grocery stores and momo shops, while the remaining individuals were engaged in odd jobs in the adjacent forest area of Sukna, Siliguri.

Table No.5: Income of the tribal household

Income	No of Household	Percentage
Below 5000	3	6%
5000-10000	10	20%
10000-15000	18	36%
15000-20000	5	10%
20000-25000	6	12%
Above 25000	8	16%

Source: Primary survey

According to the field study 37 percent of the households earned between Rs.10000 to Rs.15000 per month. Nonetheless, monthly income of the tribal communities residing in the area varied. Santhal household's average income was lower than Mech Community. Santhal Households earned less than Rs.10000 per month. The primary source of the disparity in income is the family's unemployment, as well as the fact that, in contrast to the Mech community, the Santhal community prefers to engage in menial labor such as selling firewood and domestic maid services. As contrary to several studies which shows the traditional occupation of agricultural farming of the tribal communities, majority of the tribal population of Majhua busty preferred working as daily wage labor. In fact in order to supplement family income especially among Meche Tribe, home brewed alcohol were sold in the Majhua busty.

Furthermore, 57 percent of the households had no land purchased, 38 percent had tiny landholdings of less than two bighas, and 31 percent had medium-sized landholdings of four to six percent. Sixty-eight percent of landowner households said they would rather keep their land undeveloped. The land was left uncultivated because farmers were afraid that excessive grazing would destroy their crops and had little interest in keeping them. Households with land would only engage in subsistence farming and growing crops like wheat, rice, corn and potatoes for their own subsistence. Livestock farming mostly consisted of Pigs, Cows, Goat, ducks and poultry farming was practiced in every households.

Savings and Investment:

Habit of little Savings and Investment habit are indicative of extremely low financial literacy among the tribal households. Though 60 percent of the households have borrowed loan from Bhandhan Bank mostly for the purpose of House Construction, Pig farming or purchase of consumer durables including Two –wheeler. However, only 37% of people really save money; of those, 55% choose to save in cash, 27% save as bank deposits, and 18% save in both ways. The percentage of households with LIC policies is only 23%. A quarter of the respondents possess gold jewelry, which was primarily given as a wedding present to the family's female members.

Future of Indigenous practices:

Sixty percent of the households stated that they were not interested in the next generation carrying on the traditional agricultural farming practices. They attributed this to a lack of resources, including money, labor, raw materials, and the physical and mental fortitude of their ancestors.

Way ahead:

Mech and Santhal tribe have similar pattern of livelihood. Both the tribal communities have poor standard of living with consumption of meal twice a day, with poor sanitation and water facilities . They lack health infrastructure and medical facilities. The area also lack proper educational facilities. The drop outs rates for both the female and male students are high due to their interest of working or due to financial crisis in the family and also due to lack of interest in higher studies. There is no livelihood diversification among the tribal population of Majhua Busty.   Most of the households have agricultural land which was barren and underutilized. The following actions must be taken into consideration in order to make the best use of the agricultural land that might raise the income of tribal households.

- There is a need for good training and instruction about the agricultural production.

- Proper training and educational awareness should be provided to landholders about the productive utilization of the barren land.
- The literacy and education status are very low among the tribal community. Establishment of primary and secondary education infrastructure is required so that the teaching learning process is improved.
- The land is the major physical resource available to households. Most of the available land is poor in quality, and there is not very much of it. Agricultural intervention in the form of promoting locally relevant crops should be encouraged. Similarly, Horticulture and Small irrigation schemes should be encouraged.
- Awareness about the various indigenous practices should be encouraged.
- Government efforts must be made for establishing health centres, easy access to water facilities, construction of toilets, easy mode of transportation.

References:

1. Awais, M. (2011). *An analytical study of socio-economic conditions of tribal farmers in Bijnor district of UP State.*

2. Deb U. K., Rao G. N., Rao Y. M., Slater R. (2002). *Diversification and livelihood options: A study of two villages in Andhra Pradesh, India 1975–2001* [Working paper no. 178]. Overseas Development Institute.

3. Deb, Mahato (2020). *Determinants of Livelihood Choices Among Kuki Tribes in Tripura: An Empirical Analysis. Journal of rural and Industrial Development*

4. Deka, P. (2016). *A Study on Literacy Pattern among the Scheduled Tribe Population in Goalpara District, Assam. International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Volume 6 (Issue 1).*

5. Elahee, S. M. (2013). *The Socio-economic Condition of Santal Community in Rajshahi, Bangladeh: A Case Study. Bangladeh: A Case Study (March 12, 2013).*

6. Khatiwada S. P., Deng W., Paudel B., Khatiwada J. R., Zhang J., Su Y. (2017). Household livelihood strategies and implication for poverty reduction in rural areas of Central Nepal. *Sustainability*, 9(4), 1–20.

7. Kulkarni, S. D. (1980). *Problems of Tribal Development in Maharashtra. JSTOR, Vol. 15, 1598-1600.*

8. Mallik R. M. (2013). *Tribal livelihood, food security and poverty in India*. SSDN Publishers & Distributors.

9. Mandal, Jayatra. "Socio-Economic Status of Tribe: A Case Study of Porobusty, Alipurduar, West Bengal." Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (IJIR) 2.5 (2016): 536–541. Print.

10. Oraon, V. (2012). *Changing patterns of tribal livelihood: A case study in Sundargarh district, Odhisha. National Institute of Technology, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. Rourkela: Unpublished MA Thesis. Also mentioned in* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341712954_Determinants_of_Livelihood_Choices_Among_Kuki_Tribes_in_Tripura_An_Empirical_Analysis

11. Riti Moktan (2018).*RABHA ETHNIC COMMUNITY OF NORTH BENGAL: ANALYSIS ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS. Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR) ,JETIR August 2018, Volume 5, Issue 8.*

12. Sarker, M. A. (May 2014). The Livelihood of the Santals in the Context of Declining CPR in Dinajpur.

13. Takri K.K , Dr Sahoo(2022). *CHANGING SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY ON KANDHA TRIBALS OF RAYAGADA DISTRICT IN ODISHA. EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101 Volume: 9, Issue: 11.*