



# Socio-economic status & problems of scheduled tribe community in West Bengal : An overview

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## Abstract :

There are different types of scheduled tribe communities in West Bengal with different socio-economic status. They mainly live in jungles, hilly areas etc. away from the main society. Among these tribal communities Santhal and Toto tribal groups have dimensional livelihood and Sabar tribal groups lead low socio-economic life. Even after seven decades of independence , tribals are still considered as a 'suppressed class'. Various laws have been framed by the Government of India for the safeguard, protection and development of tribals. Tribals have some common characteristics. Such as common in nature, unity by nature, uniqueness of language, own political views, simple and self-sufficient etc. They have many problems. Those problems are that scheduled tribes are largely backward in terms of education, they have nutritional and health problems, they have alcoholic lifestyle etc. The West Bengal Government has undertaken many schemes for their improvement , among them shikshashree prakalpa, Ashram hostel facility, old pension scheme, provide bicycle for girls etc. For the proper development of scheduled tribes lifestyle, West Bengal Government needs to provide them clean water, ventilated house, nutritious food etc. This study has a message for future administrators on what approach can lead to overall development of scheduled tribe communities.

**Keywords :** Socio-economic status, Scheduled tribe, West Bengal, Community, Society.

## Introduction :

The word 'Tribe' is derived from the latin word 'Tribus' which means 'one third'. India has the largest number of tribes in the world after Africa. Tribal people have certain specific characteristics that are different from other races or castes. People of the scheduled tribe generally prefer to live simple life. They are mainly isolate type and they like to stay apart from other races. Originally in India, the scheduled tribes have been living in the jungles and hills far away from the mainstream of society for many years. Now is time to bring them back into the mainstream of society with respect. Scheduled tribes of India have been cheated and hated by colonial rule and non-tribals for a long time. After the independence of India, the Government of India started giving them various protections from the social and educational aspects. But despite this, seven decades after independence, scheduled tribe people still lack essential food, shelter and education.

It is very difficult to determine the exact definition of 'Tribe'. 'Tribes' are sometimes called as 'Depressed classes'.

Lucy Mair defines 'Tribe' as "An independent political division of a population with a common culture".

According to Gillin Gillin 'Tribe' as "Any collection of pre-literate local group that occupies, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribes and castes".

## **Objectives :**

- 1) To find out the reasons behind the socio-economic backwardness of scheduled tribes in West Bengal.
- 2) To compare economic status between tribal community and non-tribal community of West Bengal.
- 3) To investigate reasons for isolation preference of scheduled tribes.
- 4) To assess the economic status and education level of scheduled tribes at present in West Bengal.
- 5) To analyze the difference in economic factors of various tribal community people.
- 6) To know about the role of scheduled tribes in society today.

## **Methodology :**

This study is mainly done with the help of secondary data. Occupation, Income, Educational status, Family size, Religious, Food habit, Life style etc. of Scheduled Tribe population are discussed with the help of secondary data. Secondary data is mainly obtained from various journals, websites, magazines, newspaper articles, encyclopedia etc.

## **Review of Related Literature :**

Pal. B, Goswami. A, Biswas. S stated about 'Socio-economic status of some selected tribes in West Bengal, India'. In their study, they investigated the current socio-economic status of various tribal communities in West Bengal. They collected samples from every 100 people of all the tribals of West Bengal and came to the conclusion that Santhal and Toto tribal groups have dimensional livelihood and sabar and oraon mainly work in labor class and among all tribal communities sabar leads low socio-economic life.

Chetri. H, Sharma. R, Devi. D, Bordoloi. J, Pegu. B, Kashyap. D described about 'A comparative study on socio-economic status and expenditure pattern of tribal farmers'. They show that even after seven decades of independence, farmers still remain as a 'supressed class'. In the present study they collected data about expenditure patterns and socio-economic status of farmers in Sonitpur district of Assam. The study revealed that tribal farmers are very poor compared to non-tribal farmers.

Mondal. J, in his paper "Socio-economic status of tribal people Mukundapur village, West Bengal" describes the current educational status of scheduled tribe people of Mukundapur village. He wanted to say that if the educational condition of the scheduled tribe people improves, then their economic status will also change and their living standards will also improve.

Mandal. J and Sengupta. P in their writings describes the socio-economic status of the scheduled tribe people of Alipurduar in West Bengal. They have shown here that the scheduled tribes live in squalid conditions and their standard of living is very poor. For their development, better farming arrangements should be made in the area, the quality of the tourism industry should be increased and above all, their educational support should be increased.

Baskey. S. K. described on 'A study on the socio-economic status of tribal people in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal'. He conducted a survey in six sub-divisions of Burdwan district and compared the socio-economic status of tribal communities. Among these he mainly used questionnaire and interview.

## **Significance of the Study:**

There are about 40 types of tribal communities in West Bengal. There are many laws in the country which are made for the safeguard, protection and development of the tribal people. Various programmes have been implemented in the tribal areas to provide quality life to the residents. But their standard of living could not improve satisfactorily. Tribals are still suffering from hunger, nutrition, lack of poverty and deprivation. Although the Government of India has taken various steps for their Improvement yet their education, living

condition, socio-economic status etc. have not changed accordingly. A clear view of the socio-economic factors of tribals has been given in this study. This study has a message for future administrators about which approach can lead to overall improvement of tribals.

### **General characteristics of scheduled tribes of West Bengal :**

1. **Equitable values** : Tribal communities are based on equitable values. Socially there is no particular distinction between them by gender or caste. Both men and women live with the same enjoyment. In some cases there is inequality between them. Especially among those who are the main person or the leading person, their social status is different from the rest.
2. **Common in nature** : Common culture can be seen among tribals just like religion, political view, food habit, language everything is similar.
3. **Own political views** : Among the tribals each different tribal group has different political views and they live in the society under the supervision of their clan chief.
4. **Endogamous Group** : Tribal people prefer to marry within their own tribal group. As a result, cultural and mental mobility within the tribal community does not occur easily.
5. **Simple and self-sufficient** : People of tribal clan are simple and self-sufficient in nature. They collect wood, honey, wax etc. and some of them also do farming. As the population grows and economic demands increase, They are now increasingly losing self-sufficiency and turning to government assistance or work in cities.
6. **Uniqueness of language** : Different tribal groups have different languages. Most of them do not written form.
7. **Geographically isolated** : They mostly live in hilly areas, forests, along rivers and prefer to live away from the mainstream of society. But now for economic reasons they mostly live in rural villages and have merged into non-tribal society.

### **Major problems of scheduled tribes of West Bengal :**

Scheduled tribes have to face various challenges and face many problems. Some of those common problems are :

1. Scheduled tribes are largely backward in terms of education. As they do not live in the mainstream of the society, they are deprived of various facilities. In particular, institutions for education through their own mother tongue are not everywhere, even if such institutions exist in some places, they are far less than needed.
2. Another common problem is their nutritional and health related problems. This is because they do not get proper food and medical facilities and they do not always have access to sanitary facilities.
3. There are also various reasons for their economic backwardness. The number of employed among them is negligible and they are mainly dependent on traditional farming. Additionally, their overall expenditure is not commensurate with their income due to lack of family planning among them.
4. The people of scheduled tribe have mainly lived in the forest as their home for ages. Forests controlled their economic existence. They used to get all kinds of fruits, honey, wax, wood, meat etc. from the forest. And all the necessities of life they extracted from the forest. But since the English came to India, they realized the value of the forest and get their attention to the preservation of the forest by enacting the Forest Acting Director 1865, Forest Act 1878, Forest Policy 1894 etc.
5. Their alcoholic lifestyle is another major problem and it is also one of the causes of loss of wealth. Various government programs related to tribals are not able to significantly improve the standard of living of tribals.
6. One of the major reasons for the backwardness of the scheduled tribe community is untouchability. Due to untouchability they could not mix with the mainstream of society. Upper caste Hindus used to maintain a distance from them. Upper caste Brahmins did not allow to enter the temple. Brahmins barred scheduled tribes from worshipping gods and goddesses in temples saying that scheduled tribes have no right to worship gods and goddesses in temples.

**Developmental schemes for scheduled tribe communities by the Govt. of West Bengal :****Education Scheme :****➤ Shikshashree :**

Various post matric scholarships and pre-matric scholarships for ix and x are offered by the West Bengal Government. One of these schemes is 'Shikshashree' scheme which provides Rs. 800/- per annum from the West Bengal Tribal Development Department to students whose annual family income is less than 2.5 lakhs.

**➤ Ashram Hostel :**

Students whose guardians' annual income is below 30000 rupees are accommodated in Ashram hostels of recognized schools and are paid 750 rupees per month.

**Special Education Schemes :**

Some special education schemes have been introduced by the West Bengal Government for scheduled tribe students in which the students are placed in residential schools and educated in modern education. These schemes are -

- Feeder schools
- Belpahari Residential Girls' Schools for Tribals
- Pandit Raghunath Murmu Residential Schools
- Ekalavya Model Residential Schools.

**Old age pension scheme :**

Scheduled tribes who belong to BPL list are given Rs. 1000 per month from West Bengal Development Department.

**Bi-cycles for tribal girls :**

Bi-cycles have been provided to the girls from class ix to class xii in Bankura, Paschim Medinipur, Purulia to prevent drop-out from schools. Given below are the statistics for Bi-cycles.

YEAR	TOTAL
2010 – 2011	9418
2011 – 2012	7747
2012 – 2013	1350
2013 – 2014	12001
2014 – 2015	74075

**SCA to TSP ( Special Central Assistance to Tribal; Sub-Plan ) :**

Various facilities have been provided by West Bengal Development Department through various schemes in scheduled tribe dominated areas. These schemes are ---

**1. Income Generation schemes :**

- Agriculture and allied activities
- Small trade & business
- Animal husbandry
- Rural transport

**2. Infrastructure Development Scheme****3. Job oriented training programme for unemployed youths**

**Findings :****Educational :**

- Tribals need to be educated in their own language so that they can be interested in getting education.
- They should be given scientific teaching by abandoning their religious dogmas.

**Health :**

- Pregnant tribal women should be informed proper information about health, education by the health organization at the right time. Moreover, they need to provide timely iron and minerals.
- Clean water, medicines, nutritious food, ventilated houses should be provided by the West Bengal Government in scheduled tribe occupied areas.
- More hospitals and health institutions should be built in scheduled tribe dominated areas. Qualified doctors should be encouraged to work in hospitals in scheduled tribe areas.

**Economic :**

- Various schemes are to be launched by the West Bengal Government, through which housing, annual stipend and financial assistance will be provided to the BPL members of the scheduled tribes.

**Conclusion :**

The various tribal communities in West Bengal have varied socio-economic status and also have wide differences in income and educational standards. Among these tribes, the income and educational standards of the 'Santhals' are better than those of other scheduled tribes. These 'Santhal' tribes are mainly dependent on agriculture. The scheduled tribes are basically plagued with various problems. In particular uneducated lifestyle, poor health, lack of sanitation, living below poverty level etc. have degraded their standard of living. Even after seven decades of independence, scheduled tribes are still deprived of complete freedom and rights. The West Bengal Government should provide more educational and economic facilities to the scheduled tribe residents so that they can get protection in both respects. More and more educational institutions should be set up in scheduled tribe areas and efforts should be made to facilitate teaching through their own mother tongue. If they are provided with all these facilities, they will be less likely to migrate. Special efforts should be made to educate women of scheduled tribe communities, as only a mother can raise a child to be a good citizen of a civilized society & it may be concluded as follows :

**1. Theory of Pseudo Development :**

The developmental strategy and the actual development of tribes is not continuous. A large number of tribal people, they failed to continue their own status even after upgradation.

**2. Theory of Identity & Ethnic Culture :**

Most of the tribal community has been lacking of their identity crisis & always try to retain their ethnic culture & failed to have mainstreaming for their proper development.

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