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**PARTICIPATION OF THE SCHEDULED TRIBE
PLAYERS IN MAINSTREAM SPORTS:
A STUDY IN WEST BENGAL**

Introduction

“A game is defined as a recreational activity characterized by: (1) organized play, (2) competition, (3) two or more sides, (4) criteria for determining the winner, and (5) agreed-upon rules” (Roberts, Arth and Bush, 1959). The games of the world as classified in terms of distinctive patterns of play by Roberts, Arth and Bush include: (1) physical skill, (2) strategy, and (3) chance. The study on 82 tribal communities suggested that all three types of games could be found among these tribal groups (Roberts, Arth and Bush, 1959). Bourdieu (1991) viewed sports in relation to the social classes and noted that i) sports must be considered a “field” which has its own dynamics, history, and chronology and is relatively autonomous from the society of which it is a part. An important argument raised by him by noting “Sport, like any other practice, is an object of struggles between the fractions of the dominant class and between the social classes”. He further stated that we must understand both what led to the “shift whereby sport as an elite practice reserved for amateurs became sport as a spectacle produced by professionals for consumption by the masses” and the political economy of all the accompanying personnel and industries involved with equipment, production, administration, etc.; and the relationship between a social class and its sports participation will depend on spare time, economic and cultural capital, and the meanings and functions attributed to the sports practices by the various social classes. Bourdieu (1988) elaborates the links between the locations of people in social space and their patterns of participation in and attention to different sports as a key aspect of the sociology of sports.

Participation in sports is closely connected with the socio-economic status of the sports person. Previous studies on sociology of sports suggested that people belonging to higher class prefer sports such as lawn tennis, golf,

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gymnastics, swimming, badminton, and squash to maintain the status quo. It is also observed that in India sports like tennis, cricket, badminton, swimming are played in private schools (mainly upper and middle economic classes), while the government schools focuses on the rural games of football, wrestling, boxing, kabaddi, handball, athletic, volleyball, each requiring a simple infrastructure (Gahlawat, 2016).

Studies also suggest that parents of both middle and lower social economic classes, socialized their children into the peoples games of soccer, basketball, and volleyball (Mazrui, 1987).

Sports have often been cited as a site of conflict and resistance, while a number of studies suggested that sport is the vehicle for upward social mobility for the minorities (Washington and Karen, 2001). A study in Chattisgarh suggested that “Tribal Sports person (boys) were superior in terms of motor fitness. They had shown their superiority in all the components of motor fitness i.e. shuttle run (speed and agility), chin ups (arms and shoulder strength) and vertical jump (explosive strength) compared to non tribal sports person” (Agashe and Karkare, 2013). While talking about fitness, we must not forget the age factor associated with sports. Swaim *et al.* (1998) in their study pointed competitive sports could be developmentally beneficial of the young adolescents if it is planned properly. The problems in competitive sports faced at the middle level are repeated injuries, unreasonable expectations of coaches and guardians and discontinuity of the players due to growing interest in other things, spending more time in education, losing interest due to not having fun or disliking the coach etc. But even then participation in sports helps in their physical and psychological development.

Tribal situation in India and West Bengal

The Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of India constitutes 8.6 percent of the total population. As per 2011 Census there were 10,42,81,034 Scheduled Tribe population in India showing a significant decadal growth rate of 23.7 percent. The sex ratio among the STs is 990 which was higher than the sex ratio of total population (943). The Scheduled Tribes are notified in 30 states and UTs of India. The number of notified Scheduled Tribe communities in India is 705. There are 23 million tribal households in India. In West Bengal there are 40 enlisted Scheduled Tribe communities, although the number of individual tribal group is 47. As per 2011 Census they constitute 5.8 percent of the total population of the state and their population is 5296953. They inhabit 1241874 households of the state. The sex ratio of the state’s ST population is 999 which was higher than the sex ratio of the STs of India. The effective literacy rate of the tribal population of India was recorded to be 59.0% which is much less than the total population of India (73%). Female literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes is even very low (49.4%) compared to the males and the gender gap in literacy is recorded to be 19.1 percent. the work

participation rate among the Scheduled Tribe population of India (48.7%) is little higher than the work participation rate of total population (39.8%) of the country. The literacy rate of the tribal population of West Bengal is 57.93%, while the female literacy rate is 47.71% only.¹

There are a number of schemes implemented by the state as well as government of India for development of the Scheduled Tribes. These could be broadly divided into two segments: 1. Schemes for livelihood development and 2. Schemes for educational development. Under livelihood development programmes institutional support is given from Ministry of Tribal Affairs for development and marketing of tribal products and Minor Forest Produce. Financial assistance is provided through The National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) through its' state wing to implement income generating activities among the tribal people. Some of the schemes sanctioned by areas under: i) Dairy, Poultry, Pumpset/ Minor Irrigation, Goatary, Piggery, Horticulture etc. in the Agricultural Sector. ii) Bamboo Furniture Making unit, Flour/ Rice Mill Unit, Steel Fabrication, Gem Stone Cutting and Polishing Unit etc under the Industrial Sector. iii) Automobile Workshop, Book Binding, Data Processing, Tent Hose etc under the Service Sector. iv) Auto Rickshaw, Goods Carrier etc under the Transport Sector etc.²

On the other hand educational schemes include scholarships at different levels sponsored by both state and central government. A state level scholarship Sikshashree is given from class V to class VII students which include annual scholarship of Rs. 800/-. Another scheme Kanyashree is meant for prevention of early marriage of the girls. It includes scholarship of Rs. 500/- per annum for the girls aged 13 to 18 years and a onetime grant of Rs. 25000/- is given to the girls turned 18 and continuing education. Pre-matric and post-matric scholarships are paid by the central and state government together. There are scholarships for higher education (M.Phil and PhD and Post doctoral research).³

Sports in India

Sports are played at different levels in India, starting from local to regional to national and upto international level. Sports are considered to be economically important for a country. The National Sports Policy of India, 2001 formed by the Central Government, in conjunction with the State Government, the Olympic Association (IOA) and the National Sports Federation focussed on integration of Sports and Physical Education effectively with the Education Curriculum. The United Nations adopted the theme of "Sport for Development and Peace" in its Agenda in 2001, which demonstrated the close linkage between Sports development and Youth development. The draft of the National Sports Policy of India, 2007 noted that "Sports, games and physical fitness have been a vital component of our civilization, as is evident

from the existence of the highly evolved system of yoga and a vast range of highly developed indigenous games, including martial arts". There are different schemes for encouraging the sports personalities in India. There is special cash reward for medal winner sport personalities and Coaches. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay National Welfare Fund for Sports Persons (PDUNWFS) is meant for assisting outstanding Sportspersons of yesteryear, living in indigent circumstances who had brought glory to the country in sports. There is provision for government pension for the outstanding sports person⁴. Although there is no particular scheme for helping or encouraging tribal sports personalities in India, but Sports Authority of India accommodates a number of ST players for taking coaching on the basis of their talent. One of the traditional tribal sports archery has gained importance at the international level. A number of tribal players in India could be found to have succeeded in different state or national level competitions. Sometimes news paper reports or television news comes into focus with the name of tribal players like Monika Soren or Bhabani Munda for their achievement. But there is little or no record of the Scheduled Tribe players in the state of West Bengal or in India. The Scheduled Tribes hardly get chance to come into the news for their achievements. Participation in sport is the way through which they can be successful and represent the country. For mapping the tribal sports personalities of West Bengal a study was undertaken by the Cultural Research Institute through the Tribal Development Department, Government of West Bengal in 2016. The aim of this study was to find out the Scheduled Tribe sports talents associated with different main streams games. Focus was given on the players who have played at the state, national or international levels.

Significance of the study

Different studies suggested that sport is not an isolated domain of interest for the social scientists. Rather sport is more commonly viewed in relation with the class and socio-economic condition of the sports persons. Even a particular sport may have association with higher or lower economic class. India is a country with diverse culture and ethnicity. There are ethnic games and traditional sports at various corners of the country. The Scheduled Tribes form a considerable portion of India's population and a number of players are involved in mainstream games and sports. To understand the level of involvement of the tribal players and to find out their difficulties, a study was done in West Bengal. It was also important to know the opportunities they can get to become a successful player.

Methodology

For data collection different sports associations of West Bengal were contacted and requested to provide a list of existing tribal players. Name of these sports associations are Sports Authority of India (SAI), Indian Football

Association, West Bengal Kabaddi Association, West Bengal Kho Kho Association, West Bengal Basketball Association, West Bengal Volleyball Association, Bengal Hockey Association, Cricket Association of Bengal and Bengal Olympic Association. Some local level institutions like Bolpur Special Area Games Centre (SAG) and Gorkha Archery Training Centre in Kalimpong. A structured questionnaire was used for this purpose containing name of the player, age, sex, educational level, community, participation in state, national or international level competitions and their contact details. The associations provided list of 314 Scheduled Tribe (ST) players from which 143 players were filtered who played at state/national/international level competitions. Field work was conducted in 7 blocks of 5 districts having more than 40% of Scheduled Tribe population. These are Kalchini block of Alipurduar, Ranibandh block of Bankura, Nagrakata and Mal blocks of Jalpaiguri, Nayagram and Binpur 2 blocks of Paschim Medinipur and Manbazar 2 block of Purulia district. Information on upcoming tribal players and successful players were collected from these districts. From these five districts a list of 597 players was collected. Among them only 36 players were found to have participated in state/national/international level games. Different clubs and coaching centres were visited for collection of information on the tribal players. For the present study only the state and national level players were interviewed. A list of state, national or international level players was prepared from the data collected. Some success stories of the players were also documented. Pictographic documentation was also done during the practice session of some tribal players. The coaches were also interviewed as per availability. The data was analysed and tabulated through MS Office Excel. Data collection and field work was conducted from January, 2016 to June, 2016.

Findings

In terms of total population three districts in West Bengal shows high tribal concentration, namely Alipurduar (25.62%), Darjiling (21.52%) and Purulia (18.45%). On the other hand Paschim Dinajpur district (16.61%) has maximum tribal population in respect of total Scheduled Tribe population of the state (Census, 2011). Tribal sport talents have been found from all these districts. Tribal girls and boys in the villages of West Bengal involve them in different traditional sports and games. But only a few of them get chance to participate in mainstream sports and play for the country.

Mapping the talented sportspersons belonging to ST communities

From the well known sports associations of Bengal 143 talented players were found including 89 males and 54 females. Among the players identified from the studied districts 22 are males and 14 are females. There are three major games in India namely, cricket, football and hockey. The team games

like football, hockey, volleyball, kho kho, kabaddi pull most of the tribal players. Although cricket is the most popular game of India, but hardly any tribal boy or girl could be found in cricket (Table No.1.i and 1.ii). According to the coaches cricket training is comparatively costly and unaffordable by the tribal players. A number of tribal players are associated with different premier division football clubs of West Bengal like East Bengal, Mohun Bagan, Mohammedan, Tollygunge Agragamy etc. The Scheduled Tribe (ST) players participate in State level championships, National League and Indian Super League which has immense commercial value. The chart 1 shows the involvement of ST players in different sports as found during the study.

The association level data shows most of the female players are associated with Archery (24.07%). There are international level players and winners of different competitions in Archery. For example Monika Soren won Asia Cup in 2015, she also own National Award in the same year. Suparna Singh is a Gold Medallist at the National level in 2016. They got training in Sports Authority of India (SAI). Monika Soren and Suparna Singh were recommended by their school Barakhagri Anchal Janakalyan Vidyalaya situated at Nayagram block of Paschim Medinipur district. This school is well known for grooming sports talents in Paschim Medinipur. The school authority has constructed a multi-gym for training the students having sports talent with the grant received from the Department of Youth and Sports of the government of West Bengal. The district level data shows that the females are successfully participating in football and Karate. Bhabani Munda is a well known football coach in Kalchini block of Alipurduar district. She formed a club namely Kalchini Doars 11 with 55 girl players. A number of tribal players are the members of this club and participated in state level competitions. Bhabani Munda received the Real Hero Award in 2013. She is

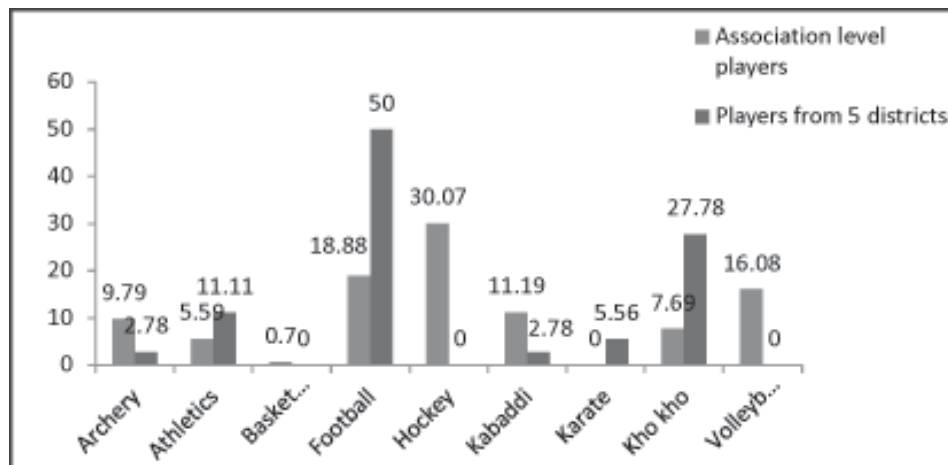


Chart 1: Involvement of ST players in different sports

the winner of L'Oreal Paris Femina Women Awards in 2014. Recently she won Bangaratna Award in 2016.

A karate training institute was found in Matiali block of Jalpaiguri district. Two successful ST players were found from this institute namely Alina Lakra and Rakesh Mahali. One of them is international level player.

Importance of SAI as a nodal training institute

There are a number of schemes implemented by the SAI with a view of promoting sports at Sub-Junior, Junior and Senior levels. The schemes are as follows:

National Sports Talent Contest Scheme (NSTC) - This Scheme is being implemented by the Sports Authority of India to scout sports talent in the age group of 8-14 (Sub-Junior level trainees) years from schools and provides them scientific training for different sports.

Army Boys Sports Company Scheme (ABSC) – This scheme for Sub-Junior level trainees. The main objective of the Scheme is to make use of the good infrastructure and disciplined environment of the Army for training boys in the age group of 8-16 years of age, to achieve excellence in sports.

SAI Training Centres Scheme (STC) - The STC scheme is aimed at grooming junior level sports persons in the age group of 12 to 18.

Extension Centre of STC /SAG - Trainees in the age group of 12-18 years are adopted to develop sports standards in schools and colleges

Special Area Games Scheme (SAG) - This aims at scouting natural talent in the age group of 12-18 years for modern competitive sports and games from inaccessible tribal, rural and coastal areas of the country and nurturing them scientifically for achieving excellence in sports.

Centre of Excellence Scheme (COE) – This is the only scheme meant for senior level trainees (12 to 25 years). Sports persons who achieved best four positions in all age group in National Championships in individual events and are winners or Runners-up in Team events are selected and provided scientific training.

The 'Come and Play Scheme' of SAI was initiated to encourage local sports persons in areas where SAI sports facilities/Centres are operational.

SAI provides hostel facility to the players under 18 years of age. The equipments of archery are very costly. SAI provides the equipments. For the tribal players it is difficult to arrange safe accommodation facility in the city as they are mostly from remote areas of different districts. Hostel is the utmost requirement for the girl players which is provided by SAI. But getting chance in SAI is not easy. The players have to go through the tough selection process.

Scheduled Tribes are also good athletes. Anil Soren and Debarjun Murmu are national level players and they are still associated with SAI.

Debarjun Murmu is a 19 years old athlete taking training in SAI since last 4 years. His native village is in Jhargram block of Paschim Medinipur district. He is a national level champion in 400 meter hurdle race. Moumita Munda is a 16 years old girl from Kalchini block of Alipurduar district taking training for Archery. She has participated in National Junior level championship. Like them many players are taking training at SAI, Kolkata and other Institutions. These are accommodating tribal girls and boys having talent and preparing them for bigger platform. They are experiencing a new dimension of life as sports person after being accommodated in the renowned training institutes. But at the beginning the local schools and training centres have played an important role for encouraging them and helping them get better chance for training.

Age specific distribution of the ST players

The talented tribal players were divided into three age groups depending on their participation in state/national/international competitions.

From the associations 11 sub-junior level players below 14 years were found, while from the studied districts 8 players at this group was recorded. Most of the players in associations are senior level players (61.54%). All the football players associated with the local clubs are senior players. District level information depicts most of the players are at junior level that is within age group 15 to 18 years. There are 30.77% junior level players in the associations as these associations organise competitions for the trainees of different age group. SAI do not provide hostel facility to the players above 18 years which is a problem for senior level players (Tale No. 2.i and 2.ii). They can take training but they have to arrange for accommodation in mess or in rented house. In the studied districts players within 18 years were mostly found as the senior players generally get admission in the sports associations of Bengal and stay in Kolkata or discontinue sports due to economic problem in the family. Often the girls get married sacrificing their sport career.

According to the archery coach at SAI, the players are always treated according to their performances in game. The players are selected on the basis of physical fitness and at least having one or two achievements in school or state level championships. According to the physical strength and ability of the players, the coaches often decide the type of sports where the player may be accommodated. The tribal sport persons generally come mostly from economically backward families. Sometimes it becomes difficult for them to carry costly equipments, specially for archery. Proper guidance of the coach helps a girl or boy to become a great sports person.

Community wise distribution of ST players

The Santals are the major tribe of West Bengal. They form nearly 50% of the total tribal population of the state. Other two major tribes are

Oraon and Munda. During the study most of the talented players were found to belong to these three tribal communities. These communities have more exposure to education and they are more aware about different schemes and facilities meant for tribal people. At different sports associations Oraon forms the majority (45.45%) followed by the Santals (37.76%), while in districts the Santal forms the majority (55.56%) followed by the Munda players (19.44%). It may be because these three tribal groups have more exposure about sports. Hill tribes like Bhutia, Tamang and Lepcha also involved themselves in different mainstream sports like football, archery, Karate (Table No. 3.i and 3.ii). In this context name of two sisters Paril Lepcha and Leerum Lepcha should be mentioned. They have own a number of medals in state and national level games. Their parents were also archers and they have established Gorkha Archery Training Centre at Kalimpong for giving training to the upcoming players. Paril Lepcha is now working under West Bengal police service. Some other tribes are also participating in different sports.

Educational status of the ST players

As per available data the players of different associations show that they are mostly studying in class IX to X (40.32%) or have studied upto that level. Some of the players are continuing after Madhyamik. Only 3 females were found to be graduates. The district level data on 36 players depict that the players are either studying at the middle school or in class IX-X as most of the identified players of five districts are sub junior or junior level players. Only one male graduate player was found from the district (Table No. 4.i and 4.ii). It is important to note that the players do not get chance to attend school regularly. Retention in one class or dropout is a common scenario for the talented ST players. The reason is more attention in sports than in education. The hostellers do not even attend school for months and sit for regular examination.

Conclusion and recommendation

In India sports are considered to be of great economic value. Some mainstream team games like cricket, football, hockey, kabaddi are played at the international level. Individual players also have contributions in international competitions in the events like archery, athletics, gymnastics etc. Such sports fetch lots of money to the players. Special sports quota is there in government jobs. The Scheduled Tribe players can take sports professionally and catch the opportunity to apply for the government jobs. In the recent decade commercialisation of sports led many players to become a global entity. Although the Scheduled Tribe players could be hardly visible in commercialised platform of sport, but the talented players can be successful at international level if they receive proper coaching.

Since most of the tribal players are from poor economic background, they do not get proper diet which is required for their grooming. They could not arrange kits and accessories as per requirement. Sometimes the players at the district level face problems getting qualified trainer. The upcoming talented players should be taken care of their performance by making arrangements for better coaching facility. The coaching centres at the district level may be supported by supplying the sports kits through the government. Yearly stipend may be given to the upcoming players so that they can concentrate more on sport. The successful players may be given one time reward for encouraging them. Local level government mechanisms may take necessary action to help the tribal players by making arrangements for coordination with the state level sports associations. The players above 18 years should also sit for various examinations for job as economic stability is important for them. Sports should be taken as carer by the Scheduled Tribe players as they have potential to become a successful sports person.

Table 1.i
Gender wise distribution of players Associated with Different Sports Associations

Type of Sports	Scheduled Tribe players					
	Male		Female		All Players	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Archery	1	1.12	13	24.07	14	9.79
Athletics	4	4.49	4	7.407	8	5.59
Basketball	1	1.12	0	0	1	0.70
Football	27	30.34	0	0	27	18.88
Hockey	34	38.20	9	16.67	43	30.07
Kabaddi	7	7.87	9	16.67	16	11.19
Kho kho	6	6.74	5	9.259	11	7.69
Volleyball	9	10.11	14	25.93	23	16.08
Total	89	100.00	54	100.00	143	100.00

Table 1.ii
Gender wise distribution of players found from five districts

Type of Sports	Scheduled Tribe players					
	Male		Female		All Players	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Archery	1	4.55			1	2.78
Athletics	4	18.18			4	11.11
Football	5	22.73	13	92.86	18	50.00
Kabaddi	1	4.55			1	2.78
Karate	1	4.55	1	7.14	2	5.56
Kho-kho	10	45.45			10	27.78
Total	22	100.00	14	100.00	36	100.00

Table 2.i:
Age group wise distribution of the players Associated with Different Sports Associations

Sl. No.	Age group wise distribution	Male		Female		All Players	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Sub Junior Level players (Below 14 years)	4	4.49	7	12.96	11	7.69
2	Junior Level Players (15 to 18 years)	23	25.84	21	38.89	44	30.77
3	Senior Players (Above 18 years)	62	69.66	26	48.15	88	61.54
	Total	89	100.00	54	100.00	143	100.00

Table 2.ii:
Age group wise distribution of the players found from five districts

Sl. No.	Age group wise distribution	Male		Female		All Players	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Sub Junior Level players (Below 14 years)	7	19.44	1	2.78	8	22.22
2	Junior Level Players (15 to 18 years)	11	30.56	10	27.78	21	58.33
3	Senior Players (Above 18 years)	4	11.11	3	8.33	7	19.44
	Total	22	61.11	14	38.89	36	100.00

Table 3.i
Community wise distribution of the players Associated with
Different Sports Associations

Sl. No.	Community	Male		Female		All Players	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Bhumij	2	2.25	4	7.41	6	4.20
2	Bhutia	1	1.12		0.00	1	0.70
3	Ho	1	1.12	1	1.85	2	1.40
4	Kora	1	1.12		0.00	1	0.70
5	Lepcha		0.00	2	3.70	2	1.40
6	Munda	1	1.12	6	11.11	7	4.90
7	Oraon	46	51.69	19	35.19	65	45.45
8	Santal	32	35.96	22	40.74	54	37.76
9	Tamang	5	5.62	0	0.00	5	3.50
	Total	89	100.00	54	100.00	143	100.00

Table 3.ii
Community wise distribution of the players found from five districts

Sl. No.	Community	Male		Female		All Players	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Bhumij	1	4.55	-	-	1	2.78
2	Lodha	1	4.55	-	-	1	2.78
3	Mahali	1	4.55	-	-	1	2.78
4	Munda	3	13.64	4	28.57	7	19.44
5	Oraon	5	22.73	1	7.14	6	16.67
6	Santal	11	50.00	9	64.29	20	55.56
	Total	22	100.00	14	100.00	36	100.00

Table 4.i
Educational status of the players Associated with Different Sports Associations

Sl. No.	Educational levels	Male		Female		All Players	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Class V to VIII	18	25.71	17	31.48	35	28.23
2	Class IX to X	32	45.71	18	33.33	50	40.32
3	Class XI to XII	20	28.57	16	29.63	36	29.03
4	Graduate		0.00	3	5.56	3	2.42
	Total	70	100.00	54	100.00	124	100.00

(Note: From the association data on education was received from 124 players as IFA could not provide the education data of the footballers)

Table 4.ii
Educational status of the players found from five districts

Sl. No.	Educational levels	Male		Female		All Players	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Class V to VIII	14	63.64	1	7.14	15	41.67
2	Class IX to X	3	13.64	11	78.57	14	38.89
3	Class XI to XII	4	18.18	2	14.29	6	16.67
4	Graduate	1	4.55		0.00	1	2.78
	Total	22	100.00	14	100.00	36	100.00

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NOTES

1. Data Source: Census of India, 2011.
2. Data Source: Official website of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
3. Data Source: Official website of Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal.
4. Data source: Official Website of Ministry of Youth Affairs and sports.

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