

PERSPECTIVES OF TRIBAL LIVELIHOOD: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE PRESENT ERA

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All over the world huge numbers of indigenous people live, and in 70 countries around the world there are about 370 million indigenous people. In this context, India is the second highest tribal populated country, after Africa, where 84.33 million schedule tribes who account for 8.6 per cent of the total people of India, and 22.79 per cent of the total indigenous people of the world live. Presently, 698 indigenous groups of people are living in India, among which 75 tribes have been identified as endangered too by the government of India.

The tribal as well as indigenous people are early inhabitants of India. They might have come from different parts of the world long ago and later settled here. They cleared the jungle and made it cultivable, and have had close and intimate relation with nature. Yet now most of the tribals depend on nature for maintaining their daily livelihood, and in this regard, their prime source of earning is forest, land and water. They are very simple in nature and mostly live in the hilly, forested and isolated areas of different parts of India from the very beginning. But with the passage of time, many non-tribal people migrated to tribal areas and started to settle and exploit various resources in an uncontrolled manner. However, nowadays many of these tribal people are facing severe problems to maintain their daily livelihood due to several reasons, and in the light of the issues and challenges of the livelihood of tribal people of India, the prime issues in focus in this paper are the problems of tribal people of India in general and with special references to the tribals of North Bengal.

Keywords: Livelihood, tribe economy, development, alienation, insecurity, migration, recourse.

INTRODUCTION

A person's livelihood refers to his "means of securing the basic necessities - food, water, shelter and clothing- of life". Livelihood is defined as a set of activities involving securing water, food, fodder, medicine, shelter, clothing and the capacity to acquire the above necessities working either individually or as a group by using endowments (both human and material) for meeting the requirements of the self and his/her household on a sustainable basis with dignity. The activities are usually carried out repeatedly. For instance, a fisherman's livelihood depends on the availability and accessibility of fish (Oxford Dictionary of English, 31 January 2011, cited in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livelihood#cite_note-1. Retrieved on 13.7. 2013). In social

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sciences the concept of livelihood extends to include social and cultural means, i.e. "the command an individual, family, or other social group has over an income and/or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs. This may involve information, cultural knowledge, social networks and legal rights as well as tools, land and other physical resources" (Blaikie P., T. Cannon, I. Davis, and B. Wisner 2004, cited in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livelihood#cite_note-1. Retrieved on 13.7. 2013). However, if the basic requirements- food, water, shelter and clothing are secured, then people can execute their life. Thus, apart from psychic needs, material wants are very much necessary for survival. Economic life deals with material wants of the people. The activity associated with the fulfillment of material want is also a constituent part of economic life. In this regard, Ralph Paddington (1952: 18) states "Economic system is designed to satisfy material wants of the people to organize production, to control distribution and to determine the rights and claims of ownership within the community." Dalton (1971: 89) stated "All society have structured arrangement to provide the material means of individual and community life. It is this structured rules that will call an economic system." Meanwhile Majumdar and Madan (1970: 188) declared "It consists of the ordering and organizing of human relation and human efforts in order to procure as many of the necessities of day to day life as possible with the expenditure of minimum effort. It is attempted to secure the maximum satisfaction possible through adopting limited means to unlimited ends (needs) in an organized manner." Obviously, economy is an important constituent of community life and plays a deciding role in the formation of cultural and social structure of society. Thus, any kind of change to it has an impact on society and consequently it has a great impact on tribal as well as indigenous people. In this regard, 698 indigenous groups of people who account for 8.6 per cent of the total people of India are living here from very early. They have had very close and intimate relation with forest, land and water as well as nature. This very simple people are the early inhabitants of this country who cleared the jungle and made it cultivable first. But with the migration and settling of non-tribal people in tribal areas over a period of time of time, various resources have been exploited in an uncontrolled manner. In the name of development, huge amount of tribal land has been acquired or alienated; deforestation has been carried out in vast extents of land for setting up industry, townships, dams, various power plants, and so on which in turn affected the biodiversity. As a consequence, nowadays many of these tribal people are facing severe problems to maintain their daily livelihood due to several reasons, which are the prime focusing issues to discuss with respect to a few tribes of North Bengal.

LIVELIHOOD OF THE TRIBES OF INDIA AND MAJOR ISSUES

From the very beginning, the tribals and their livelihood have had a close relationship with nature and even their ways of living are mostly dependent on nature. Though there are so many changes occurring and many of the Hindu castes and other non-tribal people have shifted from their traditional occupations to others, the tribals would not do this totally. Their social, cultural, religious, political and economic activities are directly or indirectly related with nature. In this regard, the tribal people of India have a heterogeneous socio-cultural pattern with varied economic conditions and activities which are mostly based on ecological setting and ethnic environment. The tribal economy has been classified in various ways by a number of scholars like, Majumdar and Madan (1956), Majumdar (1961), Atal (1965), Das (1967), Dube (1969), Vidyarthi (1977), etc., and they have suggested three-fold to eight-fold classification (cited in Choudhuri and Choudhuri, 1990: 83). These are (i) forest-hunting type, (ii) hill cultivation type, (iii) settled agricultural type, (iv) simple artisan type, (v) Pastoral and cattle herder type, (vi) labour- agricultural and industrial type, (vii) Folk-artist type and (viii) white-collar jobs and traders type (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1976: 116). However, broadly, the basic economic activities of the tribals may be classified into the following.

Food-Gathering: A number of tribes like Birhors, Hill-Khariyas, Parahiyas, Birjias, Korwas, Juangs, Hill Maria Gonds, Chenchus, Yanadis, Kadars, Malapantarams, Kurumbas, Paliyans, Onges, Jarwas, Sentinalese, Shompens and Nicobaris etc. are primarily the food gathering tribes of India. The forest surroundings and rivers are the main source for their economy with activities like collection of minor forest produce, hunting and fishing. Their individual as well as community life is organized to procure food by hunting, collecting roots, tubers, mushrooms, fruits, nuts, flowers, leaves, fibers as raw materials for ropes, bamboo, honey, latex, wax, etc.. They also hunt various wild animals like deer, hares, birds, monkeys, and fish and as a consequence they totally depend on nature.

Pastoralism: Many of the tribal people living in India depend on pastoralism directly or indirectly. The Todas of Nilgiri hills, Gujjars, Bakarwals, Gaddis and Jadhhs that inhabit Chamba in Himachal Pradesh in north-western Himalaya are fully dependent on pastoralism. In middle India, Kisan or Nagesias of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh are also dependent on it to a little extent. The Bharward or Maldhari and Roisipotra of Gujarat and the Rabaris of Gujarat and Rajasthan are the cattle herders of western India. The Gollas, Kurubas and Lambadas are the herders in south India. The Sansis of Punjab and the Choupans of Jammu and Kashmir in the Himalayan region also come under the herder type. The Bhots of Almora district depend on cattle rearing.

Apart from these, many of the tribals like Sherpas are also partly dependent on pastoralism. However, except the purely food-gatherers and few other tribes, most of the tribes of India rear cows, buffalos, sheep, goats etc.

Agriculture: Basically, except the pure food-gatherers and pure pastoralists, most of the tribals of India are directly or indirectly engaged in agriculture for maintaining their livelihood. In this context, the tribal people inhabiting the hill forest of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, etc. in north-east Himalaya, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh in middle India and Andhra Pradesh in South India are dependent on hill cultivation for their livelihood. The Abor, Khasi, Garo, Mismi, Baiga, Chakmas, Mogs, Riangs, Nagas, Malers, Hill Kharia, Birjias, the Saoras, KuttiaKhonds in Orissa, the Kamars, Maria Gonds, Khond, Juangs, etc. follow the shifting hill cultivation. Apart from these, many of the tribes are practicing plain agriculture. Prominent among them are the Khasi, Bhuiya, Santhal, Munda, Ho, Kharia, Baiga, Gond, Bhills, Minas, Khasas, Tharus, Korkles, Dubla, Koyas, and Malayalis.

Handicrafts: Apart from other means of economy, the tribals of the various parts of India have distinguished themselves as good craftsmen. The Agariyas, Abor, Baiga, Gond, Khasi, Rabha, Mech, Kota, Kurumba, Mismi, Naga etc. are experts in making various objects of wood, bamboo, cotton, fur, various reeds and other materials usually gathered from forest and natural resources.

Labour: Nowadays, huge sections of tribal people of India engage in labor work in agricultural and industrial sectors. Earlier, they primarily worked in the agricultural sector, but with the changing situation, now many of them are working in non-agricultural sectors which may be organized or unorganized. Many of them work in non-agricultural industries even on a casual basis.

Skilled White Collar Jobs, Trade and Commerce: Nowadays few families of tribal communities of various regions of India are working for their livelihood in various offices, factories and business enterprises. A few of them are even engaged in commercial trade of their own. The Bhotiyas, traders of the Indo-Tibetan border, the Valmikis, the Haiskers of Andhra Pradesh and a few individuals of different tribes are engaged in trade. Bamcha of Gujarat, Bhots of North India, Birhor of Chhotanagpur, Chari of Andaman Islands etc. are examples of tribes who follow this occupation. Basically the tribal economy is very simple and so called 'trade and commerce' is absolutely absent among the tribes of India (Chouddhuri and Choudhuri, 1990: 83-95 and Vidyarthi and Rai, 1976: 93-140).

Many of the tribals, particularly those who live near streams, falls, rivers or sea or on Islands have very close intimacy with the water source. Various

aquatic plants and animals are parts and parcels of their livelihood. The tribals who depend on pastoralism or earn a living from domestication of animals like cows, sheep, buffaloes, goats, and yak also depend on pasture land and forest combined. The tribal people, who are the agricultural labourers, are dependent on land. Even their trade, commerce and their handicraft industries are also dependent on forest resources, agricultural resources and so on. It is noteworthy to mention that a great section of tribal people who earn their livelihood from the agricultural sector, shifting hill cultivation and plain land cultivation, depend on land.

Moreover, it is clear that in most cases the tribal economy is linked to nature, and in this regard, it may be said that the first and foremost characteristic of tribal economy is the close relationship between their economic life and the natural environment or habitat which is, in general, the forest. Directly, forests meet needs of small timber, fuel, bamboo and a variety of other products, including fodders which are indispensable requirements of the tribal people living in close proximity of the forests. They provide facility for the grazing of their livestock. Forest also provides employment to a large number of tribal people. The economy of a vast majority of the forest-dwellers as well as indigenous people depends primarily on the minor forest products for their subsistence. The forest provides food, fruits, fuel, herbal medicine, tobacco leaves, gums, resin, dyes, tans and a number of other economic products and various non-timber forest produce to them. Even their socio-cultural life is intimately connected with the forest. Roy Burman opined in 1982 that "directly or indirectly in the tribal mind forest symbolizes life in its manifold manifestations i.e. home, worship, food, employment, income and entire gamut. Tribals can, in fact, be regarded as children of the forest" Ramkrishnan (1989: 72) revealed, "it is believed that the deities, representing various elements of nature such as sun, rain, fire etc. reside in these sacred groves". Therefore, it is clear that tribal socio-cultural system, i.e. family, marriage, kinship, economy, political system, religion, health, unity and solidarity or so on are very much interlinked with nature, as their economy is very much dependent on it. But at present, the exploitation of forest resources is leading to a serious degradation of forests. Between 1951 to 1980, India had lost 4.3 million hectares of forest land (1,40,000 ha. annually). The forest cover of the country as per 2013 assessment is 697,898 km² which is 21.23 per cent of the geographical area of the country. In terms of density classes, very dense forest constitutes 83502 km² (2.54%), the moderately dense forest 318745 km² (9.70%) and open forest constitutes 295,651 km² (8.99%) of the geographical area of the country. The scrub accounts for 41,383 km² (1.26%), (FSI, 2013: 14). However, many of these forests are now in a bad state. The tribal areas which

were covered mostly by forest are now deforested areas. Thus, obviously it has a very serious impact on tribal life as the economy of a vast majority of them depends on the forest.

With the passage of time, various changes have occurred. In the name of urbanization, industrialization, globalization as well as development, the prime resources of the tribal economy, forest, land, and water sources are compromised. The above symbols of modernization have spread and engulfed the livelihood sources of tribal people in the name of development. Vast tracts of land have been acquired for the setting up of huge numbers of industries, dams, hydroelectric-projects, resorts, hotels, township, rail track etc. Particularly in Jharkhand state, the following amount of land has been acquired from the marginal people including tribal people to set up various big projects.

<i>Name of the Project</i>	<i>Land in Acre</i>	<i>Displaced Family</i>
H.E.C Hatia, Ranchiacres	7,711.00	4551
Adityapur, Jamshedpur	34,432	635
Tenughat	97,843	
Bokaro	34,227	6066
Koelkaro	85,000	
Patratu Thermal Power	4,450	202

(Source: Upadhyay and Pandey, 2003: 52-53)

There has been provision for rehabilitation of uprooted families. For this purpose, uprooted families have been given land for house, land for agriculture and compensation amount, but the studies of H.E.C. by Vidyarthi (1976), Patratu Thermal Power by Singh (1976), Bokaro Steel City by Sarkar (1970), and Jhikpani by Das Gupta (1973) reveal that uprooted families were not rehabilitated properly (cited in Upadhyay and Pandey, 2003: 53). In India, resettlement researches indicate that during the last four decades, over 20 million people resettled, but as much as 75 per cent of them have not been rehabilitated, and more than 40 percent of them are tribal and poorer section of the society. The Report of the Working Group on Development and Welfare of Scheduled Tribes of Eighth Five Year Plan (1990-1995), says about the rehabilitation of the displaced tribals that out of 16.94 lakh people displaced by 110 projects studied by them, about 8.14 lakh are tribals (Varma, 2004: 18-19).

Apart from these, in various ways, a huge amount of tribal land has been alienated and is still being alienated at a fast rate. The reports from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India 2007-2008, mentioned that 5.06 lakh cases of tribal land alienation have been registered in various states of

India covering a total of 9.02 lakh acres of land, of which 2.25 lakh cases have been disposed off in favour of tribals covering a total area of 5.00 lakh acres (cited in Indigenous Rights Quarterly, 2008, http://www.aitpn.org/IRQ/Vol-III/issue_4/story09.html). We can see various cases of alienation and restoration of tribal land in different states of India. In Madhya Pradesh, out of 29,596 cases, not a single case has been ruled in favour of the tribals. Similarly, in Tripura, out of 29,112 cases, 20,043 were rejected. And in Orissa, an overwhelming 43,213 out of 104,644 cases were given verdict against the tribals. These are serious matters of concern (IRQ, *ibid.*). In Assam, we can see how the non-tribal people have bought plots from the community land of the indigenous tribal groups in the name of schools, societies, trusts, etc., but ultimately used them for individual benefit and commercial purpose (The Assam Tribune, 1st February, 2007).

Due to such acquiring and alienation of land, many of the tribals had to be deprived of their permanent occupational pursuits. Many of them were displaced from their shelters and many became shelterless too. Any type of land alienation affects the people. In many cases the landowner tribals become landless. As a result, the tribal people have to overcome many problems to maintain their minimum livelihood. To meet up with the common minimum familial requirements they were drawn into the nexus of the local moneylenders. Ultimately due to their poor level of income it became impossible for them to repay the loans. As a consequence, the money lenders extracted their remaining sources of income, namely, their land and settlement and gradually they became completely roofless and resourceless. The situation forced them to work as bonded laborers of the landlords or in other sectors.

Therefore, with a large amount of tribal land being alienated and acquired by various agents many of them became landless, displaced and had to face a lot of problems to maintain their daily livelihood. Since many of them did not get the compensation and rehabilitation promised, it impacted tribal lives and livelihood, which may be observed through the following study.

LIVELIHOOD AND CHALLENGES OF THE TRIBES OF WEST BENGAL

West Bengal is the fourth most populated state of India and second most densely populated state after Bihar, where various religious groups of people including various indigenous groups of people are living. Among the various groups of people, the tribal people occupy an important place because they constitute 5.8 per cent of the total population of west Bengal (Census, 2011). Around 40 tribal communities are distributed over all the districts of West Bengal but mostly concentrated in Jalpaiguri, Purulia, West Midnapur,

Birbhum and Darjeeling districts. For maintaining their livelihood most of them primarily depend on agriculture, food-gathering and forest collection, daily wage labour and a few of them are also engaged in trade, service etc.

However, the tribals of West Bengal are also facing the problems of land alienation and deforestation. In case of land alienation in West Bengal, CRI conducted a survey to know the nature of land alienation of tribal communities in 1960-1961, 1960-1965 and 1972-1973. CRI observed that land transferred to the non-tribals was enormous. CRI also conducted a survey under the SC and ST Welfare Department (Government of West Bengal) over 407 *mouzas* in 12 administrative blocks under then West Dinajpur district over 15, 148 people and found that 31.4 per cent were landless agricultural labourers, and there were also marginal farmers who had their own land but also used to work as agricultural labourers. It was also known from several studies that nearly 4500 acres of tribal land have been occupied illegally by the Tea Planters in North Dinajpur district; in 126 tribal villages in Malda district, 2/3 tribal peasants' land is in the possession of non-tribals; and at Samukhtala of Alipurduar sub-division of Jalpaiguri district, about 45000 acres of tribal land have been illegally transferred to non-tribals(cited in Sen, 2011).

In case of forest situation in West Bengal, at present the recorded forest area/land in the state is 11879 km², which is 13.38 per cent of the total geographical area of which Reserved, Protected and Unclassed Forests constitute 7054 km² (59.38%), 3772 km² (31.75%), and 1053 km² (8.87%) of the total forest area respectively (FSI, 2009:163; & West Bengal Forest Department, 2008). The legal status of the forest in North Bengal (six districts) is 3089 km² (14.11%) of the total geographical area. However, the legal status of forests, i.e. recorded forest area/land in the district, Jalpaiguri is 1790 km², of which 1483 km² is Reserved Forest, 217 km² is Protected Forest and 90 km² is Unclassed State Forests and Others constituting 28.75 per cent of the geographical area of the district (West Bengal Forest Department, 2008; and FSI, 2009:165). According to the estimate of 2011, individual wise forest cover in West Bengal is hardly 0.0142 hectare whereas in all-India level it was 0.0571 hectare (FSI, 2009: 17 and 165). Ultimately the forest situation in West Bengal is very poor and this scenario is very serious in case of tribal people because the economy of a vast majority of them depends on forest.

Issues of the Livelihood of Few Tribes of North Bengal: The so called North Bengal is made up of six districts- Malda, South Dinajpur, North Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar where many tribal communities are living. They are mainly Santhal, Ho, Munda, Oroan, Malpaharia, Kharia, Mahali, ChikBaraik, Kora, Nagesia, Kisan, Bhumij,

Kharwar; and Bhutia, Lepcha, Tamang, Limbu, Sherpa, Yolmo/Kagatey, Rava, Chakma, Garo, Mech, Toto, Hazong, and Mru. Basically the mongoloid tribes of the three districts, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar are living from very early times, whereas the others are mostly those who migrated to this area from other parts at different times. However, this area was covered by forest, and the extreme northern three districts were mostly covered by dense forest, hilly areas and these were isolated too. Meanwhile, most of the migrated tribal people started to come from mainly Chhotanagpur and Santal Parganas areas mainly at the beginning of clearing of jungles as well as beginning of tea plantation¹ around mid 18th centuries. They were brought by British tea estate owners primarily from this region (<http://www.actionaid.org/india/explore-projects/our-work-tea-garden-workers-west-bengal>. Retrieved on 19.7.2013 AT 2.38 p.m.). Apart from day laboring work, they were living in this area by exploiting various natural resources like forest, land and water and so on. Besides these migrated tribal groups, so many indigenous/tribal groups of people were living in this region from very early times.

With reference to challenges of tribal livelihood it is important to note that a huge number of tribal people mostly came from Chhotanagpur and other areas to this area to do work as tea labourers. It is a fact that more than 85 per cent of the tea plantation workers of West Bengal are tribal. But now their situation is alarming as many of the tea gardens have been closed. Due to this fact, many of them lost their source of earning and were facing a lot of problems in all respects. In this concern, it was reported that at various times many of the tea gardens of Terai and Doors regions were closed and ultimately 19 tea gardens were fully closed over a period of time though a few of them had been reopened later. However, the labourers who migrated from Chhotanagpur region had left behind their land and forest and fully depended on the tea gardens. Thus, with the shutdown of these tea gardens it is obvious that they have faced a lot of problems. Several studies reveal that reports of death, starvation, wage cuts, health problem, and dropout in education were common. Some even lived in inhuman conditions. It was also reported that they resorted to human trafficking including young girls and children for the sake of their survival. In the tea gardens of the four districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, and North Dinajpur of North Bengal, there were around 3.5 lakh permanent workers, and more than 25,00,000 people were dependent on the tea industry in this region. Among the plantation workers more than 75 per cent were tribal people and they were living in the gardens for the last 3-4 generations, but they have been facing terrible insecurity over decades. They lived in the shelters provided by the management; they did not hold any land for agriculture or any other means of livelihood except

work as plantation labourers (Wikipedia, *North Bengal Tea Industry*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Bengal_Tea_Industry, retrieved on 18.7. 2013 at 2.05 p.m.). It was published in *AnandabazaarPatrika*, on 15th January 2004 that 19 tea gardens were closed and 28,000 workers became jobless (cited in, *Tea Industry: Starvation Deaths in West Bengal*, http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2004/febraury/INVESTIGATION.htm, retrieved on 18.7. 2013 at 11.55 a.m.). When the gardens were closed, most of the basic amenities like drinking water, light, ration, health service etc. were withdrawn from the closed tea gardens. As a consequence they had to face a serious problem. As per government data, between 1 January 2006 and 31 March 2007, the number of deaths in the North Bengal tea gardens was 571. Of these deaths, 402 were of people less than 60 years of age, 317 were male and 254 female; 62 were children below 10 years of age (<http://sanhati.com/articles/361/>, retrieved on 18.7.2013 at 4.10 p.m.). Industries Minister, Partha Chatterjee said: "This is on record, 3,500 garden labourers have died of malnutrition in the last decade. It has been quoted in the Supreme Court." He also told that "people died in the last one decade in north Bengal tea gardens because of malnutrition" (The Telegraph, 27.8. 2011. *Tea tragedy on record - Figures on fingertips, Partha lists garden woes*, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110827/jsp/siliguri/story_14430287.jsp, retrieved on 18.7.2013 at 5.15 p.m.). Moreover, poverty was the prime cause for those deaths in the tea gardens of North Bengal.

Ultimately, most of the tribal people including those who migrated as well as local both are dependent on tea gardens for earning as well as survival. The tribal people who migrated had already lost their property, land, forest and water of Chhotanagpur region and could not return to their homeland, Chhotanagpur again. The tribal people are very simple and the concept of saving does not exist for them. The present tea labourers are paid a low remuneration which varies between Rs.60 to Rs.100 a day which is absolutely insufficient to sustain their livelihood. However, if the minimum source of earning is stopped, then, obviously they have to face serious problem. But unfortunately it is continuously happening in their life. With this poor income they could not continue their education, repair their broken houses, and provide food, dress, health services as well as basic amenities to their families. Naturally, continuous quarrels and conflict took place in this settlement. Here the matter of development was secondary or tertiary as their survival itself was faced by challenges.

Further, some of the tea gardens have been converted into residential areas in the name of development and townships have also been made. As an example, now the Uttarayan Township has been developed near Siliguri town. The tea garden workers constituting mainly the tribals protested against it

and the government deployed police forces to control the protestors, which resulted in two spot deaths and injuries to many.

With regard to North Bengal, ethnographic studies were conducted by the author also on Toto, Rabha, Mech, Garo, Kharawar, Drukpa, Tamang, Sherpa and the tea labourers belonging to Santhal, Oroans, Kharia, Mahali etc. at different times and observed a vulnerable situation among most of the tribals. The entire tea garden labourers including Tamang had no agricultural land and fully depended on tea garden as a labour source for maintaining their daily livelihood. But the monthly income of the tea garden labour families varied from Rs.1500 to Rs.2500 only, and with this meager income they had to provide the daily requirement to their average five members' family. As a result, malnutrition as well as disease, poor health etc. were the parts and parcels of their daily life. They failed to continue their education and as a result most of them dropped out in primary or in the high school level. Even, the quality of education was compromised.

The other studied tribes were the agriculturists primarily though a few of them, besides agriculture, also depended on food-gathering and forest collections partially from the forest. The studied tribes mostly had a close relation with the forest but the forest situation was deteriorating. The forest resources were scarce. The Garos lived in the Dewanhat area of Cooch Behar district, which was very near to the forest but they rarely could collect the forest material as the resources of the forest were very poor and primarily most of them had to depend on agriculture and agricultural labour work. The Mech and Totos of the Madrihat areas of Jalpaiguri district, Rabhas of Cooch Behar district and Kharowars of Malda district primarily depended on agriculture and agricultural labour work. But to practice agriculture they had to face a lot of problem as they lost their land. Though some of them had some agricultural land it was not sufficient. The data reveals that land of all the studied Garo, Rabha, Mech, Toto and Kharawar families' ranges from 1 bigha to 15 bighas. However, around 20 per cent of these studied tribal families had no agricultural land, and had to depend on other works like day labour work. Again, among the agricultural land owners, 60 per cent of them had the land which was not more than one acre (3 bighas). Further, always the land was not arable and had to depend on the monsoon for cultivation. Apart from these problems, they used very simple technology. In this context, the situation of the Kharawars was very serious as they mostly depended on manual labour because most of them lacked sufficient amount of land for cultivation. On the other hand, the Rabha, Mech and Kharawars had a very close relation with forest. They had to depend on forest for domestication, fuel, fruits, roots, raw materials for making house, medicinal plants but then due to scarcity of forest

resources or materials they were facing a lot of problems. The Drukpas who lived in the Buxa-Dooar areas of Jalpaiguri district depended on orange orchard, agriculture, forest collection pastoralism; Sherpa of Srikhola village of Darjeeling district depended on agriculture, forest collection and domestication of cows and goats. The situation of the Drukpas was not good though most of them had some agricultural land which was not fertile. They depended mainly on orange orchards but now the condition of these orange orchards was on the decline. Apart from these, small amounts of crops and vegetables were produced in their agricultural land but this never fulfilled their requirement. Various forest materials i.e. fuel, medicinal plants, other raw materials for making house, and other minor forest produces were collected but nowadays they are facing problem as the natural forests are depleting rapidly due to deforestation. Though some afforestation programs were taken up by the concerned authority these were mostly commercial plants. To overcome the shortage of food and also to fulfill the other requirements of the family members, a major section of them depended on other work such as day labour. Moreover, they did not get sufficient agricultural production from their unfertile land; orange production was decreasing; this area was reserved as a forest area, and thus, some restrictions were also placed on using the forest materials. Further, due to non availability of forest materials they had to face problems to maintain their livelihood. The Sherpa lived in the extreme northern part of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The studied Sherpa lived in the highest point of West Bengal and there was a plentiful resource of forest and the hilly areas were made cultivable by them by making terrace. Their situation is comparatively better than all other studied tribes in respect to economy, unity, solidarity and peace.

Therefore, among the studied tribes, except Sherpa, all the others were facing severe problem to maintain their livelihood. The tribals have a close relationship with nature as their socio-cultural life, economy and all other aspects are very much related with forest and land. But due to several reasons these are reducing rapidly.

In this regard, the primitive tribe Toto of the Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal, who mostly depended on forest for maintaining their daily livelihood are facing severe problem as this district was covered mostly by dense forest, but now the forest cover is not more than 28.75 percent of its entire territory (West Bengal Forest Department, 2008; and FSI, 2009: 165). The extensive forest surrounding was the main resource for their economy and considered as the major source to get the raw materials they required. They depended on forest for fruits, roots, tubers, leaves, vegetables, flowers, wild animals and birds as their prime source of food during lean months of the year. The dependence of

the Totos on forest as a source of latex, honey, spices, herbal plants collected from forests were an important source of income for them. Besides being the main source of fuel for cooking, the collected fuel wood was also sold in the market. Again, they depended on forest as pasture for their flock consisting of cows and goats. Raw materials for the craft and cottage industries of the Totos were mostly collected from forests. For making ploughs, they depended on jungle Sal trees. The Totos were equipped with indigenous tools like wooden or bamboo pots and vessels, bamboo baskets and bamboo logs for food gathering. Besides these, they made brooms, winnowing fans, fishing nets, traps for animals and containers out of it. Most of them knew matting, spinning, rope making etc. Bamboo was the pivot of Toto material culture which provided them most of their requirements.

Further, the large portions of land they once had, which was their other prime source of earning had been alienated or transferred to others, leaving them landless. Due to unavailability of these earning sources many of them had to face several problems even to earn a little for their survival, and had to go to other areas for labour. Earlier, the land of this village had recorded 1996.76 acres under the name of Toto heads, but now they own only 343 (17.18%) acres of land as 81.72 per cent of land has already been handed over to the non-Totos. This influx of non-Totos has caused many problems for the Totos, mainly because they now need to share their natural resources. Their authority over power, politics and traditional resources started to decline (Biswas, 2009; and 2012).

Previously the Totos had the control over their entire territory but with the gradual influx of the non-Toto people their control over land and forest had rapidly started to decline. The new comers, traders started to clear the forest and along with that, also exploited the other natural resources for their own purpose. Due to huge pressure of other population on this land, the forest areas were rapidly decreasing, thereby seriously affecting the prime income source of Totos. A Toto could not earn more than 20 rupees a day by selling medicinal plants or spices or fire wood or other produce from the forest. It was a serious problem particularly for the primitive tribes like the Totos because their major earning came from the forest and their socio-cultural and the socio-religious life was very much inter-related with it. However, with the decrease of forest area, it became extremely difficult for the Totos to collect the fuel wood or other daily necessities. Even the collection of raw materials for their traditional handicrafts, and house making became difficult. Previously the entire territory was replete with abundant bamboo bushes. But the commercialization and greed of bamboo traders led to the depletion of this resource and consequently there was not a single bamboo bush in their village.

Even some of them had to face problems to thatch the roof of the houses properly as the forest materials became scarce and thus, during rainy season they had no protection and were exposed to the showers and suffered ill health. The orange orchards in Toto Para village was in a very good condition up to 1930s, but due to gradual degradation of forest and soil erosion, the orchards were unable to tolerate direct sunlight and it might be due to these anticlimactic factors, humus formation in the soil got seriously affected. Therefore, the entire orange based economy was totally ruined. Since the advent of non-Toto in this area, the forest had begun to be cleared to prepare the land for settled agriculture and also for trade. Earlier they were totally dependent on folk medicine, and in this regard, the medicinal plants, etc. which were collected from forest. But due to massive deforestation most of the herbal plants, roots and tubers, animals and other natural medicinal sources were not available in this area, which affected the health and nutrition seriously. The forest could not provide their requirements related to the rituals and it was observed that they were getting debarred from socio-religious life and other ceremonial occasions of the traditional Toto society which resulted in a societal disharmony among them, and as a result, the social integrity and unity of the Totos were in continuous disturbances.

A number of afforestation programs have been taken in these areas for the development of the forests. Many new trees have been planted but the new afforestation programs have not only affected the Totos economy, but it could also not provide an alternative. Fernandes and Mahapatra have conducted two very interesting studies on the nature of displacement of tribal population due to various so-called development programs. Unfortunately, the tribals have mostly suffered but they did not receive much benefit of these programs. The observation of Fernandes (1989:211) that the new afforestation programs have helped the strong and went against the interest of the weak is really applicable to many cases in India. Moreover, the Totos were suffering a major setback to their existence.

GENERAL OBSERVATION AND REMARKS

The tribals of India have got a heterogeneous cultural pattern with different economic condition and activities largely based on ecological setting and ethnic environment. Economy is a most important need of a human being, without which, a person, and in effect, a community may become extinct. The disturbances of economy largely affect the ways of living and even all other aspects of their life including social, cultural, and political and so on. The tribals are an integral part of Indian society and civilization and no doubt they are the people of this country. Different jungles and hilly areas were converted into agricultural land and settlement by them. They are very simple

in nature; they are cordial and peace loving people. They are the claimant and have the right over these natural resource, forest, land and water. This is their property because they toiled to make it cultivable and made it arable. But in the name of development the non-tribal people as well as state mechanisms are also responsible for increasing the crises of tribal life. By exploiting their simplicity, their property, their land, forest and rivers are being used by others and mostly the tribals are losing their resources and their basic needs too. The above studies show how a huge amount of land of the tribal has been alienated; how a huge amount of land of the tribal has been acquired by the government or others for making industries, dams, townships, power plants and so on. A huge amount of forest area which was the property as well as source of survival for the tribals got depleted. Basically they lost land which went into the hand of money lenders and land lords; they were displaced from land by public projects or for other developments, and the growth of the tribal population and rise in the burden of agricultural work made them landless workers. They were facing a crisis to fulfill their basic needs and now the matter of survival is a great question for them. If we want development, then first, we have to ensure that we provide them food, shelter, clothes, health, education through proper implementation of policies and providing services. It is necessary to ensure land, forest and water rights to them and besides, land transfer and deforestation have to be stopped. Furthermore, afforestation programme and land alienation should be checked and development programs should be implemented immediately.

Notes

1. Tea was planted first in 1856 in Darjeeling district and its surrounding area in North Bengal.

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