Tribal Culture in the Matrix of an Inclusive Society: A Case of Marginality of Tribes in Terai and Dooars Region of West Bengal in India

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ABSTRACT Tribes in India are not a homogenous group and are at different levels of integration with the mainstream in the society. Originally living on marginal economy and practicing a religious life based on beliefs in spirit and supernatural powers, tribal life is now gradually witnessing conversion under the influence of a number of factors and forces like Hinduisation, Christianity, modernization, industrialization and urbanization; resulting into an admixture of tribal culture and economy with those of the mainstream in the society. In order to integrate the tribal culture with that of the rest of society, the Government of India has so far experimented with three approaches based on the politics of segregation, assimilation and integration.

INTRODUCTION

Modernity can be understood as historically associated with the urban, industrial and Participant societies of the west. The notion of modern nation, as prescribed by the western scholars, was that a nation became truly modern and developed when it arrived at that point where it closely resembled western industrial nations. After the Second World War, with the emergence of the Third World, theories and concepts that recapitulated the West European and North American transition from a traditional to a modern society generated a host of new models of development. The modernization paradigm of the sociology of development argued that third world countries should follow a path similar to that of the advance capitalist countries. It viewed the economic, social and cultural penetration by the modern west into the traditional south as furthering modernization. The modernization school in its search for a theory adopted both evolutionary and functionalist theories to explain the process of modernization of the third world countries. While the evolutionary theory helped to explain the historical transformation of the west from traditional to modern society following a unilinear path of development, the functionalist theory of change provided the foundational base of modernization theory of the sociology of development as it emerged during the post war period. Using Talcott Parsons' set of pattern variables[1], Bert Hoselitz (1960)

constructed two ideal-types of society, the one combining universalism, functional specificity, achievement-orientation and collectivity-orientation (the modern type) and the other, combining particularism, diffuseness, ascription and self-orientation (the traditional type). Modernization is the problem of ensuring a transition from dominance by the traditional to the modern type of orientation of action (Taylor1979: 34). Scholars of the sociology of development also highlighted the role of culture in the process of modernization. Sociologists following Max Weber sought to identify a set of cultural values in Asian religions as impediments to modernization. Oriental values and religions were seen as bulwark of traditionalism and a repository of ideas that were incompatible with modernity (Weber 1964). The economic model that was presented in modernization theories was the neoclassical approach which had served as an important model for western economies. It was concerned with economic growth as measured by the rate of growth of output (GNP). Industrialisation was considered as the main route to impressive economic growth. The choice of technology was to be capital-intensive mainly imported from more developed nations. In order to guide and speed up the process of development, planning should be centralised and encouragement should be given to high technology, private ownership of factors of production and free trade. The prevailing thinking regarding the way in which the traditional societies could best

achieve economic prosperity, political stability and socio cultural advancement of a modern state was to emulate the advanced countries in matters of free market policies and the protestant work ethic. It would bring about growth which would automatically take care of poverty, unemployment and income inequality. Development was viewed as essentially an economic problem. Economic growth was considered a suitable yardstick for it. In the end, growth would mean reduced inequality unemployment and poverty (Seers 1980: 5). In other words, development meant the transformation of a poor economy and society into a developed society through diffusion of knowledge, skill organization, values, technology and capital (Nash 1963: 5). Although the modernization theory came under severe criticism for its dualism and ethnocentricity, the Latin American marginality school located within the modernization paradigm contributed significantly to the study of marginal people suffering form social dislocation.

The quest for holistic development during post Second World War period particularly in the developing countries has brought to the fore some important connotations in the vocabulary of social science such as the issue of social exclusion or the term marginality. It was US sociologist R.E. Park who first defined the concept of marginal people to describe the psychological dislocation experienced by individuals situated on the edge of two conflicting cultures as a result of intermarriage or migration (Park 1928: 881). Later on Stonequist followed park in defining marginal people as suffering from psychological uncertainties arising from their unclear membership of two racial or cultural groups whose codes conflict. In such cases as the individual is not a full member of either group, he 'falls between two stools' and his or her dual social connections isolate him or her from both groups (Stonequist 1937). Marginality viewed from this perspective is an individual psychological phenomenon where the social dislocation happens due to cultural change and gives birth to uncertain status. This uncertain status experienced by individual in a problematic social position creates a distinct marginal personality. Since then, the term has been made resilient through different types of insertion that has given the concept a multidimensional expression. In the early 1960s, the Latin American Social scientists working within the modernization Paradigm used the term to refer to the people and groups dwelling on the periphery of the city in Shanties, slums and squatter settlements and experiencing substandard living conditions as a consequence of rapid and massive urbanization due to population exploration and an unprecedented high rate of rural-urban migration. Later on, marginality was used to refer to social conditions characterized by poor living standards, high rate of unemployment, absence of civic facilities and miserable working conditions. The concept also comes to signify the lack of integration of certain groups and people with the economy and culture of the society and their exclusion from political participation (Perlman 1976: 98). However, structuralist and neo-Marxist writers used the term marginalization to denote the import-substituting industrialization's inability to absorb the growing contingent of labour force. This capital-intensive industrialization process had the tendency to expel labour that led to marginalization of some sectors of the population (Kay 1989: 90).

The modernization perspective on marginality was mainly developed by Gino Germani and the DESAL school. Germani defined marginality as "the lack of participation of individuals and groups in those spheres in which, according to determined criteria, they might be expected to participate" (Germani 1980: 49). He further said, "it is essential to note that the marginal sector is not located (socially) outside society but within it, eventually to be utilised or exploited by some of the participating sectors. It remains excluded from the exercise of its corresponding roles and rights according to the normative schema in use" (Germani 1980: 83). According to Germani, marginality arises during the process of transition to modernity. In the transitional period, the society witnesses the coexistence of both traditional and modern values, attitudes, beliefs, behavioural patterns and institutions. This simultaneous presence of quite different kinds of practices, viewpoints and institutions creates a state of malintegration whereby some groups or regions are left behind. They neither participate in the modernization process nor are benefited from it and thus become marginal.

According to the DESAL school, marginals are those people or groups who are located at the lowest rung of the social order or outside it. It can be said that the marginals are not socially and economically integrated into the society or

into a class system, because they do not belong to the economic system (Vekemans and Silva Fuenzalida 1969: 44). The marginals are on the sidelines of the modernization process. DESAL's modernization approach to marginality encompasses a dualist perspective in which society is dichotomized into those groups which constitute the modern national community, that is, the integrated group and those groups which are outside it, that is, the marginal groups. The most outstanding characteristic of the marginal group is its lack of participation in society. Marginals do not participate or only minimally do so, in the social and economic benefits brought about by development. Their low level of participation debars them from engaging in decision-making processes, even on matters which directly concern them. Marginality is often used as synonymous with poverty. Thus the majority of rural population and a large contingent of urban population were defined as marginal by DESAL.

TRIBAL LIFE IN INDIA: HARPING ON CHANGES

Tribals in India are considered as the earliest inhabitants of the country. They generally used to live in forest hills and were known by different names like *Adimjati* (Primitive people) *Janajati* (folk people) *Adivasi* (first settlers) *Anusuchit janajati* (Scheduled tribe) and so on. Among these names, the most commonly used term now is *adivasi* while *Anusuchit janajati* or scheduled tribe is the constitutionally accorded name that covers all the tribes in India. Indian tribes can be classified in a number of ways based on geographical distribution of tribes across different regions as well as on the basis of their dialect, their religion and religious practices, their economy, their culture and the level of their integration with the national community (Singh 1985; Sukla 2011: 137). So far as the religious life of the tribes is concerned, tribals in India generally follow Hindu cult. Hinduism, in this sense, is not only a religion but a way of life, a product of many cultures. The majority of people in India are indoctrinated in Hindu culture and way of life that act as the integrating factor in the emergence of a national community (Prasad and Sinha 2013: 70). The tribals in India are not a homogeneous group but are at different levels of integration with the rest of the Indian society. This is particularly because of their differences in attitudes, view points, social practices, rituals, belief and their relations with the production system.

Education is an important factor that acts as a catalyst in any society during transition from age-old attitudes and views to modern outlook and practices. Notwithstanding the fact that the level of education among the tribals in general is quite low, education has played a decisive role in giving the tribals exposure to the modern way of living. Education has helped to instil modern elements in the culture and religious practices as well as in the economic life of the tribal people. It is rather the interplay of a number of factors like Hinduization, Christianity, Urbanization, industrialization, government schemes for tribal development and modern system of education that have brought about a metamorphosis in the way of life of the tribal people. Tribal culture is fast undergoing changes and this is the result of changes that have taken place in their economic system, their ecology including human environment and their religious beliefs. Religion and religious beliefs are the deciding factors that mould the way of life and the culture of the tribal communities. Belief in supernatural power, in the invisible spirit beyond the material visible world is almost universal among the tribes. The tribal India has a rich stock of myths and legends that explain the history and causes behind the celebration of each ceremony and religious occasion. Even the clan, the village or the place—all have something mythological behind them. The spiritual life of the tribal people is a combination of their beliefs in myths and legends, their faith in spirits, the rituals they follow, their worship of nature and ancestors and their mysterious relations with animals and plants (Ramya 2013: 26). The religious and spiritual life of the tribes in India in general have some common features; namely Animism, Bongaism, Naturalism, Totemism, Taboo, magic, ancestor worship and polytheism.

The economic system of the tribes is closely associated with the tribal culture. It is an established fact that the socio-economic structure of tribal communities is markedly different from that of other communities in the society. The technology tribes use is very simple and is in consonance with tribal ecology and their conservative outlook. They practice different types of occupations to sustain themselves and live on 'marginal economy'.[2] One important thing is

that a tribe is usually considered an economically independent group of people having their own specific economy (Rout 2013: 45; Thorat 2000). Tribal economy is inextricably related to tribal culture and is a product of it. The mode of production in tribal economy is traditional, indigenous and culturally predominant. It is a subsistence and primitive economy based on a system of production and distribution which is localised and geographically restricted. As such the operation of market forces and capital, both domestic and international is conspicuously absent. Hence, the Marxist view on marginality of the Latin American 'Marginality school' and the discussion on marginality within a Marxist theoretical framework mainly by exploring its relationship to Marx's concepts of the 'relative surplus population' and the 'industrial reserve army' of labour do not simply fit with the assumptions conditioning the study of tribal people as marginal in an integration- exclusion syndrome.

So far as the occupations and the economic life of the tribes are concerned, scholars have offered different typologies normally placed on a grading system. However, from the long list of typologies given by different scholars, one can make a broad economic classification based on the occupations of the tribes and the means of their livelihood. This broad economic classification includes eight categories into which the tribes can be grouped. These are

The forest hunting type

The hill-cultivation type

The plain agriculture type

The simple artisan type

The pastoral and cattle-herder type

The folk –artist type

The agricultural and non-agricultural labour type working in the mining and manufacturing industries who traditionally belong to plain agriculture and simple artisan types

The Skilled White-Collar Job and Trader Type

However, these categories are not mutually exclusive and the tribes very often adopt more than one type simultaneously as the means of their livelihood. The tribals are an integral part of Indian population. Their isolated ecology, distinct economy, their social structure and institutions, their religious beliefs and centuries of association with Hindu neighbours are all amalgamated and contributed enough space for their integration with the dominant culture of the In-

dian society preserving at the same time the uniqueness of their own culture. So far as the process and level of integration are concerned, the Tribal welfare committee constituted by the Indian conference of social work in 1952 divided the tribes of India into four major divisions.

Tribal Communities: Tribals who confine themselves to original habitats and are still distinctive in their pattern of life.

Semi-tribal Communities: Tribals who have, more or less, settled down in rural areas taking to agriculture and other allied occupations.

Acculturated Tribal Communities: Tribals who have migrated to urban and semi-urban areas and are engaged in 'modern' occupations in industries and have adopted traits and culture of the rest of the population

Totally Assimilated Tribals: Tribals who are absorbed with the mainstream of the Indian society and have brakted themselves particularly in the lower rung of the caste structure of the society.

TRIBES IN INDIAN CONSTITUTION: APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT

At the time of inception of the constitution of India the tribes are enlisted as "Scheduled Tribes" incorporated in the Fifth Schedule of the constitution. Initially, a period of ten years was set for the upliftment of the scheduled tribes which has subsequently been extended on a number of times through necessary amendments and is still continued unabated. So far as the policy of the government of India towards tribes is concerned, we find a combination of three approaches based on the polities of segregation, Assimilation and integration.

During the period immediately following independence, the government of India followed the policy of segregation as was practiced by the British government before independence (Pati 2011). The declaration of a few particular areas of tribal concentration as 'scheduled Areas' and 'Tribal Areas' is a burning example of such isolation. The assimilation of the tribal people with the rest of the population is another approach. In India, the tribal people have come into continuous contact with neighbouring people belonging to other communities and their cultures. Some tribals have gradually accepted the Hindu way of life and others are converted to Christianity. G.S. Ghurye defined the tribes as backward Hindus and argued that any attempt

to isolate them from the mainstream of Indian life would be meaningless (Ghurye 1963: 19).While some of the tribal communities are properly integrated in Hindu society, the bulk of them are rather loosely integrated and very few sections of them living in hills and forests have not been touched by Hinduism (Sarkar and Chakraborty 2003). However, the universally accepted approach of administration towards tribal development is an integrated one. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, sought the tribes to develop along the lines of their own genius and assured that in no case should there be any imposition in the name of their development (Sachchidananda 1999: 231; Shashi 1990). In his own words, "I am not at all sure which way of living is better, ours or theirs. But in some ways, I am quite certain theirs is better. A great deal of things could be learnt from their culture especially in the frontier areas. They are people who sing and dance and try to enjoy life: not people who sit in stock exchanges and shout at each other and call that civilisation" (Nehru 1958: xiii). Addressing an all-India conference of the tribals held at Jagdalpur, Madhya Pradesh in March, 1955. Nehru observed, "Wherever you live, you should live in your own way. This is what I want you to decide yourselves. How would you like to live? Your old customs and habits are good. We want that they should survive but at the same time we want that you should be educated and should do your part in the welfare of our country" (Nehru 1955) .

As an integrated approach, Nehru gave a 'Panchsheel', five fundamental principles for tribal upliftment. These principles are: -

People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.

Tribal rights to land and forest should be respected.

We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel form outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.

We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.

We should judge results not, by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved (Nehru 1958: xiii).

According to the census of 2001, the population of scheduled tribes in India stood at 84.33 million. They constitute 8.2 percent of the total population of the country with 91.7 percent of them living in rural areas and 8.3 percent in urban areas. The sex ratio of scheduled tribe population in 2001 was 978 which was much higher than the national average of 933. The proportion of scheduled tribe population to the total population had also increased form 6.9 percent in 1971 to 8.2 percent in 2001 (Table1).

Table 1: Scheduled tribe population to total population (Population in millions)

Census year	Total population	Schedule tribe	Percentage of ST popu lation to total population
1951	361.1	19.1	5.29
1961	439.2	30.1	6.85
1971	548.2	38.0	6.93
1981	685.2	51.6	7.53
1991	846.3	67.8	8.10
2001	1028.6	84.3	8.19

Source: Census of India office of the Registrar General

The constitution of India has incorporated several articles along with two schedules- the fifth and sixth schedules- to safeguard the interest of the scheduled tribes. Besides these, several laws have been enacted by the government of India that include the Protection of civil Rights Act 1955, the scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes (prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, Panchayats (Extension to the scheduled Areas) Act 1996, the scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 and the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2007 (Sarin 2005: 2131). In consonance with the requirements under the constitution pertaining to tribal development, a relentless effort has been made since independence to improve the socio-economic status of the tribes through launching of development programmes and schemes under five year plans (Rath 2006; Sahai and Agrawal 2013: 41-50). The Eleventh plan with the objective of inclusive growth adopted a three-pronged strategy for the development of the disadvantageous sections

that include interalia the scheduled tribes. These are (1) social empowerment especially through education;(ii) economic empowerment through employment and income generating activities and (iii) social justice through prevention of exploitation, land alienation, involuntary displacement as well as through survival protection and development of endangered particularly vulnerable Tribal Groups earlier known as Primitive Tribal Groups (Government of India 2011: 173 ; Fernandes 1991: 237; Mathew 1996) .

Recognizing that education provides the essential basis for social development, various schemes and programmes for providing incentives and financial assistance to the scheduled tribes have been launched during eleventh five year plan. The schemes include Post-Matric scholarships (PMS), Top Class Education scheme, the RGNF scheme for pursuing higher studies leading to M.Phil and Ph.D, National overseas scholarships and Hostels and Coaching and Allied Scheme. Between 1961 and 2001, the literacy rate of STs increased 5.32 times while that of total population increased 2.69 times. However, the gap between the literacy rate of STs and of that of the general population continued during the three decades between 1971 and 2001 almost at the same level of 17.7 percent and above (Table 2). The dropout rate is a critical indicator reflecting lack of educational development and inability to complete a specific level of education. In case of tribals, dropout rates are still very high.

Table 2: Literacy rate of general and ST population during 1961-2001

Year	General			ST		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1961	34.44	12.95	24.02	13.83	3.16	8.53
1971	39.45	18.70	29.45	17.63	4.85	11.30
1981	46.89	24.82	36.23	24.52	8.04	16.35
1991	64.1	39.3	52.2	40.65	18.19	29.60
2001	75.3	53.7	64.8	59.17	34.76	47.10

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2004-05, Ministry of Human Resource Development

So far as the economic status of tribes is concerned, the tribes are essentially dependent on agriculture and forests. 81.56 percent of the total scheduled tribe workers, both rural and urban taken together, are engaged in the primary sector, of whom 44.71 percent are cultivators and 36.85 percent are agricultural labourers. The corresponding figures for all workers are 31.65 percent and 26.55 percent respectively. This indicates that scheduled tribes are essentially dependent on agriculture (Table 3).

The incidence of poverty amongst scheduled tribes are still very high with 47.30 percent in rural areas and 33.3 percent in urban areas compared to 28.3 percent and 25.7 percent respectively in case of total population in 2004-05 (Table 4). A large number of scheduled tribes who are living below the poverty line are landless with no production assets and with no access to sustainable employment and minimum wages. The women belonging to these groups suffer even more because of the added disadvantage of being denied equal and minimum wages. As per the UNDP India Report 2007 on Human Poverty and Socially Disadvantaged Groups in India, the HDI for scheduled tribes at the all-India level is estimated at 0.270 which is lower than the HDI of scheduled castes and non-SC/ST for the period 1980-2000. The Human poverty index for scheduled tribes is estimated at 47.79 which is higher than scheduled castes and non SC/ST for the period 1990-2000.

In the context of changing economic scenario, tribes need to be trained so that they can get access to new economic avenues for improving their conditions of living. The vocational Training Centre in Tribal Areas Scheme was launched in 1992-93 to develop the skills of scheduled tribes in order to improve their socio-economic conditions by enhancing their income. The scheme was revised in April 2009. In the same way, Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India limited (TRIFED), a multi –

Table 3: Percentage of working and non-working population (Total and STs)

	Total workers		Cultivation		Agricultural labour		Household industry		Other workers		Non-workers	
	All	ST	All	ST	All	ST	All	ST	All	ST	All	ST
India	39.10	49.06	31.65	44.71	26.55	36.85	4.22	2.13	37.59	16.31	60.90	50.94
Rural	41.75	50.37	40.24	47.07	33.05	38.37	3.92	2.08	22.80	12.48	58.25	49.63
Urban	32.75	34.56	2.81	6.55	4.71	12.38	5.22	2.87	87.27	78.20	67.75	65.44

Source: Census 2001, Registrar General of India

Table 4: Population living below poverty line-ST (1993-94 and 2004-05)

Category	1993-94		2004-05		Percentage decrease (1993-94 to 2004-05)	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
All[*]	37.30	32.40	28.30	25.70	(-) 9.00	(-) 6.70
STs	51.94	41.14	47.30	33.30	(-) 4.64	(-) 7.84
GAP	14.64	9.76	19.00	7.60	(-) 4.36	(-) 2.16

Note: [*] includes ST population
Source: Perspective Planning Division, Planning Commission, New Delhi

state cooperative society was set up in 1978 for marketing tribal products as a service provider and market developer. In 2007-08, the first year of Eleventh Five Year Plan, a revised form of the TRIFED was introduced that focused on four types of activities: (i) retail marketing development activity (*ii*) Minor Forest Produce (MFP) marketing development activity,(iii) vocational training, skill upgradation and capacity building of ST artisans and MFP gatherers, and (iv) research development/Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) activity (Government of India 2011: 177).

Keeping in mind the widespread socio-economic backwardness of tribes, a separate Development plan called Tribal sub-plan for scheduled tribes was introduced in 1975, the objective being convergence and pooling of resources from all development sectors through the Annual plans of states/ UTS and the central ministries in proportion to the population of scheduled tribes for their overall development (Ambagudia 2007: 260). At present 24 states/UTs are implementing TSP. During Annual plans of 2007-08 and 2008-09, outlays of Rs 18,478.07 crores and Rs. 23,484.27 crore respectively were earmarked that constituted 8.65 and 8.61 percent of the total allocation and they were in consonance with the share of the scheduled tribe population that amounted to 8.2 percent of the total population. During the first two years of the Eleventh Five Year Plan, expenditure incurred under special central Assistance to TSP was to the tune of Rs 678.26 crore and Rs. 780.87 crore respectively. Grants under Article 275(i) of the constitution are 100 percent central assistance to the states to supplement the efforts of the state governments. During Annual plans 2007-08 and 2008-09, Rs. 400 crore and Rs 416 crore respectively were made available to the states for scheduled Area Administration. However, even after three decades of its operation it has been perceived that TSP is not being implemented satisfactori-

ly. There are some genuine problems and the planning commission is reviewing the experience in this area in order to improve the process of implementation of STP.

There are 75 identified particularly vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) earlier known as Primitive Tribal Groups (PVTGs) spread across 17 states/Union Territories living in utmost destitute conditions. These tribes were identified as the most backward among all the tribes in the Dhebar Commission Report. In order to provide focused attention to the survival, protection and development of these PVTGs, a special scheme launched in 1998-99 was implemented during the Tenth plan to provide tribe-specific services and support, interalia, for housing, land, agricultural inputs, cattle rearing, health, nutritional services and income generating progreammes. The Eleventh plan allocation for the development of PVTGs was put to 670 crores. During the first three years of the Eleventh Plan, a sum of Rs 333.6 crore was supposed to be spent for the purpose which constitute 49.7 percent of the total plan outlay for the scheme. An outlay of Rs 185 crore has been allocated for annual plan of 2010-11 under the scheme (Government of India 2011: 179).

ADIVASIS IN WEST BENGAL: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF TERAI REGION

The total population of West Bengal, according to 2001 census, has been 80,176,197 of this 4,406,794 persons are scheduled Tribes constituting 5.5 percent of the total population of the state. The state has registered 15.7 percent decadal growth of ST population in 1991-2001. There are total thirty eight notified scheduled tribes in the state. The Santhal represents more than half of the total ST population of the state (51.8 percent). Oran with 14 percent, Munda with 7.8 per-

cent, Bhumij with 7.6 percent and Kora with 3.2 percent are the other major scheduled tribes in the region. Along with Santhals, they constitute nearly 85 percent of the states total scheduled tribe population. The Lodha, Mahali, Bhutia, Bedia and Savar are the remaining scheduled tribes having population of one percent or slightly more (Table 5). The rest of the scheduled tribes are very small in population size.

Table 5: Population and proportion of ten major STs, 2001 Census

S. No.	Name of the Scheduled Tribe	Total population	Proportion to the total ST population
1	All Scheduled Tribes	4,406,794	100
2	Santal	2,280,540	51.8
3	Oraon	617,138	14.0
4	Munda	341,542	7.8
5	Bhumij	336,436	7.6
6	Kora	142,789	3.2
7	Lodha	84,966	1.9
8	Mahali	76,102	1.7
9	Bhutia	60,091	1.4
10	Bedia	55,979	1.3
11	Savar	43,599	1.0

Source: Census of India, 2001, Registrar General of India

The scheduled tribes in the state are predominantly residing in rural areas (93.9 percent). Among Lodha, Savar, and Bedia more than 95 percent are residing in the rural areas. However, Bhutia has recorded the highest 34 percent urban population. The Mahali (10.2 percent) and Kora (9.9 percent) are the other STs having comparatively higher concentration in urban areas. Of the total 4,406,794 scheduled tribe population of the state, 74.6 percent are Hindus, followed by 6.1 percent Christians, 1.8 percent Buddhists and merely 0.4 percent Muslims. As per 2001 Census, the sex ratio of total scheduled tribe population in the state is 982 which is higher than the national average for STs (978). The state also recorded a higher child sex ratio (0-6 age group) of 981 as compared to the aggregated national figure of 973 for the STs.

The literates are 43.4 percent of the total scheduled tribe population in the states which is lower than the national average (47.1 percent). The male and female literacy rate are 57.4 percent and 29.2 percent respectively which show a wider gender disparity in literacy and educa-

tion. Of the ten major STs the Bhutia has the highest literacy rate with 72.6 percent and the Savar has recorded the lowest literacy rate (Table 6). In West Bengal merely 8.4 percent of total literates among scheduled tribes have attended educational level above matriculation. The Bhutia with 26.1 percent are well ahead of other major scheduled tribes in this regard.

Table 6: Literacy rate among ten major STs

S. No.	Name of the scheduled tribe	Literacy rate (above 7+years)		
		Total	Male	Female
1	All Scheduled Tribes	43.4	57.4	29.2
2	Santal	42.2	57.3	27.0
3	Oraon	43.4	55.4	31.0
4	Munda	41.0	54.0	27.7
5	Bhumij	45.6	61.6	29.1
6	Kora	43.4	58.4	28.2
7	Lodha	34.8	46.8	22.5
8	Mahali	41.1	55.6	26.3
9	Bhutia	72.6	80.2	65.2
10	Bedia	48.4	61.7	34.6
11	Savar	26.3	36.4	16.0

Source: Census of India, 2001, Registrar General of India

Regarding work participation rate, according to 2001 census, 48.8 percent of ST population have been recorded as workers which is close to the aggregate national average for STs (49.1 percent). Of the total workers 65.7 percent are main workers and 34.3 percent are marginal workers. Gender disparity is, however, paramount with regard to main workers as 78.3 percent of males and 49.9 percent of females are recorded as main workers among the scheduled tribes in the state (Table 7). Among the major scheduled tribes Savar has recorded the highest work participatory rate at 53.4 percent while it is lowest among Bhutia (36.3 percent). Of the total scheduled tribe main workers, 23.7 percent have been recorded as cultivators and 45.1 percent as agricultural labourers.

More than half of the total scheduled tribe population in the state is concentrated in the four districts namely, Medinapur, Jalpaiguri, Purulia and Burdwan. The North of West Bengal popularly known as North Bengal mainly comprises of Terai region that covers the foothills of Darjeeling (Siliguri sub division) Jalpaiguri and Cooch Bihar districts. The northern part of the region is undulating and of much higher altitude while the southern part is rather sloping with

Table 7: Distribution of total, main and marginal workers among STs

T/M/F	Total workers(percentage to total population)	Main workers(percentage to total workers)	Marginal workers (percentage to total workers)
Total	2,149,255 (48.8%)	1,412,133 (65.7%)	737,122 (34.3%)
Male	1,195,480 (53.8%)	936,302 (78.3%)	259,178 (21.7%)
Female	953,775 (43.7%)	475,831 (49.9%)	477,944 (50.1%)

Source: Census of India, 2001, Registrar General of India

wide valleys intersected by several river basins. The major rivers flowing across the region are Teesta, Jaldhaka, Torsha, Raidak and Mahananda. The total geographical area in Terai Region is 4800 sq km.

According to 2001 Census, the total population of the Terai Region is 550 million. Scheduled Castes and scheduled tribes together constitute about 51 percent of the total population. Of the thirty eight notified STs in the state, Toto, Rava and Mech are the indigenous tribes in this region. Totos are found in Madarihat block, Rava in Kalchini block and Mech in Kumargram block. However, a distinctively large number of tribal population have migrated in this region from other parts of West Bengal as well as from other states particularly from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh to work as tea plantation laborers. The tribes who have migrated are mainly Oraons, Mundas and Santhals. The principal tribal communities in the district are Oraon (51 percent), Munda (15 percent), Santhal (11 percent), Lodha (7 percent), Mech (3.7 percent), Kora (1.57 percent), Rabha (1.16 percent) and Toto (15 percent) (Government of India 2001) (Table 8). Jalpaiguri is the largest tea growing district in west Bengal and almost the entire labour force in tea industry is comprised of immigrants and their descendents. The local tribals like the Mech, Rava and Toto rarely work in tea gardens. The migrants have thus established their settlements in and around tea plantations. Earlier, the Ravas lived in colonies constructed for them by the Forest Department. The *'bustees'* are situated within or on the outskirts of the forests. These *'bustees'* are now shared by other tribals like the Oraons, the Mundas, the Santhals or others and sometimes also with Nepali

Table 8: Distribution of ST population in Jalpaiguri, 2001

Block/Town	Total population	ST population	% of st population to total population (a)	% of ST population to total St population (b)	Area (sq km)	Concentration of ST population (no. of ST/sq km.) (c)	Index mark for distribution of ST people (a+b+c)	Rank of distribution
Raiganj	283967	12723	4.48	1.98	615	21	9.05	12
Jalpaiguri	280927	16774	5.97	2.61	501	33	14.02	13
Maynaguri	281700	3545	1.26	0.55	531	7	2.83	13
Dhupguri	418461	79068	18.89	12.32	565	140	57.05	6
Mal	265392	91262	34.39	14.22	546	167	71.92	2
Matili	105906	51011	48.17	7.95	205	249	101.65	1
Nagrakata	115907	57325	49.46	8.93	397	144	67.60	4
Kalchini	252571	99303	39.32	15.48	712	139	64.75	5
Falakata	254273	41121	16.17	6.41	354	116	46.25	8
Madharihat-Birpara	185470	61252	33.03	9.55	377	162	68.35	3
Kumargram	178047	54079	30.37	8.43	518	104	47.73	6
Alipurduar-I	197231	32435	16.45	5.05	379	86	35.69	9
Alipurduar-II	196984	36892	18.73	5.75	319	116	46.71	7
Urban Area	384337	4898	1.27	0.76	48	102	34.69	10
Jalpauguri District	3401173	641688	18.87	100.00	6227	103	-	-

Source: District Census Hand Book, Jalpaiguri

Castes. Because of increasing population pressure, the Forest Department is now working on the principles of joint forest management with dwellers in or on the outskirts of the forests. The ethnic composition of villages in the plains is mixed. The tribals like the Oraons, the Mundas, Santhals, Ravas, Mech and others live in the same village with non-tribals like the Rajbansis. However, the dominant position is always taken by the non-tribals.

MARGINALITY AND THE QUEST FOR INTEGRATION

Tribes in India do not represent homogeneity in their origin, stages of development and modernization, their economic life, religious practices, cultural secularisation and even with regard to their social structures, customs and beliefs. They are product of different historical and social conditions. They belong to four linguistic families: Austro-Asiatic family, Tibeto-Chinese family, Dravidian family and Indo-European family with several different racial stocks and religious moulds (Prasad and Sinha 2013: 50). So in the absence of neat classifications of tribes as a homogenous socio-cultural category, a unified policy approach will not do justice to all the tribal communities. However, in dealing with the tribes and their social intercourse with the mainstream in the society, three distinct policy approaches have so far been tested: policies of segregation assimilation and integration. The process of cultural assimilation of the tribal people with the mainstream society is a continuous process. Hinduism which is a product of many cultures could be seen as one unifying thread running through out the country as a whole, although it is not homogenous and in reality a conglomeration of centuries old traditions and practices. Hinduism represents a distinct style of life and there is an undercurrent of mutual reciprocity in the Indian society. Adivasis, as a result of continuous contact with the mainstream in society have attached themselves to caste groups in a peripheral manner and at the same time many of the Hindu communities have also absorbed the cultural practices of Adivasis.

However, the most desirable course, as propagated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, is to work for the integration of the tribes in the national setting with the mainstream in the society according to their genius. The autonomous exist-

ence of tribes in India outside the orbit of caste society have led to the preservation of their socio-religious and cultural practices. Hindus and Christians have interacted with *Adivasis* to civilise them which has been defined as sanskritisation and westernization (Pati 2013: 49). During the pre-independence period, the policy of the British Government was to let the tribes live in isolation and maintain their status quo. After independence, the national leaders started thinking in terms of a policy shift with the objective to improve the conditions and way of living of the tribal people through programmes of welfare for the tribes on a priority basis and these policies and programmes were reflected in the framing of the constitutional provisions which put emphasis on the promotion of tribal welfare and the safeguard of the interests of scheduled tribes and the scheduled areas. Simultaneously, the subsequent five year plans also made incessant attempts for brining about a comprehensive and integrated change in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the tribal people. The eleventh plan, for example, with its avowed objective of inclusive growth managed to pool adequate resources to break the stagnation of the closed tribal society. However, the ground reality is somewhat different from what was originally conceived. The tribal situation in India is extremely heterogeneous and so far as the economy and culture of tribes are concerned, they rest at different levels of integration with the mainstream society (Sahoo and Naidu 2013: 118-123; Sharma 2007: 17-26). Thus the tribal communities which have gone through a cultural transformation process of Hinduization or are under the influence of Christian missionaries become the principal recipients of the fruits of development meant for them. A new group of educated, urban bred, politically aware and culturally secular tribal youth emerged cutting the traditionally rigid boundaries of different tribal communities who became instrumental in accelerating the pace of transformation of the tribes and work for their integration with the rest of the society. This new educated and urbanised class took up the leadership from age old, rural bred, tradition-oriented tribal leaders and endeavoured to establish an organization with the objective of improving and uplifting the socio-economic conditions of tribes, conscientising them about the world around them, and generating political awareness among them. As an outcome of this

venture, the Akhil Bhartiya Adivasi Vikas Parisad (ABAVP) came into existence initially with fifty members in 1967-68 and registered under societies Registration Act of 1860 with Kartik Oran as the president of the Organization. The aims and objective of the Parishad as outlined in the constitution of the Parishad include, interalia, (i) preservation, promotion and safeguard of the tribal religion, culture, tradition and language; (ii) preservation, promotion, safeguard, watch and act in furtherance of the rights, interests and privileges of the Adivasis in economic, social and cultural fields and procurement for them of a firm condition of living so as to merge in the national life of the country;(iii) opening up of schools, colleges, libraries, social institutions and hospitals to further the cause of education, social welfare and health of the Adivasis (Constitution of Akhil Bharatiya Vikas Parisad: 2) .

The west Bengal Branch of the Parishad in its 21st State conference held from the 7th November to 9th November 2008, at Nagrakata in Dooars deliberated on certain important issues relating to (i) constitutional provisions (ii) Educational development (iii) protection of tribal land and properties (iv) Upliftment of Adivasis of Tea gardens (v) Implementation of tribal welfare schemes and programmes of government and (vi) Development of tribal culture, language and literature (Resolution of 21st State Conference of ABAVP 2008). Tribes in Dooars and Terai have raised their voices in favour of integration with the rest of Indian society while preserving their autonomous tribal identity. This prompted Parishad to register the demand for codification of tribal customary law. While appreciating the commitment of the government regarding non-interference on tribal customary law, the conference pleaded for codification of oral tribal customary laws which are based on primitive indigenous tribal religion known as *Sarna Dharma* and inclusion of primitive tribal religion in the Census records of India so as to enable adivasis to enjoy the right to freedom of religion under the constitution. Apart from the plea for preserving the primitive religion practices, customary laws and usages, the conference also advocated for the development and recognition of major tribal languages, for example, Santhal language with *olchiki* script as a medium of education in primary and secondary level schools in Santhal tribal populated areas.

Tribes in India in general and in Terai and Dooars in particular, conceive themselves as belonging to the lowest rung in the social ladder and judged by every socio-economic indicator are residing at the periphery of the society. Naturally, they are too much vulnerable to external conditions surrounding them and are very often unable to cope with the situations. As such, the incessant and growing violence and movement of hill people for the inclusion of parts of Terai and Dooars into the so called Gorkha Territorial Administration have bewildered them and compelled them to come out to the street in order to convey their voice of protest to the government –both central and State. The conference thus, provided the platform to register the protest of tribes and to raise a demand for scheduled Area (Autonomous Region) under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Nevertheless, seemingly to show the feeling of oneness, devotion to mother land, and national spirit, the conference proposed to the central government for the creation of an Adivasis Regiment that might make the presence of the tribal people in the defence of the country in line with the existence of Gorkha Regiment in Indian army.

Now coming to the original premises of marginalization as was developed by sociologists, the tribals in Terai and Dooars region of west Bengal are in a bewildering state of psychological dislocation. They are not regarded as untouchables but the mainstream in the society has relegated them to the lowest rung of the social order in the predominantly caste-based rigid matrix of Indian society. However, there is no doubt that Hinduization and Sanskritisation have prompted the tribals to get into the caste hierarchy in a peripherial manner. At the same time, as a result of continuous interaction of the tribals with the 'others' in the society, there is an admixture of tribal culture, rituals, religious practices and social customs with those of 'others' Christianity and modernization have immensely influenced the culture of the tribes. But the Christian missionaries who worked among the adivasis were driven more by their zeal for brining in the tribals within their religious fold and less by the commitment to salvage them from cultural uncertainties and social dislocation. Whatsoever, the call for a socially homogenous nation isolated if not eliminated, the independent, autonomous aspiration of the tribes (Chacko 2005).

Although the percepts of traditional Hindu society with rigid cultural practices and considerable caste based occupational specialisation

rarely permit social inclusion, the spirit of Indian democracy is extensively pervasive and provides enough space for accommodation. The constitution of India incorporated several provisions to safeguard the interests of the tribes and integrate them with the rest of the society., The government of India at the same time, has made ceaseless effort through framing of policies particularly under five year plans to improve the socio-political and economic conditions of the tribes. But while a small minority of *Adivasis* are benefited from the constitutional provisions, government policies and welfare measures, the majority of them are denied and pushed to both economic and cultural impoverishment. Nevertheless, the enlightened groups from prime tribal communities have more or less been able to shake of their social uncertainties and have succeeded through formation of their own organization to preserve their own religious and cultural identity (Hasnain 2011: 118; Singh 2007: 759). The problems of cultural conflict and unclear status of the tribes in the society that tend to create marginal personality are overcome by some sections of the tribal people, if not all, which is clearly evident in their demands for codification of oral customary laws and inclusion of distinct tribal religion in the census register. Hopefully, tribes in this region would find themselves integrated with the rest of the society along with tribes in other parts of vast multicultural and multilinguistic Indian society.

NOTES

Parsons has formulated the concept of 'pattern variables' to distinguish traditional societies from modern societies. Pattern variables are the key social relations that are enduring, recurring and embedded in the cultural system- the highest and the most important system in parsons's theoretical framework (Parsons 1951; Parsons and Shils 1951).
In a marginal economy one group of people practices different types of occupations at a time for their livelihood. Tribes generally use different kinds of occupations to eke out their subsistence that combine hunting with honey gathering, shifting cultivation with animal rearing and it shows the complexity of economic subsistence in the lower culture. See Majumdar (1961: 139).

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