



## Condition of the major migrant tribes of Jalpaiguri District: A historical survey over the last hundred years (1901-2000 A.D.)

Manadev Roy

Assistant Professor of History, Kurseong College (Affiliated to North Bengal University) Darjeeling, West Bengal, India

### Abstract

After the formation of Jalpaiguri district in 1869 the British Government selected the district as a centre of Tea Industry in India. Many migrant tribes namely the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, Malpahari, Chikboraik etc., came to the district following by the tea industry. But at the beginning of their settlement the tribal workers could not come out from the boundary of the tea gardens. These gardens were seemed like isolated islands. They were physically and mentally tortured by various authorities of tea gardens, money lenders, and land lords etc. In the tea gardens tribal labourers lost their lives affected with black water fever, malaria, dengue, cholera etc. as medical facility was not good. The tribal children did not have the choice to study in their mother tongue. In school they had to study either in Bengali, Hindi or Nepali medium. In Jalpaiguri district, the subsistence economy forced the tribal men and women and their children into manual work. In the post-colonial period the migrant tribes were fully divided into two groups e.g., the Christian and non-Christian. Christianity ensured spread of education among the converted section of the major tribes and in this way helped these people to break through the age-old practices in various respect. Since the last decade of the twentieth century closure and lock-out of tea gardens were everyday news. As a result the tribal workers were compelled to work elsewhere as daily wage labourers. Being deprived in every sphere the tribals alienated themselves from the main-stream political parties and the tribes of Jalpaiguri district came towards ethnic based associations such as Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Bikash Parishad.

**Keywords:** migrant tribe, tea garden, captive life, land alienation, identity crisis, separatist movement

### Introduction

Jalpaiguri district is one of the districts of West Bengal. It is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas, also known as the *Duars* region. Some say that the word '*Duars*' came from the Sanskrit word '*Dwar*' which means 'the gateway' as indeed it is to the hills of Darjeeling, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. National Highway No. 31 runs across the district towards the North-Eastern States of India and thus the district serves as a lifeline for the eight sisters in North-Eastern India. From the geographical point of view, the district lies between 26°16' and 27°00' north latitudes and 88°25' and 89°53' east longitudes. The district is bounded by Darjeeling district and Bhutan in the North, Cooch Behar district and Bangladesh in the South, the state of Assam on the east and on the west by the district of Darjeeling and Bangladesh<sup>[1]</sup>.

After the formation of Jalpaiguri district in 1869 the British Government selected the district as a centre of Tea Industry in India. Thereafter the Government began to sanction lands by lease to various companies or persons for the establishment of tea gardens in this district. Many Indians became involved in this industry and started planting tea. The number of tea-gardens increased day after day. In this connection a big problem arose before the tea planters, that was labour crisis, as the indigenous people of Jalpaiguri like the Rajbansis, the Meches, the *Garos* etc. did not like to work as labourers in these gardens. Consequently the planters of Jalpaiguri district brought in many tribals from different tribes such as the Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Kheria, Malpahari, Chikboraik etc., from other states like Bihar, Orissa, and Central Province. As per mass-permutation the

Santhal, Munda and Oraon were major among the migrant tribes. Though most of the migrant tribals came to the district as tea garden coolies, few of them involved in agricultural belts. However their life-style over the last century was not good.

### Methodology

For this paper I have collected both Primary and Secondary sources from the Central Library of Visva- Bharati University, West Bengal State Archives in Kolkata, National Library of Kolkata, National Library of Siliguri, Central Library of North Bengal University, Jalpaiguri District Library and numerous village libraries of Jalpaiguri district. A handful of resources have been collected from the Digital Repositories. Governmental publications such as Statistical Hand Books, Reports on Five Years' Plans, sources such as Census Reports, District Gazetteers, Journals, Periodicals, Weeklies, Newspapers and various other sources have been consulted for the present work. To collect both primary and secondary sources I have done some field survey in various tea gardens, Christian churches, and tribal villages of the district. Special emphasis was given to oral history. In this regard interviews and interfaces with elderly people and eminent personalities who were active or close witnesses to the social, cultural, political and economic life of the tribes of Jalpaiguri district during this period have been conducted.

### Captive life

Before migration to *Duars* of Jalpaiguri district, geographical territory was main aspect to the migrant tribes.

Water, forest, and land were important factors in ascertaining and defining their identity. Their whole existence and livelihood was centered with these factors. But at the beginning of their settlement the tribal workers could not come out from the boundary of the tea gardens. These gardens were seemed like isolated islands. The tribal workers got only one holiday for marketing. Not only this but also in the 'hat' (market) they were under control of 'Choukidars' (guard men for the tribal workers). They could not get opportunity to interact with other communities. The relatives of the tribal labourers could not stay in their small hut without permission of the authority e.g., the Managers of the tea gardens. Even the female workers were physically or mentally disgraced by the Managers, 'Choukidars' (guard men), *Dafadars* (supervisors) or other officials of the tea gardens. The tribal workers had to take permission from the managers of tea gardens for their marriage ceremony. And the parents of the bride and bride groom were bound to submit a list to the higher authority of the concerned gardens about the numbers of invitees in this ceremony. Apart from tea gardens, in tribal villages the tribal men and women were deprived by the landlords, money-lenders<sup>[2]</sup> or any local non-tribal headman. The authorities of the tea gardens also employed tribal children as workers in the gardens. So the tribal children could not take avail educational opportunities. Sometimes the labourers had to face unequal contests with leopards. Many tribal children lost their lives by sudden attacks of leopards.

#### Insulted by others

The neighbouring *Rajbansis* identified the tribal labourers (the Santhals, the Mundas, the Oraons etc.) by the term 'Jhangar' or 'Maydeshi' that means very low category or inhabitants of middle *desh* that means Central Provinces. The *Rajbansis* did not even drink a glass of water from the hand of a 'Jhangar'. They were physically and mentally tortured by various authorities such as Managers, 'Choukidars' (guard men), *Dafadars* (supervisors) or other officials of tea gardens, money lenders, and land lords etc.

#### Unhealthy environment

As a result of spraying medicine in tea gardens the tribal workers were affected by various diseases. In the tea gardens of *Terai* and *Duars* many tribal labourers lost their lives affected with black water fever, malaria, dengue, cholera etc. as medical facility was not good<sup>[3]</sup>. The identity crisis due to modern health policy was most visible among the major tribes of Jalpaiguri district from colonial period. After getting quick result from allopathic medicine some tribal labourers threw their long established medicine that was herbal and easily affordable to them.

In spite of quite a few developments in the field of medical sciences by the Europeans and the natives, the health and hygienic conditions gave birth to several sub-national movements and problem of identity among the tribals of Jalpaiguri district. The tribal coolies could not avail sufficient medical facility in comparison to the non-tribal people of Jalpaiguri district. Hence the Oraons of Jalpaiguri revolted for better health condition during 1915-1916. In the year 1906, some tea garden tribal workers of Alipurduar rose to revolt for better health condition. In 1912 the Nagrakata tea workers became violent with many demands along with the improvement of health and hygiene<sup>[4]</sup>.

#### Governmental restriction in forest

The British government adopted the policy of reservation of forest, such as Gorumara National Park, Jaldapara National Park etc., in colonial period. Therefore the tribes could not easily enter these forests for collecting herbal medicine. Likewise many forests of the district came under control of British administration and offices of forest department were constructed. Therefore the tribes lost their freedom in collecting forests' productions. In 1918 one acre Government *Khas* land situated in Taluk Kharibari *Tahail*, Falakata of Jalpaiguri district was transferred to the Forest Department for the construction of a Forest Office<sup>[5]</sup>. Thus many forest offices were constructed in many forests from where the officers easily preserved the forest's resources in colonial period. In 1921 few lands of Western Duars of Jalpaiguri district were reserved for grazing and supply of timber and fuel etc<sup>[6]</sup>. As a consequence the tribals lost their right for collecting herbal medicine from jungle or forest. Besides, the emerging of middle class businessmen played a vital role for changing the economic condition of the district.

#### Crisis in Language

Language is one of the main identity markers. It clearly distinguishes one from the other because language is not just a means of communication but an important aspect of culture and identity. Through language and words stories of human values, practices, songs, idioms are stored or conveyed. These tribes were of the oral tradition unlike other cultural groups who followed the written tradition. So, language became very important for the tribals because it was the only means through which they passed on their traditional knowledge from one generation to another generation. If their language got lost, it was not a mere loss of language but a loss of history, traditional thought-pattern, oral literature and rich indigenous knowledge which had been collected over the centuries. At the time of migration different tribal groups had different mother tongues. The Oraons spoke *Kurukh*, a language of the Dravidian family which was totally different from other dialects of the other tribes. The Mundas spoke their own language known as *Mundari*, while other tribes like the Santhals spoke *Santhali*. Since the beginning of the twentieth century *Sadri* which was a mixture of Hindi and other tribal dialects, became popular among the migrant tribal workers of the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri district. Gradually *Sadri* became the second mother tongue of the Santhals, Mundas and the Oraons of the district<sup>[7]</sup>. This meant a great loss of their mother tongues.

#### Educational Crisis

Moreover the tribal children did not have the choice to study in their mother tongue. In school they had to study either in Bengali, Hindi or Nepali medium. The teachers too were either Bengali or Nepali or Hindi speaking and they neither understood the 'Adivasi' culture and sentiment nor could they communicate adequately with the 'Adivasi' children. Therefore the tribal children had to suffer for identity crisis. Even the tribal people had to learn the languages of their dominant neighbours such as the well-to-do *Rajbansis* or the Southern Bengalis in order to be able to communicate with them. On account of this a number of schools had remained closed for certain period of time and in a number of cases these schools had not functioned since the beginning of

academic year <sup>[8]</sup>. Naturally the major tribes, the Santhals, the Mundas, and the Oraons of the district had lost the originality of the mother tongue <sup>[9]</sup>. In the *Terai-Duars* area tribal people were clamouring for establishment of more Hindi Medium schools. Demand had risen for the introduction of the *Sadri* language as medium of instruction in *Terai-Duars* primary schools.

### Breaking of Solidarity

In original homeland most of the migrant tribals were in solidarity with one another and with the entire village in their joys and sorrows. In moments of need of one another, each family showed its solidarity with the other in terms of ploughing the fields, sowing seeds, transplanting and harvesting. There were many other economic and social activities in which they helped out each other free of cost. This was an important aspect of their identity. These *Adivasis* had a strong sense of community. Community was the centre of their life and activities. This sense of collectivity helped them rise above the narrow walls of individualism and have respect for diversity, in order to counter divisive tendencies, hatred and conflict. Community life was the foundation of their democratic system. According to S.M. Michael, "The tribal society is not organized along the hierarchical line of class. It is not based on the basis of occupation by birth. The tribal society is organized on kinship basis." <sup>[10]</sup>

Moreover there was a tremendous collective economic organization of these migrant tribes which was not found in other communities. Rather than individualistic approach in their economic enterprises, they had a sense of social responsibility and co-operation. Their orientation was towards mutual sharing rather than hoarding. In Jalpaiguri district the migrant were predominantly engaged in agriculture and tea industry and their economy could largely be termed as subsistence economy. The subsistence economy forced the tribal men and women and their children into manual work. But there was exploitation of tribal economy by various hands like manager of tea gardens, brokers, petty businessman, land lords etc. The price of cloth and food grains had made the position of the labourers precarious. The result of this was a distinct lowering of the already very low standard of living of plantation labour.... The inducement for labour to emigrate could only be a higher wage and yet such was the tea-garden wage in 1921-22 that many garden coolies who tried to leave the plantations, being dissatisfied with the conditions therein, were easily absorbed in their home districts on a higher wage <sup>[11]</sup>.

### Land alienation

Since colonial period the tea garden labourers used to cultivate their basic household needs like paddy, rice in the waste lands surrounding the tea gardens. In such lands, the planters never planted tea seeds. But in the post-colonial period, the garden authority, in order to increase the rate of production, started planting tea seeds in such waste lands. With the progress of modernization most of the tribals who used to cultivate their own village-land, slowly and gradually became landless <sup>[12]</sup> agricultural workers of the land which once was possessed and owned by them or by their forefathers. This was the main reason of their grievance against the garden's management and also the immigrant outsiders such as the Southern Bengalis. It, no

doubt, resulted in many clashes which took place simultaneously between the garden authority and the *Adivasi* workers. Actually the tribals started to advance towards integration with the general mass of people, but at the same time began to lose their traditional socio-cultural characteristics.

In the post-colonial period the identity crisis of the Santhals, the Mundas, and the Oraons became more prominent. The major migrant tribes got some cultivated lands by the tea garden owners and some vested lands by State Government. Though alienation of tribal land was prohibited, yet there are many instances of land transference of tribal land to non-tribals. Implementation of land reforms could not check the alienation of tribal land. Practically most of the tribal lands had already been transferred to non-tribal people. In the course of time a huge amount of agricultural tribal land of Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar of former Jalpaiguri district was transferred to the tea planters. Samuktala of Alipurduar district formerly Jalpaiguri district was a *Santhal* dominated area. A survey was conducted by Krishnapriya Bhattacharya on the illegal transfer of tribal land to non-tribals. It is found that about 45000 (forty five thousand) acres of tribal land have been illegally transferred to non-tribals <sup>[13]</sup>. The non-tribal people cheated the tribals when they offered loans to the poor tribal people in lieu of the mortgage of land. The trickster non-tribal persons knew that the impoverished tribesman would never be able to repay the amount with interest and demanded the land back. In course, when the credit-amount increased, the alienator offered some extra money to take control of the land permanently. In many cases, they manipulated the Land Commissioner to get the land registered in their name. Sometimes the alienator did not bother to register the land, as they believed that the tribal who had taken money would never claim the land back, even though he was legally entitled to do so. The loss of land from the tribal hands could be for discharge of loan liabilities incurred as a consequence of perpetual subsistence economy or due to legal lacunae. At any rate, land alienation on tribal areas had been continuing, unresolved and bringing serious problems since it meant loss of their resource base <sup>[14]</sup>. A tribal without his land did not have a proper identity. In this time, tribal lands were gradually transformed to tea gardens due to the ignorance of the tribal people. At the time of field survey the present investigator learnt that for the tea gardens different private entrepreneurs had borrowed land from the tribal farmers in a condition that one or two members of each family would be permanently employed in the tea garden. But after agreement, they were cheated, no one was employed in the garden, or the garden was abandoned after few years. Hence there was no production as well as no employment. Land of tribal people was forfeited in such a way <sup>[15]</sup>.

### Christianization & Hinduization

In this period the migrant tribes were fully divided into two groups e.g., the Christian and non-Christian. As the *Adivasis* (tribals) could not be regarded as Hindus in the orthodox sense, they were regarded as non-Christians. These migrant tribes usually preferred to call them *Samsars*. Nevertheless in the domain of pure religion their (the Santhals) acceptance of *Thakur* as the supreme god had been assessed by H.H. Risley to be the result of the influence of Hinduism. The word '*Thakur*' was of Sanskrit origin and the Hindus used the name for gods in general. Some Bengali and Hindi

words had been introduced in the Santhal vocabulary and these were noticed in the language of their hymns and prayers. The difficulties of determining the extent of their borrowing in the field of religion might be illustrated by the fact that the language of spells and prayers offered at the time of sacrificing contains an admixture of Hindu Bengali words....many of the songs sung were composed in Bengali <sup>[16]</sup>. They took part in Durga puja festival of the Hindus. They put on new cloths and attended the puja with wives and children and enjoyed the fun for five days like the Hindus. The *Sakrat* festival of the Santhals was equivalent to the Hindu *Pous Parban*. The Santhals observed this festival on the last day of the month of *Pous* (month as Bengali Calendar), just as the Hindu did <sup>[17]</sup>. Tribal widows generally observed the austerity of the Hindu widows in dress and customs. There was no governmental recognition of their traditional *Karam Puja & Sarhul* which were the important long-established festivals of some tribal workers of Jalpaiguri district and even North-East India <sup>[18]</sup>. Their Semi-Hindu religious faiths were replaced by Christianity; about twenty percent (20%) of the tribal population in the region were Christian and Christianity of various denominations was spreading fast among the tribal village and in the tea-gardens.

### **Destruction of Folk Culture**

The solvent section of the Christian tribals started going after western style of life in their fashion of garments, norms and customs, food habits and the like. Christianity ensured spread of education among the converted section of the major tribes and in this way helped these people to break through the age-old superstition in various respects. In case of illness the converted tribals began to avail modern allopathic treatment <sup>[19]</sup>. The early pioneering Christian missionaries brought to the Santhals as well as other tribals, a humanistic religion and modern civilization in the place of a primitive pattern of life. This philanthropic personalities cured the Santhals of custom like witchcraft and included in them Christian and western concepts of life and ethics. Christianity actually provided a new set of ideas and values, attitudes and behavioural patterns; in a word a new way of life. That means the role of Christianity had been that of another important agency of cultural change among the major tribes of Jalpaiguri district. The Christian missionaries had played vital part in bringing about change <sup>[20]</sup>. Therefore the migrant tribes lost many of their traditional cultures that led to a crisis.

The power equations with the dominant communities such as the Southern Bengalis or the well-to-do Rajbansis and the relative imbalance in reproduction and dissemination of cultural forms contributed to the loss of elements of tribal culture. The three most significant areas where the crisis became prominent were language, religion, and art and crafts. Much of these changes were launched by outside forces taking shrewd advantage of the marginalized existence of the tribes. Therefore the major migrant tribes gradually lost much of their own language, traditional religion and faith, traditional art and technology, and much of their distinctive mode of life. Hence identity crisis became obvious among these tribal communities of the district in the twentieth century. However, the crisis which appeared in every corner of the tribal livelihood in the twentieth century is examined below. But, it is a matter of regret to us that in the course of time most of the tribal

people lost some of their distinct features and plunged into a position of identity crisis.

The introduction of modern educational system by the central government and the state government also hampered the traditional cultural aspects such as folk music and instruments of the major tribes of Jalpaiguri district. The parents began to send their children to the schools of urban centers which were situated far away from the tribal belt. It did not directly destroy the folk music and instruments of the tribes but it changed the entire cultural value system in which the tribal identity was rooted. There were few who were born in a family with a long musical tradition and they could not attach with folk music and instruments because more children were spending the better part of the day in school and were being attracted by other activities. As a result there was less opportunity among the children to understand the exposure towards their traditional folk music and musical instrument <sup>[21]</sup>.

Again after the partition of the country in 1947, and emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, streams of immigration or infiltration from East Pakistan and Bangladesh occurred in the areas. The immigrated Bangladeshi people occupied a vast area in almost everywhere. Thus the Duars grew into a new hub of multi-racial and multi-lingual people, and of course, this led the demographic and cultural environment to be too complex for the migrant tribes. In this situation they lost many of their long established customs.

### **Lock-out tea gardens**

Since the last decade of the twentieth century closure and lock-out of tea gardens were everyday news. There were nearly twenty one closed tea gardens and about 100000 (one lakh) workers were suffering from starvation. They were deprived of their provident fund, gratuity benefit and medical facilities. The role of trade union leaders was dubious. Often they passively helped the tea garden owners to declare lock-out in lieu of financial benefit. Naturally in *Terai-Duars* region malnutrition, starvation, diseases, joblessness, child trafficking, death etc. were the regular feature. Governmental financial assistance to the workers of the closed tea gardens was not regularly paid. As a result the workers were compelled to work elsewhere as daily wage labourers <sup>[22]</sup>. In some cases the nature of work offered was unsuitable to the tea garden labourers, especially as the women workers of the tea gardens were not accustomed to hard labourious work. There was also legal complication to distribute financial assistance to all workers of the closed tea gardens. As per existing rules those who had no P.F. (Provident Fund) account were not entitled to get allowance. So a huge number of workers of closed tea gardens were yet to receive allowance. The poor economic conditions led them to fall into the clutches of money lenders or *mahajans*. This created a vicious circle out of which they could not move out <sup>[23]</sup>. These issues and problems of the tribal people of Jalpaiguri were very pathetic. Here government and the tea garden authority did not pay their moral attention towards the poor tribal people. It created a big crisis of stability of jobs of the tribal workers namely the Santhals, the Mundas, and the Oraons of Jalpaiguri district. Regarding

lock-out tea gardens a table is given below.

**Table-23**

**Table 1:** Lock-Out Tea Gardens

Sl.	Name of the Tea Estates	Situated
1	Looksan Tea Estate	Nagrakata
2	Carron Tea Estate	Nagrakata
3	Red Bank Tea Estate	Dhupguri
4	Surendranagar Tea Estate	Dhupguri
5	Dharanipur Tea Estate	Nagrakata
6	Raipur Tea Estate	Sadar
7	Kathalguri Tea Estate	Dhupguri
8	Chinchula Tea Estate	Kalchini
9	Ramjhora Tea Plantation	Madarihat -Birpara
10	Bamandanga& Tondoo Tea Estate	Nagrakata
11	Majherdabri Tea Estate	Alipurduar-2
12	Chamurchi Tea Estate	Dhupguri
13	Samsing Tea Estate	Matiali
14	Raimatang Tea Estate	kalchini
15	Dheklapara Tea Estate	Madarihat-Birpara
16	Kalchini Tea Estate	kalchini
17	Kohinoor Tea Plantation	Alipurduar-2
18	Mujnai Tea Estate	Madarihat-Birpara
19	Srinathpur Tea Plantation	Alipurduar
20	Rohimabad Tea Estate	Malbazar
21	Torsa Tea Estate	Kalchini

**Source:** Field survey in several times

Tea gardens were the main employment source of tribal workers of Jalpaiguri district. The tribal laborers lost their job during the closing of the gardens. Then the laborers shifted to another profession after a long waiting. From the closed tea gardens a few male labourers forced to migrate to the different states of the country, the women and young age workers had been employed in different hard construction works such as lifting and breaking stones from the river beds etc. Due to unemployment in tea gardens every year, hundreds of tribal girls mostly teenagers had gone missing over the past few years from the poverty-stricken dying tea estate areas of the Duars. Driven out of home by poverty and because of the dream of a better life, these girls had fallen prey to human trafficking. They were trapped by local agents promising lucrative jobs in big cities of the country. After leaving home, however, these girls were untraceable [24].

### Formation of Tribal Organization

Being deprived in every sphere the tribals alienated themselves from the main-stream political parties and the tribes of Jalpaiguri district came towards ethnic based associations such as *Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Bikash Parishad*, formed in 1967 by Kartik Oraon the *Adivasi* Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha (1967 to 1971 and 1971 to 1977) from Gulma district of Jharkhand. It was charitable organization for the *Adivasi* committee. Since the time of formation it has been working as NGO (bearing registration number 49/1967-68 (old) 160/2006-70) in West Bengal especially for the awareness campaign, capacity building, educating, research on related to development work & training etc. The trust also provided various types of programme like training and imparting various programmes to the poor and vulnerable section such as vocational training, agriculture, horticulture, personal hygiene, youth leadership, awareness programmes on safe motherhood and child survival, adolescent girl's related program, domestic

violence, environment and ecology, global warming, health awareness program such as health check-up, eye screening, blood donation, motivation camps, non-formal education centre, social and relief work such as books distribution to the poor students, cloth distribution to the poor, and social forestry. Birsa Tirkey, John Berla et.al were its active member in *Duars* of Jalpaiguri district. *Adivasi Gaon Sudhroa Samity* or *Adivasi Gram Sanskar Samity* was formed in 1973. It was also created by Kartik Oraon with the aim of upliftment the poor and backward tribal people of Jharkhand. Manohar Tirkey, Tejbahadur Toppo and many others of *Duars* were its member. As branch of *Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Bikash Parishad* it worked very much among the backward tribals of Jalpaiguri district. *Adivasi Mahila Suraksha Committee* was emerged in Jharkhand in 1988 under Kartik Oraon. With the aim of women empowerment it was formed by the down trodden women of Jharkhand. Many tribal ladies such as Binita Oraon, Anjali Oraon et.al were its member of *Terai* and *Duars* of Jalpaiguri district. *Adivasi Krishi Raksha Committee* was tribal agricultural protection committee. It was also formed in Jharkhand in 1986 and many tribals named Surya Oraon, Mantu Oraon, Binod Munda et.al of Jalpaiguri district became its member. The poor tribals of *Terai* and *Duars* protected their land alienation to non-tribals under the committee [25].

### Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that in the new socio-economic background the migrant tribes lost many of their traditional beliefs and practices. Actually financial crisis created cultural crisis which further created self-identification crisis and finally it took turn into identity crisis. Even present days the tribal people regarded ousted race to the Barna Hindus of Jalpaiguri district. Hence the tribal villages set up a comparative distance of upper caste Hindus' dwelling houses. The well-established Rajbansis also tried to keep distance from the tribes. The tribes were not regarded as human being to the non-tribal Southern Bengalis or the established Rajbansis. In the missionary schools, the tribal youths learned the Christian doctrine of human equality and the old religious ideal of brotherhood of man. While their learning enabled them to discover the beauty of human equality on which their own tribal social system was based, it also armed them to criticize the Bengali Hindu society, which with its rigid caste system, perpetuated human inequality [26]. However, Christianity, education and British administration all played their part in producing tribal awareness. Conscious tribals felt insecure in the predominantly Bengali Hindu society of Jalpaiguri district. They viewed their culture as a minority culture and looked for safeguard to protect it from the inroads of Bengali culture. This state of mind was perhaps common to all minorities. Ethnic consciousness of the minority in a majority preserved culture, whether for reasons of prestige, respect, civil rights, culture autonomy, political power or economic opportunities, usually took the form of ethno nationalism.

Therefore a separatist movement took place under the leadership of the major migrant tribes namely the Santhals, the Mundas, and the Oraons of Jalpaiguri district who were socio-economically most backward, oppressed and easily vulnerable community. It was obligatory along with the Gorkhland and Kamatapuri movements, for which the

tribals who belonged to Indo Austric group demanded for the introduction of the sixth schedule in the tribal dominated Terai-Dooars area (mostly situated in Jalpaiguri district) under the banner of Akhil Bharatiya Adibasi Bikash Parishad( All India Tribal Development Board). To counter Gorkha Jana-Mukti Morcha's claim over Terai-Dooars, Adibasi Bikash Parishad was formed. However the claim for the introduction of Sixth Scheduled gave a new dimension to the ongoing separatist movement in Jalpaiguri district as also over entire North Bengal on the whole. Elwin, a research scholar on tribals and their problems stated that "everything necessary should be done for the development of the tribals provided that the quality of tribal life was not impaired, the tribal culture was not destroyed and tribal freedom was restored."<sup>[27]</sup> So proper understanding of the nature of society and culture, values, different ethnological and ecological settings, leadership patterns, etc., was indispensable for any planned programme of tribal development and welfare<sup>[28]</sup>. The personnel of government and non-government institutions should be given administrative and financial freedom to bring about requisite change in consonance with tribal ethos and aspirations<sup>[29]</sup>.

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