



# ASECA CHANNEL

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## Editorial

The economic well being helps developing a class and in certain set up brings together people though in a limited way. The process of mingling of different groups of people at various levels is becoming quite common in view of educational, social and economic upgradation. The Santal Society is also not an exception. When acceptability and intermingling become common and easy, there are certain boundaries which are natural to collapse. The boundaries around us start to cripple down under the weight of understanding and fellow feeling. The burgeoning trend of intermingling among people at various strata brings them together with better understanding and feeling. This has translated into establishing new ties both personal and official. The official relationship does not bring the issue for public discussion or debate but when it comes to establishing personal (read conjugal) relationship with other group of people, public discussion is immediate and takes the form of a debate.

Santal Society is intensely endogamous. This is an independent society with adequate manpower and well established norms, customs, rules and procedures to handle issues of human existence. It can be observed that adequate systems and procedures are in place to deal with simple as well as complex issues. The members of the community need not have to look for guidance or support from any other community / group. In addition to other aspects, the institution of marriage is always an intra community affair whereas the bride and groom always belong to the community. The numerical strength is ensuring self sufficiency in establishing intra relationship and supporting them comfortably to continue as an endogamous society. The marriage in Santal community is traditionally a community affair with the direct involvement of parents as well as traditional headmen and villagers. There are instances of love marriages (seeking bride or groom from other social groups) taking place mostly

confined to urban places and educated people. Presently, the number of brides from other social background making inroads to Santal society exceeds the number of grooms making a choice for a bride from this society.

Few years back the number of people marrying out side the community was limited but it is being observed that this number is rising though not in an alarming way. The rise in numbers draws its sustenance from various factors important being the education upgradation and economic betterment/independence.

Whether individual is vulnerable than the society or the society is loosing something due to this process/development. The majority feels that given the present state, the other groups are benefitting from the process and the Santal community is loosing its precious as well as scarce resources in the form of educated and earning members. While our legal system in a liberal state being sensitive to plural traditions responds quite favourably, the traditional system does not so easily accept this kind of alliance and applies its moderate/stringent prescriptions to discourage its members from indulging in such activities. Here, modern thinking and traditional thinking come face to face and arguments, counter arguments, suggestions, criticism and annoyance immediately follow. But the fact remains whether the persons indulging in such alliance are aware of the provisions and prescriptions attached to such alliance. The comfort zone is Santal society though does not approve such alliances, however, does not cause harm to such love birds.

It's always the individual who look up to the society and the outlook of the society may not be always conducive to a person who is not bound by its norms. Society needs to create a sensitizing process where young people are educated to enable them above all, the maturity to choose wisely.

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## Scheduled Communities: A social Development profile of SC/STs (Bihar, Jharkhand & W.B.)

(Source: Planning Commission)

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{Continued from May 2010 issue}

The scheduling of tribes followed a somewhat different course. Initially, they were clubbed with the deprived castes as Depressed Classes. But over a period of time they were systematically weaned out of the Depressed Classes and subsequently, from the category of Scheduled Castes also. Unlike the Scheduled Castes, they did not form a part of the hierarchical caste system but were affected by it. In effect, their relatively egalitarian socio-politico-economic organisation was disrupted by colonial and feudal exploitation, leading to periodic insurrections and rebellions against these (exploitative) interests. The proper scheduling of tribal communities, who suffered from mass scale land alienation's reducing them to impoverishment, took place only after independence.

The present study has taken place after six decades of independence and political democracy, which has witnessed the political resurgence of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The formation of the north eastern States, and more recently of the two new States of Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, is a manifestation of struggles for greater tribal control over governance of their own populations in these traditionally dense (tribal) territories. Scheduled Castes have thrown up national and State level leaderships and political organisations which can capture or share power through the parliamentary process in the States, even when they are not in numerical majority. These developments suggest that the political environment for the development of Scheduled Communities has been improving over time.

The broad objective of our study is an empirical portrayal of the social development profile of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the three States of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. We have covered two panchayats in Bihar, two in Jharkhand and four in West Bengal. In addition, the

two urban areas, Ranchi in Jharkhand and Jhargram in West Bengal, completed the ten locations from which samples were drawn. In reality, Jhargram proved not too different from a rural location, as far as our scheduled communities are concerned.

Two `secular' aspects of social development have been pursued. The first relates to the *material* basis of the secular domain, including the whole range of activities associated with livelihood and economic well-being; housing, which is a basic need reflecting the quality of life; and health, which is so vital for the reproduction of labour and society. The second aspect we have covered is literacy/education, which is basic to *empowerment*. We had to curb our interest in analysing the `sacred' domain of ritual and socio-cultural transactions, as well as our interest in political empowerment, as we realised that the survey method by itself was not a sufficient instrument for the pursuit of these objectives, nor could the limitations of time and resources permit further enlargement of the scope of our study. We are conscious, however, that these aspects hold enormous significance for a study on social development, and propose that a separate project can specifically address these objectives.

Since our survey is limited to ten locations in the three States, it is obvious that only the scheduled communities that have come up in our sample provide the basis of our study. As many as 24 Scheduled Castes and 15 Scheduled Tribes figure in our randomised samples in the ten locations. \* All these castes and tribes have been included in our analysis at the State level. However, analysis at the level of individual Scheduled Castes/Tribes within each State, involves only those 14 Scheduled Castes and 8 Scheduled Tribes which have 20 households or more in our sample.

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\* These are:

Scheduled Castes : Bagdi, Bauri, Bhoogta, Bhuiyan, Chamar, Damai, Dhobi, Doai, Dom, Dusadh, Kami, Kaora, Konai, Lohar, Mahar, Mal, Musahar, Chaupal, Dabgar, Namasudra, Nat, Pan, Patni, Saki. Scheduled Tribes: Asur, Bhumij, Chik Baraik, Ho, Kisan, Kora, Lodha, Lohara, Mahali, Munda, Nagesia, Oraon, Santhal, Sarvar, Sauria Paharia.

The scope of our study is limited in another important sense. No comparisons are possible with the non-Scheduled Caste/Tribe populations. Without such a comparative framework, we are aware, the logic of this kind of inquiry will remain incomplete.

Further, generalisations at the level of the three States, and inter-state comparisons are strictly with reference to the ten locations in these States. However, we assert that within our limited orbit of generalisations, the insights and patterns that are revealed cannot be ignored, and merit serious thinking.

Any portrayal of a profile of social development of scheduled communities is broad enough to give the portrayer a certain degree of flexibility. We have gone through different levels of conceptual abstractions and analysis in an attempt to penetrate the reality, which circumscribes them. We hope this study will contribute however little, to an understanding of how social scientific portrayals can be attempted at levels of abstractions beyond rich descriptions.

While introducing our field of scheduled communities, we noted their general work participation and their distribution in agricultural labour, non-agricultural labour and other non-agricultural occupations. The scheduled communities had varying rates of work participation. \* The question that naturally arose was: what did these varying rates of work participation signify? Did a high or low participation necessarily indicate a better or worse economic status of the given Scheduled Caste/Tribe?

**Earners Status** : This led us in our study to develop the twin concepts of **earner status** and **earning status** of scheduled communities. The earner status is defined as the percentage of average number of

earners per household to the average size of the household, of the scheduled communities. Thus a high or low earner status of a scheduled community indicates a high or low work participation per household for that community.

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\* According to the 1981 Census, the work participation of Bhuiyan in West Bengal is the highest at 56.9 percent and lowest for the Dhobi again in West Bengal with a work participation of 27.0 percent. Amongst the tribal communities, it is highest among the Mahali in West Bengal with a work participation of 45.4 percent, and lowest among the Oraon of Bihar with 36.1 percent. It may be noted that the range is much larger for the Scheduled Castes.

We have taken the position that, while theoretically, the average per capita household income for a scheduled community is the best measure of its earning status, in practical terms, collection of primary household data on income is notorious for its inexactitude for a variety of well known reasons. We have therefore used consumption expenditure, which is relatively reliable, as a proxy to income.

Particularly for the economically and socially backward communities, consumption levels correspond reasonably with their earning status. We must be clear in our mind, however, that consumption expenditure is a *reflection* of earning status, *not* a measure of actual earning.

Our argument is that earner and earning status need not correlate. It follows that earner and earning statuses of scheduled communities will present various combinatorial manifestations. These, in turn, will provide the basis for inferences and interpretations.

In our study, this is one level of theoretical abstraction, within which the profiling of social development of scheduled communities has been attempted.

{To be continued...}

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## Contemporary Tribal Situation and Issues of Broad Based Discourse at various levels

**B.K. Roy Burman**

I cannot represent adivasi perspective, but I can attempt to convey adivasi perspective about which I became aware in diverse capacities. Four decades ago a Central Scheduled Tribes Advisory Committee was set up by the Government of India with Welfare Minister as Chairman, 18 Scheduled Tribe Member of Parliaments (MP) and two social scientists as members. Similarly, Central Scheduled Castes Advisory Committee was set up with 18 Scheduled Caste MPs and two social scientists as members. As a social scientist, I was member of both the Committees. During 1991-93 I was Chairman of Advisory Committee of Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (precursor of Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples). Since 1994 till June 2009 I have been to one or the other tribal areas in almost every month in various capacities. Traditionally Adivasi societies are caring and sharing societies. Development to them is giving concrete form to this perspective. They look for inclusivist approach to development not exclusivist approach. If it is kept in the back of our mind, that while in India the adivasi are only 8 percent of the population around 60 percent to 90 percent of the major mineral resources of the country and substantial quantum of other endowments of nature are concentrated in their traditional habitats and that while in the world the indigenous peoples are 4 percent of the population, most of the natural resources including oil are concentrated in their ancestral domain we can realize what a great intangible asset their perspective is for humanity as a whole.

Apart from the adivasi perspective about development, adivasi world-view of extension of self in the surroundings - human and non-human, biotic and abiotic, as reflected in the practice of totemism along with many other cultural trait, qualifies the adivasi to play vanguard role in the humanist resurrection at every level – from the local to the global. During the last two decades I have been advocating a point that, in the era of environmental crisis when continuation of life on the planet earth is

becoming more and more problematic, the tribal peoples with their rootedness in nature will have to play a role in the 21st century similar to that of the working class during the late 19th century to mid 20th century. This is a strategic approach, not an autogenous state of art approach. My formulation got a boost from Giovanni Arrighi's characterization of tribe as a "status class". Tribal system of access of resources is in a continuum process of erosion because of incompatibility with the system promoted by the State or the dominant political economy. In India, as noted by Justice Hidayatullah, in general land belongs simultaneously to a clan and to an individual. The Government of India Committee on land holding systems in tribal areas reported that while in these areas individual rights are embedded in community rights, state does not recognize community as a land or land based resource holding legal person. In fact, Planning Commission's Committee on Development of Backward Areas in its report on North East India advocated that for the sake of progress community land should be individualized. Tribal students of North East Hill University strongly protested against this. At the programme level since Fifth Five Year Plan Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), approach has been in operation. This approach was developed by a five members Committee of which, only Dr. B.D. Sharma and myself are still surviving, others are no longer in this world. Salient features of TSP as envisaged by us were (a) Development outlay in the same proportion as the tribal population bears to the total population at the state and national levels respectively (b) for each tribal predominant area (Integrated Tribal Development Project Area or ITDP area) preparation of project plan based on comprehensive survey of social demography, political economy and cultural ecology (c) project fund consisting of institutional finance as loan and State subsidy (d) adoption of measures for elimination of exploitation of tribals through various processes. {To be continued...}

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