

CONTEMPORARY LIVELIHOOD SCENARIO OF LODHA TRIBAL COMMUNITY IN PASCHIM MEDINIPUR DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract:

The main objectives of study are to interpret and analyze the socio-economic and religious scenario of the Lodha tribe in the post colonial period and also to suggest suitable recommendations for their overall development. The present study has been made to examine the livelihood status of Lodha's in post colonial era, their resistance efforts against colonial & post colonial era, their past & present occupational pattern, their religious practices, impact of Government & Non-Government programmed for upliftment of their life style, Recommendations for their progress in terms of comparative development indicators have been illustrated here.

Keywords: Primitive Tribe-Lodhas, Religions practice, Colonial & post colonial rule, Resistance, Govt. & Non-Govt. initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

In the colonial and post colonial periods the idea of 'state' regulated the life of tribal people of India. Hence the change occurred in the lifestyles of the primitive tribes who were mostly dependent upon the forest areas. This impact we may watch in a tribal group who are familiar in the name of Lodha. Lodhas are most probably originated from the modern Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) state of India. From the 1901 census report it is found that Lodhas were migrated from M.P. It has been seen agriculturist primitive tribe who are called as 'Lodh', 'Nodh' or 'Lodhi'. Shavara tribe in the *H.H Risley's* report is linked in a relation with the Lodha tribe. In the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa the Shavaras hold the higher status than the Lodhas in the society. Some time it has been seen that the Lodhas are identifying/assimilating themselves or the same clan or group with the *Shavaras*.

OBJECTIVES & METHODS:

The objective of present study is as follows-

- a) To highlight the origin of the Lodhas.
- b) To give light on their unique religious practices.
- c) To chalk out the negligence and coercive administrative action towards his tribe in pre and post colonial time.
- d) Their deprivation in socio - economic perspectives over time.
- e) To bring in front the primitive tribes of the Paschim Medinipur District as it holds the highest number of S.T. Population in the state of W.B.
- f) Discuss the causes of non-participation of a group in the modern social processes.

The work is mainly done based on field observation and secondary data, which have been collected from both governments, non-government offices published and unpublished records.

THE STUDY AREA:

This tribal group is mostly found in Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. Besides, they are found in Suliapada and Morada blocks of Baripada sub-division of Mayurbhanj district of Orissa. For this study 469 Lodhas dominated 469 villages have situated in 20 blocks of Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. The district is in the south western corner of the state (between 21⁰ 36' 40" N to 20⁰ 56' 40" N and 86⁰ 35' 22" E to 88⁰ 31' 30" E). Its area is 13000 sq km out of which forestlands cover is about 1700 sq km. The Lodhas occupied inhabits are mainly found in the north western part of the district. They are a semi-nomadic, notified community who are gradually becoming settled agriculturists nowadays.

DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF LODHAS:

According to 2001 census the number of Lodha people in West Bengal is 84,966 which is 1.9% of the total Schedule Tribe population is 44,06,794 (50.47% Male S.T.&49.53% Female S.T.) of the state and Paschim Medinipur is 7,72,177 (14.87% S.T. of Total district population & 17.52% S.T. of Total S.T. population in West Bengal) of which Lodha constitutes 60136 (7.79%). According to separate survey made by Cultural Research Institute (2003-04), Tribal Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, 14783 Lodhas families live in the districts of Paschim Medinipur of which male and female population are 51.5% and 48.5% respectively.

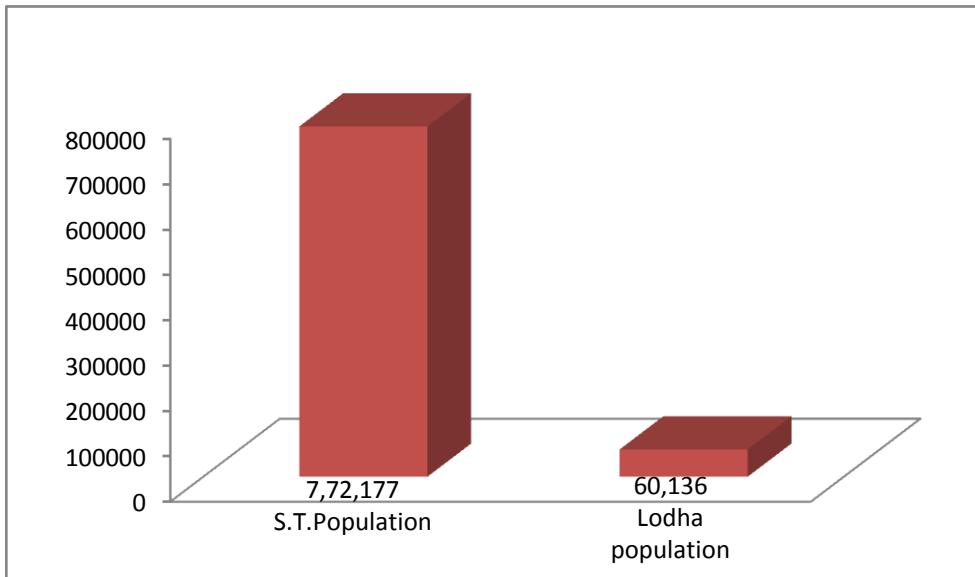


Fig: Total S.T. & Lodha Population in Paschim Medinipur District.

Literacy Level: According 2001 census, Among all S.T. Population in W.B., 43.40% population has been returned as literate (above 7⁺ years), which is lower than the national average (47.10%). The male literacy rate 57.40% and female literacy rate 29.20%. Among the Lodha's, the total literacy rate is 34.80%. Where the male literacy rate is 46.8% and female literacy rate is 22.50%. So, here a large number of gender disparity in literacy.

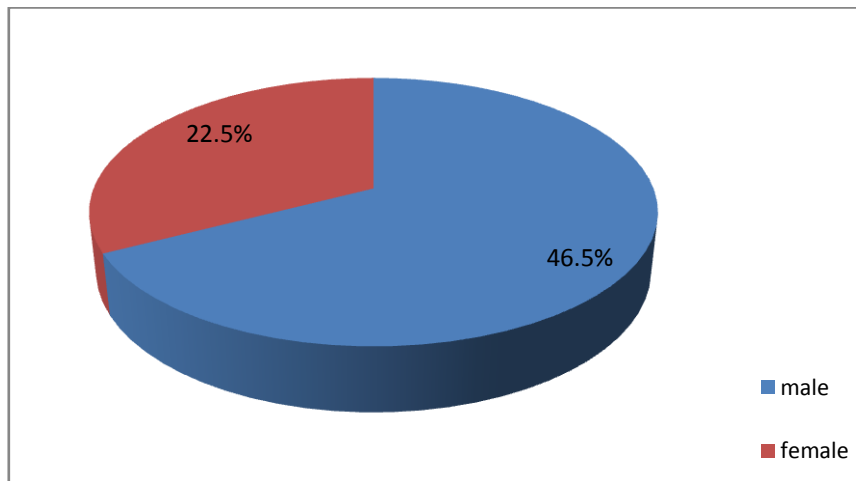


Fig: Literacy Level (in %) of Lodha Tribe in Paschim Medinipur

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE LODHAS:

In male dominated society, the father is the head of a family. The work responsibility is equal for the male and female members of the family. Though in the household affairs, the female members played a more vital role.

Lodha people are divided into nine clans consisting of a separate religion deity. Below is a list of names of clans and their respective deities.

Sl. No	Name of the Clans	Description of the Deity of the Clans
1	Bhakta or Bhukta	Chirka Aloo (a type of potato)
2	Mallik	Makar (Capricorn)
3	Kotal	Moon & Tortoise
4	Digar	Susuk (Gangetic Dolphin)
5	Nayek or Layek	Sal fish (Snake head)
6	Bhunia	Sol fish (Snake head)
7	Dandapat or bag	Tiger
8	Arhi or Ahri	Chanda Machh (Pomfret)

Source: Prepared by author based on House Hold Survey

In the Lodha society the priest is called as ‘*Dehri*’ or ‘*Dihri*’. They also worship goddess ‘*Sitala*’. This goddess is worshipped almost in every village of West Bengal. Though their main deity is ‘*Barham Mata*’ who is also familiar as ‘*Vanadevi*’ whose vehicle is a lion. Once in Chatrya Sankranti (The last day of the Bengali month Chatrya) or in 1st day of the Bengali month Magh the goddess is worshipped with offering of clay toys of tiger, elephant, horse etc. And the temple is obviously placed in an open place underneath a big old tree.

CHANGES IN THE LIVELIHOOD OF LODHAS IN COLONIAL RULE:

Prior to the colonial rule the primitive tribes lived a self sufficient life. But in the colonial era the systematic administration of the British rule made thus life miserable. They were alienated from the forestland as the forest was the main source of their livelihood. They were very much dependent on the non-timber forest products, timber products etc. Though completely unaware about the livelihood practices of these tribes the British Government was not ready to hear the agony of them.

The ‘*Jangle Mahal*’ belongs to the South West part of West Bengal, the sage of tribal struggle began in the mid-eighteenth century when the diverse hunting, gathering and agricultural communities of the region were wrestling to maintain their liberty from the ruler class.

RESISTANCE AGAINST COLONIAL RULE:

These gradual incidents created large scale conflicts among forest managers and local people, which marked the beginning of a symbiotic relationship between the forest dwellers themselves. And when these led to violent and non-violent resistance against the state by the tribal groups like the Lodhas the British Government rudely/brutally suppressed the resistance activities and finally alienated the Lodhas from the greater Indian Society by the tagging the title of 'Criminal Tribe'.

CONFLICTS WITH THE STATE AFTER INDEPENDENCE:

This agony of being marked as '*Criminal Tribe*' continued till the 1952 when the Government of India abolished the title of 'Criminal Tribe'. But socially the Lodha tribes faced various barrier, when the urban people regarded them as a "Criminal tribe", even the other tribal groups also. The 'santals', another dominated tribe in West Bengal discard them and don't mix with this tribe.

Though there were some instances where the Lodhas committed serious crimes and in few cases they even molested the women sandals and other tribal groups. It had been seen that false charges were made against the people of Lodha tribe. Even police authority harassed them whenever there was a Criminal incident took place in adjacent areas.

Government authority failed to control these incidents and therefore local people took the law in their hands. In 1961, there was a clash between the Lodhas and the Mahatos, Lodhas and Santals.

PRESENT OCCUPATION OF THE LODHAS:

At the present they have spread out other region to work as farm labourers. Their main economy is based on collection of 'Shal leaves' for making dining plates, country cigar, locally name as '*Bidi*'. They even trap lizards snakes to sale them. Snake charming is their good business.

Among the tribal groups the Lodha has maximum quantity of dry land for cultivation hence; they have become agricultural labourers. Though in some areas, this primitive tribe is living by means of hunting-gathering. They are even now completely unaware about the traditional techniques of agriculture.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT & NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE UPLIFTMENT OF THE LODHAS:

Government authority itself & along with some NGOs initiated many programs to enrich their lives and life styles. In the West Bengal, they had

been given four rehabilitation centers in the district of undivided Midnapur which are presently located adjacent to famous Lalgarh of Paschim Medinipur district. Those are 1. Dholkat Pukuria, 2. Daharpur, 3. Kukai, 4. Dhansol. Later time Bamun mara Lodha colony, Chota Mauri Development Centre and Santigarh Lodha Colony were build up for their rehabilitation.

To bring a change in their mentality, life style the missionary societies like Protestant Christian Mission, American Baptist Mission, Methodist Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society etc. worked a lot. But it eventually created a fraction among the tribal by dividing them into Christian and non-christian.

Lodha Sabar kalyan Samity is a famous NGO working for the development of the Lodhas in the district of Paschim Medinipur.

Government is continuously trying to improve their lives by procuring them with poultry products, the raw materials. Besides, Govt. has built houses for them to give them shelter.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

But due to lack of effective Governance and effects of drought, it has not made much progress in terms of comparative human development indicators.

Much effective Govt. initiatives should be taken in the districts of South West Bengal, especially in Paschim Medinipur as it is considered to be a backward district of West Bengal in terms of human and physical indicators and mainly for agro-forest based economy.

1. Negligence towards the primitive, ultra poor tribes especially the Lodhas be eradicated form this district which holds the highest number of S.C. & S.T. families in the West Bengal.
2. People's views and grievances need more space and more opportunities to include them in decision making. Democratic facilities should be easily affordable to them.
3. Development in the field of transport is long-cherished desire of the inhabitants. Besides, villages are not well connected with the main roads of the state.
4. The most important thing is freedom which the primitive tribes like Lodhas lost after colonial rule which they never achieved aftermath.

Even in Independent India they were subdued by the upper class tribes like Santals. Their long cherished aspiration to live freely in the forest area has become a day dream in the modern state system.

5. In today's world more crucial are the lives, livelihoods and aspirations of the forest dwellers. In this context, the recent enactment of the **Forest Dwellers Act (Recognition of Forest Rights), 2006** by the Government of India can be seen a progressive legislation aimed at undoing historical injustices to the tribal people.

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