

# Tribes of Jalpaiguri District: Origin, Development and Politics during Colonial Period to Post-Colonial Period

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**Abstract:** *Aboriginal of Jalpaiguri district whose ancestor were indigenous to the Indian Continent before British colonialism are called 'Adivasi' (tribes). In Jalpaiguri district there are found various castes, and tribes like Toto, Bodo, Rabha, Santhal, Rajbanshi, Asur and Tamang. This study will be attempt on Tribes of Jalpaiguri District: Origin, Develop and Politics of the tribes during colonial period to Post-colonial period. The main purpose of this study is to ascertain as to how these people settled in this remote region of the Jalpaiguri district, what is their history of origin, improved their living standard with development and profiles of the political scenario in the colonial to post-colonial period of Jalpaiguri. This work follows the step of methodology Pre-field, Field report and Post field or analysis of Primary and Secondary data.*

**Keywords:** Origin, Development, Politics, Adivasi, colonial, Plantation, Education, Aboriginal

## 1. Introduction

Jalpaiguri derives its name from the olive fruit, which is locally known as 'jalpai' – it literally means a place where olives are found abundantly. Its name is also associated with Lord Shiva who is also known as Jalpesh, the presiding deity of the region. Jalpaiguri shares the northern part of West Bengal and is close to international borders with Bhutan in the north and Bangladesh in the south. It is bounded by the state of Assam and Darjeeling district in the East and West. Jalpaiguri comprises chiefly of a rural population, which is more than 80 per cent of its total population. The topography of the land is cut across by rivers, rivulets and hills, and covered with tea gardens and forests. It is a virtual cauldron of different ethnic races and tribes like the Rabha, Toto, Metch, Santhals, Madasia and Oraons.

The Jalpaiguri district is of comparatively recent creation and was formed in 1869. After the annexation of the Duars in November 1864-65, they were divided into the Eastern and Western Duars, the formed of which now forms part of the district of Golapara. The Western Duars was divided into three tahsil, vis- the Sadar, comprising the tract of country between the Tista and Torsa rivers with its head-quarters at Mainaguri, the Buxa tahsil extending from the Torsa to sankos river, which include the mountainous part of the annexed territory.

In the prehistoric times the Jalpaiguri district formed in 1869 part of the kingdom of Pragyothisa, or as it was afterwards called, Kamrup, which extended as far wear as the karatoya river. The third of the Assam kings, mentioned in the Jogini Tantra, the first of whom flourish in the first century A.D. The European conquest and colonialism not only expanded their commercial empire but also had created a distinctive social space altering the economic and environmental history in the non-European world. One of the ways was the commercialisation of agriculture and secondly was the establishment of large-scale plantations which served the western capitalist and revenue interest. Along with the large-

scale cultivation of cash crops like jute, the tea plantations in British India served various other purposes like sanatorium and residence of the British officials in hill stations during summer, cantonment of the army, and experimental sites for western innovations in the field of medicine (Bhattacharya, 2011).

During the nineteenth century British colonial rule in India, the introduction of tea plantation in northern parts of colonial Bengal had changed economic base and the demographic characteristics of the region. Darjeeling which was established as a hill station sanatorium for the British officials to attain good health soon became a hub of tea plantation as a result of the capitalist aspiration of the colonial authority. Almost at the same time, another region located at the foothills of Darjeeling Himalaya known as Duars also emerged as one of the largest teas producing belts in British India. Surprisingly, Duars region became popular as 'unhealthy'. The foothills of Darjeeling Himalayan region located on the eastern bank of the Teesta River is known as Terai which also includes the Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling and western bank of the Teesta River is known as Duars. After the Indo-Bhutan Duars War (1864-1865), the Treaty of Sinchula was signed in 1865, the north-eastern part of present-day Bengal Duars region was annexed to Bengal from Bhutan. Subsequently, in 1869 the Jalpaiguri district was formed with the amalgamation of Terai, Duars and the Tetulia subdivision of Rangpur district of present-day Bangladesh (Debnath, 2010). The introduction of plantations in the region has also contributed to the alteration of the demographic structure and the geographical space. A vast stretch of land in this region was given to the planters at nominal rates of revenue and in other parts, the land was settled under Jotdari tenure where the Adhiars (peasant-sharecroppers) cultivated jute and rice under the Jotdars (peasant-cultivators) (Das Gupta, 1985). The Lepchas at Darjeeling and the Mache's and Rajbanshi's at the foothills were the people who claimed to be lived in these regions and practised subsistence agriculture (Das Gupta, 1992).

## Origin and Development of the Tribes of Jalpaiguri district

The Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal is said to be the smallest version of the whole of India. From ancient times to the present, people of different races, tribes, castes and religions have entered this border district of West Bengal. Some of them have remained here permanently, some have stayed here for a while as per the rules of history, some have merged with the next human flow, but the remnants of all these human groups have not completely disappeared. Here a mixed or cohesive people has taken refuge in language, culture and mass formation. Identity is the sense of being or of becoming a badge that distinguish one from others. Human identity is a universal that is often treated as self-evident and problematic. As a concept, it is linked to state identity national identity, ethnic identity, individual and personal identity. Identification of members of the group on the basis of sharing common attributes, on the basis of all or some of the attributes, language, gender, relation, culture, ethnicity etc. indicates the existence or formation of identity. Identity question of various caste, ethnicity or tribal identity. Actually, identity crisis had become one of the most serious issues in colonial and post-colonial period in India. Even ethnic group seeks to assert their ethno-based identity.

Tribe identity is the sense of being or of becoming a badge that distinguish one from other. Human identity is a universal that is often treated as self-evident and problematic. As a concept, it is linked to state identity, national identity, tribal identity. The identification of members of the group on the basis of sharing common attributes, on the basis of all or some of the attributes, languages, gender, religious culture, ethnicity etc. indicates the existence or formation of identity. Ethnic identity is usually based on a combination of several factors of a tangible and non-tangible nature. These includes amongst others, a common language, culture and religion a consciousness of a group solidarity, historical destiny and emotion commitment regarding shared territory, history etc. Social mobility of tribe in Jalpaiguri has in recent time become the subject of enquiry by the researchers. In their work a rational objectives analysis as to how dissident group of tribes of lower strata, such as toto, boro, santhal, Asur, Rajbansis were still raised their status in the caste hierarchy and climbed up to the respectable rank has been made. This works is a humble attempt to trace their origin and development. Historical origins of the terms of tribe and their emergence as distinct identity is Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal. It examines various views of Indian and foreign researcher or scholars, writers and ethnographers of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period regarding their origin and development aspects of tribes. The identity is a historical phenomenon and not a given or natural thing. Every community has their special identity and ethnographic history, which helps other to have clear understanding and to take necessary steps for the development of that particular community. H.H Hunter and Risley opinion about the tribe of India they origin from Indo-mongoloid family.

In the colonial period many tribes were son of the soil like Rajbanshi, Toto, Garo, Mech, Rabha etc. They were not to agreed work in tea garden. So, the Planters brought many

tribes from different part of India as a tea labour. Many came in greed for land after that they know as Adibasi. Understanding of current tribal societies need a basic respect to the historical processes, which have determined the course of consecutive changes in ideological, political economic and socio-cultural life of the tribal communities. Adivasis constitute about 8% of the total population of Indian and have origin much before of the advent of the Aryans. They are scattered throughout the country and live mainly in remote and rural areas, especially in Jalpaiguri (undivided) district. They are increasingly subject to exploitation, and to dispossession of their land. Tribal communities have faced isolation and social discrimination like that of 'Dalit' from the mainstream society. Aboriginal Indians of the North Bengal whose ancestors were indigenous to the Indian continent before British colonialism are called 'Adivasi' or tribe. In Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal there are found various caste and tribes such as Toto, Rabha, Mech, Santhal, Rajbanshis, Tamang etc. The paper will attempt in this origin portion look into the Origin of the tribe of Jalpaiguri district. Before attempting to sketch the main results of the Bengal inquiries we may pause for a moment to take stock of our terminology. Thanks to Sir John Lubbock and Dr. E. B. Tylor the study of ethnography has of late years begun to be understood in England. 'It embraces.' Says M. Elisee, 'the descriptive details, and ethnology the rational exposition, of the human aggregates and organization known as hordes, clans, tribes and nations, especially in the earlier, the savage, and barbarous stages of their progress'. In the other words, ethnographic applies the comparative method of investigation, and frames by by this means hypotheses concerning the origin of the tribes themselves (Risley, 1892).

In the plantations of Darjeeling, the Nepali/ Paharia people (Mangars, Limbus and Rais) who migrated to the region from mainly eastern Nepal were given the priority for the labour recruitment by the British planters. While in the plantations of Terai and Duars region, primarily the tribes of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas (like Oraons, Mundas, Santhals and Kharias) were recruited as labourers. Consequently, the Lepchas, Meches and Rajbanshis were pushed out of the areas where tea plantation had entered as they hardly find employment in the plantations. The British planters brought from Chhotanagpur region and Santhal Parganas through the Sardari system. The Sardars were the plantation labourers who send back to their home districts in Chotanagur and Santhal Parganas with an authorisation certificate from the garden managers to recruit labourers. The Sardars used to get commission for labour recruitment which varied from Rs. 2 to Rs. 8 per person. The Sardari system was given sanction in the year 1870 (Xaxa,1997). This paper will be analysis of tribes of Jalpaiguri district their origin, development and politics in their life journey. They were separately two distinction showed scenario in this region one the son of the soil primitive habitant and on the other hand migrant tribes. But in this distinction gradually mixed up with the modern touch. They were mixed with the other tribes who was the pre-resident of this area. According to Mati Santhal says 'he heard it from his grandfather that when the British brought them for the tea plantation as a labour and in the greed of giving land. After the colonial period they merge with the other tribe in marriage or other

sources. The tribes of Jalpaiguri in the colonial period they faced some kind of developed with the overcome in migration problems and settlement problem. There is some difference between the permanent tribes and the infiltrating tribes. This migrant tribes or infiltrating tribes.

### Politics on the tribes

The state is seen as an active contributor to identity politics through creation and maintenance of state structure which defines and recognizes people in terms of certain identities. Hence, we find that identity questions of various caste and communities around in India are based on language, religion caste and ethnicity or tribal identity. Actually, identity crisis had become one of the most serious issues in colonial and post-colonial India. Every ethnic group seeks to assert their ethno-based identity. In the Jalpaiguri district legitimised its current policies for structural adjustment and liberalisation by promising economic growth and prosperity for all. Opponents point to the havoc that these policies seen to necessarily entail for the rural poor and the natural resource base that supports them, and assert once more the need for a different model of welfare. Among these models, 'sustainable development' appears today as the most influential theoretical framework shaping the political practice of environmental activist in tribal area of Jalpaiguri.

Despite the best efforts of activist to mobilize tribal groups for sustainable development, this utopia appears as distant as ever. Instead, wherever middle-class activist intervention has been absent, Adivasi (tribe) assertion has taken a different direction altogether, towards a kind of minority identity politics which is ambivalent in its orientation towards the principles of sustainable development. While middle class activists and Adivasi leaders share certain common concerns, their competing conceptions of the tribal and of the environment create a degree of mutual antipathy that has so far prevented their coming together. These varying conceptions partly stem from the emerging differentiation of the tribal community into two distinct classes, a process accelerated by the intervention of the state and market forces. This paper tries to explore claims about tribal relationships with nature by looking at politics within a tribal trade union, focusing on the relationship between the middle-class activists who started it and the tribal activists who are now emerging as its leader.<sup>2</sup>

These people are basically poor and situated in rural areas. A traditional tribe's house builds with bamboo, straw and clay. They are not aware about the modern housings. Many governments have come and gone, but their house have not changed. Mukesh Oraon said that 'we are poor one side and other side tea garden closed so we are jobless, we can't fit our houses properly. On the one hand there is a lack of food because there is no money, then how to build a house. If the government had built our house, we might not have had this situation. We can't eat good in our family of 4 or 5 people. The leader and the minister came and said that I will help in all aspects but no one is doing the right thing. So, we are helplessly living in this modern age.' On the report of dheklapara closed tea garden, from the eve of starting tea plantation in this area there are no higher secondary school even now, how could they develop in higher education. From the few years age some primary school was build for

children. After the primary school, many of them drop out of school and go to work, on the one hand there is a lack of money and on the other hand there is no school. Although many students go to school on foot or zip car<sup>3</sup>, it is 15 to 17km away from their village. Absolutely deprived of the touch of 'Right to Education'<sup>4</sup> here, why is that? Maloti Oraon says 'many times if they missed the car they have to walk'.

There tribal people basically work in tea garden and the tea factories. But when the factories are closed it becomes hell for those people. It is the only way of their earnings. In dying tea gardens of Jalpaiguri, Adivasi workers struggle to make a living wage. Atoyamunda says 'living in the middle of nowhere with no work other than that available in tea plantation, worker and their families have been suffering from malnutrition, anaemia and other nutrition-related problems. Combined with the lack of medical treatment, the results have been drastic. Workers and members of their families have been dying like flies'. A decade later, there have been several reports, by both activists and journalists, on workers living and dying in hunger. It called 'starvation death' and 'prolonged illness' by the government, the last time they made it to headlines was in December 2011, when nine such deaths took place within a month a Dheklapara. Every year near around 120 people died due to proper food and treatment. Where is the 'right to food' voice? Looking around this area, you can see Bengali and English schools, where are the Hindi schools? Lalita khariya says that 'my two children studying in Bengali school and one is Bengali school lack of opportunity to find Hindi school'. We definitely say that this Bengali politics or British politics. Most of the tribe who live in the remote area converted to Christianity and some in crowded place are converted in Hindu.

## 2. Conclusion

Political, economic and other reasons brought them as tea workers. Although their origin and growth is normal, the political focus has not yet fallen on them. They were helpless during the British rule, they are still helpless today. There is a political influence behind the loss of their heritage. There has been a lot of improvement in the political influence in the country, in the state, in the village, then why is their condition like that? They have forgotten the right to education, they have forgotten the right to food. Why aren't they getting all the benefits like normal villages and public settlements? Will their fate not change in the modern age?

## Notes

- 1) The term Adivasi derives from the Sanskrit roots adi (first origin) and Vasi (inhabitant) and refers to India's Scheduled Tribes. Though the term suggests that tribal people are indigeneous in the American sense of being clearly distinguished from white settlers, this is not historically true for Indian where the boundaries between tribal groups and others have always been porous. Using the term 'tribe' alone has its own problems (Hardiman 1987).
- 2) To avoid clumsy and long-winded usage, I shall use the term 'activists' only to refer to the middle-class youth

- from urban backgrounds who have settled in the tribal region, and shall use the term 'tribal leaders' or 'Adivasi leaders' for the local activists who have joined the union.
- 3) People, women and students of this marginalized area all travel outside the village in buses and zip car. Since the number of cars is very low, the car is very crowded. So due to lack of space, boys and girls have to climb on the roof every day. They have to stand for hours for a car.
  - 4) The Right to Education Act 2009, also known as the RTE Act 2009, was enacted by the Parliament of India on 4 August 2009. It describes modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children aged between 6-14 years in India under Article 21 (A) of the Constitution of India. This act came into effect on 1 April 2010 and made India one of the 135 countries to have made education a fundamental right for every child. It prescribes minimum norms for elementary schools, prohibits unrecognised schools from practice and advocates against donation fees and interviews of children at the time of admission. The Right to Education Act keeps a check on all neighbourhoods through regular surveys and identifies children who are eligible for receiving education but do not have the means to.
  - 5) The National Food Security Act 2013 (also 'Right to Food Act') is an Act of the Parliament which aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of India's 1.2 billion people. It was signed into law on 12 September 2013, retroactive to 5 July 2013. The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA 2013) converts into legal entitlements for existing food security programmes of the Government of India. It includes the Midday Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services scheme and the Public Distribution System. Further, the NFSA 2013 recognizes maternity entitlements. The Midday Meal Scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme are universal in nature whereas the PDS will reach about two-thirds of the population (75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas).
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