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## Tribes of Dakshin(South) Dinajpur:A Changing Scenario in the Twentieth Century

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**Abstract:** This research paper is a comprehensive study of tribes in Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, aiming to deeply explore its cultural, historical dynamic, socio-economic and education. Tribal people lived in India since ancient times. Tribals considered as minority in number and also recognized as a backward class in West Bengal as well as in India. Dakshin Dinajpur district is one of the districts of 23 districts of West Bengal which consists of eight blocks (Kushmundi, Gangarampur, Kumarganaj, Hilli, Balurghat, Tapan, Harirampur and Bansihari) and 16.12% different tribal populations were Bhumijs, Chakmas, Garos, Hajngs, Hos, Karmalls, Mahall, Bedia, Lohara, Lepchas, Mundas, Oraons, Santans etcetera have been identified as the scheduled tribes of Dakshin Dinajpur district. Dakshin Dinajpur district occupies eight position in terms of scheduled tribes population in the state. This article mainly highlighted the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people of Dakshin Dinajpur as per the census of 2011. This paper is mainly based on secondary and primary data which are collected from several sources. According to the census of 2011 the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people of Dakshin Dinajpur district are not sufficient for their development. This article will help in analyzing the conditions of tribal people in Dakshin Dinajpur.

**Keywords:** Census, Dakshin Dinajpur, Population, Literacy, Tribal people, Tribal development.

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### Introduction

The term 'tribe' comes from the Roman word 'tribuz' which means three divisions. In India the tribes belong to three stocks named the Negritos, the Mongoloids and the Mediterranean. The

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tribal population is an integral part of India's social fabric and has the largest concentration after that of the African continent. The tribal population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalised group in India. Tribals have been subjected to various forms of deprivation in India since ancient times, particularly in the Socio-economic matters. In India, there are various forms of discrimination based on caste, religious, gender, rich and poor. It is difficult to say that the exact date of coming of the tribals in Dakshin Dinajpur district in the colonial period. They had migrated from Chhotonagpur of Bihar during the second-half of the 19th century specially after the Santal Rebellion of 1855-1856. So we can say that the first batch of the tribals Chhotonagpur region on jungle had come during the Bargi invasion phase in the Barind area of present Malda district. The adivasi people of Bihar used to come to Dinajpur during the colonial period for the search of work in the agricultural field and household industries like oil mills, sugar mills etc. The Zamindars had welcome them for reclamation of cultivation land they imposed taxes on this land , even evicted the people and made them sharecroppers or wage labour. In response to the demand of the British Government, the Zamindars had launched a vigorous programme for there clamation of the Jungle land. This reclamation programme had laid the foundation of the tribal settlement in Tapan and Gangarampur of Dakshin Dinajpur. In the colonial period, Dinajpur was a district of Bengal province in between the rivers of Nagar and Karotoya bounded by Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Bagura, Rajshahi, Malda and Purnia district of Bihar. After the partition of the subcontinent two third of Dinajpur was sent to Pakistan and one-third remained in India named West Dinajpur. After that Dinajpur was divided into two districts named Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur. Dakshin Dinajpur which was emerged as 27th district of West Bengal on 15 April 1992.

### **Brief history of the District**

Mention the term Dinajpur district in historical evidence some 2000 years ago. The district witnessed during the reign of the Maurya, the Gupta, the Pala and the Sena Empires. The district is rich in mythological, historical, archeological, religious and cultural heritage. The Muslim invaders attacked the district and side by side the district also observed the glory of Buddhism and Jainism. So many local people of the district involved in the national movement and the struggle for freedom made the history of the district very glorious.

First get the mention of undivided Dinajpur in ancient times when the district was a part of the Pundra Kingdom. It is believed that the origin of the state of Pundras was derived from Aitareya Brahmana. Pundrabardhan is known as present Mahasthangar and was the capital of the Pundra Kingdom. Presently Bangar is situated beside Punarbhaba river in Gangarampur which was once known as Kotibarsha. The entire district along with the whole of Pundra bardhan was part of the Mauryan Empire and this fact is proved through archeological excavations at Bangas and the Mahasthangar inscription of Chandragupta Maurya. His Mahasthangarh inscriptions show that when famine occurred during his period, he donated the coin called Gantak to get relief of the famine to the people. During the Gupta period numerous discoveries of various inscription provide

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evidence of influence of the Gupta's over Pundrabardhan. The great Pala ruler Mahipal -II dug a tank in Kushmundi Block which is still known as Mahipal.

In 1204 AD, Turkish General Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji, attacked Nabadwip, Nadia in Bengal with eighteen soldiers who were initially mistaken with horse traders and defeated Lakshman Sen. Even after conquering Nadia, the centre of power was in Devakot, present Gangarampur, as he established his capital there. In the year 1585 the great Mughal Emperor Akbar conquered Bengal at that time the first authentic traces of Zamindari family of Dinajpur are found.

The opinion regarding the name Dinajpur varies widely. Hamilton has mentioned Dinajpur as the 'abode of beggars'. About the origin of the name, he has opined that perhaps it originated from the name of Dinajpur family. King Ganesh belonged to this family. Elsewhere he has stated that perhaps there was a local prince, named Dinwaj or Dinaj and after his name, the area was known as Dinajpur.

Sengupta in West Dinajpur District Gazetteer has presented a brief discussion on the derivation of the name Dinajpur. It is supposed that the name of the district is derived from the name of a local king, named Dinaj or Danuj. But, the controversy arises regarding the identity of this king because history shows that the Dinaj king was a king of Sonargaon. Hence, the possibility of the origin of the term 'Dinajpur' from the name of the king of sonargaon is not justified. This king might be the Raja Ganesh, the king of Gour whose title was Danujamardana-Deva and from his name the term Dinajpur might be evolved.

India became independent from the British on August 1947. A part of erstwhile Dinajpur district became a part of this bifurcation and approximately two third of the Dinajpur district was included in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) and one third was within India and was renamed West Dinajpur. West Dinajpur was further subdivided into Uttar (North) Dinajpur and Dakshin (South) Dinajpur on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1992.

### **Demographic Scenario**

Dakshin Dinajpur is one of district of West Bengal in India. There are 9 Taluks, 1631 villages and 8 towns in Dakshin Dinajpur district. The total population of Dakshin Dinajpur district as per 2011 census is 16,76,276 of which 14,39,981 reside in rural areas and 2,36,295 are from urban areas out of which 857,199 are males while 819,077 are females. In 2011 there were total 396,406 families residing in Dakshin Dinajpur district. The literacy rate of Dakshin Dinajpur district is 64.65% out of which 69.58% males are literate and 59.48% females are literate. There are 28.8% Scheduled Caste (SC) and 16.43% Scheduled Tribe (ST) of total population in Dakshin Dinajpur district. The total area of Dakshin Dinajpur is 2219 sq.km with population density of 755 per sq.km. The Population distribution of Dakshin Dinajpur district for the last five decades is shown in Table 1 below.

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**Table 1:** Rural and urban population in Dakshin Dinajpur district with percentage to total in bracket

Census year	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total	772618	989294	1230608	1503178	1676276
Rural	684625(88.7)	847845(86.7)	1066383(86.7)	1306324(86.9)	1439981(85.9)
Urban	87993(11.4)	141449(14.3)	164225(13.3)	196854(13.1)	236295(14.1)

**Source:** Census of India 2011, West Bengal, District census handbook, Dakshin Dinajpur.

**(Note:** Till Census 1991 both Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur were parts of undivided West Dinajpur District which was bifurcated in 1992. As such the figures before 1991 are common for both the districts and 1991 data has been recasted.)

It can be observed from the above Table that the total populations of the district has increased steadily from 1971 to 2011. On the reverse, percentage of urban population has increased up to 1981 then decreased up to 2001 and again increased in 2011 Census. As per Census 2011 out of total population 14.1% people lives in urban areas while 85.9% lives in Rural areas.

### Caste wise population of Dakshin Dinajpur district

Schedule Caste (SC) constitutes 28,8% while Schedule Tribes (ST) were 16.4% of total population in Dakshin Dinajpur district of West Bengal.

**Table 2:**Distribution of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes (Male and Female)

	Total	Male	Female
Schedule Caste	482,754	248,312	234442
Schedule Tribe	275,366	138,025	137,341

**Source:** Census of India 2011, West Bengal, District census handbook, Dakshin Dinajpur.

### Literary Condition

Education is the container and carrier of progress of the society as well as the backbone of the society. It is the catalyst to socio-economic development. India soon after independence laid emphasis on promoting education among all sections of it's people with particular emphasis on weaker sections, namely the Scheduled Tribes. The constitution have made some specific

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provision in Article 15(4) and Article 46 for promoting education among Scheduled Tribe (STs). The National Policy on Education (NEP) 1986 also gives priority on opening primary school in tribal areas, encouraging promising ST youth to take up teaching in tribal areas.

The present paper focuses on educational scenario among the Scheduled Tribes of Dakshin Dinajpur district with particular reference to the educational progress and backwardness among the STs of Dakshin Dinajpur district. The tribes of the Dakshin Dinajpur district are very backward in educationally attainment. According to census 2011 the total literacy rate of Dakshin Dinajpur district is 72.82%. The male Literacy rate is 69.58% and the female literacy rate is 59.48% in Dakshin Dinajpur district. Population wise out of total 1,083,685 literates, males were 596,474 while females were 487,211. Also the male Literacy rate was 78,37% and the female literacy rate was 67.01% in this district.

**Table 3:** Distribution of literacy rate in Dakshin Dinajpur district as per Census 2011.

(Age o-6)	Total	Male	Female
Children	188,135	96,143	91,992
Literary	72.82%	69.58%	59.48%
Schedule Caste	482,754	248,312	234,442
Schedule Tribe	275,366	138,025	137,341
Illiterate	592,591	260,725	331,866

**Source:** Census of India 2011, West Bengal, District census handbook, Dakshin Dinajpur.

According to census 2011 the percentage of highest tribal literacy in Balurghat block 56.01% ( male and female) and the lowest percentage of literacy is found Kushmundi block in compare to other blocks. Rank wise position of inter block tribal literacy according to census 2011 is as follows Balurghat, Tapan, Gangarampur, Kumarganj, Bansihari, Hilli, Harirampur, Kushmundi.

The literary condition among the Scheduled Tribes of Dakshin Dinajpur district was not very encouraging. This district was educationally backward and the tribal people were much behind others in respect of education and literary. Children of the tribal communities are deprived of higher education due to economic poverty. Most tribals live in poverty in rural slum areas, the Ministry of Rural Development plays an important role by implementing various poverty alleviation programs to raise their status above the poverty line and provide financial and other assistance for their employment and income-generating activities. Tribals need to solution to their economic disadvantage because they can provide higher education to their children if they are economically developed or self-reliant. Otherwise the development of India is also national along with the development of the state unity and national integration will be hindered as tribal people form a large part of India's total population.

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## Economic Status

The tribal population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalised groups in India. The constitution of India had organized tribal population as weaker sections of the society based on their Socio-economic backwardness and the age old social discrimination and physical isolation that they had been subjected. The tribal were basically cultivators. Most of the tribal peoples did not have the land of their own land and were largely dependent on the labour work in the various fields. Their traditional occupation was to the making of brooms from one kind of grasses to the handcraft works of different taste and design with cane or Bamboo. Side by side they took the profession of fishing, hunting gathering, and cultivators as sources of income.

Initially the immigrants tribal people got land at a very lenient rent. But when the land was reclaimed the Zaminders began to oppress the tribal people for eviction. Due to imposition of higher rent and Mahazani Loans at high rate of interest the tribal people become bargadars or sharecroppers. Immigrant tribal of Dakshin Dinajpur district were involved in agriculture work.

Even after independence the economic condition of the tribal community of Dakshin Dinajpur district has not changed. Their livelihood by animal husbandry catching fish and on forest. Only 3% scheduled tribes are in Government service.

The Dakshin Dinajpur is situated by border side of Bangladesh. So many Bengali people from different culture have come to live here and after partition of India and before created of Bangladesh. This district is called an Agricultural based district where over 87% of dweller is villager. The Bhumijis , Bhutias , Chakmas , Garos , Hajangs,Hos, Karmalis, Koras, Lepechas, Lodhas, Moghs, Mahalis, Mals, Meches, Mundas, Nagesias ,Oraons ,Rabhas and Santals have been identified as the Scheduled Tribes of Dakshin Dinajpur.

Economic condition is one of the most valuable parameter for measure of development level and also standard of living. According to Census 2011 Balurghat block is the highest ranked that indicate good economic condition among the tribal of this district and the lowest ranked block is Kushmundi. On the basis of economic status rank ( highest to lowest,according to Census 2011) of the blocks are Balurghat, Tapan, Gangarampur, Bansihari, Kumarganj, Hilli, Harirampur , Kushmundi. So it illuminate the inter block tribal development is not equally spread over the block of the district.

**Table 4:** Inter Block Economic Status of Dakshin Dinajpur District

Block	Households (ST)	Earnings 5000-10000	Earnings >10000	5000-10000 %	>10000 (%)
Kushmundi	3813	90	34	0.19%	0.07%
Gangarampur	7765	214	36	0.38%	0.15%

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Kumarganj	7412	147	69	0.35%	0.17%
Hilli	4035	129	70	0.62%	0.34%
Balurghat	16886	618	399	1.02%	0.66%
Tapan	13368	396	181	0.67%	0.30%
Bansihari	6672	155	113	0.48%	0.35%
Harirampur	5394	64	65	0.20%	0.20%

**Source:** Soren, David Durjoy Lal& Subrata Mondal ,An Analytical Study of Inter District Tribal Development of Dakshin Dinajpur District ,West Bengal in Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies (JHSSS) Volume :1, Issue: 5 ,p.45.

From the very beginning, the tribal people are associated with different economic activities. Settled cultivation are the major type of economic activities the tribal people associated with. Later, with the development of industry, they have started to work as unskilled labourers in the industries . The tribal people are at the lower level of economic development. But now-a-days, the tribal people not only depend on their family members, they have started to hire labourers. However, every tribe has its specific principal occupation which gives them a kind of occupational identity. For example, the Birhors are the food-gathering tribe where as the Mundas are the agricultural tribe. So in case of Birhors, food-gathering is their traditional occupation or the agriculture is the traditional occupation of Mundas. The traditional occupation of seven selected tribal communities of Dakshin Dinajpur is in the Table 5.

**Table 5:** Selected Tribal Groups and their Traditional Occupations

Tribal Groups	Traditional Occupations
Santal	Hunting- Gathering And Agriculture
Oraon	Agriculture
Munda	Agriculture
Bedia	Agriculture
Mahali	Basket Making And Bamboo Craft
Mal Pahariya	Shifting Cultivation and Hunting
Lohara	Iron Works

The Socio-economic condition of the tribal of India are very poor even after so many years of freedom .

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## **Programme for Tribal Development and Government Schemes**

The scheduled tribes(STs) of India as well as West Bengal remained socially, educationally economically and politically backward in the Indian society. Consequently in the changed scenario serious efforts are to be made to improve their Socio-economic condition. Due to the spirit apart from various constitutional safeguard, a number of voluntary organization started providing various facilities to the weaker sections of the society for the proper upliftment. The scheduled tribes historically disadvantaged people recognized in the constitution of India. They were known as the Depressed classed at the time of colonial period.The reservation policy became an integral part of the constitution through the efforts of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, who participated in the round table conference and fought for the rights of the oppressed and depressed classes.

However, the Central Government and State Government started various welfare schemes and launched many programmes for the upliftment of the tribals. Some of them mentioned here . Community Development Scheme ( CDS) in 1952 for ST which was a scheme for the development of roads , bridge , culverts etc . in tribal areas .The large sized Adivasi Multi - Purpose Co-operative Society (LAMPS) in 1971 which was affiliated to the West Bengal Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation Ltd; conducted and assisted different Governmental programmes ; The West Bengal SC and ST Development and Finance Corporation took up economic development schemes for SC and ST people; Indra Awaas Yojana (IAY) in 1985 that undertook to provide houses to poor SC/ST families. Family oriented scheme (FOS) in 1986 that was Bank Loan Programme, the scheme and programme were run by the Central Government and State Government. A separate department of the State Government Named as Tribal welfare came into existence in West Bengal in 1952 , which mainly looked after the scheme of Scheduled Tribes. The Tribal Welfare Department was further renamed as Scheduled Caste and Tribes Department in 1967 in order to cover both SC and STs in the state. Since , 1997 the department name has been changed as Backward classes Welfare Department. This Department worked to benefit of all the backward classes of the state.

Apart from these, various social welfare programmes were taken by Dakshin Dinajpur district. Under Grameen Punarbas Yojana (GPY) a composite fitment rehabilitation centre for person with disabilities, where artificial limbs were being distributed free of cost. The scheme is still run by the Indian Red Cross Society, Balurghat. National Trust for Multiple handicapped, mental retarded and cerebral palsy handicapped run by the Red Cross Society, Balurghat provides hostel accommodation and special schooling for vocational education. Under National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation Dakshin Dinajpur District Social Welfare Department provides prescribed format of application form for loan schemes of economic rehabilitation to physically challenged persons. The Rural Health Development Centre, an NGO at Jamuna, Harirampur set up Short Home Stay for destitute and socially abandoned girls and women, which no doubt was helpful for tribal upliftment.



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Although the tribal development schemes had very little impact on the life of majority of the tribals. The fruits of the development by inducting these schemes were not evenly distributed among all the tribal people, rather a few sections are still enjoying a large chunk of it . Growth is still not making any headway towards overall tribal development available and accessible to the tribal population of India.

### **Conclusion**

The scheduled tribes have passed a long way to reach the present condition. They have long suffered from innumerable disabilities as stated above. Although the commissioner of scheduled castes from the time to time has been suggesting various remedies, it has to be made clear that instead of suggesting ideological remedies it may prove more beneficial if the suggestions are based on rational thinking and the principles of social equilibrium. At present we require a well consistent plan for the socio-economic upliftment of the scheduled tribes keeping in view their present attitudes and emerging trends of relationships with other castes. The constitutional safeguards and socio- economic protection, the problems of SCS/STs are continuing in our society especially in rural and interior areas. They are in fact the worst victims of the sorry state of affairs. Hence it might be suggested that sincere efforts would be necessary towards the foundation of a uniform policy applicable throughout entire rural areas of India as a whole. Hence it might be a policy applicable to be provided to increase employment opportunities be created that special measures to secure an equal footing in the society in course of time. Much controversies and arguments for and against have been raised in connection with reservation issues. It is strongly felt that in order to minimize the frustration of Scheduled tribe's community. Heavy backblocks of reserved vacancies existing in the public sector and arrangements should be made for filling up the quota of reserved vacancies in such a way that the scheduled tribe's communities are adequately represented in all category of services.

Present literacy scenario according to Census 2011 of Scheduled Tribes in Dakshin Dinajpur continues to be very slow. The level of educational attainments has been very slow. Higher education is imperative for educational advance of Scheduled Tribes but socio- economic development remains to be major constraints. The STs in rural areas of Dakshin Dinajpur continued to lag behind in terms of education. The urban literacy scenario too is not very encouraging. A very small section of STs reside in urban areas. Educational mobility is not very significant. The major section of STS children remains the first generation learners.

The Scheduled Tribe communities in Dakshin Dinajpur are mostly immigrant from Chhotanagpur region in central India. The influx of non- tribal people into the region gradually alienated the tribals from their land and compelled them to work as wage labourers. Thus the poverty situation became acute in their homeland. A section of tribals who were not accustomed to new type of work cleared the forested area and occupied the vast terrain and took up agriculture as main occupation. The legacy of illiteracy continued since the migration to the new place. The poverty stricken and illiterate tribals could not see beyond the immediate need. The cultural isolation and economic backwardness still has not improved which remains a major constraining factor for

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educational advance for the tribals. The STs population since their immigration continue to reside in rural and backward areas, highly inconducive to educational advance. After independence a number of provisions have been provided for educational advance of this marginalized Scheduled Tribes of the country. Despite “Positive Discrimination” literacy or education had made a very slow progress among the Scheduled Tribe people of Dakshin Dinajpur. The STs are suffering from the generational backwardness in education. The STs are highly disempowered to utilize the state welfare measures for economic and educational concern. A look at the census decadal growth shows a very dismal picture of educational advance among the STS of Dakshin Dinajpur. Promotions of education among STs of Dakshin Dinajpur required over all integrative approach along with positive discrimination.

Considering the entire study, it can be concluded that this district is far away from the target of development of all the tribal people of this area, which implies that wide gap exists between the policies for the tribal development and their implementation. Actually, mere development plants, policies, constitutional provisions and safeguards are not sufficient for the development of tribal people; rather emphasis should be laid on their proper implementation. Only then the tribal people may really develop in the true sense of the term and join the mainstream to participate in the country’s journey towards development.

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