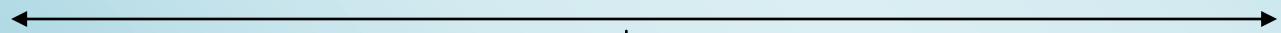


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## A TRIBE<sup>1</sup> WITHIN A NATION: CHALLENGES AHEAD

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### **FIVE APPALLING INCIDENTS**

#### ***INCIDENT 1***

Budhan a 28-year-old from Akarbaid village in Purulia, one of the poorest districts in West Bengal, was arrested on 10 February 1998. He was a member of the 'Denotified Tribe' named 'Kheria Sabar' (also known as Lodhas in West Bengal) was arrested by police and brutally tortured within the police custody for seven days and he died in custody. The police however reported that he committed suicide by hanging himself in the lock-up. Later, Paschim Bangya Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samiti, a civil rights organization filed a writ petition in Calcutta High Court against the police (Writ Petition No.3715 dated 1998) and it was revealed that Budhan was killed by police torture. (*Amnesty International Report*, 2001:24). Ganesh Devy, a litterateur and social activist vividly narrated in her article the case of the death of Budhan Sabar in police custody in February, 1998. (Devy, 2000: 53-55).

#### ***INCIDENT 2***

An anthropologist, Probodh Bhowmick in one of his articles narrated how the Lodhas in the bank of river Subarnarekha in erstwhile Midnapore district were chased and finally thirty-nine of them were brutally beheaded and the rest were taken to the custody of the killers in September 1979. (Bhowmick, 1981:6). In the same article Bhowmick reported that in an earlier incident in 1968 the houses of eighteen Lodha villages were burned by the Santals (Ibid, 1981: 6). Lodhas were attacked on charges of some criminal activities by the Santals. In this connection it is relevant to quote Bhowmick's comments who spent his lifetime in conducting participatory fieldwork among the Lodhas. We quote him

My observation on the Lodhas, an ex-criminal group of people of West Bengal suggests that territorial and economic displacement, with poor adaptability of the group to the fast changing situations, generated criminal propensities in a group, particularly when there are environmental circumstances favourable for such crimes, with concomitant looseness of the grip of the administration. (Bhowmick, 1990:57).

### ***INCIDENT 3***

Famous Bengali litterateur, social activist and Magsaysay award winner Mahasweta Devi reported in her 1983 article published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 'Lodha killing is a regular feature in West Bengal' and she enumerated the killing of thirty four Lodhas in West Bengal from 1979-1982.(Devi, 1983:947).

### ***INCIDENT 4***

In 2004, an awful incident occurred among the Lodhas during the Left Front Government regime at Amlasole village in Paschim (West) Medinipur District. Media reported the starvation death of five Lodha-Sabar in a village named Amlasole in Binpur II in Paschim (West) Medinipur in the state in the year 2004. Later, these deaths of Lodha-Sabar individuals owing to hunger and malnutrition raised uproar in West Bengal Assembly. At that time the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, did accept that 'conditions of starvation' existed not only in Amlasole but in many other villages although his party remained convinced that the deaths were due to disease caused by malnutrition and lack of basic medical care. The communist led State Government denied that lack of food could have led to death of the individuals of this marginalized ethnic group. The Government sent a medical team which concluded that the deaths occurred among the Lodhas owing to their excess consumption of illegal liqueur and incidence of diseases like tuberculosis, jaundice and malaria. The disturbing fact however remained that the area where the Lodhas died did not have any road connectivity, proper health care delivery system and the governmental food distribution system through Public Distribution Shop was in a very poor condition.(*Economic and Political Weekly*,2004:2541). A vivid firsthand account of the District Magistrate, Mr.Chandan Sinha also matched with the EPW report. In addition Mr. Sinha concluded:

....Amlasole became a metaphor for starvation deaths in rural India, of extreme deprivation, of neglect. Yet, most of those who trained their cameras or pens on Amlasole or distributed 'relief' to the people, did not attempt to explore the causes underlying the predicament of the people of the area. (Sinha, 2013:43).

### *INCIDENT 5*

In the recent period some members of the minority ethnic group, that is Lodha/Kheria/Sabar however got themselves educated and began to enter the modern institutions located in the urban and semi-urban areas of West Bengal. But even within the modern institutions they were found to be marginalized and faced discriminations of various kinds. A notable example is the case of the first Lodha graduate named Chuni Kotal who was a girl hailing from a very poor and uneducated Lodha family in Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. Chuni committed **suicide on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1992 in Medinipur. She was a student of the Anthropology Department of Vidyasagar University. She alleged that a teacher of the Anthropology Department belonging to the majority community (a high caste Brahmin) used to harass and insult her by mentioning her low origin. The West Bengal Government constituted a one man enquiry committee by a retired judge of the Calcutta High Court which acquitted the teacher. The suicide of Chuni created uproar in the media and the political circles which reappeared time and again in the academic literature (Chanda, 2005: 130-141; Devi, 1992: 1836-1837).**

The five incidents narrated above are not isolated. They have a history. The history is the story of exploitation, marginalisation, human rights violation, social exclusion and policy failures on the part of the governments to deliver social and economic justice to a group of voiceless people who were categorized by the colonial government as 'Criminal Tribe' and then by the Independent governments as 'Denotified' and 'Primitive Tribal Group'. Can 'social harmony' and 'inclusive development' bear significant meaning without the inclusion of this ethnic minority in the mainstream of a democratic country? Before we address this question, one should travel in space and time about the Lodha-Sabars. Who are they? How do they live and survive?

## **MARGINALISATION OF THE LODHAS IN AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

### ***THE COLONIAL PERIOD***

The Criminal Tribes Act dates back to various successive pieces of legislation enforced in India during British rule. The legislation was first enacted in 1871 as the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 which applied mostly in North India. The Act was extended to Bengal Presidency and other areas in 1876, and, finally, with the Criminal Tribes Act, 1911, it was extended to Madras Presidency as well. The Act went through several amendments in the next decade and, finally, the Criminal Tribes Act, 1924 was enacted incorporating all the aforementioned provinces.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criminal\\_Tribes\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criminal_Tribes_Act)). Interestingly, in an article entitled 'The Criminal Tribes of India' published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* in 1923, a retired British administrative officer Frederick de L. Booth Tucker wrote?

.....Crime in most countries is committed by individuals, in India usually by tribes, communities and gangs, who are highly organised and trained in it from childhood as a profession. The entire family and the relatives of an Indian criminal, including the women and children, are usually associated with him in the commission of crime. It is looked upon by these tribes very much as we regard the military profession, and is considered to be both honourable and lucrative. (Tucker, 1923:158-168).

According to Tucker, there were 18 settlements of criminal tribes and in the then Bengal Presidency there was only one such settlement and the community which was recorded by him as criminal was not the Lodhas but 'Karwal Nats'. Moreover he stated in the same article that most of the families in those settlements were found to practice agriculture combined with petty commodity production and the rest were engaged in industrial occupations.(Ibid).Tucker's description does not fit to the traditional occupation of the Lodhas practicing hunting gathering as was reported by the anthropologists much later. The question is how the Lodhas were included under the Criminal Tribe category and brought under the purview of the Criminal Tribes Act, 1911?

In the same volume of the journal published after five months, another British official of the Police in his correspondence in connection with a remark made by Sir Edward Henry in the discussion on Commissioner Booth Tucker's paper dealing with Criminal Tribes Act observed:

.....The chief motive of the Act is to save criminal tribes from themselves; to reform and to reclaim them, so far as is humanly possible. The Act, as it stands, supplies to the criminal classes a method by which they may be able to improve themselves and to lead decent lives. To the general public it affords a scheme of protection while it places at the disposal of the police a lawful means for keeping potential criminals under proper supervision (Faulkner, 1923: 449).

Faulkner in the conclusion of his correspondence mentioned about how the Lodhas of the then Bengal Presidency might have been designated as a Criminal Tribe by the local administration who were empowered by the law to

declare a whole tribe as criminal if a certain section of the community were found to commit certain non-bailable offences. We should quote Faulkner verbatim:

...If only a part of the tribe is addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences, then only that part of the tribe may be declared a criminal tribe for the purposes of the Act. This was, to my knowledge, done in the case of certain gangs of the tribe of Lodhas in the district of Midnapur (Ibid).

The above exchange between the two experienced British officials revealed the truth that the Lodhas<sup>2</sup> as a community were not initially included under the designation of a criminal tribe at least like the other communities of India but some members of the community were definitely declared as 'Criminal' as early as the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century and then by the immense scope of the law and the discretion of the British officials the whole community was classified as a Criminal Tribe. Be that as it may, one thing was clear in the basic premise of the Criminal Tribe Act. The premise was clearly explicated in the first quote from Booth Tucker's article wherein he opined that crime in India was committed by '*tribes, communities and gangs*' who were '*trained in it from childhood as a profession*' and they regarded crimes '*to be both honourable and lucrative*' profession like the westerners who viewed military profession as admirable.

### ***THE POST COLONIAL SCENARIO***

In the article, 'The Criminal Tribes of India' the renowned sociologist K.M. Kapadia succinctly summarized the attitude of the British administrators in the following manner.

The approach of the Government was fundamentally wrong. It postulated that (i) the so-called Criminal Tribes represented a group of born criminals, that (ii) crime was hereditary with their members and that (iii) criminals could be reformed by ruthless punishment and lifelong harassment. (Kapadia, 1952: 99-125).

In volume III of the *People of India* (1994) edited by Dr. K.S. Singh, the then Director General of the Anthropological Survey of India it was reported that the Lodhas are mainly concentrated in the western part of Midnapore district in West Bengal and their traditional rights of access to forest have been curtailed. The *People of India* volume added

...they makes surreptitious forays into forests, which result in criminal cases being filed against them. Consequent to the colonization scheme, some have taken to agriculture. Besides, they supplement their income by working as daily-wage laboureres, when hunting or fishing yield little return (Singh, 1994: 695-696).

According to Ajit Danda, the former Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, the Lodhas belong to Mundari speaking population who are mostly found in the forest covered areas of Singhbhum District of Jharkhand, Mayurbhanj District of Orissa and Midnapore District of West Bengal, which is also known as Jungle Mahal since the colonial period that were found to inhabit mainly in the three aforementioned states of India. They speak a dialect composed of distorted Bengali, Oriya and words of Mundari origin.(Danda, 2002: 103).

The Census of 1981 shows that the total population of the Lodhas including the Kharias and the Kherias of West Bengal is 53,718 The Lodhas are concentrated in Midnapore District and their total number according to the Census of 1981 was 16,534. Compared to the other neighbouring scheduled tribes, viz. Santal,(22,80,540) Oraon,(6,17,138) Munda(3,41,542), Bhumij(3,36,436) and Kora(1,42,789) the numerical strength of the Lodhas (84,966)are much less in West Bengal.(Tribal Health Bulletin, 2014:126). Besides West Bengal, they are also found in the Mayurbhanj and Baleswar districts of Orissa, Originally, they inhabited hilly rugged terrains covered with jungle. Their mother tongue is Lodha, which is close to Savara, an Austro-Asiatic language. They are fluent in Bengali. Traditionally they were forest dwellers but now they have started cultivation either as owner or as agricultural labourer and are also engaged in hunting and fishing. (Mandal, H.et.al. 2002:32).

In one of the pioneering anthropological study, the Lodhas were depicted as a semi-nomadic community who used to move from one place to another in search of livelihood (Bhowmick 1963:1). According to Bhowmick, the Lodhas of erstwhile Medinipur district depended mainly on food gathering and hunting and some of them were found to be engaged in agricultural as well as non-agricultural activities as hired labourers of the higher caste and wealthy families of the villages. By and large, since dependence on forest produce is not sufficient for them, the Lodhas were also found to be engaged in a variety of occupations to sustain their livelihood (Ibid: 29-30).

An earlier study done by Professor P. K. Bhowmick (1966:68), he described the socioeconomic transformation of the Lodhas since the British colonial period. Bhowmick's study was based on the Lodhas of present day Paschim (West) Medinipur. He observed that the Lodhas have never been incorporated in the mainstream Hindu society and culture, although since the withdrawal of the British Criminal Act in 1952, many governmental schemes had



been introduced to improve the socio-economic condition of this marginalised community. Bhowmick also observed that the Lodhas in many cases were found to be used by the powerful sections of the rural society in illegal activities like theft, burglary and robbery. According to him, these local elite groups developed a vested interest to obstruct the developmental programmes earmarked for the Lodhas since economic upliftment of the Lodhas, might endanger the clandestine activities of the local power elite (Bhowmick, 1966: 70).

A former police official of the Government of West Bengal, Ranjit Kumar Gupta, who collaborated with the action anthropological experiments of P.K.Bhowmick in the rehabilitation of the Lodhas in West Midnapore reported in 1979 about the interethnic conflict among the Lodha, Santal and Mahato communities. Referring to a Police report Gupta in his book *Essays in Economic Anthropology* narrated the case of the conflict in a vivid manner

The only major police report relates to a combined mass attack by the Santals and the Mahatos on the Lodhas of the areas around a village called Mohulboni on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1958, in course of which four Lodhas were killed and several Lodha huts were set on fire. The provocation was an armed robbery in Santal hut in Mohulboni by the Lodhas, and alleged rape on a Santal woman. The major background reason was obviously the tension due to the Lodha depredations against propertied classes who also happen here to different ethnic groups. It is to be noted that the Mahatos (the Kurmi Kshatriyas) who were not at all an injured party in this case took an active part in the outrage on the Lodhas. (Gupta, 1979:155).

The above account of the police official revealed that apart from the violence committed by the dominant and settled agricultural community (the Santal) on a semi-nomadic and a gatherer-hunter tribe (the Lodhas), the active involvement of the Mahatos (a non-tribal group) in the violence on the Lodhas, exposed the process of 'cultural othering' of the Lodhas which was prominent even after the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed in 1952 and the Lodhas were declared as a denotified tribal community.

Another observer searching for the sources of ethnic conflict in the Jhargram subdivision of Paschim (west) Medinipur district noted that the criminal activities of the Lodhas create resentment among the Santal which sometime leads to attack on the former and the coercive action by the administration cause among the Lodhas a kind of 'psychic persecution producing a disastrous effect on their social behavior. (Chaudhuri, 1987: 1851-1852).

According to a media report even after six decades after Independence the socio-economic condition of the Lodhas have not changed. In the same report the journalist also pointed out that the Government has given development inputs without inquiring the beneficiaries' basic needs. As a result implementation of development inputs have been failure owing to lack of awareness, knowledge and proper monitoring of the implementing authorities. (Roy, 2009).

Furthermore, the denotification process also carried the colonial hangover of looking at those 'Criminal Tribes' as born criminals. G.N. Devi, a noted scholar-activist and the editor of *Budhan, the newsletter of the Denotified Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Groups (DNT-RAG)* narrated the passage from the Criminal Tribes Act of the colonial period to the post colonial Denotified Tribes Act in a succinct manner.

.....Soon after Independence, the communities notified as criminal tribals were denotified by the Government. This notification was followed by substitution of a series of Acts, generally entitled 'Habitual Offenders Act! The HOAs preserved most of the provisions of the former CT Acts, except the premise implicit in it that an entire community can be 'born' criminal. Apparently, the denotification and the passing of the HOAs should have ended the misery of the communities penalised under the CT Act. But that has not happened. The police forces as well as the people in general were taught to look upon the 'Criminal Tribes' as born criminals during the colonial times. That attitude continues to persist even today. (Devi, 1998).

Under this post-colonial scenario, various welfare measures have been undertaken by the Central Government to improve the living conditions of the Lodhas. After the independence of India from British colonialism many plans and projects of specific nature have been initiated by the Government to resettle the forest dependent and semi-nomadic Lodha minority community in an agriculture dependent sedentary life. Meanwhile, a good number of rehabilitation schemes have been formulated and implemented on the Lodhas and most of these schemes failed and no lasting impact of them could be made. (Bhowmick, 1985: 17).

Mahasveta Devi' s long experience of working actively for the cause of the Lodhas led her to recommend certain concrete solutions which she thought should have been adopted by the policy makers and government functionaries for the development of this small and marginalised community of Bengal. According to her, plans with big budgets may not work for the real development of the Lodhas and secondly, development inputs for the community should be executed and managed by the Lodhas themselves. In another article published in the

*Economic and Political Weekly*, Mahasveta Devi narrated her experience of observing the enthusiasm created among the Lodhas when in 1982-83, they revived their own community organisation (*Lodha-Sabar Kalayan Samiti*). We quote from the author,

.....The Lodhas had revived the Samiti in sheer desperation for physical survival. The awakening of the Lodhas surprised the state government. The sluggish serpent eternally in winter hibernation covering the Lodha name seemed to stir a little. Six Lodhas were appointed as Lodha cell social workers, including Chuni Kotal. And three boys were appointed as village welfare supervisors in Chakua, Chandabila and Pranabpalli, on contingency basis, at ten rupees a day. All were employed in September 1983. .... This encouraged the Lodhas, through their devotion and dedication Lodha and some non-Lodha children came to the community centre for studying. These workers could persuade the Lodhas to give up drinking, to save from their wages, to live hygienically. They felt that the state government was coming forward with schemes for development and the Lodhas should be prepared to reap the full benefit of such schemes (Devi, 1985: 1467).

At present the Lodhas do not live exclusively in the forest covered areas, but have spread out in other deforested regions and are found to work as agricultural and non-agricultural labourers. Their main economy is still based on collection of minor forest products, such as leaves for preparing leaf-plates for sale. According to Bhowmick, the Lodhas were found to collect edible roots and fruits for household consumption and sell the surplus in the local markets. They are also found to be engaged in the collection of tussore cocoons and sell them in the market for cash. Lodhas also catch snakes and lizards and sell their hides and consume the flesh of these animals. They also catch fish and tortoises from the water bodies for domestic consumption as well as for sale. (Bhowmick, 1963).

The Government of Independent India repealed the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952. Even after denotification as criminal tribes, the Lodhas continue to suffer from the social stigma and the non-tribal neighbours still behave unsympathetically towards them. Over the decades, the Lodhas gradually changed their occupation from hunting gathering to agriculture as an alternative means of livelihood owing to deforestation. (Danda, 2002:110-111).

Mahasweta Devi not only wrote on the abject poverty and exploitation of the Lodhas, she also worked for decades to fulfill the various demands of the community towards the upliftment of their socio-economic condition. Although, not an anthropologist, Mahasveta Devi has firsthand personal experiences of the failures of

governmental schemes and shortcomings of the government policies directed towards the development of the Lodhas in erstwhile Midnapore, and the adjoining districts of West Bengal. Unlike academic anthropologists, she practiced activism through the publication of a literary magazine in which many literate tribal persons including Lodhas wrote about their living conditions, violence committed to them by the state and higher classes of the society and the demands of the different tribal communities. Mahasveta Devi herself also wrote a number of articles in Bengali and English in which she depicted the ground realities regarding the problems of the implementation of development inputs and schemes among the Lodhas. In one of her articles published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1983, Mahasveta Devi cited examples of some Lodha villages in the present Paschim Medinipur district in which government schemes have failed to reach the beneficiaries, although they were badly in need of the development programmes. In the article Mahasveta Devi categorically pointed out:

.....Usually the schemes are made by people not knowing or caring to know what the tribal really need. The plan is then, after the usual procedures, left to the contractor.... I have seen contractor- made construction works meant for the Lodhas. It is better to make specious earthen huts. With a structure of cement, brick and sand, the inevitable contractor is bound to enter the scene. To whose benefit? Not the Lodhas'. Over three decades, huge sums has been spent in the name of the Lodhas and the community has gone much below the poverty lines. (Devi 1983:948).

A recent novel written by Nalini Bera a government official who worked among the Lodhas in erstwhile Midnapore district of West Bengal depicted the daily lives of the Lodha-Sabars in a picturesque manner. The name of the novel is *Sabar Charit* (2005) which literally means 'The Sabar Character'. In the novel, which is based on the personal experiences of the author, the daily lives of some Lodha women are depicted in painstaking detail. The characters in the novel were mainly found to eke out their living through the collection of various forest products (Bera, 2005). The author, however did not deal with the problems of social discrimination and implementation of the development schemes as narrated by other anthropologist and activists.

In an important article, written much later in the *Newsletter* of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain, Bhowmick explained the socio-psychological processes which created a vicious circle of underdevelopment, poverty and mistrust among the Lodhas. We quote him below:

...The chronic poverty and low aspiration level and lack of zeal of these people have created socio-cultural and economic constraints which, in turn, have made them lazy and lethargic. This has also made them unresponsive to any sort of change or innovation introduced for their uplift. (Bhowmick, 1981: 7).

Bhowmick's depiction of the dismal condition of the Lodhas however, should not be taken as a generalised statement about the tribe. His own applied anthropological experiments at least in the early stages yielded inspiring results. According to his collaborator R.K.Gupta the cluster farming cooperatives in Nayagram area involving the Lodha, Santal and the Mahatos brought self-confidence among the landless Lodhas and crime rate declined. (Gupta, 1979:160-162). More than three decades after the publication of his *Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter* article, the academic administrator Mr.Chandan Sinha narrated the successes of the Lodha development scheme in a positive tone. In the chapter 'A Glow in the Darkness' in his recently published book *Kindling of an Insurrection: Notes from Junglemahals*, Sinha depicted a good number of Lodha families in Jhargram who showed remarkable strength and courage at the individual and community levels to care for the poultry and the livestock given to them from the government under the RSVY scheme and built houses under a governmental scheme with their family labour. In Sinha's words

... Darkness had fallen but with the help of torchlight we made our way to the house of Hari and Pramila Sabar. Upon reaching their homestead I found Hari Sabar digging one side of the foundation all by himself! I asked him why he was working so late. He told me that during the day he had gone to the jungle to collect sal leaves. Upon his return finding some portion of the foundation incomplete he decided to complete digging the length before calling it a day. It was stirring sight, especially since most people tend to dismiss Lodhas as incapable of hard work and responsibility. (Sinha, 2013: 206-208).

## **IN SEARCH OF INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT AT THE MICRO-LEVEL: AN EMPIRICAL ACCOUNT**

The social scientists however, have not yet made any empirical attempt to assess the impact of the development inputs given to this marginalised community. In a series of empirical studies, we have made sincere attempts to assess the utilization of the various developmental inputs given by external agencies towards the demarginalization of the Lodhas. (Panda & Guha, 2009:69-75; 2012: 75-84). Opportunities came when in the month of November 2005, we conducted a social anthropological fieldwork in connection with a research project on 'Socio-economic Impact Assessment of Development Programmes. Among the Lodha/Sabar of Binpur-II &

Nayagram Block of Paschim (West) Medinipur District', under the *Rastriya Sama Vikas Yojana* scheme of Paschim Medinipur district sponsored by the Planning Commission of India.

The following account is a summary of the study which is based on our prolonged anthropological enquiries conducted in the Government departments and the target villages of the three administrative blocks (Binpur II, Nayagram and Narayangarh) of Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal.

The government has given various types of development inputs to the Lodha-Sabar beneficiaries in the surveyed areas to bring them in the mainstream and also uplift the socio-economic condition of this tribe. The developmental inputs under the Rastriya Sama Vikas Yojana, (RSVY) Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) schemes included (i) non-refundable cash loan for building house, (ii) solar cells for domestic use, (iii) cattle (cow, goat, bullock) and poultry birds, (iv) husking and spray machine for agricultural purpose, (v) job card, (vi) money for domestic animal, and also included the distribution of plots of agricultural land under developmental input as *patta*.

Another important component of the governmental perspective centering round the development of the Lodhas was to settle this tribe as an agriculturist population. For this reason, every effort to improve the condition of the Lodhas consisted of giving them land, permanent houses, domestic animals and poultry birds. There was virtually no effort on the part of the Government and the NGOs to improve the economy of the Lodhas within the fold of the forests which the members of this tribe knew best. The traditional and intimate knowledge of the Lodhas about the forest and the animals on which the community sustained its livelihood were rarely studied and used by the governmental and non-governmental development agencies.

The findings revealed that at the time of the field survey (during 2005-2006 & 2008-2012) 402(29.09%) beneficiary families out of 1382, spread over three administrative blocks of Paschim Medinipur have received various types of developmental inputs in different combination. The nature of distribution of developmental inputs by the Government shows that emphasis was given to cash loan for house building and high technology solar cells. Through our observation and interviews with the beneficiaries we have found that most of the houses were built in a hurried manner and seemed to be weak in structure. The beneficiaries also expressed their dissatisfaction with the newly built houses.(BOX 1). It was also found that the majority of the beneficiaries who

received solar cells either sold them against cash to well-to-do neighbours belonging to other communities or could not use them properly.

Little attention was paid to strengthen the household level economic base of the Lodhas through the distribution of agricultural land and other related inputs like ploughs, irrigation water, manure and pesticide. There was no effort on the part of the agriculture department to train the beneficiaries in cultivation. The distribution of cattle and poultry birds among the Lodhas of the survey population also revealed that the beneficiaries could not manage their cattle and birds owing to lack of basic knowledge in rearing those animals. As a result, it was found that many cattle, particularly goats have died within a short period of time after those were given to the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries of old age pension scheme complained about the delayed payment of pension by the concerned department of the Government. The overall scenario of the utilisation of the various development inputs showed that the majority of the beneficiaries utilised the development inputs, although there was a large amount of variation among the different inputs in terms of their utilisation.

The comparative scenario of the utilisation of the four major development inputs in the three blocks among the Lodhas showed a marked overall variation. Variation is also found in terms of the type of development input. Let us enumerate the variations. In the following table and the analysis we have summarised the findings on the utilisation of the development inputs by the Lodha families in the three blocks in a comparative framework.

**Table 1 Comparative Scenario of the Utilisation of Major Development inputs among the Lodha Households in three blocks of Paschim (west) Medinipur.**

Development Inputs	Binpur-II		Nayagram		Narayangarh	
	Utilised	Unutilised	Utilised	Unutilised	Utilised	Unutilised
Solar cell	04[17.39]	19[82.61]	60[73.17]	22[26.83]	Solar cell has not been given.	
Patta Land	01[10.00]	09[90.00]	11[39.29]	17[60.71]	15[88.28]	02[11.72]
House	12[33.33]	24[66.67]	75[60.48]	49[39.52]	15[100.00]	00
Cattle	05[20.00]	20[80.00]	00	02[100.00]	09[64.29]	05[35.71]
Total	<b>22(23.40)</b>	<b>72(76.60)</b>	<b>146 (61.86)</b>	<b>90(38.14)</b>	<b>39(84.78)</b>	<b>07(15.22)</b>

[ ] Represents the number of households out of the total beneficiary households in a particular block for a specific development input, ( ) Represents the number of households out of the total beneficiary households in a particular block for all development inputs.

## ANALYSIS

1. The development inputs given to the Lodhas have been utilised by them most successfully in the Narayangarh block and interestingly, solar plates have not been given at all in this block.
2. The worst scenario is found in the Binpur-II block in which non-utilisation of all the development inputs predominated the scene. Nayagram lies in the middle position in terms of the utilisation of the development inputs.
3. When we look separately to each development input, we find that the utilisation of domestic cattle can be regarded as a kind of development input which turned out to be an unutilised input except among the Lodhas of Narayangarh who showed the best performance in the utilisation of all the inputs.
4. The utilisation of financial assistance for house construction given as a development input showed that even the overall worst performers (Lodhas of Binpur-II) have made a substantial utilisation of house construction as a development input.
5. Regarding *patta* land, we do not find full utilisation in any of the blocks studied but in case of house we find full utilisation in Narayangarh Block.
6. The development assistance given in the form of cattle revealed a grim scenario both at Binpur II and Nayagram blocks while the performance of the beneficiaries towards the utilisation of this input was found to be fairly well in Narayangarh block.(Panda and Guha, 2015).

### BOX 1 A typical case of Landlessness and house building of a Lodha family

Name of informant: Tapan Sabar (name changed)      Age: 44      Sex: Male  
 Village: Amlasole,      JL. No: 25      Block: Binpur-II

According to the respondent there are six members in his family. They are dependent on forest resource collection and daily labour. He had received a record of right on *patta* land from the Block Land and Land Reforms Department in 2004. The family has also received financial assistance for house building in 2004. All the family members are living in the house but it is not suitable for living as the roof is damaged. Jiban said : 'Our house is in a very poor condition because it was built by bricks with mud and thatched by tin with a single door made by plain sheet of tin and there is neither any window nor any ventilation system. The house was constructed by a contractor under the supervision of some government official and they did not consult us regarding the planning of the house. Moreover, if the house requires repair we will not be able to do it without the help of the contractors who made the construction.' Jiban also added: 'I have received *patta* land on paper in 2004 and the amount of the land is 0.15 acre only, but till now I have not seen the land or the plot which has been allotted under my name. May be some other person is cultivating the land. The government official who gave the *patta* paper to me did not show the actual spot where my piece of land is located'.



## IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

In this research, we have found micro-level differences in terms of the utilization of development inputs by the Lodha families of the three administrative blocks of Paschim Medinipur district which have a bearing on the macro-level policies undertaken by the Government to ameliorate the socio-economic condition of the most economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized tribal population of a district identified under the macro category named “backward”. It was also found that the failure on the part of the Government to make use of the various development inputs to the target group of beneficiaries is related with the specific situation of each block. The salient features of the block specific situations should have been taken into consideration while implementing the macro-level policies. Some of the recommendations are summarized below.

*First*, the road transport and public communication systems should be improved in all the blocks, particularly in Binpur II and Nayagram. Governmental efforts towards the supply of safe drinking water and minor irrigation systems should be initiated immediately in all the areas inhabited by the Lodhas.

*Second*, skill development and production of value added items made out of minor forest produce by the Lodha villagers still remained one of the most neglected areas by the Government.

*Third*, the Lodha families to whom *patta* land have been issued on paper should immediately be given the actual right of possession with full protection against all kinds of disturbance by the district administration and the panchayat.

*Fourth*, the financial assistance for house building plans should also have been made in consultation with the beneficiaries themselves to give honour and importance to their specific needs.

*Fifth*, and not the least, solar cells should not be given to individual Lodha families without enquiring into their socioeconomic conditions. In this field based research it was found that the Lodha families in the Narayangarh block were much advanced in terms of the utilisation of development inputs. Solar cells should have been given to the Lodha families of this block instead of giving them to the beneficiaries in the Binpur II block.

This study revealed the historic injustice towards one of most marginalised community of West Bengal designated as ‘Criminal’ in the colonial period continued through the post colonial time. The governmental efforts to ameliorate the living condition of the Lodha-Sabars made some inroads, although more sincere efforts

combined with solid empirical research are needed along with social activism initiated by P.K. Bhowmick and his Institute of Social Research & Applied Anthropology, to achieve social harmony and inclusive development of this 'Primitive Tribal Group'.

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<sup>1</sup> In academics the word 'tribe' is used in anthropology as a conceptual category which refers to both as a 'type of society' (simple, egalitarian) and a 'stage' (devoid of centralized authority) in social evolution. (Sahlins, 1968). In the Indian context, the anthropologists distinguished tribes as well as related them with the caste society in a continuum. (Beteille, 1986 and Sinha, 1958). 'Tribe' in India is also treated as an administrative category for the purpose of positive discrimination (e.g. reservation in jobs). Recently, the tribes in India are also viewed as 'indigenous peoples' or 'adivasis' by the activists and social workers although the administrative category still seems to be important even to the tribes themselves. (Xaxa, 1999a & 1999b). Lodhas are also classified as a scheduled tribe in India by the Government.

<sup>2</sup> The wikipedia says, 'Lodha means piece of flesh named after their ancestor. Lodhas have been in the focus of anthropologists and social activists. During the early period of their rule, the British government in India oppressed the tribal people of Jungle Mahals, who were traditionally dependent upon the forests for a living. They had revolted but were ruthlessly suppressed. Having been deprived of their livelihood and without any alternatives, they took to criminal ways of life and were subsequently branded a criminal tribe. They should properly be labelled as uprooted rebels. Lodha titles are Nayek, Mallick, Digar, Sardar, Bhokta, Kotal, Dandapat, Bhunya etc. These titles reflect social responsibility. They are descendants of Jarasandh from Mahabharata. The Lodhas hold that they are Sabars.

( [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lodha\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lodha_people) accessed through Google on 21.10.2014).