



Received on
15 May, 2026

Revised on
09 June, 2026

Accepted on
10 June, 2026



Socio-Economic Changes in Tribal Society Due to Plantation Labour in Dooars

Tumpa Debnath ^{a†} 

^a Department of History, Alipurduar Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Alipurduar, West Bengal, India

[†] Corresponding Author:

✉ tumpadeb86@gmail.com (T. Debnath)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21424737>

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the socio-economic, cultural, and political transformation of tribal communities in the Dooars region of North Bengal under the influence of the tea plantation system. It investigates how the migration of Adivasi groups from the Chotanagpur Plateau to tea estates during the colonial period reshaped their traditional livelihoods, social institutions, cultural practices, and collective identity. The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive methodology based on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, government reports, and historical records. Dependency Theory, Modernization Theory, and the Marxist perspective are employed as analytical frameworks to interpret the processes of change. The findings reveal that plantation labour facilitated economic integration, educational opportunities, and infrastructural development, while simultaneously generating poverty, labour exploitation, dependency, and social marginalization. A significant contribution of this study is its integrated analysis of economic, social, cultural, and political changes, highlighting both continuity and transformation in the lived experiences of tribal communities. The paper emphasizes the need for development policies that protect tribal identity, cultural heritage, and social dignity.

KEYWORDS: Dooars; Tea plantation; Tribal communities; Labour migration; Social change; Cultural transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Dooars lies at the feet of the Eastern Himalayas in northern West Bengal. The region came into prominence as a producer of tea in the later years of the nineteenth century when it was governed by the British colonialists. With rapid expansion in the cultivation of tea, there arose a requirement on the part of the tea planters of a regular supply of labour. Because the local population was not large enough or unwilling to work under difficult circumstances in the tea plantations, labourers had to be brought from tribes outside the region, especially from the Chotanagpur plateau. Quite a few people belonging to the tribes of the Adivasis, such as the Oraon, Munda, and Santhal, made their way to the Dooars at this time (Bhowmik, 2011; Breman, 1996).

The coming of these communities to the Dooars represented the dawn of a new era for

them. Ultimately, they got themselves settled in the tea plantations and came to be known by the names “tea tribes” or “plantation tribes.” This marked a huge transformation in their lifestyle as they had distanced themselves from their old ways of earning a living and instead opted to join the world of systematic wage labour related to the tea business. The influence of plantation life soon spread beyond the economic realm, as plantation life increasingly began to shape their social and cultural aspects as well. It is this aspect that we will analyze in this paper in a humanistic approach, bringing into focus both their successes and their challenges in the context of plantation life (Bhowmik, 2011).

2. METHODOLOGY

The following investigation seeks to highlight the changes which took place among the tribal communities in the Dooars with regard to the labour practices in the plantations by employing the exploratory and analytical method of research. As the investigation essentially deals with the process of experiencing history and social change, hence the method used in this research can be termed qualitative in nature (Creswell, 2014).

Primary dependence has been placed on secondary source materials. Information for this investigation has been obtained from books, academic journals, archival material, government documents, and scholarly research papers which focus on the topics such as labour in tea plantations, migration, tribal society, colonial economy, and social change in North Bengal. In order to have a better knowledge of the issue, the present study also benefits greatly from works of eminent authors like S. K. Bhowmik, Jan Breman, Verrier Elwin, André Béteille, and many others (Bhowmik, 2011; Breman, 1996; Elwin, 1964; Béteille, 1974).

The study utilizes a conceptual approach to explore the topics of labour migration, livelihood changes, dependence, marginality, cultural assimilation, gender relations, as well as other societal transitions. It also applies Dependency Theory, Modernisation Theory, and Marxism to analyse the relationships between the workforce in the plantation sector, capitalism, and tribal societies. It shows the continuing influence of the plantation economy on tribal people's lives in the Dooars through the connections made between historical events and current events (Breman, 1996; Bhowmik, 2011).

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PLANTATION LABOUR IN DOOARS

The establishment of tea plantations in Dooars (North Bengal), has a long history going back to the colonial period of 1874 when colonialists began extensive planting of tea in the area. Impressed with the richness of soil and favourable climatic conditions, they found that the place was ideally suited for setting up tea plantations. With the spread of tea gardens, there was a massive expansion of cultivated land, mostly neglecting the rights of native populations. Soon enough, the growing tea business led to a requirement of a reliable and large source of labor for running these plantations (Bhowmik, 2011).

The local populace was unable to provide sufficient labour for the growing demand in the tea industry owing to the paucity of the workforce and

the unwillingness on the part of the locals to take up plantation work under adverse circumstances. The British planters had to resort to recruitment of labourers from non-Dooars areas due to the deficiency of labour. During this era, many indigenous tribes were transported from outside Dooars like the Chotanagpur plateau area. While some Adivasi groups migrated in response to job opportunities, many were also tricked into migrating by dubious recruitment methods. Many more were forced to move because of various forms of duress. For the majority of the Adivasis who migrated to the Dooars region, migration was not just a process of relocating to a different place. It signified the start of a totally different existence (Bhowmik, 2011; Breman, 1996).

The living conditions of those working in the tea estates were characterized by high levels of structure and control. After establishing themselves in these estates, the laborers began to become increasingly dependent upon the administration of the estate for more than just employment purposes; in addition, they required the assistance of the estate administration in order to get basic amenities of life (Bhowmik, 2011).

4. TRADITIONAL TRIBAL SOCIETY BEFORE PLANTATION LABOUR

Before they migrated into the Dooars area, people like the Oraons, Mundas, Santhals, and other tribes had a lifestyle that was very much dependent on nature and was determined by age-old traditions and customs. These tribes had a societal organisation based on cooperation (or mutual reliance) and responsibility. As a result, their communities were balanced even though they were extremely poor in relation to material wealth; they had no shortage of support networks and bonds with nature. The communities were influenced by the seasons and traditions in their daily lives, while communal well-being was considered more important than economic well-being (Elwin, 1964).

4.1. Economic System

The economies of these tribal societies were based on meeting their basic needs through various forms of subsistence (to meet their basic physical needs). Agriculture was the mainstay of their occupations, but the objective of agriculture was to provide for their own households and did not involve making money. Apart from cultivating crops to meet their requirements, these people used hunting, fishing, and gathering forest

products as other means of earning their living. In such economies, land was seen more as a communal property, and its usage was decided by the members of the community together. As far as involvement in market systems was concerned, these people had little exposure, resulting in their economic independence due to the minimal need for monetary inputs (Elwin, 1964; Xaxa, 2008).

4.2. Social Structure

Social relations in the life of the tribal groups were closely associated with clan identities, which had significant importance to shape their personal identity as well as social obligation. Social relationships were governed through customary practices and shared responsibilities, along with a strong feeling of belongingness. The nature of the tribal society differed significantly from the mainstream societies in terms of having an egalitarian structure, which lacked any social stratification to a considerable extent. Cooperation among people, communal welfare, and respect towards each other were some of the most important principles in their social lives (Béteille, 1974; Elwin, 1964).

4.3. Cultural Practices

The tribal people had an abundant cultural heritage that was deeply associated with their day-to-day life as well as their connection with nature. The cultural heritage of the tribal people was conveyed by means of music, dances, festivals, and other forms of rituals that expressed the values cherished by the community. Nature was seen by many tribes as something sacred instead of simply being the physical world. Most of the tribes adopted the practice of animism whereby they honored the powers of nature along with ancestral spirits (Elwin, 1964).

4.4. Autonomy

One remarkable aspect of the traditional tribal society was the sense of autonomy that prevailed within such societies. There existed a high degree of autonomy in respect of the authority exercised by such societies in respect of the management of their lives using their own customs. The traditional institutions like the village council performed a significant role in governance as well as dispute resolution among others. Each village was self-dependent on matters concerning basic needs of life (Xaxa, 2008).

Nevertheless, this traditional lifestyle saw major modifications when members of these tribes relocated to the Dooars area and engaged themselves in plantation work. This engagement of tribal communities with the plantation system inevitably led to disturbances in their previously practiced economic and social systems and also affected their culture. This community that had for ages lived a self-sufficient life came to need a systematic arrangement of wages and thereby entered into a phase of social and economic change (Bhowmik, 2011).

5. ECONOMIC CHANGES IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

There have been some major changes in the economics of the tribes in Dooars due to the expansion of plantation work. One of the significant changes that can be noted here is that there has been a shift in the economy from the survival mode to a wage economy. Prior to the development of the tea trade in the area, people survived by engaging in agriculture and utilizing forest produce and the custom of sharing among themselves. Though it may not be a profit-oriented economy for the tribes, yet it offered some stability and security (Bhowmik, 2011).

5.1. Shift from Subsistence to Wage Labour

The inclusion of these tribes in the plantation scheme slowly resulted in an alteration in their means of earning their livelihood. In this regard, these people came to be dependent on their earnings from labour rather than on their own produce. Such an approach gave rise to the existence of a money-economy amongst these people. While previously, they had fulfilled most of their requirements through their own produce, now they needed money in order to fulfil their necessities. Labour, thus, made life more structured to some extent as they started getting wages for their work. Nonetheless, they became increasingly dependent on the plantations as their sole means of earning their livelihood.

With the passage of time, traditional activities like hunting, gathering, and indigenous agriculture lost their significance in the plantation economy. These traditions, which used to be integral parts of tribal lifestyle, were becoming less common. The youth who had grown up under the new system did not have many chances to learn these things, resulting in their demise, thus disconnecting the community from its traditional culture (Bhowmik, 2011; Breman, 1996).

5.2. Poverty and Economic Vulnerability

Despite working in wage employment, workers within wage employment are still faced with a level of economic insecurity and uncertainty. They generally have very little steady income and, therefore, experience great difficulty meeting their basic needs despite working long hours in harsh conditions. After working several hours, many wage workers remain in poverty. Furthermore, their continued reliance on the plantation industry restricts their ability to seek other forms of income (Bhowmik, 2011).

It also becomes more challenging for workers when a tea garden closes or tea production is reduced, thereby losing their primary income source. Widespread unemployment results in workers who lose their main source of income through their employment and creates significant financial problems. For workers who no longer have regular income, such as wage workers, it is much more difficult to fulfil the basic requirements of food and water and create problems such as hunger, malnutrition and ultimately bankruptcy (Breman, 1996).

5.3. Migration and Livelihood Diversification

Migration is now viewed as one of the most effective means of escaping poverty and other economic difficulties. For many members of tribal communities, especially the youth, migrating has become an important means of finding better employment. Migrants usually either temporarily migrate for work and then return after several months or permanently migrate to another area for the purpose of creating a better future for themselves. Most migrants will work in the informal sector as either construction laborers, domestics, or in small businesses. Though migration can certainly prove helpful to the migrants in earning extra money and alleviating poverty, there are also numerous difficulties that arise because of this process. Insecure jobs, poor living conditions, and social loneliness are the most common problems faced by migrants (Breman, 1996).

5.4. Emergence of New Economic Practices

Nevertheless, there is some evidence of an adaptation to changing economic conditions on the part of tribal communities. Some families have taken an active part in local business through trading in agricultural products and other minor

items. Other families have tried out entrepreneurship in small ways by running small shops or petty trading businesses. The government's schemes for providing welfare assistance have also made contributions to the process of adjustment in this regard by giving monetary support, generating job opportunities, and facilitating access to basic services. However, the positive impact created by all these factors is limited in nature. Most of the families do not seem to be taking advantage of the opportunities in front of them due to problems arising from ignorance, lack of education, and resource scarcity. Hence, the economic evolution that could take place among the tribes of Dooars is still incomplete (Xaxa, 2008).

6. SOCIAL CHANGES IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

Labour in plantations in Dooars brought about transformation which went well beyond the economic aspects of the life of tribes. Slowly but surely, it began changing their social structure and even their daily interactions. As their life on the plantations grew more and more integral for their survival, the old social organizational practices also underwent change due to various social and institutional pressures. The community-based social structure of tribes slowly transformed into a more regulated and institutionalized social structure (Bhowmik, 2011).

6.1. Transformation of Social Structure

Changes in the social structure of the tribe constituted a major transformation undergone by tribal societies. In earlier times, social life was organized according to the clan system and the extended family, whereby individuals had to cooperate in the performance of various activities and lived in cooperation with each other. The advent of plantations made it increasingly difficult for the traditional social organization of the tribes to function. Gradually, the extended family system broke down, and people started living in nuclear families.

The plantation system created hierarchies and divisions of roles. Decision-making was carried out at higher levels, leaving the laborers subordinate to plantation owners and managers who had absolute power within the organization. This created inequalities in society, which did not exist before due to the rather egalitarian nature of their previous social life (Béteille, 1974).

6.2. Education and Awareness

The transformation in education is another area of impact that has had variable results, depending on which community is looked at. For example, the building of primary schools in many tea gardens over time has made it easier for more children to access education. As a result of developing this access, there have been increases in literacy rates and a broader understanding of the opportunities available outside of working in the tea gardens among younger community members.

Education has also provided greater knowledge and aspirations, leading youth to look for their futures outside of working in tea gardens than they ever may have previously. As a result, this has contributed to the growing trend of youth searching for work outside of the tea gardens. Although the development of aspirations through education has been largely positive, there are multiple barriers to achieving this goal. Poverty is often the highest barrier to education due to many parents being unable to afford to send their children to school past a certain age, as well as many children being forced to leave school early to help the family earn an income. Other barriers to achieving educational goals include a lack of facilities and a shortage of qualified teachers (Xaxa, 2008).

6.3. Health and Living Conditions

The health and daily life of tea workers is a source of continuing concern. Although most of the workers still live-in small houses 'given' to them by the owners of each tea plantation, these houses are seriously neglected. There is a lack of access to basic services like clean water, sanitation, and health care. All of this leads to many health problems in the plantation communities, especially because of diseases and malnourishment, among others. There are situations when health conditions are critical due to hunger, among other things, and there are very few healthcare facilities for tea workers to access frequently enough so that their medical problems are identified and treated; therefore, those health problems have a significant negative effect on the way tea workers live (Government of West Bengal, 2022).

6.4. Gender Roles and Women's Participation

Women in tea gardens have a critical and essential role to play in society and in the economy. A large number of workers at tea plantations are women. They work in a variety of positions, such as picking and processing tea leaves. Through their

participation as wage workers, women can gain some degree of independence and visibility in society (Bhowmik, 2011). But women's participation in wage labour often does not equate to greater power and equality. Many women remain marginalised and exploited at home and in the workplace. In addition to working at tea plantations, women have little control over decision-making and are also expected to complete household tasks. The twofold challenge of completing household duties and working in a tea plantation has a significant effect on women socially and physically (Bhowmik, 2011).

It is an intricate and gradual process for the transformation of tribes in the Dooars. Despite the strides made by women entering into the economy and with a general increase in education levels, tribal peoples continue to lose badly; they are subject to great inequalities, overcrowding in sub-standard homes and lack of opportunities. Modern developments all over the world have opened up opportunities but moreover problems, a legacy of change for tribal peoples.

7. CULTURAL CHANGES IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

The introduction of plantation work has had a gradual yet clear impact on the culture of the Dooars tribal population. So, the culture of most tribal groups in India before starting plantation labour was closely interwoven with nature, traditions and the social character of the group. Nature and the changing cycles of nature were all factors that determined the way a group lived and viewed their environment. However, as the tribal communities became part of the tea plantations and started mixing with other social groups, their cultural world started changing (Elwin, 1964; Bose, 1967).

7.1. Cultural Assimilation and Hybridization

Cultural shifts such as assimilation and hybridization have occurred among tribes as a result of living and working on tea plantations. Exposure to people from different backgrounds has led to the introduction of new customs, languages, and cultures into the lives of the tribes and resulted in a growing reliance on the regional language and local language. Changes in the way people dress, eat, and behave socially are common examples of these influences (Bose, 1967).

Many original tribal traditions have been preserved despite a large number being lost to assimilation; many will likely continue to exist due to the presence of other traditions that have

merged with and coexisted with the old traditions, thus creating a hybridized culture. As such, some traditions have been preserved for longer periods of time, while some have been lost due to the hybridization of the cultures created within the tribes as a result of being exposed to the new environments created by tea plantation activities (Bose, 1967; Elwin, 1964).

7.2. Decline of Traditional Institutions

Since traditional institutions are no longer as important as they were prior to the development of plantations, village councils governed many aspects of social relations prior to establishment of plantations. Village councils and customs were used for dispute resolution and establishment of law and order, and provided significant contribution to cultural values, community ties and continuity of generations prior to plantations. As a result of the plantation system, the loss of these institutions began; over time, formal administrative agencies and plantation owners took their place. The weakening of traditional decision-making processes and lack of community cohesion were some effects of this change on community relations and governance (Elwin, 1964; Breman, 1996).

7.3. Persistence of Cultural Identity

Despite these changes and evolving systems, there remains a very strong and vibrant connection to the Tribal community in the Dooars in terms of their language, culture and way of life. There are many traditions still intact and continuing to play a vital role in all aspects of Tribal communities today such as through their festivals, rituals, songs, and dances which bind the Tribes together as one community united by common heritage and heritage culture.

Religious belief based upon an understanding of nature, and an emphasis on ancestral veneration, remains at the core of Tribal Religious practise and continues to play a significant role within the community identity of Tribals. This is further supported by the oral passing down of culture, language and traditions from generation to generation, which has enabled Tribals to continue to pass down their culture and maintain a unique cultural identity, even in very rapidly changing circumstances and changing conditions (Elwin, 1964). Therefore, one can conclude that the cultural transformation of the Dooars tribals has consisted of both the processes of change and the processes of continuity. As such - even with many

changes in recent years, and due to numerous influences from outside sources - the Indigenous Peoples of the Dooars have shown themselves to have a high level of adaptation while at the same time remaining connected to their traditional cultures by having continued their existence through adaptation to change, which has allowed them to remain stable since having adapted to cultural change as they have in previous periods of cultural change (Bose, 1967; Elwin, 1964).

8. POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The history of tribal people in the Dooars is not just characterized by socio-economic changes but has also witnessed many political and institutional changes. With time, as these tribes became a part of the plantation economy system and eventually came under the administrative ambit of the government of India, the governance system for them also underwent changes. Previously, matters related to politics and society were decided by the traditional system of governance prevalent among these communities. However, with time, as these communities started becoming parts of the formal political system, the nature of governance also changed (Jaffrelot, 2003; Xaxa, 2008).

8.1. Integration into State Systems

In addition to the different types of changes that the tribe communities have gone through, one of the most crucial is the integration of the tribes into the electoral system. The members of these tribes are now able to exercise their right to vote and be involved in other forms of democracy such as helping to elect their leaders (Jaffrelot, 2003).

The tribe communities have also had access to various government welfare schemes, which will ultimately lead to an improvement in their standard of living. These include sectors such as health, education, employment, and even social security. Moreover, the status of being a Scheduled Tribe has made the tribes eligible for a wide variety of benefits (Xaxa, 2008).

Yet, for many indigenous groups, the actual picture on the ground can be much more complicated than that. Despite being officially integrated into the political sphere, there remain different types of marginalization processes. Indeed, in many instances, they still have little power to affect decisions made within politics, and their interests do not receive due consideration and proper representation. There can exist some discrepancy between policy making on one hand

and policy implementation on another, and this often means that desired outcomes will not be achieved (Jaffrelot, 2003; Xaxa, 2008).

8.2. Marginalization and Lack of Representation

Another problem encountered by most of these tribal societies is that of lack of awareness regarding their rights and entitlements. There exists a good number of people who are unaware of the advantages and opportunities that can accrue to them, as well as the means through which these advantages are accessed. In this way, they end up seeking help from intermediaries or the relevant authorities, a factor that may lead to exclusion, exploitation, or neglect (Xaxa, 2008).

The process of political integration has opened up new prospects for development and inclusion; nevertheless, there still exist many forms of inequalities and exclusions that pose a threat to the development of marginalized groups. This has been exemplified by the case study of the tribal society in Dooars, where inclusion in the process of politics does not solve the problems faced by such communities (Jaffrelot, 2003; Xaxa, 2008).

9. CHALLENGES FACED BY PLANTATION TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Tribal populace residing close to the tea estates of Dooars still have to confront a long list of ills in contemporary Times. These challenges can also affect social, environmental and economic issues; they are present every day in these people's lives (Bhowmik, 2011; Lahiri-Dutt, 2014).

9.1. Economic Crisis and Garden Closure

The tea estate closure is the primary challenge impacting the communities. The tea estate is not simply a job for most families living in the communities; it is what sustains them. In other words, if the tea estate is not working in all or any manner; workers are left without income. These workers have no income in the present, so it is exceedingly hard to fulfil their rudimentary necessities like food, health care and schooling for themselves and kids without a work. Poverty and hunger are prevalent among such communities. Whereas a few families may qualify for basic needs or recovery from dramatic tea estate closure, many families must resort to extreme measures simply to survive (Lahiri-Dutt, 2014).

9.2. Exploitation and Labour Rights Issues

Tea gardens can have hundreds of jobs on offer, but tea workers are paid so little (or sometimes not at all) that their lives remain precarious. Due to the harsh conditions of work in their plantations there are not enough facilities, such as sufficient housing, health care, sanitation. Labour laws exist to safeguard the rights of workers but ensuring compliance is incredibly difficult, making workers dependent on plantation management for their living and job condition (Bhowmik, 2011).

9.3. Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is also another major challenge amongst the tea community. Due to their adverse historical background of exclusion from society, they do not enjoy the privilege of quality education and health care. Since tea families have always lagged behind as far as status is concerned, they are denied any form of upward mobility and therefore remain perpetually poor. In addition, the tea community faces discrimination and social avoidance that decreases their self-esteem and confidence in the larger society (Sundar, 2009).

9.4. Environmental and Economic Vulnerability

Moreover, environmental and economic reasons can make plantain communities and tribes more vulnerable and susceptible. The economy of tea plantation is too much depends on climate factors. Climate conditions are also affected by global economic changes. Changes to the price of tea or climate conditions can have a direct influence on the productivity and profit level of the plantation companies, and thus directly impacts the wages and job security of plantation workers. For these reasons, it's evident that these challenges should cause one to support policy initiatives geared towards providing labour protections and promoting sustainable business practices; therefore, improving the quality of life for tribes located in plantain communities (Bhowmik, 2011; Lahiri-Dutt, 2014).

10. POSITIVE IMPACTS OF PLANTATION LABOUR

While plantation labour in the Dooars region has faced many problems, it has also brought about certain beneficial changes in the lives of the tribal people. The process was gradual and not necessarily even in all cases, but the positive changes were instrumental in adapting to new circumstances (Bhowmik, 2011).

10.1. Economic Integration

The other positive impact is the economic integration that has resulted due to the plantation labour practices. Through participation in the tea garden labouring, the tribesmen were able to integrate into the cash economy, which is a very big shift from their previous way of living, since before, they had not been associated much with the money economy or the markets in general. Through earning money in the plantations, they were able to participate effectively in the markets around them and acquire items that they could not have otherwise (Bhowmik, 2011).

10.2. Social Mobility

The rise of schools and educational institutions in both tea estates and non-tea estates provides evidence of positive change regarding social mobility. The educational opportunities afforded to young people through education are numerous, despite the barriers that still exist, and education has created job opportunities for those who could not find one working on a plantation. There are many examples of how people's exposure to modern institutions, as a result of having been educated through school, has helped them develop a broader perspective on their lives and aspirations for the future (Béteille, 2003).

10.3. Infrastructure Development

The establishment of tea plantations has also resulted in improved infrastructure in the area. Currently road networks, educational infrastructure and health care facilities have improved in the many areas that have tea plantation expansions. Although these services are still not available everywhere, and what is available may be of poor quality, they are still creating better life conditions for the people who live in these areas (Xaxa, 2008).

10.4. Awareness and Aspirations

Another major aspect of development is that many tribes are increasingly aware of their rights and what is possible for them. This awareness has created increased aspirations for improved living conditions and a more dignified future (Béteille, 2003; Xaxa, 2008).

11. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Analyzing the change in Dooars tribes cannot be undertaken merely by gathering and assessing facts. To understand the change, it is necessary to look at the underlying theory of the change (Breman, 1996).

11.1. Dependency Theory

One of these theories focusing on the explanation of the underlying theory of dependency. This view posits that the introduction of the plantation caused the tribes to develop a greater reliance on an economic sector, namely the tea industry. The livelihoods of the people, the housing and even access to various social services were increasingly linked to the activities of the plantation that sometimes operated based on external interests. This made it extremely difficult for the people to diversify economically (Breman, 1996).

11.2. Modernization Theory

Modernization theory is an alternate explanation of the conditions present at the time of the arrival of the plantation. In this instance, the plantation was responsible for introducing the tribes to various modern institutions such as schooling systems, healthcare, and government. As a result, there have emerged a number of favourable aspects, which include increased consciousness, aspirations, and the chance to achieve upward social mobility. However, it should be pointed out that the benefits of modernization were not available to everybody. While some people managed to benefit from modernization, others continue to face the barriers created by poverty and lack of social and economic opportunities (Béteille, 2003; Xaxa, 2008).

11.3. Marxist Perspective

One such interpretation, that is much more critical, lies in the analysis given by Marxism. This ideology stresses the unequal dynamic between labour and capital that characterizes the plantation system. The labour provided by workers is necessary for the creation of profits in this case. However, even though workers contribute so much to production, they do not enjoy the benefits that their work brings them, while at the same time the industry continues to create profit. As a result, there is a huge inequality that leaves the workers in a worse economic condition than ever (Bhowmik, 2011). All in all, these theoretical concepts provide insight into the problems faced

by tribes residing in Dooars (Breman, 1996; Bhowmik, 2011).

12. CONCLUSION

The lives of the people of the tribes in the Dooars have been transformed by the plantation labour system. They have shifted from being self-sustaining people living through their subsistence economy to one which revolves around wage economy connected to the industry of tea. In addition, they have access to modern facilities such as schooling, health care, and governmental social welfare programs. Despite all that, however, there have not been only favourable effects due to this. There are numerous difficulties which the tribals still have to confront, for instance, displacement, dependency on plantations, and their own marginalization (Bhowmik, 2011; Breman, 1996).

There is a need to look into the matters of better pay, better safety at work, and other options as far as earning income goes. The improvement in schooling, health care services, and welfare policies needs to be considered as well. Most importantly, the development should be based on respecting their identity while making sure their progress is dignified (Xaxa, 2008).

In order to have an effective transformation process, attention must be paid to better pay scales, safer working conditions, and provision of additional means of income apart from the existing sources of income. The improvement of the educational sector, healthcare sector, and welfare policy implementations, which have been successfully implemented, will also be essential. Most essential of all would be making sure that all developmental endeavours lead to the progress and dignity of the tribes and their cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author TD would like to thank Principal of the Alipurduar Mahila Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal, India for his support and encouragement.

FUNDING

The authors did not receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST/COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests or conflict of interest to disclose.

REFERENCES

- Béteille, A. (1974). Six essays in comparative sociology. Oxford University Press.
- Béteille, A. (2003). Equality and universality: Essays in social and political theory. Oxford University Press.
- Bhowmik, S. K. (2011). Labour in the tea gardens of North Bengal: A study of the plantation system. Institute of Development Studies.
- Bose, N. K. (1967). Culture and society in India. Asia Publishing House.
- Breman, J. (1996). Footloose labour: Working in India's informal economy. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Elwin, V. (1964). The tribal world of Verrier Elwin: An autobiography. Oxford University Press.
- Government of West Bengal. (2022). Report on the socio-economic conditions of tea garden workers in West Bengal. Labour Department, Government of West Bengal.
- Jaffrelot, C. (2003). India's silent revolution: The rise of the lower castes in North India. Permanent Black.
- Lahiri-Dutt, K. (2014). Plantation labour, livelihood insecurity and tea garden communities in India. In K. Lahiri-Dutt (Ed.), The coal nation: Histories, ecologies and politics of coal in India (pp. 170–185). Ashgate.
- Sundar, N. (2009). Subalterns and sovereigns: An anthropological history of Bastar, 1854–2006 (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Xaxa, V. (2008). State, society, and tribes: Issues in post-colonial India. Pearson Education India.

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Debnath, T. (2026). Socio-Economic Changes in Tribal Society due to Plantation Labour in Dooars. *Humanity and Nature: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 2(1), 31 - 39. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21424737>

SMT. TUMPA DEBNATH is a State Aided College Teacher (SACT) in the Department of History at Alipurduar Mahila Mahavidyalaya, affiliated with the University of North Bengal. She completed her graduation from Alipurduar College and post-graduation from the Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur and qualified the WB SET in 2022. Her research interests include Modern Indian History. She has published several research articles in national and international journals and actively participates in academic research, teaching, and curriculum development.

