



ORAON IN DOOARS: HUNTER GATHERERS TO PLANTATION WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

Oraon, is a tribal group of people inhabited in various states across in India as well as in Bangladesh. They have a rich and vast range of folk songs, dances, tales as well as traditional musical instruments. In 1871, the British Government declared the Dooars as non-regulated area, for that purpose tea estates were introduced. Tribal people were borrowed from Chhotonagpur region where poor people namely Santals and Oraons lived without fixed and settled economy and were dependent on jungles but the new forest policy of the British Government whereby felling of trees in reserved forests were prohibited and declared punishable by law, deprived them of their traditional ways of living in the forest enclaves. It was for that reasons, thousands of laborers emigrated from Chhotonagpur to the tea gardens of Dooars. Now in Dooars they are basically tea garden labors and agricultural laborers. After entering in plantation economy their ethical values, cultures, age old traditional values have been squeezed. Present paper is concerned with a study of impact of changes of their livelihood in Dooars region, problems and probable solutions.

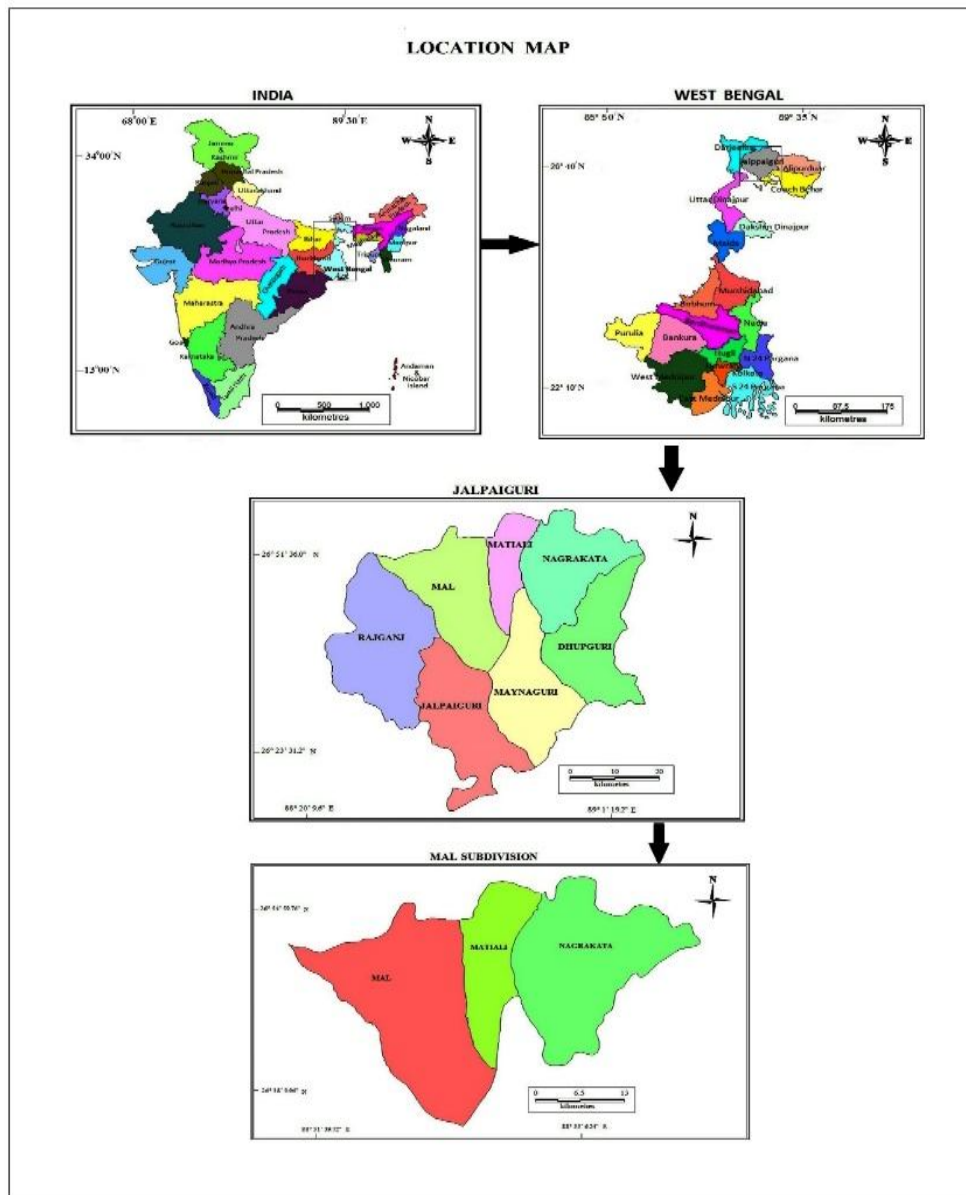
KEYWORDS: *Aborigine, hunting, plantation economy, traditional values.*

INTRODUCTION:

Oraon, differently known as Uraon, Oran or Oram, is an aborigine inhabits in various states across in India as well as in Bangladesh. Majority of them living in Chhotonagpur region of Jharkhand are known as Kurukh. Earlier they used to live at Rohta plateau but dislodged by other people and accordingly migrated to Chhotonagpur where they settled in the vicinity of Munda-speaking tribes. Historians indicate this may have occurred around 100 BC. After introduction of tea plantation in Dooars region of Bengal and Assam in second half of nineteenth century they were hired with all other tribal communities in this region. They were basically hunters and peasants in the Chhotonagpur plateau region and Central India. But their dislodgment changes their occupation and age old traditional cultures.

In broader sense, the study area is Dooars which is a natural physiographic unit hence difficult to delineate. So, Mal subdivision also known as Malbazar of Jalpaiguri district in the state of West Bengal is considered as study area. Presently Mal subdivision has three community development blocks namely, Mal, Matiali and Nagrakata consisting of 22 gram panchayats and Mal municipality. The subdivision is situated between 26°36' and 27° 0' North latitudes, and 88°14' and 88°40' East longitudes. The total geographical area of Mal subdivision is 1150.84 Sq. Km.

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Oraon are noticed almost in all tea gardens and all villages of the Subdivision. Oraon are the major tribal group of the Dooars. In Mal subdivision about 40.31% of total tribal households are occupied by Oraon. In Mal block the share of Oraon to total tribes are maximum (44.71%) among the three blocks. In tea garden areas they are absolute majority in number. Maximum concentrations are to be found at Rangamatee GP (57.89%) followed by Bagrakot (52.80%) and Bidhannagar (52.20). Total share of Oraon households to total tribal households are very poor in non-tea garden areas e.g. Moulani (8.67%) and Lataguri GP (21.20%).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS:

The place of origin of Oraon people is not traceable by the historians. It is assumed that Oraons were the inhabitants of Sindhu Ghati. But, due to the invasion of the powerful Aryans, they left that place around 1750 B.C. Then they reached in Shahabad place called Rohtasand finally came to settle down in

Chhotanagpur. There were already many other tribal groups, among them the Munda community is one. In Chhotonagpur plateau region, the Oraon people were involved in occupation of hunting, agriculture and collection of forest produces. They were very poor and living without fixed and settled economy.

These people for generations were dependent on jungles but the new forest policy of the British Government whereby felling of trees in reserved forests were prohibited and declared punishable by law, deprived them of their traditional ways of living in the forest enclaves. On the other hands, Due to pressure on land, frequent famine and oppression of money lender and land-lord, they started migrating in batches to tea plantations in Dooars and Assam. Loss of land, increase in population, need for cash, and atrocity money-lender and zamindar drove out a large number of Oraon to tea gardens.

In 1871 under the supervision of Mr. Becket the lands of Dooars were divided in three categories viz. (1) Land for agricultural purpose, (2) Land for reserve forest and (3) Land for tea cultivation. For the purpose of tea garden laborer, Oraons and other tribal communities were hired from Chhotonagpur region. It was for that reasons, thousands of tribal people emigrated from Chhotonagpur to the tea gardens of Dooars (Sunders, 1895).

The present study highlighted the problems associated with dislocation of tribal people after entering in plantation economy. Their traditional cultures and value based identities have been diminished.

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY:

In order to carry out the study, primary data have been collected from each 22 gram panchayat areas. 20-50 Oraon tribal households have been surveyed from each gram panchayat depending on the numerical strength of their households. Random sampling methods have been adopted to collect data from the field. Census data have also been incorporated where necessary. Sampled data have been analyzed by chi square and product moment correlation. These two statistical techniques are further tested by significance and t test.

The Chi-square statistic is basically a method to test the correspondence between certain observed and estimated frequencies. In case of close correspondence between the two, the statistics chi-square (χ^2) as given below will be statistically insignificant (Mahmood, 1998).

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^n \left[\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \right]$$

Where, O_i and E_i are the observed and estimated frequencies respectively of the i th class. The shape of the distribution will vary with $(n-1)$ which is known as its degrees of freedom.

Pearson's product-moment correlation formula (r) is concerned with the measurement of the strength of association between variables (Das, 1997). In equation form, the Pearson's product moment correlation is:

$$r = \frac{\sum(x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum(x - \bar{x})^2 \sum(y - \bar{y})^2}}$$

Where, r = Pearson's product moment correlation, \bar{x} and \bar{y} = Mean values of x and y respectively.

Without applying the test of significance, generalization cannot be made to determine relationship for all when the number of observations in the study is very small. The test is carried in the following manner:

$$t = r \sqrt{\frac{n-2}{1-r^2}}$$

MAJOR FINDINGS:

The dominant thinking today is in favor of assimilation of the tribal people into the national mainstream without any disruption. It is not easy to have both dissolution and assimilation at the same time (Roy, 1970). They have come in contact with various external or internal forces and are in constant change. As they are no longer in isolation, but exposed to various forces, so change in their culture is inevitable. But their contact with outside world has allowed a number of evils to infiltrate in them along with a number of benefits (Purkayastha, 2015).

After habitation in Dooars region following changes have been occurred in the livelihood of Oraon people.

1. OCCUPATION & ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION:

The tribal people had strong sense of community life before the British rulers and Hindu *zamindars* and moneylenders intruded into their lives. The popular forms of subsistence economy are that of collecting, hunting and fishing or a combination of hunting and collecting with shifting cultivation. Even the so-called plough using agricultural tribes do often, wherever scope is available, supplement their economy with hunting and collecting. After in-migrating in Dooars most of the Oraon people seemed to be depend on tea gardens as they were hired for plantation works. Following are the statistics gained during household survey:

Table 1 Occupational pattern of Oraon people in Dooars region

Nature of Occupation	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Tea Garden (throughout the year)	46.0	67.0	57.0
Tea Garden (Seasonal)	09.0	10.0	10.0
Agriculture	05.0	03.0	04.5
Agricultural labor	10.0	04.0	08.0
Business	02.0	01.0	01.5
Out of home for earning	08.0	01.0	06.0
Govt. Employee	01.0	00.3	00.6
Unemployed	18.0	06.7	11.4
Others	01.0	07.0	01.0

Source: Primary data collected by the author

Due to frequent closure of tea gardens and due to poor income many of them engaged in different activities. Every year, hundreds of tribal girls mostly teenagers have gone missing over the past few years from the poverty-stricken dying tea estate areas of the Dooars. Driven out of home by poverty and because of the dream of a better life, these girls have fallen prey to human trafficking. They have been trapped by local agents promising lucrative jobs in big cities of the country. After leaving home, however, these girls have become untraceable (Sumati, 2013). Earlier the Oraon people were also very poor but they can able to maintain their own need, but in the Dooars they are in distress condition because of very poor income.

2. LOSS OF CONTROL OVER NATURAL RESOURCES:

Before the coming of the British, the Oraon including other tribal communities enjoyed unhindered rights of ownership and management over natural resources like land, forests, wildlife, water, soil, fishes etc. Indigenous peoples have an intuitive relationship with nature, a wealth of traditional knowledge, and have used natural resources for their livelihood. With the concept of protected forests and national forests, the tribal people felt themselves uprooted from their property of forests. Even the concept of earlier forest village is abolished recently by the notification of the government. The forest villages of Apalachand forest under Mal block, namely, Gajoldoba, Mech Basti, Magurmari and Sologhariaetc have been converted to

revenue mouza. Same fate of conversion also occurred at NimaTandu forest village under Matiali block, namely, Baradighi, Bamni, South Indong, BichaBhanga, Saraswati, Murti, and Uttar Dhupjhora (Kolkata Gazette, 29/09/2014). Hence the right of forest is abolished today.

3. EROSION OF IDENTITY:

Most of the Indian tribes have been in contact with other populations since time immemorial. As a consequence identity of tribal communities in respect of society and culture has been eroded gradually. Consciously or unconsciously, tribal people began to imbibe Hindu ideas and observe festivals and worship some Hindu Gods. In certain areas, a social stratification system resembling those of Hindu caste system evolved. Srinivas (1966) conceptualized this process and gave the name 'Sanskritization'.

The Oraon and other tribal communities faced a cultural crisis because of losing their ethnicity for entering into the civic society. Spread of Christianity is continuing among the tribal in Dooars areas by the catholic missionaries. While the missionaries have been pioneers in education and opened hospitals in tribal areas, they have also been responsible for alienating tribal from their culture. These tribal communities having their ethno-cultural identity crisis because of their conversion into other religions, now-a-days, many of them are going to forget their mother tongue and their traditional customs, usages etc. By entering into global world and global culture the young generations are going to forget many things of their own traditional culture.

During the field survey among Oraon people, a few questions were asked about their identity, origin and culture: Regarding their predecessors' original place, 63% have no ideas, 22% respondents think that they are native, 15% has rightly answered that their original place was in Jharkhand. Regarding their language of mother tongue only 15% know the right answer. In tribal society clan and totem are two important considerations. These are the symbol of identities. 50% respondents know their religion. On an average more than 60% respondents do not know the answers, 15% answered wrong and about 20% has rightly answered. So, from the above survey data, it is very much clear that tribal in Dooars are gradually eroding their identities.

4. ASSIMILATION WITH THE NON-TRIBAL AND OTHER TRIBAL COMMUNITIES:

Sahlin (1966) writes that the term 'tribal society' should be restricted to 'segmentary systems'. They enjoy autonomy, and are independent of each other in a given region. We may observe this about the Santals, Oraons and Mundas of Jharkhand. The indigenous people of the Dooars were the Koch-Rajbanshis, the Mech, the Rabhas and the Lepchas. In the second part of nineteenth century, a large number of tribal immigrated to the Dooars from Jharkhand of which Oraon was largest community in number. Again after the partition of the country in 1947, and emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, streams of immigration or infiltration from East Pakistan and Bangladesh occurred in the areas. Continuous assimilation has resulted demolition of rich cultural heritage. Due to assimilation following changes have been undergone.

- a) **Marriage:** Marriage outside the Oraon tribe was restricted in Oraon society. Marriage between near relative was also not permitted. Bride-price and re-marriage were widely practiced among Oraon. Widow of deceased brother becomes wife of younger brother. But now-a-days inter-caste marriage and marriage to non-tribal family are also allowed. Christian Oraon often marries communities like Munda, Kharia and Santal due to influence of Christianity. They even follow custom of Bengali and Rajbangsi marriage system. Age old *Minoying* custom of marriage is now verge of abolition.
- b) **Dress and Ornaments: Traditional dress of Oraon** mostly replaced by style shirt with collar. Traditional ornament worn by Oraon woman is *Baju, Nakfuli, Husle, Hathpatta, Dhul, Churi, Hikhhol*. But Oraon women now generally use modern ornament instead of their traditional ornament. They feel inconvenience to wear old kind of ornament. Thus it is observed traditional attire of Oraon is becoming unpopular day by day and getting replaced by modern kind of ornament.
- c) **Song and Dance:** Traditional dances and songs are deeply rooted in their social and cultural life and source of enjoyment and relaxation. Oraon people have their different numbers of songs and dances

such as *Karam dance*, *Fagua dance*, *Jhumar dance* etc. accompanied by different musical instruments e.g. *Mandar*, *drums*, *Nagra*, *Dholakand flute* are main musical instruments they use associated with the occasion of birth, marriage, name giving, attaining of puberty, sowing of seed, harvesting, wearing new flower and eating new fruit and crop, hunting. But in present scenario it is observed that their traditional dance and song are not being performed by them.

- d) **Religious Belief:** In Chhotonagpur plateau, most of the Oraon believe in Animism. Their supreme deity was Dharmesh who is resemble of Sun. In agro-based region, their major festivals were connected with each stage of agricultural operation to seek their favor. There were many spiritual ghosts associated with their year wise rituals. Now, most Oraon do not seem to be familiar with these spirits. Traditional ceremonies and rituals are replaced by Hindu god and goddesses. In Dooars region tribal people are gradually converting to Christian as a result Christian ceremonies are getting popular now a days. As per the primary data 2% tribal people believe in Animism, 32% in Christianity and 66% are believer of Hinduism.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS:

How far the modern technology and modernization affect the agricultural economy of tribal people can be statistically tested.

Test: 1-The Chi-Square goodness of fit test has been used to determine whether the distribution of average modern agricultural tools used by the tribal people is even or not.

Assumption: We make a null hypothesis that the average number of modern agricultural tools in each GPs to be equally distributed. The null hypothesis (H_0) framed is as under:

H_0 (Null Hypothesis) = There is no significance difference between the observed and expected number of modern agricultural tools in each selected GP.

H_a (Alternative Hypothesis) = There is significance difference between above two variables i.e distribution is not even.

Df= Degree of freedom is $(10-1) = 9$

Significance level: 0.01, 0.05, 0.10

Table 2 - Chi-Squared Test of Distribution of Modern Agricultural Tools

Selected GP	Average number of tools (O_i)	Expected value (E_i)	Residuals ($O_i - E_i$)	($O_i - E_i$) ²	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Odlabari	40	40.3	-0.3	0.09	0.002
Tesimla	37	40.3	-3.3	10.89	0.270
Kranti	38	40.3	-2.3	5.29	0.131
Chapadanga	38	40.3	-2.3	5.29	0.131
Moulani	45	40.3	4.7	22.09	0.548
Lataguri	47	40.3	6.7	44.89	1.114
MatialiBatabari-II	38	40.3	-2.3	5.29	0.131
Bidhannagar	39	40.3	-1.3	1.69	0.042
Angrabhasa-I	41	40.3	0.7	0.49	0.012
Angrabhasa-II	40	40.3	-0.3	0.09	0.002
Total	403	403	0	96.1	2.385

Source: Computed by the Researcher

Since the result indicates that the estimated value of χ^2 is 2.385 which is too much smaller than that of the critical values. For (n-1) degree of freedom the tabulated value of chi square at 1% level of significance is 21.67, at 5% level of significance is 16.92. So, the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 and 0.10 significance level. It confirms that there are changes in respect of impact of modern agricultural tools with a slight fluctuation.

Test: 2- Pearson's product-moment correlation formula (r) has been adopted to measure the impact on livelihood. Considering their past occupation certainly there are significant change of livelihood patterns. But if it is considered from the present position of habitation their livelihood pattern remain traditional and change is insignificant.

Assumptions: Impact of modern economic activities on the traditional livelihood pattern of tribal people is insignificant.

Table 3.a Changes of Livelihood Patterns as per Respondents Opinion

GP	Total no. of respondents	Percentage of Respondents Participated		
		Occupation changed in respect of primitive occupation	Occupation changed since inhabiting in Dooars	Income & Food habit changed since inhabiting in Dooars
Bagrakot	125	75	05	05
Rangamatee	125	80	04	11
Rajadanga	50	70	08	14
Changmari	50	82	07	11
Lataguri	25	55	10	19
Bidhannagar	50	65	11	10
Indong Matiali	75	71	07	6
Angrabhasa-I	50	61	06	7
Sulkapara	75	65	09	8
Champaguri	125	76	08	7

Source: Primary data collected by the author

For the purpose of correlation, Percentage changes of occupation in respect of primitive occupation is considered as independent variable (x); and Percentage of income and food habit changed since inhabiting in Dooars as dependent variable (y).

Table 3.b Correlation coefficient between changes of occupations and livelihoods

GP	X	Y	$x-\bar{x}$	$y-\bar{y}$	$(x-\bar{x})^2$	$(y-\bar{y})^2$	$(x-\bar{x}).(y-\bar{y})$
Bagrakot	75	5	5	-4.8	25	23.04	-24
Rangamatee	80	11	10	1.2	100	1.44	12
Rajadanga	70	14	0	4.2	0	17.64	0
Changmari	82	11	12	1.2	144	1.44	14.4
Lataguri	55	19	-15	9.2	225	84.64	-138
Bidhannagar	65	10	-5	0.2	25	0.04	-1
Indong Matiali	71	6	1	-3.8	1	14.44	-3.8
Angrabhasa-I	61	7	-9	-2.8	81	7.84	25.2
Sulkapara	65	8	-5	-1.8	25	3.24	9
Champaguri	76	7	6	-2.8	36	7.84	-16.8
Sum	$\bar{x}=70$	$\bar{y}=9.8$			662	161.6	-123

Source: Computed by the Researcher

Correlation co-efficient for table-3.b is:

$$r = \frac{-123}{\sqrt{662 \times 161.6}} = -0.38$$

There is poor negative correlation between X and Y variable. However, without applying the test of significance, we cannot generalize this relationship for all GPs, as the number of observations in the present case is very small. The test is carried in the following manner:

$$t = r \sqrt{\frac{n-2}{1-r^2}} = 0.38 \sqrt{\frac{10-2}{1-(0.38)^2}} = 1.16$$

The tabulated value of t for 8 (10-2) degrees of freedom is 3.36 at 1%, 2.31 at 5% and 1.86 at 10% level of significance respectively. The computed value (1.16) is not greater than even the 10% tabulated value of t. Thus it may be concluded that impact of modern economic activities on the traditional livelihood pattern of tribal people is insignificant.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The British rulers used to isolate the tribal people from the general mass, where a very small number of people were allowed, i.e., some contractors, government officials and a few businessmen. This isolation led to much exploitation by non-tribal money-lenders, contractors, zamindars and middlemen (Vidarthi & Rai, 1976). Elwin (1939) advocated for the establishment of a sort of 'National Park' for the isolation of tribal people.

The ultimate way in which the tribal were approached is the integration one. The policy of isolation is neither possible nor desirable, and that of assimilation would mean imposition. Hence integration alone can make available to the tribes for the benefits of modern society and yet retain their separate identity. The policy of integration which aims the base of Indian culture, i.e., 'unity in diversity' got its due importance through developing a creative adjustment between tribes. The Oraon in Dooars can be integrated by:

- a) Creation of sufficient job opportunities in Dooars either in tea gardens or in agriculture or allied fields.
- b) Spread of basic and technical/ professional education by means of their own language in case of primary education.
- c) Tribal culture and traditions to be maintained.
- d) A complete Mini Hospital or health unit (including a medically qualified doctor, a laboratory technician, a pharmacist and a staff nurse with required medicines and basic laboratory testing set up, etc.) in a mobile van should be set up which will cater to the health needs of the tribal community in a group of adjacent villages fixing a date at least weekly or preferably in the weekly tribal market to minimize the tribal sufferings.

CONCLUSION:

Oraon in Dooars region are undergoing change in their comprehensive life. In present day, some of them are also educated, if not sizeable number, to review existing situation-political, economic, and socio-cultural. Most educated Oraon understand change and continuity in present society and their right to live and sustenance. They are associated with other tribal communities to raise their voice against exploitation, marginalization and poor economy. So, overall betterment of this community requires a package of developmental programme.

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