A Nomadic Tribe Becomes a Settled Agriculturist : The Lodhas - A Stigmatized Criminal Tribe in India in British Period

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Abstract

The Lodha, a hunting -gathering tribe in Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram Districts of West Bengal, traversed a long trajectory from nomadic life to settled agriculturist. They are the autochthonous people of the Frontier Bengal[1] like the other tribal groups such as Santal, Munda, Bhumij, Ho and others. Among these, the Lodha occupies a significant place in that region due to their socio-economic and religious activities. In colonial period, the Lodhas were identified as a criminal tribe after the amendment of the Act in 1871. In earlier days, they were the forest dwellers and their livelihood was based on hunting-gathering. Due to enforcement of Forest Act in 1865 they were forced to leave the forest and were engaged with different type of criminal activities. But over time they were declared as primitive tribal group by the Government of India like the other two tribal groups, namely, the Toto and Birhor of West Bengal. Now they are known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). Since 1960 special attempts were made to make them settled agriculturist by giving them land, agricultural equipments, materials for house construction and the like. Slowly and gradually, they became settled agriculturist with the process of cultural assimilation from the local agricultural communities. On the other hand, many changes have been observed in their socio-cultural and religious lifedue to the impact of globalization, industrialization, information technology and of many other governmental policies. These are analyzed.

Key words - *Frontier Bengal, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), Primitive Tribal Group (PTG), Criminal Tribe, Cultural Assimilation*

Introduction

Over a few decades, being stigmatized as a 'criminal tribe' by the British, thename of the Lodhatribe in Bengal,has been till today proliferating the former image profile of their livelihood in the minds of the local people, generation after generation. During the time of colonial period, the criminal tribes were identified as born criminals or professional criminals. Historian David Arnold (2006) argues that such communities were classified within the Act because they did not conform to the colonial pattern of settled agriculture and wage labour.The

Lodha tribe was identified as a de-notified tribe after the revocation of criminal tribe Act in the year 1952 (Bhowmick,1963). Due to the addition of various Amendments, the criminal tribe Act of 1871[2] was again modified in 1897 and 1911 respectively. Subsequently, the then Britishers assumed that due to their hereditary qualities they accepted criminality (Sharma 2000, Kapadia 1952). British Government's unethical marking of the adjective 'criminal' on tribe is still scintillating among the people of India and other foreign countries too. But the Lodhas are still glorifying themselves by their ancient history and culture. The Epic period was delineated by the enlightening stories of Savara, the non-Aryan king. Before the invasion of Aryan, the non -Aryan king ruled over India and constituted the pan Indian civilization. There are ample evidences of the stories of Savara in Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas and different ancient literatures (Padhi 1975, Dash 2014, Bhowmick 1963, Bhakta 2009, Hansdah 2018). The Lod has think that they are the descendants of the king Savara and often they identify themselves as 'Lodha Savara' (Bhakta 2009). In Orissa, a large number of Savara community live and locally they are identified as Soura, Savara, Sora and Sabara. Historically there were some evidences that they used to worship first Lord Jagannatha as their deity (Eschmann et. al. 1978, Joshi 2007). In the temple of Jagannatha, earlier they were engaged with priesthood and even today they are also involved with the priestly work of the worship of Lord Jagannatha with the other Brahmin priests (Dash 2014, Bose 1953). The Lodha Savaras who are residing in different places of Jhargram and West Medinipur Districts have many similarities with the Savaras of Orissa (Padhi 1975, Dash 2014). Even in West Medinipur and Jhargram Districts a good number of temples exist where the main priests of those temples[3] are the Lodhas known as Savaras (Bhowmick 1982). Before the intrusion of the Aryans, they were the original settlers of Bharata. But after the Indus valley civilization the Aryans gradually established themselves as the nation builders (Fuchs 1973; Hasnain 2009). Consequently, the original settlers began to settle in different forest areas and since then they claimed their identity as indigenous population of the land. It is believed that the Lodha Savaras of West Bengal and the Savaras of Orissa[4] have many similarities in their socio-economic-religious life (Bhowmick 1975; Bhakta 2009; Bose 1953). Most probably slowly and gradually, the geo-political boundaries have separated them from one state to other. Both of them are known as Hinduised tribe. They have no original language. They simply follow the local language. As for example in Bengal the Lodhas speak in Bengali language and they say that they are the Bengali Lodha Savara. On the other hand, in Orissa, they speak in Oriya language but many of their pristine culture justifies that there are many similarities in their socio-economic and religious life. In West Bengal, all the Lodha Savaras worship the Hindu gods and goddesses along with a few of their jungle deities by holding their traditional legacy. On the other hand, the same trend has been followed by the Savaras of Orissa.

A Long Journey: Nomadic Tribe to Settled Agriculturist

In West Bengal, with the passage of time, the Lodhas traversed a long journey from criminal tribe to Particularly Vulnerable Group owing to their distinguishable vulnerable features.

Till today they possess a few traits of marginality like low level of literacy, less or no governmental representative, and persisting primitiveness (Bhowmick 1994). In 2008 onwards they have been marked as PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group).

Changing faces of their everyday life have been observed by conducting a field study in a village named Daharpur situated in Paschim Medinipur,West Bengal, India. The village was studied 60 years ago by an eminent social anthropologist, Prabodh Kumar Bhowmick, who published his classic ethnographic work entitled as *The Lodhas of West Bengal* (Bhowmick 1963). Lodhas were declared as 'de- notified tribe' in the year 1952, when Bhowmick started his Ph. D. dissertation on them.The criminal tribe's name was revoked. During the time of his field work the then Lodhas were hardly wonderers.They mainly depended on forest and forest products with scanty opportunities available to them. Their socio-economic condition was very poor. They lived a life of hand to mouth.Their low level of literacy, poor economic level and mostly zero level representation of Government's service had cumulative effect in worsening their situation, this prompted the Ministry of Tribal Development to categorize them under the group of P TG (Primitive Tribal Group) along with other two tribal groups - Birhors and Totos in West Bengal (Bhowmick 1994).

During that time, with the help of Government, a small amount of money was sanctioned and with this some developmental schemes were formulated on them. Daharpur village as a model village was selected by the anthropologist.They had to be settled unwillingly to this village Daharpur (with the help of the Government's welfare measures). Bhowmick also established Bidisa[5]- a Non-Voluntary Organization to do some welfare work for the rehabilitation of the Lodha tribe. It is in this area the re-study has been done. Changing faces of the everyday life of the Lodhas have been observed by the present writer through conducting an extensive field work on them which started on and from the last January 2022 to till date.

The Lodhas are now settled in different villages of the Districts of West Bengal and they have been lately shifted from hunting –gathering economy to settled agricultural economy. Initially, during the time of their first settlement in Daharpur village, they showed a negative attitude to do agricultural works as they were at that time tuned with the culture of nomadism, by moving here and there in different forest areas, they used to collect their food and were engaged with hunting and fishing activities from the nearby forest named Belti situated in Narayangarh Block, Paschim Medinipur, which is situated within the Jhargram forest area in Jhargram District, West Bengal. During the time of their early settling (early 1960s) often they sold their agricultural land, agricultural equipment like plough, axe, hoe and many domestic animals which were given to them by the Government. Sometimes they sold their house construction materials also as they did not like to be settled in one place. The local high caste people generally purchased all those materials at cheap price by exploiting the innocent tribal people.

But the recent survey (February 2022) reveals that now they are getting increasingly interested in agricultural works. There is not a single family of Lodha who is surviving without food.The Lodhas have crossed a long journey of 60 years from hunting-gathering to agricultural economy.

Many important factors of social change like industrialization, urbanization, globalization with information technology have brought many changes in the socio- economic life of the Lodhas. Side by side, various welfare schemes have been implemented by the Government to change their ways of life. As a result, slowly and gradually they have been adjusting themselves in the light of modernity.

Different schemes of Central and State Governments in the last twenty years helped them to change their socio-economic life drastically. Especially since 2011 awareness for better living is realized and it is continuing till date. Now they think that they are also the members of the village society like the other tribal and non-tribal groups. A sense of solidarity also emerges among them. Especially the Lodhas now think and express that they are the Lodha Savara. This nomenclature was given earlier by one of the members of the Lodha Savara community whose name is Prahallad Kumar Bhakta. Lodha Savara is a Hinduised tribe as referred to by Bhowmick (1963). The Savaras asserted themselves as the early settlers of Bharata which was ruled by Biswabasu who belonged to the Savara tribe, a non-Aryan Hindu ruler. As a result, they think that they are much closer to Hindu caste group. But on the other hand, ethnic groups like the Santal, Munda, Oraon and many others also want to continue their cultural identities along with a development orientation. However, the Lodhas are a little bit different from them.

The Study Area

The present study is based on field views. The present writer conducted a field work on the village Daharpur. Daharpur village is situated in Block Narayangarh and District West Medinipur. It is 21 km away from Kharagpur station. The NH 60 is the high road in the eastern part of Daharpur village. The western side, of the village has a big forest locally named as Belti, which is near Keleghai River from where the tribal people fulfill the needs of their daily life.The forest provides fodder, wood, twigs and many dried plants and roots for their fuel. They collect wild fruits, honey, edible roots, small animals like rats, birds, one type of snake like reptile and many other eatable jungle products.They also collect small fish, molluscs, shrimps, crabs and many other aquatic organisms from nearby ponds lying in the vicinity of forest for their food. At present the local people get the facilities of daily marketing from Narayangarh. There is also a railway station known as Narayangargh near Daharpur village. Since earlier days they are availing of the facilities of weekly village marketing system known as *hut* situated in Narayangarh. Every Thursday the village *hut* goes on. At present due to the high road facilities, they are getting the advantages of daily market also.

Earlier, there was a king's palace in Narayangarh. The name of the last king was Narayan

Ballav Pal. Now the palace is still there but its glamour is no more. The King's son is now a retired school teacher. A well-known Raj - temple named Brahmani is still upholding the traditional heritage of the local area. There is a popular myth that around eight hundred years back one day Raja Gandharba Pal, Sadgop by caste, was passing from this place and fell asleep on the way. Suddenly, he was awakened and saw three goddesses coming to him. After that, the Raja built this temple and placed three images of the goddesses, namely, Brahmani, Rudrani and Indrani. Since then, this temple has been very active.The devotees from different places would come and worship the goddesses. The temple is open for all caste and tribal people. They worship together to get the blessings of goddesses. The structure of the temple is unique. The heritage of the area still glorify the place. Historically, this place is also important as Sri Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu crossed this area after visiting the Brahmani temple on his way to Puri, the place of Lord Jagannatha.

Table 1 – Distribution of the Lodha Population in the District Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal.

	LODHA Population								
District	**Block**	**No. of Village**	**No. of Household**	**Population**					**Sex Ratio**
				Total	**Male**	**%**	**Female**	**%**	
Paschim Medinipur	**MedinipurSadar**	27	792	3244	1656	51.05	1588	48.95	959
	Keshpur	8	203	820	435	53.05	385	46.95	885
	Salbani	13	241	1041	550	52.83	491	47.17	893
	Dantan I	5	178	756	368	48.68	388	51.32	1054
	Dantan II	2	84	366	177	48.36	189	51.64	1068
	Daspur I	4	52	175	86	49.14	89	50.86	1035
	Kharagpur I	46	1777	7074	3589	50.74	3485	49.26	971
	Kharagpur II	24	858	3130	1588	50.73	1542	49.27	971
	Keshiary	17	1187	4396	2285	51.98	2111	48.02	924
	Debra	22	467	1614	823	50.99	791	49.01	961
	Sabang	11	830	2699	1373	50.87	1326	49.13	966
	Pingla	7	415	1255	620	49.4	635	50.6	1024
	Narayangarh	50	3701	12250	6232	50.87	6018	49.13	966
	District Total	**236**	**10785**	**38820**	**19782**	**50.96**	**19038**	**49.04**	**962**
		468	**16733**	**61104**	**31099**	**50.9**	**30005**	**49.1**	**965**

Source- Cultural Research Institute (2018)

Research Design

A total of 112 families of Lodha live in Daharpur village (as seen in recent survey, 2022). Daharpur is a multi-ethnic village consisting of 504 households of different castes and tribes. The total composition of the households and the sample of the different ethnic groups are given in Table-2.

Table 2 – Composition of Different Castes and Tribal Groups along with Sample in Village Daharpur

Caste/Tribe	Occupation	Total	Sample
Brahman	Priesthood and Worshipping	5	02
Mahisya + Kayestha	Land holding community and cultivation	12	03
Sodgop	Land holding community and cultivation	47	06
Jugi	Umbrella re-pairing, bedding work, Cultivation and Business	24	04
Tanti	Weaving and Cultivation	4	02
Kamar	Iron work and Cultivation	6	02
Dhopa	Washing and Cultivation	2	02
Bagdi/ Brga Kshatriya	Cultivation/ day labour	44	06
Hadi	Drum -beating and Cultivation	2	02
Vaisnab	Cultivation and singer of devotional song	10	02
Bagal	Day labour/ Cultivation	16	03
	Total	**172**	**34**
Munda	Government Job holder, Cultivation and agricultural work	220	43
		220	**43**
Lodha(do)	**Cultivation /Agricultural Work/ Small Business**	**102**	**21**
Converted Lodha(do)	**Cultivation/Day Labour**	**10**	**02**
		112	**23**
	TOTAL	**504**	**100**

Source- Field survey done in 2022

Table 2 describes different multi-ethnic groups (Caste and Tribe) living in village Daharpur. Daharpur is a multi-ethnic village consisting of different caste and tribal groups. There is a total of eleven caste groups consisting of Brahman, Mahisya + Kayestha, Sodgop, Jugi, Tanti, Kamar, Dhopa, Bagdi/ Barga Kshatriya, Hadi, Vaisnab, Bagal, and two tribal groups: the Lodhas and the Mundas. The total number of households in Daharpur village is 504 of which 172 households belong to different castes (34%). 220 (43%) households of Mundas are living

in different areas of the village and 112 (23%) Lodha families are residing there. Accordingly, the purposive sample has been drawn from the entire households of the village along with the sample of each group. In this way, 34 sample households from various caste groups, 43 sample households from Mundas and 23 Lodha households have been selected purposively.The present research paper deals only with the changing status of the Lodha tribe. There are 112 numbers of households and the sample size is 23.

Out of 112 families, 10 lodha families are converted into Christianity and the rest are non-Christians (102). Form this 23 Lodha families from 112 families from the village Daharpur have been selected of which two are Christian families and 21 are non-Christians. Purposive sampling had been followed to elicit data...

Extensive field work was conducted for the present research work. Direct observation, face to face interview, and focus group discussion are mainly done for knowing the changing life of the Lodhas in Daharpur village. This village was studied earlier by Prabodh Kumar Bhowmick in early 1960s. After that the re-study has been conducted by the present researcher to assess the changing life style of theLodhas.

Sample Characteristics

Table 3 - Distribution of theLodhafamiliesat different Paras in Village Daharpur

Lodha (Para Wise)	Total Population
Masak Para	77
Tegeria	25
Kali Mandir Para	10
Total	**112**

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Sample Lodha Families (Table 3.1 to table 3.6)

Table 3.1 –Clan Wise Distribution of the Sample Lodha Families

Tribe	Name of Clan	Taboos of Clan	Frequency
Lodha	Sandilya\ Sandil\ Chandil	The do not eat *Swetmagur (one type of jeol fish)*	12 (52.18)
	Sishu	They do not eat big fish from ocean	03 (13.04)
	Sal	Sal fish is prohibited	03 (13.04)
	Kashyap\ Cachchap	They do not eat tortoise	03 (13.04)
Lodha converted to Christian	No Clan		02 (8.70)
	Total		**23 (100.00)**

Figures in the parentheses (brackets) indicate percentages

Majority of the Lodhas belong to Sandil\ Chandil clan, but now they say that their clan name is *Sandilya*. There is a marked point of difference between caste and tribe in the sense that caste groups identify themselves with their clan names or *gotros*. The caste people have

different *gotros,* which are generally originated by using the names of different sages or *rishis*, i.e., *Sandilya, Bhradwaj, Kashyap, Modhukulya* etc. But the tribal people identify their ancestors through their clan names which are not originated from the names of sages or *rishis*. Their clan names were originated either from different objects, or the names of different trees, flowers, animals etc. Gradually the process of *Sanskritization*[6] helped them to change their clan names as for example, now the *Chandil* clan becomes *Chandilya* and then it becomes *Sandilya.* In this way, they have borrowed different *gotro* names from the Hindu caste people without knowing the proper meaning of the term. In similar way they have adopted *Kashyap* from *Cachaap* (tortoise), which was their clan name before. This process of adopting clan names is one of the examples of the transformation of the hunting – gathering tribeto become an agricultural tribe by following the culture of agricultural communities. There are ample examples of cultural assimilation of the Lodha with the local agricultural castes living around them. During the time of birth, marriage and death they employ local Brahmin, local washer man (dhopa) and barber (Napit) to provide ritual services. They perform various functions to complete different ritualsjust like Bengali caste group. All these rituals are performed by different specialist groups. The Lodhas follow the Rite-de-Passages of the Bengali caste group and the members of the village approve this. In this way they rightly claim that they are the "Bengali Lodha Savara." Slowly, they have become part of the larger Bengali society. But in the Daharpur village a large number of Mundas also reside and they never claim that they are the part of Bengali group. They have their own ethnic culture and with time they're enforced their ethnic cultural identity.

Source- Field survey done in 2022

Table 3.2 - Age Distribution of the Head of the Family

Lodha Tribe	Age in Years					Total
	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	Above 65	
Lodha	02 (8.70)	05 (21.74)	04 (17.39)	05 (21.74)	05 (21.74)	21 (91.30)
Lodha converted to Christian	-	-	-	1 (4.35)	1 (4.35)	02 (8.70)
		TOTAL				**23(100.00)**

Figures in the parentheses (brackets)indicate percentages

Table 3.3 - Nature of Families

Lodha Tribe	Nature of Family		
	Nuclear Family	Joint Family	Total
Lodha	15 (65.22)	06 (26.08)	21 (91.30)
Lodha converted to Christian	01 (4.35)	01 (4.35)	02 (8.70)
	TOTAL		**23 (100.00)**

Figures in the parentheses (brackets) indicate percentages

Table 3.4 - Family size

Lodha Tribe	Number of Family Members				Total
	1 – 3	4 - 6	7 - 9	10	
Lodha	06 (26.08)	13 (56.52)	02 (8.70)	-	21 (91.30)
Lodha converted to Christian	01 (4.35)	-	-	01 (4.35)	02 (8.70)
	TOTAL				**23 (100.00)**

Figures in the parentheses (brackets) indicate percentages

Table 3.5 - Nature of House

Lodha Tribe	Nature of House			Total
	Pakka	Kachha	Mixed	
Lodha	05(21.74)	02(8.70)	14(60.86)	21(91.30)
Lodha converted to Christian	01(4.35)	01(4.35)	-	02 (8.70)
	TOTAL			**23(100.00)**

Figures in the parentheses (brackets) indicate percentages

Table 3.6 - Land distribution

Lodha Tribe	Amount of Agricultural Land (Katha)					Total
	No Land	1 - 19	20 - 39	40 - 59	Above 59	
Lodha	03(13.04)	07(30.43)	07(30.43)	01(4.35)	03(13.04)	21(91.30)
Lodha converted to Christian	-	-	01(4.35)	-	01(4.35)	02 (8.70)
			TOTAL			**23 (100.00)**

Figures in the parentheses (brackets) indicate percentages

Majority of the Lodha family's are nuclear in nature due to their poor income, spatial problem in their original houses and also their preference to stay separately from their parents. In general, the grown up lodhas prefer to live in nuclear families. Number of families with fewer member is very common in their society. At present fully mud-built houses are not seen. Majority of the houses are either pakka or mixed for this they now get help from different schemes ofthe Governments, both State and Central. In general, now they have some agricultural land. They do cultivation by themselves. They afford to sell their produce from their land, though after all, for most of them the amount is very low. They get sufficient rice and wheat\flour from the Government free of cost. Engagement in cultivation has resulted inchanges in their status from nomadic life to settled agriculturist.

Changing Scene: Then and Now

Earlier

The Lodhas, a nomadic forest living group, was identified as a criminal tribe by the colonial rulers. They were notorious for their criminal offences and the local people were horrified for their violent activities. The insecurity in their lives led them to move from one place to other places of the District Pashim Medinipur like Jhargram, Gopivallavpur, Dantan, Binpur, Keshiary, different places of Lalgarh,Narayangarh and the like (Bhowmick 1990).

Over a period of time the Lodhas have traversed a long historical trajectory. Around 1960s,when the first systematic ethnographic work on the Lodhas was done by Bhowmick, primitivism still persisted in their socio cultural life processes.'The traditional bow and arrow culture, which was evolved through pulling strings of the catapult, developed in them a spirit of homocentrism' (Manna 1990).

At that time, the process of transition was just started. Newly developed schemes for development were initiated to bring them into the mainstream society. But they were confused and were not still ready to accept the newly developed life style in their everyday life. They remained largely de-motivated and also they continued to be totally exploited by the local caste people of that area. But situation has changed now after fifty years. The changing scenario is observed when the same village is re-studied by the present researcher.

In the earlier study, it was seen that they were socio-economically very poor. All Lodha families lived in mud-built thatched houses. Each of the family had barely one room for their living purpose and this too they shared with their domestic animals. At that time, they mainly depended on forest and forest products. They used to collect different forest products from nearby forests.

Present-day

Now they are settled agriculturists and majority of them have their own land except for a few(13.04%). Each Lodha family now that is after Corona, gets 27 kgs rice every month along with 5 kgs wheat and 12 kgs of flour. They also get sugar, kerosene oil at subsidised rate. As a result, all Lodha families get food daily. They even earn some money by selling paddy, they produce. Before 2007, they had practiced cultivation of seasonal crop, the *Amon* rice. But now they practice agriculture by getting water from deep tube well or submersible pump which they hire from the local big cultivators. For *boro* cultivation they spend approximately Rs 4000.00 for one bigha of land. The Daharpur village area is a draught prone area, the rain water is not available always, so for *amon* (seasonal) cultivation they sometimes have to hire water from nearby big cultivators for which they spend approximately Rs 200.00 per hour. But it depends on the situation. The big cultivators are Horen Bhnuia, 55 years old, a Bagdi by caste, who is service holder and big cultivator and lives in AndhiraVara village and Dinesh Debnath, aged 35 years, a Jugi by caste and a big cultivator living in the same village, who supply water to the small farmers and collect money from them.

Earlier for drinking water, they had to depend on nearby pond or from nearby well. But now they get drinking water from tube wells. Since 2007, this practice is getting due to sandy and rocky mud levels. Often the tube well facilities are not properly available. Recently after implementation of the State Government scheme in the name of *Sajal Dhara*, they get sufficient tap water. Water now is available in the morning from 6 to 8 AM, from 10 AM to 12 noon, and at 3 PM to 5 PM in the afternoon. For availing such facilities, they have to pay Rs. 50 per family each month. The tap water is used mainly for drinking purpose, although they do washing, cleaning, bathing and all house hold chores with this water. No doubt the facility of drinking water makes their life safer and secure. Earlier the children used to suffer from diarrhea, typhoid, jaundice and different skin diseases but now they are almost free from those diseases.

Education is another important indicator and an indicator of settled life. In Daharpur village, there are three primary Schools, namely, *Daharpur Sabar Pally Nimna Buniadi Vidyalaya, Daharpur Prathamik Vidyalaya and Koragaria Daharpur Sishu Siksha Kendra*. There are two *Aganwaries* in Kalimandir Para and Masak Para for the children up to ages five. In these schools the pregnant mother also gets food and other medicines. One high School at Bidisa is also availed by the children of the Daharpur village. All children of the village go to school daily. There are also two schools in Narayangarh and Makrampur. From the Lodha families 31 students, both boys and girls, attain school regularly in class eight to class twelve in Daharpur village of which 14 are males and 17 are females. Two girl students are getting higher education. One of them named as Gayetry Bhakta (19 yrs of age), is nursing student and another named as Amrika Bhakta (18 yrs) is a college student. All Lodha children go to school daily.



The Lodha children are in primitive life mood (1965-66)



Gayatri Bhakta – A Lodha Nursing Student (2022)



Amrika Bhakta- ALodha College going girl (2022

Infrastructural Changes : State Government and Central Government Schemes

Earlier mud-built roads were there. But gradually *morum* roadsare built at a few places of the village Daharpur. Since 2017 metal roads are replaced by concrete roads.

Mud-built houses are replaced by mixed house of mud and brick, as well as brick and cement built houses provided by the Central Government Scheme, such as, *Pradhan Mantri Abas Jojona.* During the time of the ruling by CPIM party,only ten 'pakka'houses were made. Since 2011 *Bangla Abas Jogona* scheme was introduced and at present thirty-five houses are constructed in the same village by the state Government.Toilet facilities are available in a few houses where three to four families have built their own toilet with their money, but six families are enjoying toilet facilities provided by the Central Government's *Swachcha Bharat Mission.* Each family had to give Rs.1000 and the rest of Rs.10,000 per family was paid by the Central Government.

Women folk are also engaged in different SHG Programs. Especially in the Lodha paras there are four SHGs, where the women are mainly engaged in cooking at different *Aganwary* centres.

Another important scheme, known as, *Lakshmi Bhandar,* is implemented for women aged from 25 years to 60 years. In this scheme SC and ST women get Rs.1000 and general caste women get Rs 500 per month. *Pension Scheme* is implemented in the year1995 (15thAugust) where Rs.1000 is given to each male and female who are inthe age of 60 years and above. From 8th March 2013, *Kanyasree scheme* is implemented for unmarried girls upto 18 years of age. Among the Lodhas in Daharpur village one girl has received it and two girls are ready to get it. *Rupasree scheme* is also there, where after 18 years,one will get Rs, 25000.00, but no one in the village yet got it. *Widow Pension*s cheme for women of 40 years to 59 years of age is there. Rs. 400 is also given to each widow. *Old age Pension* scheme is availed by all aged persons. In this village there are 20 persons who are availing the benefits of the scheme. Since 2018, all families got the facility of using gas but now only 5 families are using the gas for cooking. This facility was installed free of cost through the scheme of the Central Government but one has to bear the running expenses. *Abas Jojona* started during the time of C P I M in the year 2005, when Rs. 30,000 was given to each enlisted family. But now after 2011 the amount has been increased and now each family gets Rs. 1 lac and 50 thousand.

So, at a glance, it appears that enormous changes have taken place, especially after 2010. During the time of Bhowmick's study, the Lodhas largely lived a life of primitiveness but now significant improvement has taken place in their socio- economic life. We are hopeful that very soon the Lodhas will get a new status in the village society.

Changing Socio-Economic and Religious Life

Initially, during the time of Bhowmick's study the Daharpur village was controlled by



Tulsi Mancha in Kanchan Digar's (Lodha) house

the general high caste people who were socio-economically affluent at that time. But now the total scenario in connection with the village social relations has changed. The Lodhas are now claiming that they are not the adivasi group like the Munda or Santal tribes. On the other hand, they are claiming that they are the Lodha-Savara who is closely associated with the Bengali Hindus. As a result, slowly and gradually they are assimilating the Bengali culture. Most of the Lodha family's house has a courtyard where the female members, generally the wife of the head of the family, planted a *tulsi* (Ocimumtenuiflorum) plant on a *mancha,* a small temple like structure. Sri Hari and Lord Shibais represented by Bael plant (Aegle marmelos) and ma Manasa symbolically represented by *cactus* (Cactaceae) plant.

The place is cleaned with cowdung daily. *Dhup* (Incense), flower and Chandan (sandal paste) are used for worshipping the gods and goddesses. They also blow the conch shell.

In this way the Lodhas are gradually changed into an agrarian community. It is very interesting to note that all Bengali festivals are celebrated by them. They claim Durga Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Kali Puja, Saraswathi Puja are their own festivals like the Bengali culture. As a result, ssteadily they are abstaining from the worshipping of their traditional ethnic gods and goddesses. Only twice they worship their traditional gods and goddess i.e.,in the last day of the month of Chaitra (March-April), during the time of *Chaitra Sankranti* and on the last day of the month of Paus (December- January) *Makar Sankranti*. No Brahmin Priest is required. Their own priest known as *deharies*, at present a 72 yearsold man, named Subal Diger, Kinkar Kotal, 50 years of age; Sunil Bhakta,50 years of age worship their tutelary deities. In each and every living area they have some *Baram-than* (Sacred place). At a*than* (sacred place) the priest of a particular clan of their own community perform the worship. Under a big tree like Banyan (Ficusbenghalensis) or Peepal (Ficusreligiosa) or Mango (Mangiferaindica) or Neem (Azadirachtaindica) or any other, a place known as *Garam* or *Baram-than* is made ready for worshipping their titular deities. The small earthen horses and elephants are placed there. During the days of *Sankrantis* they worship. In Daharpur village among the Lodhas one traditional deity named *Sannyasi Bir* is worshipped. Sunil Bhakta acts as a *dehari* (priest). All the lodha families take part in it. They collect subscription of money of Rs.50 from each family and perform the worship. Day by day The Lodhas are closer to Bengali



The day of Makar Sankranti 15th January, 2022 the image of Sannyasi Bir worshipped by the dehari Sunil Bhakta.

culture apart from restoring their pristine culture, which was associated with forest and nature earlier.

Newly Developed Social Relations among the Villagers

In general, the village societies are characterized by the rigidity of caste system. The villagers strictly adhere to the social distance with each other. Sixty years ago when the previous work was done by Prof. Bhowmick, the village society was strictly characterized by caste type of stratification. The adivasi group was totally segregated from the others. But now that type of social distance does not exist. All groups are considerably accepted by all excepting their ethnic cultural differentiations. The Brahmin as a superior caste always maintained a social distance from others and this trend is still going on. On the other hand, the Brahmins also perform worship and other ritualistic functions for all caste groups and the Lodhas are not the exception. The Mundas have their own *Pahans* known as *Brahmin* (Priest). On the other hand, in other ceremonial days and public gatherings of the village, the Lodhas also participate. Even on the festive days of other caste groups, they also participate and accept food and other material goods from them. During the time of annual worshipping of the village gods and goddesses, they also worship and play significant roles to complete the function. Even in the employment guarantee scheme for hundred days work, all villagers (caste and tribe together) take part in it. Tribals also perform various vital roles in village politics. In Daharpur village Souman Bhakta, 40 years old, Kinkar Kotal, 50 years old, Sunil Bhakta 50 years of age and Prafulla Bhakta at the age of 62 are directly involved and play various roles in village panchayat.

The Lodhas settled Agriculturist today

Now the socio-economic life of the Lodhas is fully dependent on agriculture. They are settled permanently in different villages of the districts of Jhargram and West Medinipur. Daharpur is such type of one village where the Lodhas have settled and accepted agriculture as their occupation. Gradually with time they also participated in different socio-religious activities

of the villagers. Centering round cultivation, they also perform some of the agriculture related rituals annually like other agricultural caste groups, such as, *Mahisya, Sadgop, Tili, Teli* and many others of the village society. All these socio-religious activities related to agriculture are performed by them on their own and there is, no need for Brahmin to do such activities. In Daharpur, a good number of Lodhas possess a good amount of land today. The names to be mentioned are: Basudev Naik aged 30 years (6 bigha), Adhin Bhakta aged 40 years (6 bigha), Madan Bhakta aged 42 years (5 bigha). In general, the farmers' houses have open court yard to keep paddy and straws after bringing the paddy from the field to house, it is known as *Khamar Bari* which is an open place for keeping paddy.



A Place stored with paddy for future

Now a days the large lands are cultivated with tractors. The Lodhas are not an exceptional. In this village generally Dinesh Debnath, 35 years old and Monoranjan Debnath 40 years old jugi by caste help the lodhas by hiring tractors for cultivation.

The list of the agricultural activities.

Name of the Agricultural Activities	Month	Participation of the Members	Nature of Performing	Worship of the Deity
Sowing seeds *Tolafelano*	Early July	Both male and female members	Prepare land and sowing seeds for seedling	No deity is worshipped, but they generally observean auspicious day for the agricultural work
Seedling plantation *Dhanroa*	August	More females than males	Seedling are planted in the cultivable lands	On any auspiciousday
Ripening of paddy, ready for cutting paddy *Dhan kata*	November to first week of December	Both males and females	Cutting plants are ready for processing	It depends on the days of maturity. They celebrate the auspicious day as *Khamar puja*

Continuity and Change

Previously the Lodhas were the worshippers of Jungle gods and goddesses of which the names of the Barams are mentionable. They are the worshippers of *Barams*, only on the day of *Makar Sankranti* they worship the tutelary deity. Earthen elephants, horses and other articles for worshipping like flowers, fruits and tulsi leaves are offered for getting His blessings. In village Daharpur the *dehari* named Subal Diger, aged 72 years performs the priestly functions for the welfare of the villagers. The horse is the symbol of *Baram* deity. The Munda tribes who are residing at the same Daharpur village are also the worshippers of *Baram* deities. It is very clear that the adivasi or the indigenous population of the Border Bengal worship the *Baram* deities for maintaining their healthy and safe life as *Baram* deity is the deity of the forest.

They are also the worshippers of goddess Sitala. This also signifies an important characteristic of village society based on agriculture. Generally, in each village irrespective of different tribal groups, all caste groups also worship the goddess Sitala. The Sitala than is also in the central part of the village. The village society is distinctively marked with invisible boundary known as *para,* where different people of various communities live. Caste and tribal communities of the village worship goddess Sitala separately, but they also participate and worship the village goddess Sitala, which was arranged by the members of the village club where all villagers irrespective of caste and tribe participate in it. Another important god has been worshipped by the villagers is the Lord Shiva. During the time of *Charak* festival all the villagers worship lord Shiva. Irrespective of differences among caste, tribe and religion, all the villagers participate in it. Mongal Chandi is another village deity which is worshipped by them by the villagers on different auspicious days. So, the Lodhas who were once considered as a criminal tribe, a stigmatized group, are now accepted by the villagers as their own neighbor like the other agricultural communities.

An opinion survey has been done in this research through focus group discussion. There are altogether ten senior members of the Lodha community along with a few senior women folks who also participated there. They had been asked to narrate their life experiences in forest-based economy and their feelings towards the agro-based economy on which they are spending their days. All of them virtually lamented for leaving their forest-based life pattern. Especially they are not getting help from *gunin* (medicine man) (Manna & Manna 2018; Manna 2003). Only one or two medicinal men like Subal Digarand Baku Bhakta are surviving. New generations are not interested to hold the tradition. Medicinal plants are not available like in earlier days due to climate change (Manna & Manna 2016). All senior Lodha members say that till today forest is their sweet home. They love forest life as it fulfills their dreams, gives comfort and keep them fresh like nature.

Conclusion

Indian history and culture always seem to respect others as it moves progressively since the day of Independence. No doubt a massive change in the socio- economic life of the people

draws attention not only the people of the local area but also it focuses on a larger attention in the field of the entire system. Poverty, deprivation, exclusion, corruption, and the like persist along with the social development and transformation of Indian social system (Vaidyanathan 1995; Nayar 2007; Kattakayam 2012). In spite of all these short comings, the poor section of the society specially the Lodhas, who were once identified as a criminal tribe by the Britishers and the local people were also horrified and did not approve the activities of the Lodhas, have crossed a trajectory from hunting gathering to settled agriculturists. They have also taken upsome cultural traits of Hinduism where the tribal culture of Lodha is gradually eroded. The changing socio-cultural and religious life rationalizes it, though economically and educationally they are lagging behind. This imperative field study justifies that the Savaras/Lodhas gradually accept their socio-cultural mobility like the main stream population following the process of globalization and availing the fruits of developmental schemes.

Notes:

1 Frontier Bengal has been addressed as Western Frontiers by Bhowmick (1976) in his book *Socio cultural Profile of Frontier Bengal*. It is known as '*Samanta Bhum'* of Anga-Vanga And Kalinga region of ancient legends ... the area is still now inhabited by many autochthonous or primitive people represented by the Santals, Mundas, Lodhas, Kharias, Mahalis... most of whom still cling to their pristine culture.

2 Criminal Tribal Act provided for registering all the members or any member of the tribes or tribe declared as criminal tribes.

3 In the area of Border Bengal good no. of temples are visited, where the priests belong to Savara community. It is assumed that earlier these Savara priests were the novel. But with passage of time, the Brahmin priests were associated with them. A few examples are given here. The name of the temple isGuptamani situated under the jurisdiction of Jhargram police station of the Mumbai Kolkata National highway.Jaichandi temple is another one which is situatedin the village Pitalkanthi\ Patharkathi, under SankrailP.S of Jhargram .Now theLodha priest named Gajen Pramanickworships daily in this temple. On the other hand, the name of the priest\ Dehari in Guptamani temlple is Sunil Ojha who is a Savara Lodha (Sarita 1982). The traditional legacy of worshipping by the Lodhapriest\ Dehari is still continuing in various places of Border Bengal (Manna and Bera 2018).

4 The worship of Lord Jagannath by Savara is also mentioned in Darubrahma Gita written by Jagannath Das in 16th Century AD and in DeulaTola written by Nilambara Das in 17th Century AD. Regarding origin of Lord Jagannath, historian William Hunter also remarked that the aboriginal people worshipped a Blue Stone inside dense forests as Nilamadhaba the Dravidian God, who was offered kacha (Raw) food by the primitive tribes and with the passage of time as the Aryan elements introduced Jagannatha into Hinduism, he is worshipped as God of Aryan (a more civilized race) who is offered pakka (cooked) food. At present this two fold worship coexist side by side. Till today the Sauras or Savaras worship trees "the Nature God" known as "Kitung" which means God (Joshi 2007).

5 Bidisa is an Ashram Hostel and is a model example of running tribal hostel under Samaj Sevak Sangha, a NGO (around 1960).The founder of this Ashram Hostel was an eminent social anthropologist, Prabodh Kumar Bhowmick, Calcutta University, West Bengal. Gradually he developed the Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology which was lying within the boundary of itin the year 1975. It is situated in the adjacent area of village Daharpur, PaschimMedinipur, West Bengal.

6 'Sanskritization is a process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher or more often twice born caste' (Srinivas 2003).

Acknowledgement

Prof.Samita Manna is the awardee of ICSSR Senior Fellowship for the year 2021 – 22. This paper is largely an outcome of the Senior Fellowship sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). However, the responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed, and the conclusion drawn is entirely, of the author.

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