

Abstract

Development of the tribal communities, in general, and the Primitive Tribal Groups, in particular, has been the most challenging task before the government ever since India attained political independence in 1947. Though the need to uplift socio-economic conditions of the tribals was realized from the very beginning of the planned development of the country, not much could be achieved, in spite of special provisions being made in successive plans. Besides, the condition of the Primitive Tribal Groups within the tribal community has been further precarious, for their extremely poor living, and isolation. Several arguments are advanced to explain the failure of development strategies, and both the state and the tribal groups are held equally accountable. While the state is responsible on account of not giving due consideration to the community's requirements, the tribal groups are held responsible for their illiteracy, culture, and seclusion and subsistence economy. The present study attempts to look into the socio-economic conditions and health practices of the Lodha primitive tribe. The study is based on a sample of 300 respondents randomly drawn from the three Lodha villages of the district of Paschim Midnapur, West Bengal. The findings of the study reveal that while some changes have taken place with regard to their socio-economic condition, they still remain very poor and a lot more is required to be done. The study contradicts several myths about the living conditions of the primitive tribal groups. The result shows that they manage their livelihood and engage themselves in various economic activities like any other poor section of society. The income of the Lodha people is very meagre as they work as labour. The study does not substantiate their living in isolation. Rather, they are found to have adapted many cultural traits of the mainstream Indian society including the social evil of the dowry system. They live in one room dwelling made of mud asbestos and straw. There is no provision for basic amenities in their dwelling. The physical environment of the Lodha villages is found to be very unhygienic. Domestic animals, goats, pigs, stray cattle and dogs etc. freely roam around. They follow both the traditional as well as modern medical systems with regard to their health requirements. They are at the cross-road of transformation, and if their requirements and socio-cultural preferences are adequately addressed to their satisfaction, the possibility of significant positive change cannot be ruled out. There is a need for an exclusive institution managed by educated Lodhas in cooperation with NGOs which may act as a bridge between the Lodha community and the government functionaries to ensure their development.

Keywords: Primitive Tribal Groups, subsistence economy, state functionaries, seclusion, environmental living.