SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN THE TEA GARDENS OF ALIPURDUAR DISTRICT

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Abstract: This paper is a part of research work on scheduled tribes in the tea gardens of Alipurduar district by Manik Paul under the supervision of Dr. Debasish Biswas to investigate into the socio-economic profile of the scheduled tribes (ST) population in the tea gardens (T.G.) of Alipurdar district in West Bengal. The demographic profile, religious beliefs, literacy, income, housing conditions and health conditions of scheduled tribes has been described in the selected tea gardens of Alipurduar district. The investigator tries to analyse the primary data of different socio-economic variables of scheduled tribes community in the tea gardens with the help of different tables and figures. It is observed that the ST population of male is higher than the female in the tea gardens area. It is found that in religious belief a large section of the tribal community got attracted to Christianity and converted to Christian. The majorities of the heads of the households are having education up to primary level only and they prefer nuclear family. The most of the tribal people are mainly engaged as labourer or tea garden workers and their income mostly depend on their self earnings. Most of the tribals have *kacha* houses and less have *pucca* houses. The tribal people in the tea gardens faced a miserable health conditions. The study indicates that more than 90% of the tribal people in the tea garden area have the habit of drinking of liquor. So the socio-economic conditions of scheduled tribes in the tea gardens area are very pathetic.

Key Words: **Socio-economic, Scheduled Tribes, Tea Gardens**, **Religion, Education, Income, Housing and Health.**

Introduction

The tribal population is seen in almost all parts of the peninsular region of India. They are broadly called as *adivasis* means the original inhabitants of the land. As any population of the country, they have also contributed to shape the culture and society of the region. However, it is doubtful that they had achieved their due share of the development that has taken place in the post-independent India. The general features of their subsistence economy have not been changed positively to catch up with the changing nature of society and economy. Krishnan (1985)[1] defines "tribe is a social group of simple and kind, the members of which speak a common dialect, have a single government act together for common purposes and have a common name, a contiguous territory, a relatively uniform culture or way of life and a traditions of common descent." Majumdar (1961)[2] defines tribe as "a collection of families or common group bearing a common name, the members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos, regarding marriage, professions and have developed a well assured system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations." Chatopathyaya (1978)[3]defines "a tribe ordinarily has an ancestor or a patron deity. The

families or groups composing the larger units are linked through religions and socio-economic functions."

Significance of the study

The tribal areas and the tribal people in our country lag woefully behind others in development and the tribal continue to be among the weakest and the most exploited section of the society. Socio-economic development of tribal is considered important, not only because of the institutional obligation but also as a crucial input for the total development of tribal communities. The physical and social isolation, poor economic condition, attitude of the parents, educational problems and health problems are various crucial issues in the proposed study area. Most of the studies based upon the plight and problems faced by the tribal people lack any definitive dissemination regarding the socio-economic development of tribal people especially in the tea gardens of Alipurduar district. There are lot of studies on schedule tribes but the studies related to socio-economic conditions among tribals in the tea garden areas of Alipurduar district in West Bengal is very rare.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:
i) To analyse the social profile of tribal communities in the tea gardens of Alipurduar district.
ii) To identify the economic profile of the tribal communities in the tea gardens of Alipurduar district.

Method and Materials

A random sampling technique is used for the primary data collection. Household Survey was conducted with questionnaires and interviews in the tea gardens of Alipurduar district in West Bengal. In order to carry out the study based on the pre-designed objectives the researcher has been conducted intensive fieldwork among the selected sample from the selected region. There are six (6) blocks and sixty four (64) tea gardens in Alipurduar district. The sample has been collected randomly from 6 selected tea gardens and in each tea garden 60 households have been taken. In this way 360 tribal households have been selected randomly for the study in the tea gardens of Alipurduar district.

In order to measure the socio-economic status of tribals in the tea gardens of Alipurduar district, the researcher relies on questionnaire for representation of data by tables, diagrams and index marks. Analysis and representation of primary data by means of selection of parameters of socio-economic conditions have been taken to assess the tribal people's status in the tea gardens area. The appropriate data have been presented in a descriptive manner. Tabulation methods have been used for the presentation of the data.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Features:
The age of the head of the household will indicate his capacity to work and also influence over the production capacity of the households. If he is too young he lacks experience and if he is old he cannot work hard. Similarly the age composition of the family members also helps to assess the available work force in the family and its impact on production of the household. Here, the tea garden wise distribution of the heads of the household in different age groups is presented in Table-1. in five categories such as 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60 and above 60.

Table-1. Age-Composition of Scheduled Tribe household respondents in selected tea gardens

Tea Garden	Ages					Total
	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Above 60	
Mathura	4	10	21	18	7	60
Majherdabri	5	15	17	15	8	60
Dhawlajhora	6	12	18	17	7	60
Sonkos	7	10	20	15	8	60
Rydak	8	13	13	20	6	60
Kartick	5	12	15	21	7	60
Total	35 (9.72%)	72 (20.00%)	104 (28.89%)	106 (29.44%)	43 (11.94%)	360 (100%)

Source: Compiled by the Researcher from primary data

From the above table, it shows that 9.72% of scheduled tribe population of the sample households are in the age group of 21-30, 20% of the scheduled tribe population of the households are in the age group of 31-40, 28.89% of the scheduled tribe population of the households are in the age group of 41-50, 29.44% of the scheduled tribe population of the households are in the age group of 51-60 and 11.94% of the scheduled tribe population of the households are in the age group of above 60. It shows from the table that the most of the scheduled tribe households (29.44%) are fall in the age group of 51-60. Majority of the heads of the households nearly 80% are in the age group of 31-60. In this regards significant differences are not found across different tea gardens of the study area.

The age-composition of scheduled tribe household respondents in the selected tea garden is presented in the following bar diagram.

Figure-1. Graphical representation of age-composition of scheduled tribe
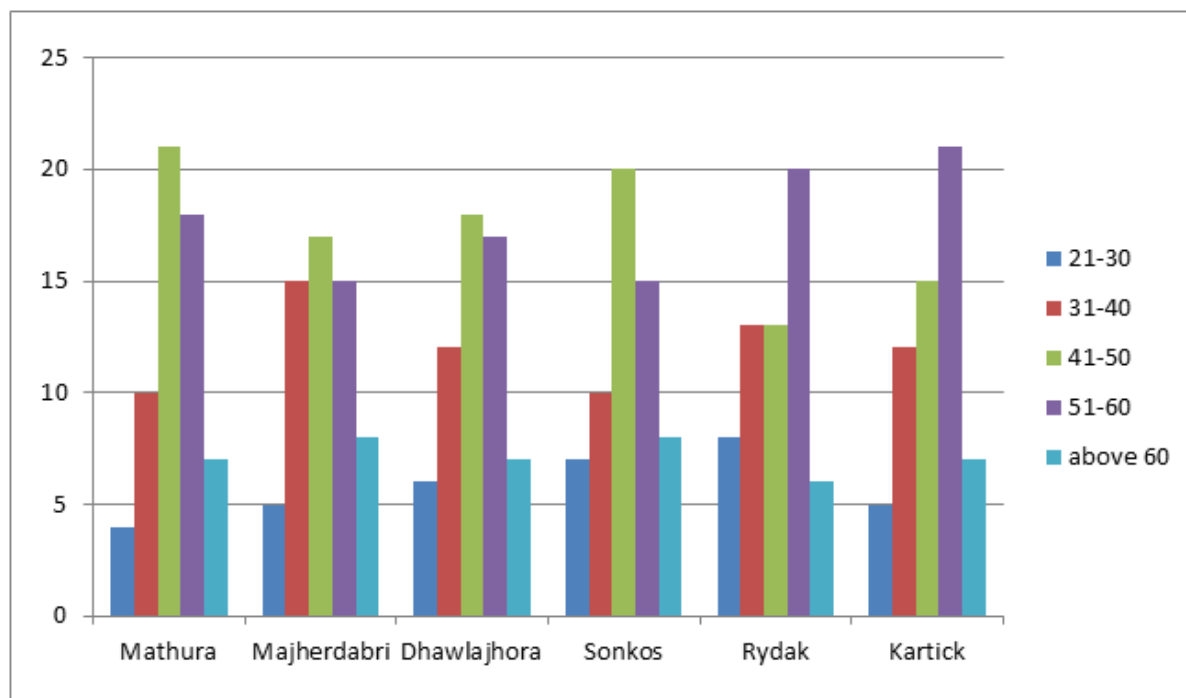
Sex–wise Distribution:

Age composition of various groups would only indicate the potential of work force and this factor alone may not be adequate definitely anything precise about the nature of stratification. Hence the data relating to sex-wise distribution of the household is having relevance. The households are classified into male and female category. The sex-wise distribution of the households in the selected tea garden is presented in Table-2.

Table-2. Sex -wise distribution of Scheduled Tribe Household respondents

Tea Garden	Male	% of Male	Female	% of female	Total
Mathura	32	53.33%	28	46.67%	60
Majherdabri	34	65.65%	26	43.33	60
Dhawlajhora	33	55.00%	27	45.00%	60
Sonkos	35	58.33%	25	41.67%	60
Rydak	30	50.00%	30	50.00%	60
Kartick	31	51.67%	29	48.33%	60
Total	**195**	**(54.17%)**	**165**	**(45.83%)**	**360(100%)**

Source: Compiled by the Researcher from primary data

From the above table, it is found that the scheduled tribe male (54.17%) are more than female (45.83%) of total tribal population in all the selected tea garden. It also shows that the tribal male respondents are more than female respondents mostly in all the selected tea gardens of the district. It can be observed from the above table that in all the selected tea gardens the proportion of male households are higher than the female households.

The sex-wise distribution of scheduled tribe households in the selected tea garden is presented in the following bar diagram.

Figure-2. Graphical representation of sex of scheduled tribe household respondents
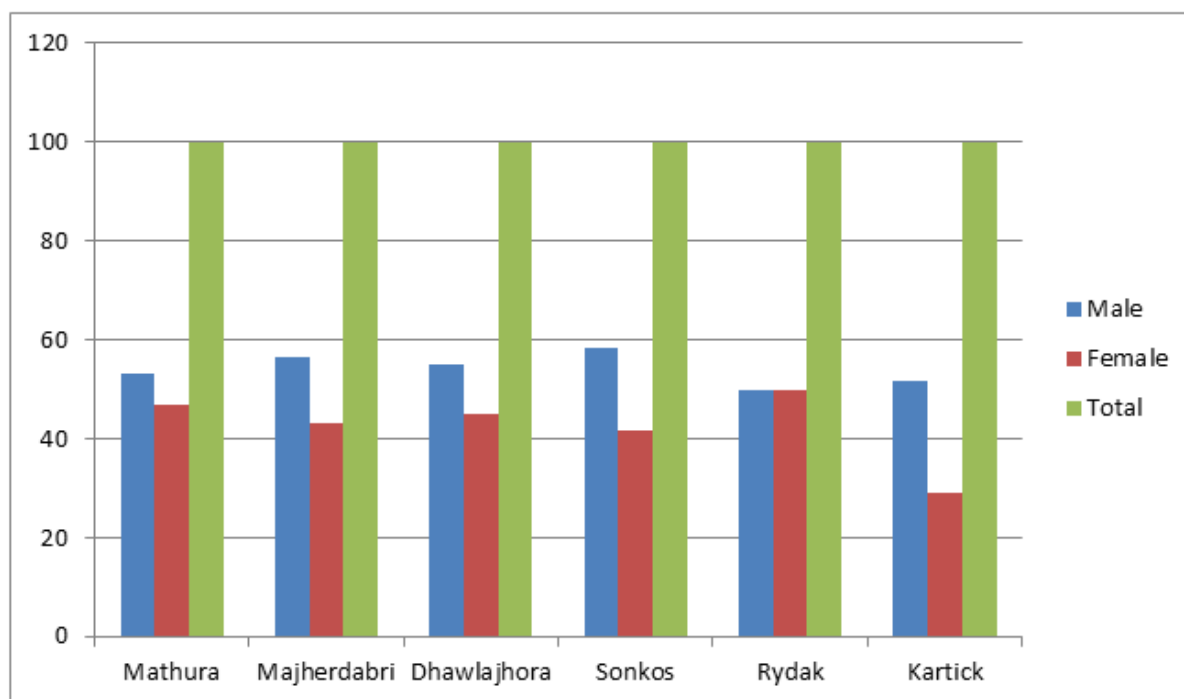
Religious beliefs:

The tribal of the tea gardens of Alipurduar district mostly obey their traditional believes. In this district there are differences in religious rituals among the tribal communities. The traditional belief and worshiping of nature and God differs to Hindu religion from one place to another. After independence, Catholic Christian missionary activities spread all over the Dooars among the tribal people and that activities spread the Christian religion among the tribal communities. As a result a large section of the tribal community got attracted to Christianity and converted to Christian belief.

**Table-3. Religious beliefs of scheduled Tribe households**

Tea Garden	Hindu	%of Hindu	Christian	%of Christian	Others	%of others	Total
Mathura	40	66.67	20	33.33	00	00	60
Majherdabri	34	56.67	23	38.33	03	5.00	60
Dhawlajhora	32	53.33	26	43.33	02	3.33	60
Sonkos	34	56.67	24	40.00	02	3.33	60
Rydak	30	50.00	26	43.33	04	6.67	60
Kartick	35	58.33	23	38.33	02	3.33	60
Total	205	(56.95%)	142	(39.44%)	13	(3.61%)	360(100%)

Source: Compiled by the Researcher from primary data

The above table shows that in the selected tea gardens most of the tribal people believe in Hindu religion (56.95%), the average ratio of Christian religion is 39.44% and others religion is 3.61%.

The religious beliefs of scheduled tribe household in selected tea gardens are presented in the following bar diagram.

Figure-3. Graphical representation of the religious beliefs of scheduled tribe household
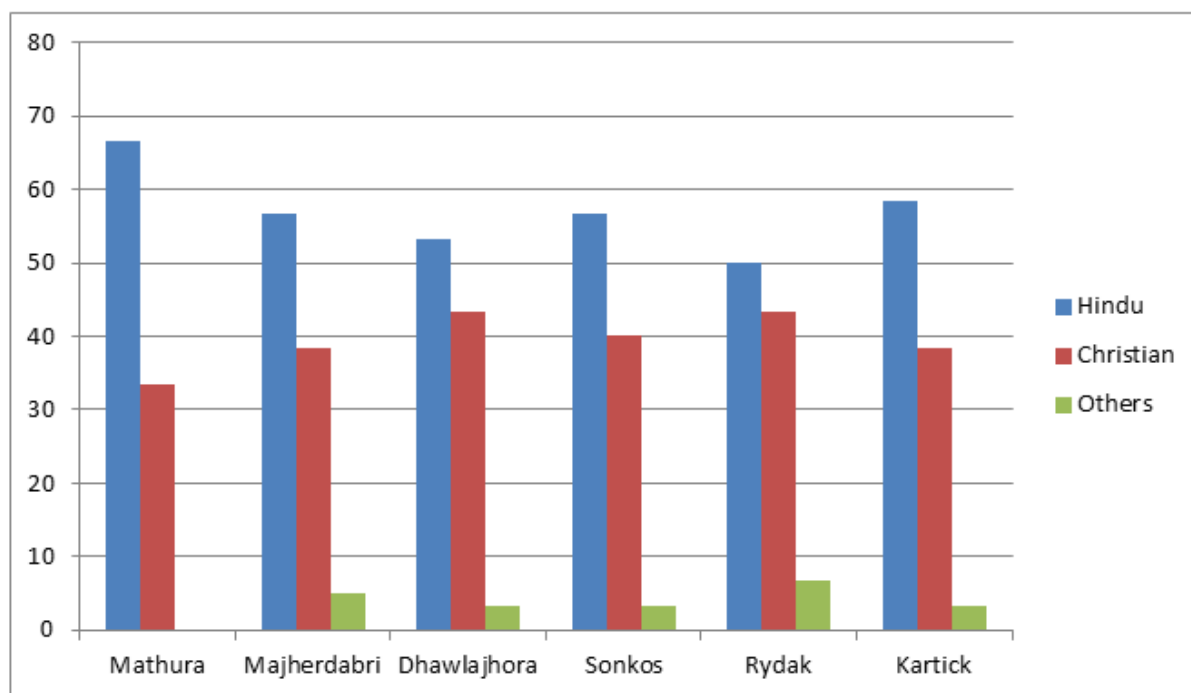
Literacy:

The tribal children of the tea gardens are born with talent equal to that of the non-tribal children but inadequate education infrastructure, early participation of children into work, abject poverty and a lack of supportive education culture at home and in the community have contributed to the high incidence of illiteracy and very high rate of early dropout among the tribal population in the region (Roy, 2007)[4]. Education has been recognized as a key factor in tribal development to bring in economic and social transformation among the tribals. The tea garden wise distribution of head of the household's literacy level is presented in Table-4.

**Table-4. Distribution of Literacy level of tribal household respondents**

Tea Garden	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate	Literate	Illiterate	Total
Mathura	14	4	2	-	20	40	60
Majherdabri	19	5	4	2	30	30	60
Dhawlajhora	21	5	2	-	28	32	60
Sonkos	20	5	3	2	30	30	60
Rydak	24	4	2	2	32	28	60
Kartick	22	3	3	-	28	32	60
Total	**120 (33.33%)**	**26 (7.22%)**	**16 (4.44%)**	**6 (1.67%)**	**168 (46.67%)**	**192 (53.33%)**	**360 (100%)**

Source: Compiled by the Researcher from primary data

From the above table it is found that the literacy rate of the head of the tribal household is 46.67% and illiteracy rate of the head of the tribal household is 53.33 % of the total sample population in the selected tea gardens. It also shows that among the literate of the head of the tribal households only 33.33% are completed primary, 7.22% are completed secondary, 4.44% are completed higher secondary, and 1.67% are completed graduate level in all the selected tea gardens of Alipurduar district. It is clear that majorities of the educated heads of households are having education up to primary level only. Further there is considerable variation of the education status of the heads of households among the tea gardens. However, the literacy level of the heads of households partially reflects the status of trials.

The distribution of literacy and illiteracy level of tribal household in the selected tea gardens are depicted in the following bar diagram.

Figure-4. Graphical representation of literacy and illiteracy level of schedule tribes
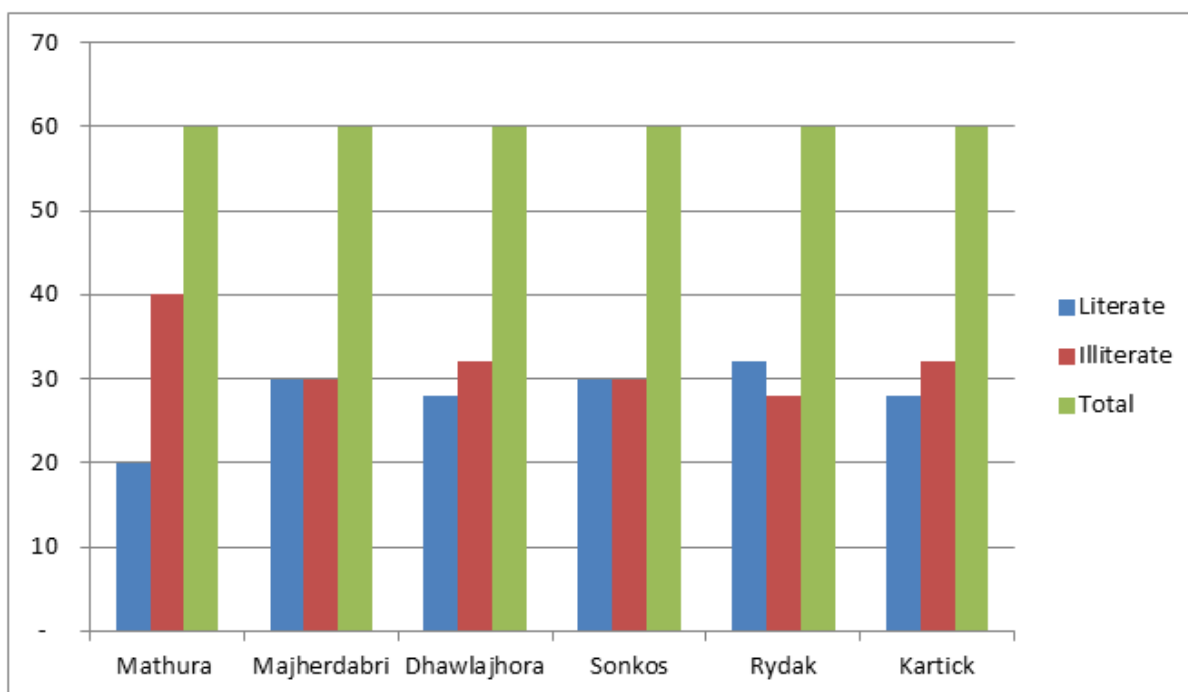
Income:

The story for the tribal people of the tea gardens differs from other parts of the country. Speaking about the tribals of the tea garden areas in Alipurduar district who are basically depend on tea garden as labour, car driver, forest wood puller etc. The tribal people of tea gardens are generally involved in tea garden and their salary is earned every fortnight at a rate of Rs. 232.00 per day. No work, no pay basis salary is prevailed in the tea gardens. The monthly income for tribal people is very low in all the selected tea gardens. The details pertaining to monthly family income of tribal household in the selected tea gardens is presented in Table-5.

Table-5. Monthly Family Income of the Tribal Household

Tea Garden	< Rs. 3000	Rs.3000-5000	Rs. 5001-7000	> Rs. 7000	Total
Mathura	15	30	10	5	60
Majherdabri	20	25	12	3	60
Dhawlajhora	18	28	10	4	60
Sonkos	16	32	8	4	60
Rydak	14	31	9	6	60
Kartick	17	32	7	4	60
Total	100(27.78%)	178 (49.44%)	56 (15.56%)	26 (7.22%)	360(100%)

Source: Compiled by the Researcher from primary data

From the above table it shows that among the tribal household 27.78% of the respondent have monthly family income below Rs. 3000, 49.44% of the respondent have monthly family income between Rs. 3000 - 5000, 15.56% of the respondent have monthly family income between Rs. 5001- 7000, and 7.22% of the respondent have monthly family income above Rs. 7000. So it is clear from the table that most of the tribal household respondents monthly income fall between Rs 3000-5000 and lowest monthly family income fall above Rs. 7000 in the selected tea garden area.

The incomes of the tribal households are depicted in the following pie diagram.

Figure-5. Graphical representation of income of the tribal households
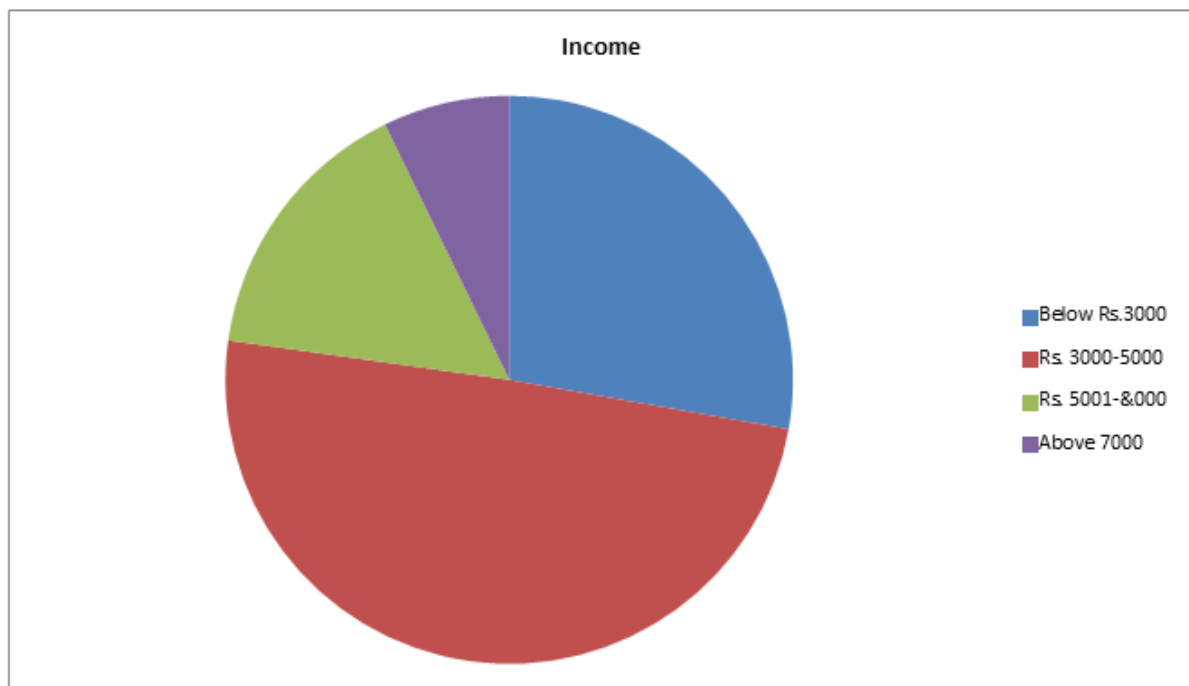
Housing Conditions:

House type is one of the food indicators of nature of living habitant. Different indicators are there to identify liveable house like number of rooms inside, kacha or pucca or mixed i.e, combination of kacha and pucca house, rented house or own house etc. In the tea gardens tribals household are living on the land of the tea owner and they have only a small room with kacha, pucca and mixed housing condition. The details pertaining to housing condition of tribal household in the selected tea gardens is presented in Table -6.

Table-6. Housing condition of tribal household in the selected tea gardens

Tea Garden	Kacha	Pucca	Mixed	Total
Mathura	30	3	27	60
Majherdabri	25	5	30	60
Dhawlajhora	35	4	21	60
Sonkos	32	2	26	60
Rydak	30	5	25	60
Kartick	31	6	23	60
Total	183(50.83%)	25(6.94%)	152(42.22%)	360(100%)

Source: Compiled by the Researcher from primary data

From above table it shows that among the tribal household 50.83% of the respondent have their *kacha* house, 6.94% of the respondent have their *pucca* house and 42.22% of the respondent have their *mixed* house. So it is clear from the table that most of the tribal household respondents have *kacha* house and less respondents have *pucca* house in the selected tea garden of Alipurduar district.

Different housing condition of tribal household in the selected tea gardens are depicted in the following bar diagram.

Figure-6. Graphical representation of housing condition of tribal households
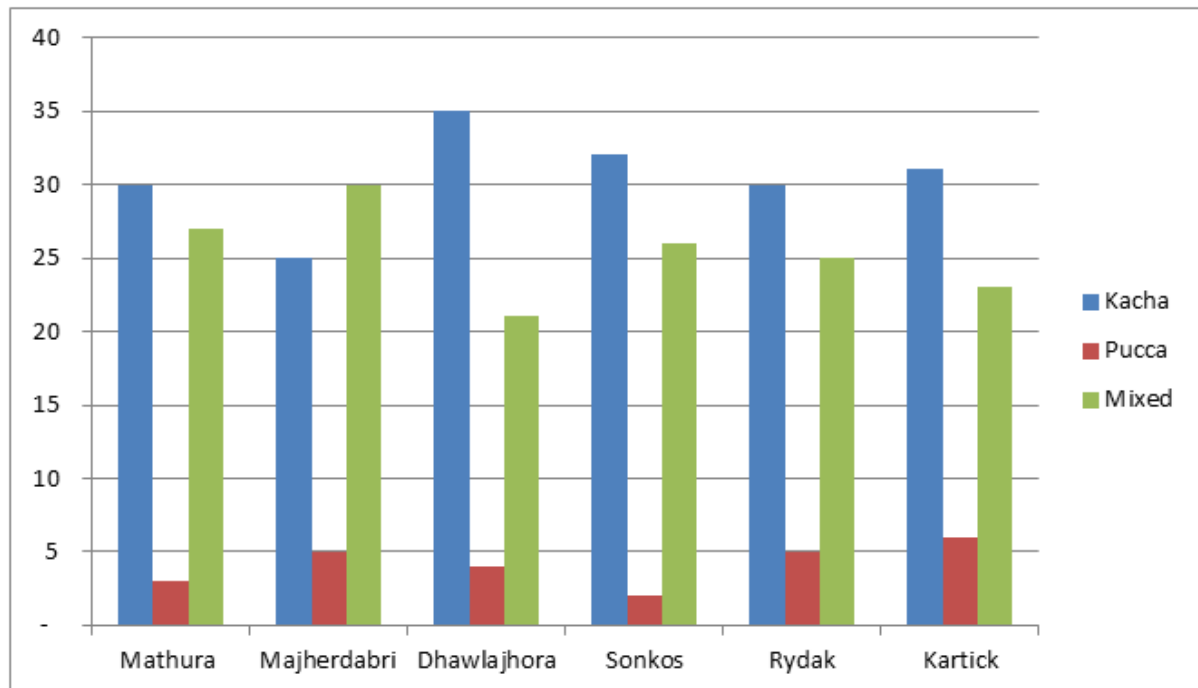
Health Conditions:

Public health and nutrition of the tribal people were not satisfactory during the colonial rule. In most of the diseases were concerned, they had to depend on the local process of treatment by *ojha or kabiraj*. Apart from this they had to depend on charlatan or quack, as because there was no qualified doctor, as a result, the patients had to expire for the wrong treatment. The details pertaining to health condition of tribal household in the selected tea gardens is presented in Table 6.14.

Table-6.14. Health Conditions of tribal households in the selected tea gardens

Health Indices (Figure in percentage)

Tea Gardens	Separate Latrine	Separate Kitchen	Safe Drinking Water	Treatment by Doctor	Sufficient Nutrient food	Institu-tional Child delivery	Without drinking habits
Mathura	50%	30%	19%	25%	10%	38%	8%
Majherdabri	45%	25%	21%	27%	11%	39%	7%
Dhawlajhora	44%	25%	20%	28%	15%	39%	10%
Sonkos	40%	27%	21%	25%	12%	39%	12%
Rydak	60%	32%	25%	42%	25%	48%	11%
Kartick	60%	28%	25%	21%	14%	37%	9%
Average	49%	27.83%	21.83%	28%	14.50%	40%	9.50%

Source: Compiled by the Researcher from primary data

From the above table, it is found that the institutional delivery average rate is only 40% and rest of the tribal people depend on local *dhai* or old women in their known houses in study area of selected tea garden. There are lack of sources of drinking water and proper sanitation

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problems in almost all tea gardens of the study area. The table also shows that there are 49.83% tribals have separate latrine facilities, 27.83% have separate kitchen facilities, 21.83% have safe drinking facilities, 28% have taken treatment by the doctor, 14.50% tribals have sufficient nutrient food, and 9.50% have without drinking habits. It indicates that more than 90% of the tribal people in the selected tea garden in the study area have the habit of drinking of liquor.

Findings of the study:

1. In age-composition significant differences are not found among tribes across different tea gardens of the study area.

2. It can be observed that in all the selected tea gardens the proportion of male household respondents is higher than the female household respondents.

3. It is found that a large section of the tribal community got attracted to Christianity and converted to Christian belief.

4. It is clear that majorities of the educated heads of households are having education up to primary level only. Further there is considerable variation of the education status of the heads of households among the tea gardens.

5. It is clear from the study that most of the tribal household respondents prefer nuclear family than joint family in size.

6. It is clear from the study that most of the tribal household respondents are mainly engaged as labourer and tea garden worker in the selected tea garden area.

7. It is found from the study that most of the tribal household respondents depend on their self earnings and fewer respondents depend on their father's earnings in the tea garden area.

8. It is found that most of the tribal household respondents have *kacha* house and less respondents have *pucca* house in the tea garden area.

9. There are lack of proper sanitation and sources of drinking water in almost all tea gardens of the study area.

10. The study indicates that more than 90% of the tribal people in the tea garden area have the habit of drinking of liquor.

Conclusion

The socio-economic condition of scheduled tribes shows that they are suffer from various issues like lack of literacy, low per capita income, lack of proper housing condition, lack of pure drinking water, lack of sanitization, lack of sufficient nutrients, negligence in treatment and bad habit of liquor drinking . To improve the socio-economic conditions of scheduled tribes in the tea gardens area there should have taken necessary steps from government and policy makers for tribal development. Above all the ignorance and unconsciousness among STs can be removed with the help of the proper education.

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