Tribal Concentration in Purulia District, West Bengal, India: A Regional Level Study

Somnath Mukherjee

Assistant Professor of Geography, Department of Geography,
Bankura Christian College, Bankura, West Bengal, India, Mobile No. 7908626548
E-mail: somnathmukherjee_bcc@yahoo.com

Abstract

Tribal concentration is one of the major indicators of backwardness in regional planning of India. Since time immemorial tribal population has been considered as backward population. Beside this tribal population is also identified as indigenous and most primitive. So it is imperative to study tribal population to understand present scenario of this ethnic society in age of globalization and the condition of geographical space where this population is rich in concentration, popularly known as scheduled area. The paper peeps into and scans block wise tribal concentration of one of such scheduled areas of West Bengal and India known as Purulia district with the aid of statistical procedures like Index of Concentration, most suitable cartographic technique the dot method. It is having second highest population concentration among the districts of West Bengal. Purulia is also one of the backward districts of India. Apart from such economic constrains this undulating topography of the extended part of Chottanagpur plateau offers favourable ecology and habitat to the tribes. This led to high concentration of tribal population in the district. Purulia is also the only district of West Bengal where the most primitive tribe of India the Birhors live.

Keywords: Tribe, Population concentration, Index of Concentration, Dot Method

1. Introduction

Tribe is considered as an indigenous population of India. Tribal population concentration has been taken as one of major indicators of backwardness in regional level planning since time immemorial. On the other hand regional level planning also considers the geographical space where tribal concentration is high known as Scheduled area. It is significant to examine the concentration of the tribal communities in different geographical locations vis-à-vis the indigenous environment where the tribal people preferred to live from since long time. This step would perhaps further helps to understand these tribal communities better on the phase of real development. The paper in this context has taken Purulia district of West Bengal as study area. Purulia district is having second highest population concentration in West Bengal. It offers favourable geographical settings like hilly undulating topography with green vegetation on top especially at the blocks like Bundwan, Bagmundi etc. The district is also having different tribal communities like Santal, Kharia Sabar especially Hill Kharia, Birhors, Bedia etc. Santal is the most populated tribe who prefers to live in uni-ethnic villages. On the other hand, tribe like Kharia Sabar presently lost their pristine habitat and compelled to live in multi-ethnic villages with non-tribal population. Ecological significance in tribal life is found in the writing of Colonel T.C.Hudson's (1985), *'The Primitive Culture of India'*, where he expressed about Kheria Sabars and Birhors and their means of subsistence around unique ecology . Major objective of this paper is to find out the demographic condition of available

tribal population of Purulia district. In this study the paper takes help of statistical procedure like Index of Concentration and cartographic technique like dot method within a GIS environment. Major objective of this study is to identify the places where tribal population are high in Purulia district with the help of statistical and cartographic techniques. Beside this the paper also tries to understand the demographic condition of tribe in Purulia where most important tribes of the district are going to identify.

2. Materials and Methods

Block wise tribal concentration is collected from Census data and different district Statistical Handbooks. Information about different tribal communities is also taken from related books, journals and government records.

In the present study, to assess the concentration of tribal communities in Purulia district, 20 C.D.Blocks are taken as geographical units. With the help of 2011 Census data, the present study is statistically classified the block wise tribal population of Purulia district and represented the findings by a cartographic representation within a GIS environment. Index of Tribal Concentration method is applied to understand the block wise tribal concentration known as Index of Concentration. Here index of concentration is calculated by the following equation:

$$\text{Dimension Index} = (\text{Actual} \div 100)$$

Where, hypothetically, lowest percentage is '0' per cent and highest is '100' per cent.

Dot method is the suitable method to understand the distribution of population. In this paper this cartographic technique is taken to understand tribal concentration of Purulia. It is calculated on the basis of highest tribal population of a single block. In Purulia, Kashipur block is having highest tribal population. Thus total population of Kashipur is taken as 100 dots. So, one dot represents dividing the total tribal population of Kashipur block with 100 and number of dots per block is calculated on the basis of tribal population of any block divided by population represented by one dot.

3. Results and Discussions

Purulia district is by far one of the appropriate locations for the habitation of the tribal people. Quite uncommonly tribal communities of the district exhibit distinctiveness as to the ecology, economy and society in comparison to other districts of West Bengal. In Purulia district, most of the tribal communities consist of Proto-Australoid group, characterised by dark skin colour, sunken nose and lower forehead. They are mainly rural people. It is also found that nearly 99 per cent of the total tribal population of Purulia district is inhabited in villages. According to the Census, 2011, the most important tribal communities of Purulia are Santal, Bhumij, Kheria Sabar, Kora, Mahali, Munda, Oraon, Bedia, Gorait etc. It is also interesting to note that one Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group namely Birhor tribal community is very marginally found in few areas of Purulia district. As per linguistic affiliation is concerned, the languages spoken by most the tribal people are from Austro-Asiatic family. P.K. Bose (1985) has mentioned about twelve clans of Santal community like Kisku, Saren, Marandi, Baske etc. Similarly, Dikshit Sinha (2010) explained the social structure of the Kheira Sabars. Social structure of the Birhors on the other hand could be vividly explored from the pioneering work of Asim Kumar Adhikary (2008). While the study of different tribal communities on several

parameters of social ecology proceeds, it is also significant to examine the concentration of those tribal communities in different geographical locations vis-à-vis the indigenous environment where the tribal people preferred to live from since long time. This step would perhaps further helps to understand these tribal communities better on the phase of real development. Furthermore, understanding the distribution of human society on spatio-temporal context with the introduction of cartographic technique always has been the old and prime concern in geographical researches. In the present study, to assess the concentration of tribal communities in Purulia district, twenty blocks are taken as geographical units. With the help of latest Census data, the present study is statistically classified the block wise tribal population of Purulia district and represented the findings by cartographic method with the help of GIS software. Application of GIS in regional planning and development is important. Das (2004) in this context explained that "for the last decades, planners are taking the help of Geographical Information System (GIS) for drawing up economic plans." In addition to this he stated its limitations as well. In his words he wrote that "…I strongly feel that by utilizing only GIS we shall not be able to plan for sustainable development, unless we integrate it with local environmental situation and human elements like local aspiration, local customs, local entrepreneurial ability, literacy, resource availability etc.". The study is also taken the backwardness of the tribal blocks in Purulia district as a parameter again to unfold the real condition of tribal people in the age of modernization.

The prevalent concept of identification of backwardness particularly on the basis of tribal concentration from government level is further examined here with the aid of index of concentration. Index of concentration of Scheduled tribe population reveals that Bundwan and Manbazar-II, these two blocks are clubbed in the category of very high. This is also stated in "Table 1" and presented in "Fig. 1". It is to inform that Bundwan is having the highest percentage of tribal population about more than fifty percent. Here least populated tribal blocks are Purulia-II, Raghunathpur, Santuri, Neturia, Jaipur. Tribe like Santals are inhabited in both uni-ethnic and multi-ethnic villages and all the blocks of the district especially Bundwan, Kashipur, Manbazar-I, Manbazar-II, Bagmundi etc. Birhors are the only tribe inhabited at Purulia district in West Bengal. They are the most primitive tribe and have two classes one is Uthlu and another is Jagghi. Man of Jungle the Birhors are still residing in caves of Ajodhya hilly region of Purulia. Bhupatipalli of Matiala is the place where they have been resettled from government level. Kharia Sabars are now mostly landless and compelled to live in the outskirt of a village like Damodarpur in Puncha block. They have been misused for illegal activities since British rule and still badge with the stigma of Criminal Tribe. Agents of transformation spilled over into the pristine habitat of tribe. They have been marginalized and thrust of materialistic development brought them into nowhere situation. They are not accepting means of such development which are against their norms and culture. Extremists took this as agenda and penetrated into the deep forests and among the tribe.

Table 1: Block wise Index of Concentration of Tribal Population

Blocks	Dimension Index	Category	Blocks	Dimension Index	Category
Arsha	0.22	Medium	Manbazar-I	0.23	Medium
Bagmundi	0.24	Medium	Manbazar-II	0.49	Very High
Balarampur	0.32	High	Neturia	0.23	Medium
Barabazar	0.18	Low	Para	0.05	Very Low
Bundwan	0.51	Very High	Puncha	0.24	Medium

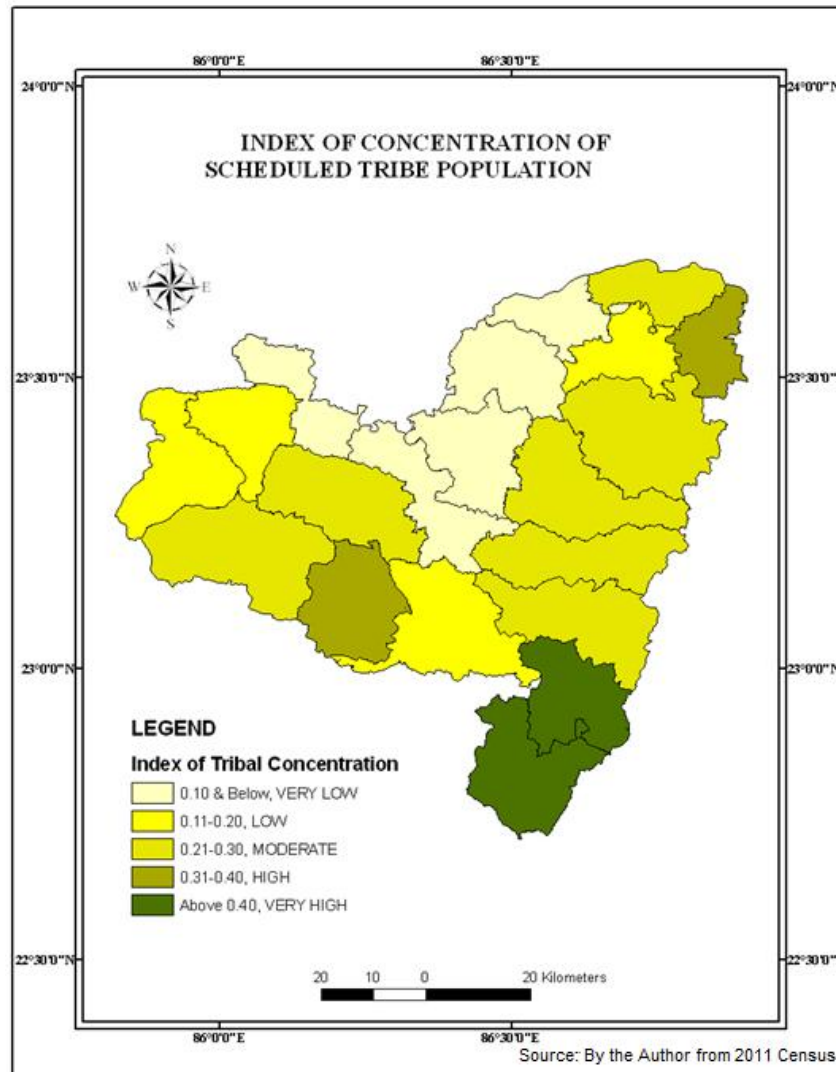| Hura | 0.27 | Medium | Purulia-I | 0.1 | Very Low |
Jhalda-I	0.12	Low	Purulia-II	0.04	Very Low
Jhalda-II	0.13	Low	Raghunathpur-I	0.11	Low
Jaipur	0.1	Very Low	Raghunathpur-II	0.06	Very Low

Source: Compiled by the author

Fig.1: Index of Tribal Concentration of Purulia

The prevalent concept of identification of backwardness particularly on the basis of tribal concentration from government level is further examined here with the aid of one of the suitable cartographic methods known as dot method within a GIS environment. In this segment of study first of all a figure is prepared with the help of statistical techniques to locate where the tribal people are mainly inhabited in Purulia district. With the help of dot map it is observed that tribes are mainly concentrated in the southern portion, eastern portion and in the south-western portion of Purulia district. Bundwan, Manbazar-II, Kashipur, Hura, Balarampur – these blocks are registered maximum number of dots and represented in "Fig. 2".
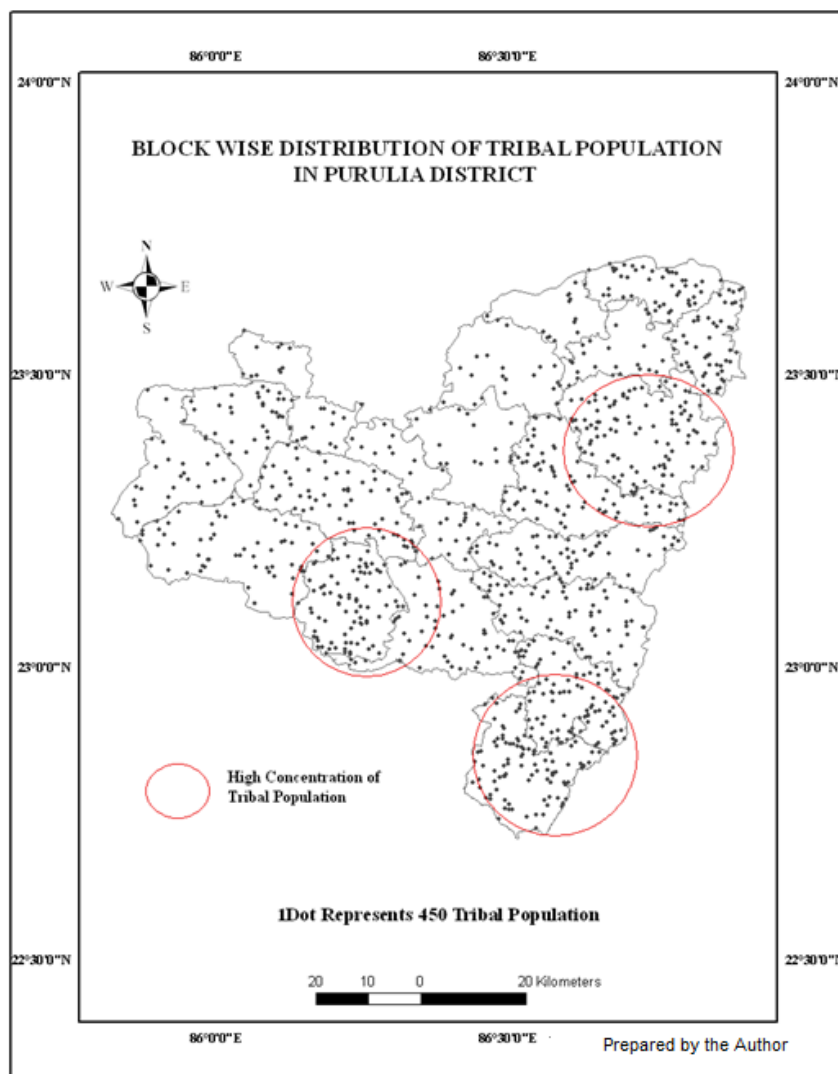
Fig.2: Dot method represents block wise tribal concentration

4. Conclusion

It is evident from the recent Progress Report published by District Collector Office, Purulia that the district has about thousand identified backward villages out of 2468 total inhabited villages and about 60 per cent of tribal families are living in those identified backward villages. Further, among the 20 blocks of Purulia district, identified economically backward villages are mainly concentrated in Jhalda-II, Arsha, Bagmundi, Balarampur, Bundwan, etc. and eventually in these economically backward blocks, tribal clustering have been the maximum. For instance, Bundwan with 59.10 per cent of backward villages has fallen under the category of very high tribal concentration with over 50 per cent of the total population. Similar cases also have been noticed in Balarampur, (62.22 per cent backward village), Bagmundi (71.53 per cent backward village) and Arsha (72.63 per cent backward village) blocks where tribal population ranges between 20 to 40 per cent i.e. medium to very high

category of the total population of the block. On the contrary, naturally in relatively developed blocks like Purulia-II (23.53 per cent backward village), Raghunathpur-I (28.75 per cent backward village), Raghunathpur-II (33.33 per cent backward village) and Purulia-I (41.51 per cent backward village) where concentration of tribal population have been minimum, fall under the category of 20 to less than 10 per cent i.e. low to very low category. But exceptionally, in spite of having more than 65 per cent of developed villages, both Manbazar-I and Manbazar-II Blocks have fallen into the categories of medium and very high classes respectively in relation to tribal concentration. In this case, it is expected that as the tribes are living in relatively developed villages, the chances of transition towards development in socio-cultural and economic condition also could be raised. But beside few exceptions, fortunately or unfortunately, there is no evidence of such development found in tribal life and livelihood in both the aforesaid blocks. Hence, beside some exceptional cases, as a whole it is understood that most of the tribal population is inhabited in the identified backward blocks of Purulia district. No wonder, as tribals are economically backward, the areas they live with such huge concentration, automatically exhibit the backwardness. For an administrative purpose, for decades, these blocks are known as *Tribal Blocks* or *Scheduled Areas*, particularly identified for future developmental works. Moreover, it is evident that since past, blocks like Bundwan, Manbazar-II, Balarampur etc. are favourable as a tribal habitat due to its geographical location i.e. availability of abundant forested uplands far from the mainstream societies. High concentration is also attained because here large number of tribal migrated from neighbouring states and districts consequent in search of identical geo-climatic, socio-economic and cultural conditions.

5. References

Adhikary K. Society and World View of the Birhor: A Nomadic Hunting and Gathering Community of Orissa. Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata. 2008: 69-70.

Bose P. K. Classes and Class Relations among Tribes of Bengal. Ajanta Publications. 1985:108.

Das N. An Approach to Sustainable Development – A Concept. The Dying Earth – People's Action Nature's Reaction. Eds. Kolkata: acb publications & Netaji Institute for Asian Studies. 2004: 372.

Sinha D. The Hill Kharia of Purulia A Study on he Impact of Poverty on a Hunting and Gathering Tribes, Kolkata: Anthropological Survey of India. 2010: 11-12.

Govt. of West Bengal. District Statistical Handbook, Purulia. Bureau of Applied Economics & Statistics. 2008.

Govt. of West Bengal. Status of Rural Development Report. Office of the District Magistrate, Purulia. 2009: 14.

Hudson T. C. The Primitive Culture of India", New Delhi: Ramanand Vidya Bhawan, 1985: 24-25.