

DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON TRIBAL SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF THREE BLOCKS IN THE DISTRICTS OF BANKURA AND PURBA MEDINIPUR

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Synopsis

Democratic decentralization is the hallmark of a participatory democracy like India. The foundation of participatory democracy in the country has been laid in the shape of panchayati raj. To expand the scope of panchayat raj so as to reach the marginal classes the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act was passed in 1992. The Act, among other things, stipulates the reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and women in different rural representative bodies. The present study is concerned with a view to analyzing the impact of democratic decentralization on the santals, and in turn, their perception of the functioning of the panchayati raj in the tribal-infested areas of three blocks - two blocks from Bankura District, Ranibandh and Sarenga, and Panskura-1 block in Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal.

The present research is primarily based on survey method. The study has made a survey of 21 villages of the areas under scrutiny during the period 2008-2013.

The field survey conducted in the areas under study amply makes it clear that the tribals in general are not very receptive to the provision of panchayat system. They are more interested in protecting the dignity and legitimacy of their own traditional authority rather than to assert their own rights, guaranteed by the Constitution of the country. On the part of the panchayats and local administration enough efforts and initiatives were not taken to make the local tribals aware of the advantages of the system. The NGOs did not lag behind this attitude.

This communication gap between the panchayats and the NGOs on the one hand and the tribals on the other, created a sense of disbelief and sectarian attitude among the tribals. As a result, the government effort, however limited it may be, did not yield the desired goals of democratic decentralization. And the tribals also on their part become deprived of the welfare measure of the governments. Thus as far as the findings of our survey are concerned, the impact of democratic decentralization, particularly the 73rd Constitutional amendment was virtually negligible.