

Pondering the Past

Glimpses of Our Society and Culture

Volume III

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The Socio-Cultural Aspects of Kharia-Shabar in Purulia: A Historical Analysis (1870-1950)

Nilanjan Chaki

Introduction

In the Pre-Vedic society in India, there is a growth of a group of tribes who used to depend on nature totally and accordingly their culture developed. The District of Purulia in West Bengal is inhabited by more than a dozen of ethnic communities, the least known among them are the Shabars. There has been very little attention so far paid to the study and development of the tribe. Except being represented in the census reports, they have not yet been brought into focus by any initiative from any corner. At the time of independence Government of India found that there were 13 million people and 127 communities who were classified as Criminal Tribes Act of 1924. Prior to the independence, the British Government ascribed the 'Shabar community as the Criminal Tribe'. In 1952 this Criminal Tribe Act was replaced and communities were designated as 'De-notified Communities'. The Shabars were also among the de-notified communities. Shabars were classified as Scheduled Tribe by the Government of India during the time of independence and acknowledged them as the most primitive group among the tribals as 'Independent Tribe'.¹

The ancestral individuals of West Bengal comprised of 5.6 percent of the all out populace of the state as evaluated in the most recent statistics. There are forty Scheduled Tribes and three Primitive Tribal gatherings found in West Bengal as per the most recent records of the state.² Three Tribal people group specifically Birhor, Toto and Shabar were pronounced as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG). Some other inborn networks like Lodha and Kharia have additionally been guaranteed the name of Shabar. In this way the identity of Shabar as an autonomous ST people group of West Bengal makes disarray with another ST people group of West-Bengal, for example, Lodha. The Lodha community likes to call them as Lodha, ST.

