CHAPTER IX

ECOLOGICAL SET-UP OF A FEW DOOARS VILLAGES: CAST STUDIES

Village Pattern:

The Dooars is a typically rural area and as such there are numerous villages scattered all over the region. These villages have wide cultural diversities, which are mainly due to the change in their physical and economic environments. In some places, villages are clustered round the tea estates although the natural environment is characterised by rugged terrain, swift-flowing rivers and forests. In other places, villages are developed near the fertile and cultivated lands. Accessibility factor has also led to the development of village settlements. Most of the villages developed round the tea estates, are economically dependent on the tea industry and as such considerable acculturation has also taken place in their village society. The villages located near the agricultural fields or near the lines of communication, on the other hand, enjoy freedom of economic enterprise and have been able to retain considerable part of their original culture.
In order to find out the impact of this plantation industry on the general economy of these villages, a socio-economic survey was carried out in three villages of Jalpaiguri District, viz., (1) Tondu, situated adjacent to a tea garden but otherwise enjoying complete isolation; (2) Sikapur, situated adjacent to a tea garden as well as in the midst of fertile agricultural land where there is a competition between the tea induced culture and indigenous culture; and (3) Dalimpur, situated far away from tea plantation areas, thus maintaining its original culture remaining unspoilt from the influence of plantation economy.

The object of the study is to assess the changes in the socio-economic structure under various economic influences and to show that the ecosystem responds markedly to any change in the economic environments.

The study is mainly based on the field survey of the three villages. To make the study more comprehensive it is desirable to cover more villages, but financial and other limitations stand in the way. Despite these handicaps and shortcomings, the study has brought to light some interesting features of cultural differentiations.
Table 71
Comparative study of the villages surveyed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tondu</th>
<th>Sikarpur</th>
<th>Dalimpur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location in F.S.</td>
<td>Nagarkata</td>
<td>Rajgunj</td>
<td>Falakata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest Rly. Station</td>
<td>Nagarkata</td>
<td>Jelpeiguri</td>
<td>Falakata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (in acres)</td>
<td>1048.74</td>
<td>5231.50</td>
<td>1422.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>4300</td>
<td>1470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. Tondu:

Physical Environment: Tondu, a very small village, is located within Nagarkata Police Station. It is situated approximately in 26°N latitude and 88°E longitude. It covers an area of 1048.74 acres with a population of 164.

Tondu is situated on an almost level land at a height of 230 ft. above sea level. The surface is covered with recent alluvial deposits. Soil composition reveals coarse gravels and sandy clay. The village is bounded on its western side by the Jaldhaka river and on the east by the Dina river. In the north
is the dense Diana forest, consisting mainly of Sal (Shorea robusta). The forest is full of wild animals and ideal for big games. Located within a dense forest and swift flowing rivers, accessibility to this village is difficult. As such, exchange of ideas and trade with the adjoining regions are limited.

Cultural Elements: The inhabitants comprise mostly of the prospective tea garden labourers. They originally hail from Chotanagpur Plateau of Bihar. Quite a number were absorbed in the tea plantation. But a substantial number were refused, as the employment potentiality of the tea garden had already reached the saturation point. They began to settle in nearby localities. Most of the people were tribals and they found the surroundings identical to their native place and preferred to live near their relatives with scope for hunting, free enjoyment of life etc. This naturally gave rise to such a type of settlement whose residents, though do not earn their livelihood from the tea estates, are indirectly benefited from them. They sell vegetable products, milk and other supplementary goods to the adjoining tea estates. This village is, therefore, located within the sphere
House Types: The house types are very primitive. The dwellers possess ideas of making houses similar to their homes in Chotanagpur Plateau. In this new environment, as the houses are liable to be damaged by floods every year, they do not take special care for permanent construction. The houses are generally built up of bamboos, tied together with cane. The fencings are of grasses or of split bamboos. The roofs are made of straw and the floors with mud. Due to the lack of urban influence, brick built houses are rare.

Food: Rice is the staple food of the villagers. Fish and meat are often taken because they are abundant in the rivers and jungles, but these are taken in a most primitive form. They roast the meat or fish instead of cooking them. Liquor is a very common and popular drink.

Dress: The villagers still retain their primitive customs in the matter of dresses. Even within the younger generation, there is no marked change. The men wear the clothes round their loins which cover them only from their waist to their knees. The women-folk cover their body with cotton sheets from their
Fig. 34 - A bird's eye view of Sikarpur village adjoining Sikarpur Tea Estate.
breast to their ankles. Ornaments are worn by men and women.

Social and Religious Affiliation: Difficult accessibility of this village has restricted cultural influence from outside world and thus it remained very primitive in ideas. Moreover, as it has no particular economy of its own, the villagers have to depend on the adjacent tea estates in every sphere of life. They do not have any common place to discuss their views or settle any problem. They have to visit the tea garden in each and every occasion. Even they have no specific festivals of their own. They are thoroughly linked with the tea estates.

2. Sikarpur:

Physical Environment: Sikarpur is a fairly large village, located in Rajgunj thana. It is situated approximately in 36°36’00”N latitude and 88°32’30”E longitude. It covers an area of 5231.50 acres with an estimated population of 4,300 only.

Sikarpur village is situated on a flat plain covered with alluvial deposits consisting mainly of sandy loams. The village is drained on its eastern side by the Talma river and is surrounded by Jungle Mahal forest on its north-western
part. The forests are mostly cleared for cultivation. Communication pattern is fairly good. As a result of this easy accessibility, external influence is well marked in this village.

**Cultural Elements:** Sikarpur was a flourishing village long before the establishment of tea industry. Production of rice and jute was its principal economy. Subsequently, tea estates were developed adjacent to this village. Some people got employment in the newly opened tea estates. Most of the villagers have now become agricultural labourers. Only a few got employment in the tea plantations.

**House Types:** Like Tondu, the people of Sikarpur live in poverty. Their houses are poorly built which are so common in the Doons. Most of the houses are made up of mud, bamboo and straw which are collected from the jungles. Brick built houses are few and far between. Some houses are constructed of brick, mud and straw. The walls are made up of bricks, the floors with mud and their roofs with straw. In the construction of houses, urban influence is seen prominently but due to the absence of money houses are of poor types.
Food: The staple food of the villagers is rice. Fish and meat are often taken. They use oil as well as vegetables, milk, curd and spices. Drinking of liquor is common amongst the well-to-do families and tea garden labourers.

Dress: The usual clothings are a jacket-like thing called 'phatua' and 'dhoti' for men, while the womenfolk wear 'sari'. Recently, a tendency is seen in men and women to wear trousers and shirts and blouses respectively. This is more common within the younger generations.

Cultural Affiliations: Sikarpur village has changed much of its cultural traits as there occurred considerable cultural diffusion from outside world and also from the tea plantation industry. The villagers often travel to the adjacent towns, market centres, tea gardens and distant places to enjoy different festivals and bring with them different cultural ideas. They have their own Bhawani Puja - a religious festival - developed during the "Sanyasi Rebellion" in the late 19th century. The actual deity is similar to the Goddess Kali of the Hindus and the Puja is usually performed in a similar fashion in the month of November. Besides, the
Fig. 35 - A typical farm-house in Delimpur village away from any tea estate.

Fig. 36 - A typical farm-house of a well-to-do villager.
villagers also participate in the festivals performed in the neighbouring tea estates and the adjoining non-tea villages.

3. Dalimpur:

Physical Environment: Dalimpur village is located in the Falakata Police Station. It is situated approximately in 26°38'N latitude and 88°27'E longitude. It covers an area of 1422.64 acres with a population of 1470.

Dalimpur is located on a level plain, being covered with alluvial deposits. Soil composition reveals sandy loams. The village is drained on its eastern and western sides by the Kujnal and the Keljani rivers respectively. These rivers have made the land most fertile. The important characteristics of this village is its proximity to overland routes thus facilitating the in-flow of external influences. The main economy is agriculture, particularly cultivation of rice. A few persons are engaged in transport and trade. This village is relatively unaffected from the economic impact of tea plantation, the village being situated far from it.
House Types: The villagers generally live in poorly built houses which are made of straw, mud, and corrugated iron sheets. The floors are built of mud, the roofs are thatched with hay or covered with corrugated iron sheets, and the walls are made with pleated bamboo being plastered with mud. Mud houses are common. Well-to-do persons build brick-built houses which are, however, relatively few.

Food: The villagers of Dalimpur like all other villages take rice as their principal food. They use oil for cooking vegetables, meat and fish. Milk, curd, and spices are common. Very few persons, however, possess drinking habits.

Dress: The villagers are gradually imbibing urban habits. The younger people wear trousers, shirts, blouses, shoes, etc. while the older generations are used to dhoti, phatus, piran, etc. The use of ornaments is limited within the womenfolk. The urban influence is more common in their dresses than in their food habits and house types.

Cultural Affiliations: The residents of this village are mostly local folk. They largely belong to the scheduled caste community. The main economy
is the cultivation of rice. As such they are not generally influenced by the plantation economy. In their original form, the villagers had to live in considerable hardships. But now, they like to improve their economic set-up. While carrying on trade or commerce or to pursue other services, they have to travel to other market centres and bring with them different cultural forms. But they are dogmatic in their religious and social customs in their village. They occasionally move to the adjacent areas to take part in other festivals.

Conclusion:

Tondu, Sikarpur and Dalimpur villages have almost identical physical environments, viz., nature of terrain, vegetative cover, rivers etc. The difference grows from the differentiation in their economic set-up and results in their cultural differentiation as well. Of the three villages studied here, Dalimpur and Sikarpur have been more exposed to the outside economic influences with the development of overland routes etc. than Tondu. With increasing cultural contacts, considerable acculturation has taken place in the former two villages. This is well reflected in the gradual improvement in the agricultural technique, change
in occupational structure and employment status of the villages. With such change in outlook the villagers are moving elsewhere in search of employment and are benefited from the same.

Tondu, however, exists in complete isolation. The village is cut off from the adjoining areas by thick forests and rivers. Due to such isolation, the cultural core of the original habitat of this village remains strong but the economy has not yet been stabilised beyond the subsistent standard. Poor accessibility and isolation are responsible for maintaining the existing ecosystem in a static state. Accessibility and economic influence of the plantation industry, on the other hand, are responsible in inducing quick change or transformation in the socio-cultural profile of the inhabitants of Sikarpur and Dalimpur.