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## **Underdevelopment of the Underdeveloped: Changing Perspective of the Chain Community in West Bengal**

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**Abstract:**

*The Chains are a highly undeveloped and a little-known ethnic community of India. The community may also be found in Bangladesh and Nepal too. In India, they are settled in states such as West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. In West Bengal, the Chain community lives in the districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, North and South Dinajpur, Birbhum, Burdwan and Midnapore. Malda has the largest Chain population not only in West Bengal, but also in the country. Total population of the Chain community in West Bengal is estimated at about 25 lakhs. The Chains usually live on the bank of the River Ganges or some other rivers as before and naturally far, far away from the urban areas. They might also be found today settled in large number in some rural areas far away from rivers. Most probably, such areas must have been located on or near the riverside at the time of their being settled and their present position is to be attributed to the change in the courses of the rivers. In West Bengal, the Chains, popularly known as Chain-Mandal, belong to the scheduled caste' category in four districts and to the category of depressed backward class in the other districts.*

**Source:**

*Secondary sources of information about the community are scanty. The data for the presentation has been collected from primary sources i.e. field work and observation, interview, group discussion, case study, daily life observed, etc. Various observations from birth to death have been taken note of. Aged and educated persons of the society along with the social organizers from the community constitute one of the main sources of information.*

### **1. Historical background**

The Chain or Chaing, according to E.T. Dalton<sup>1a</sup> was included amongst the lowest class of the Hindus, the others being Bind, fisherman, boatman, and general labourers; Kewots and Malers, fisherman only and none of the other castes would touch water drawn by the castes. James Wise<sup>2</sup> suggests that the Chains, like other fisher castes, are most probably remnants or offshoots of an aboriginal race, having no relationship with the true Aryan Hindus. H.H. Risley<sup>3</sup> also took the Chain as a cultivating and fishing caste of Behar and Central Bengal, probably an offshoot from some non-Aryan tribe. Since time immemorial, the Chains have settled and migrated to different places, especially near the banks of the Ganges and other rivers. In most cases, many of them abandoned their habitat due to erosion and changes in the course of the Ganga and still keep doing so. The Chains are thickest south of the Ganges.

According to Buchanan,<sup>4</sup> Nator in Rajshahi now in Bangladesh, was the centre of the tribe (the Chain) in Bengal in his day. According to James Wise,<sup>5</sup> the Chain was one of the largest and most scattered fisher tribes of Northern India. In 1883, they numbered 67,300 persons in Bengal, chiefly congregated in Malda and Murshidabad. In the same year, Malda returned more than any other district of Bengal.<sup>6</sup> In Bihar as many as 41,686 were registered, being massed in Patna and Mungir, while the Santal pergunnahs contained 17,576. The Chains were also found in Oudh, where Carnegy<sup>7</sup> connected them with the Tharu, Raji, Nat, and other unclassified tribes, inhabiting the base of the Himalayas.

### **2. Physical Feature**

Patrick Carnegy, Deputy Commissioner and Settlement Officer of Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh), traced in their physiognomy features peculiar to Mongolian races.<sup>8</sup> They are usually of medium stature, mostly dark/semi-dark complexioned and of proto-Australoid facial feature.

### **3. Nature as Known from Literature**

As regards the nature of the caste, E. A. Reade<sup>9</sup> says, "Wherever found, the Chains are notorious as thieves, and "extraordinary clever impostor (fake/fraud) and thimble-riggers." Mr. G. F. Magrath<sup>10</sup> adds that their reputation as thieves, impostors, and swindlers is in his experience not altogether deserved, as the men whom the common people, and even the police of Behar, describe as Châins usually turned out on inquiry to be Maghayâ Doms, Nats, or Rajwârs. The term *Châi-panâ*, however, is a

common expression for stealing among Hindi-speaking natives. Mr. Beverley also asserts that this bad character is not altogether deserved.

#### 4. Social Organization

The Chain, according to Hunter, is probably a Bihar caste.<sup>11</sup> There are four sub-groups among the Chain: i) Bara-Chain; ii) Sirwal, or Chirwal; iii) Bhatial; and iv) Chhota-Chain.<sup>12</sup> The four sub-groups are, in fact, *khoms* (sub-castes) of the community. Hierarchical differentiations among the different *khoms* are recognized at the territorial, linguistic and social levels to regulate marriage. The Shirwal sub-caste refers to those living along the upstream of the Ganges while the Bhatial to those settled along the downstream. According to G.E. Lambourn,<sup>13</sup> the Chains are divided into two sub-castes, *Bara* and *Chhota*, which do not intermarry." Earlier the Chhota Chains were looked upon as untouchable by their Bara counterpart, who did not even drink water touched by the former. The occupation of the Chhota Chain is to catch fish and go to different villages for sale with the fish basket on their head. The Bara Chains are only engaged in agriculture, but they may also catch fish but for their consumption and in no way for livelihood because it is considered as extremely reproachable. The only *gotra*<sup>14</sup> they have is *Kashyap*, which means that the Chains trace their descent from the ancient sage Kashyapa by unbroken male descent. The *gotra* appears more a concept borrowed from the neighbouring Hindu communities, since it has no functional utility for the Chains.

#### 5. Religious Beliefs

According to James Wise,<sup>15</sup> in Oudh the Chain worshipped Mahabira (the Monkey god), Sat Narayana, and Devi Patan. However, those who came to Bengal, like other fisher tribes, are followers of the Panch Piriya creed, and worshippers of Koila Baba. The Chain of West Bengal also worships Panch Pir as their family deity and offer sacrifices of crushed grain to them. They also worship most Hindu deities like goddesses Kali, Durga, Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), Saraswati, Manasa and gods like Shiva, Ganesa, Kartika, Satyanarayana and others.<sup>16</sup> Many of the Chain in West Bengal receive spiritual guidance from Vaishnavas and worship Radha-Krishna.

#### 6. Language

A few decades ago, the Chains - one and all - spoke a distinct language called the Chain. But now their language has considerably changed from Chain to the local dialect of Bengali in West Bengal, which changes their communication medium. The Chain language is a mixture of a few languages and dialects such as Hindi, Maithili, Magahi, Bengali, etc.<sup>17</sup> The language, though prevalent since early times, has neither any written form nor native scripts of its own. 'Tyain' is used in Chain language in the same sense as 'YOU' in the English to address the listener of any age. The Chains are bilingual, speaking the Chain at home with the family members or neighbours of the same language but using the major non-Chain language of the locality outside in the society.

#### 7. Economy

Basically, the Chain in West Bengal has been a landowning community, with individual proprietorship of land. Since time immemorial, agriculture had been the primary occupation of almost all the Chain families. Even a few decades earlier, everywhere could be found many big farmers among the Chain,<sup>18</sup> holding land individually from 20 acres to as high as 700 acres. However, a great number of families have lost much of their arable land for different reasons such as river erosion, sale to incur the expenditure of traditional community feast on marriages and *Sradha* ceremonies, newly-introduced bridegroom price, law-suits, medical treatment as well as to run the family against a very low income, etc.

Many of them are, however, still associated with agriculture. But land is not sufficient in most cases for the sustenance of the whole family. In addition to the factors mentioned above, the other includes an ever-increasing fragmentation among large number of children in the family from early and unplanned marriages. They are, therefore, now mostly marginal farmers producing for their own consumption. The majority are unable to use irrigation facilities because of the cost involved and depend upon rainwater to a great extent. Coupled with this is less use of *modern farming methods* that considerably affects the quantity and quality of production. It is an established fact that farming today requires tractors, combines and other implements that cost much. Many Chain farmers, therefore, find it difficult to purchase farm equipment. Often times, getting equipment is most difficult after a poor harvest or when financial trouble strikes. Hence, the Government should come forward to help farmers who seek assistance for purchase of farm equipments. The problems of investment in *irrigation* facilities on the *farm* could be solved by subsidized government financing of agricultural pump sets.

While the land they hold or the production they generate is not sufficient for sustenance, they couldn't switch over as much as required to other suitable substitutes of agriculture due to an inclination for agriculture, lack of education, homesickness, geographical remoteness, etc.

Around 90% of the Chains now depend wholly or partly on labour for an income. Many are now daily-wagers to be paid in cash. But mostly they are Beedi rollers, the rest including the agricultural labourers, Dadan labourers,<sup>19</sup> etc. Interestingly, majority of the beedi workers happen to be the women and the female children. The Chain women also play some part in agricultural production. In many cases, the husbands or male members of the family are idle, home-sick and averse to work hard and away from home. Even if they are hard-worker and good-earner, many are prodigal for their addiction to gambling, alcoholism and traditional intoxicants. However, there is no system of bonded labour among them.

Big businessmen are quite rare in this community. Even the petty businessmen are also highly negligible in number, below 1% without any doubt. The Chains have a long-nourished phobia that if they invest money, earned or obtained from other source, in business and if it does not run successfully, the whole amount will get lost forever. Therefore, they have developed an age-old

tendency to desist themselves in taking risk of choosing business as their profession. Overriding this traditional mind-set, if and when some unemployed youths want to set up small business ventures or small-scale industry taking loan from banks, in many cases they are very disappointingly treated by the banks. The state government should, therefore, convince public sector banks to lend loans, providing subsidy for these business ventures. What the Chains - not only men but in some cases women too - mostly sell in the market is vegetable they produce in their usually small piece of land. Being highly backward in education, the Chains are very poorly represented in services – public or private- much, much less than 0.25% in Govt. services. To improve their representation in services, unemployed educated Chain youths may avail of the Free Career Oriented Coaching Scheme for Candidates belonging to Scheduled Caste. The economically disadvantaged students of the Chain community should also be provided free coaching of good quality so as to enable them to appear in Competitive examination and succeed in obtaining an appropriate job in Public/Private sector as well as to enhance their skills and capabilities for ensuring rapid economic development and integration in the national mainstream.

Still all the members of approximately 40% of the Chain families are deprived of full three meals. But their basic right to food, dress and shelter cannot be guaranteed without enhancement of income. Job opportunity throughout the year heavily lacks in the Chain areas, which offer only seasonal works with low rate of income such as weeding in the crop-field, harvesting of paddy, wheat and jute, removing of jute-fiber, weeding-composting-unearthing and boiling of turmeric rhizome, wage-labour in vegetable production, unskilled and unorganized labour in mason work, etc. Therefore, job-oriented programme need to be implemented by the Government when and where jobs are not available in the locality. There is, of course, provision under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) of enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. However, a miniscule number of households receive their full entitlement, while in most cases, much less numbers of days of employment are given per household against the stipulated 100 days. Delayed payments, dishonesty and non-functioning panchayats affect MNREGS performance. Besides, women are often allotted work 7-8 km away from their home, where one cannot find toilets and crèches for children at the work sites for which MNREGS has provisions.

A number of Chain people earn their livelihood by menial jobs such as van-pulling, rickshaw pulling, *bhutbhuti* (mechanized van)-operation, etc. round the year but their income is low. Hence, proper rate of fair and number of passengers should have to be fixed by the local authority. Besides, for smooth plying of vehicles and easy movement of people, more new roads have to be built up interconnecting the villages and specially the one leading to the national highway, schools, markets and health centres; Narrow roads are to be widened and existing roads mostly in bad shape to be satisfactorily maintained too.

Job opportunities can also be created by encouraging and improving setting up of small scale industries. Self-help group formation may also be encouraged, ensuring the banks provide financial assistance to them. It is also found that aversion to work as well as spending much of the income in alcoholism, gambling, etc brings about poverty in many families. Apart from necessary, strict administrative steps, awareness programmes on these burning issues need to be undertaken to prevent these suicidal and discouraging habits by organizing popular musical and theatrical programmes and ensuring the presence of the people concerned by offering incentives in the form of health drinks, soft drinks, food packets, etc. The State should promote the 'economic interests' of the Chain with 'special care' and ensure that they are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocation unsuited to age or strength."

## 8. Food

Both rice and wheat are their staple food. They are non-vegetarian, but do not eat beef, or pork. They have roots and tubers as vegetables. The Chains usually take food, preferably boiled rice, thrice a day. There is a widespread tendency among them to cook rice at a time at noon for lunch, dinner and breakfast. The lunch may include rice, *daal* preparation (twice/thrice a week),<sup>20</sup> some vegetable fry/curry or some pot-herb. *Dal* and vegetables are almost invariably replaced by some vegetable soup or non-veg. soup of fish (generally once/twice a week), chicken (once/twice a month) and mutton (once in 2/3 months). Potherb is a very popular curry among the Chain as because it is easily available in one's own field or in the neighbourhood at no cost. The dinner comprises rice as well as curry – very frequently insufficient – cooked at noon and if necessary, supplemented by bread and some fresh preparation. In the morning, the Chains have a liking for *pantabhat*<sup>21</sup> as breakfast. In the event of exhaustion or insufficiency, it may be supplemented by *Muri* (puffed rice) or *Chira* (Flattened/beaten rice) or *Sattu* (foodstuff consisting of a mixture of ground pulses and cereals and flavoured with green chilli, salt, onion and sometimes lemon juice) or bread served with salt, chilli, oil and at times some curry. To cook three meals at a time is a traditional strategy of saving fuel as well as time and energy of the womenfolk who have lots of domestic works to do from early morning to early night in addition to some income-related works. It is found that the Beedi-worker women tend to devote as much as less time possible in cooking in order to manufacture more quantity of Beedi to earn proportionately higher wages. The Chains seldom drink milk and almost never consume dairy products except during illness. Some of the Chains produce cow-milk but mostly for sale and keep just a little only for the children. They eat fruits if produced by them and rarely purchasing from market. Alcoholism which was very rare in the past among the Chains has been increasing at an alarming rate. Lunch is usually taken between 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. and dinner at 8-8.30 pm in the families which have no electric facility at home. Both the desired quality and quantity of food is a great problem for the Chain at present. Nutrition and variety of food is traditionally not taken into consideration, giving emphasis only on quantity. However, all the members of large number of families, especially the motherly women, still do not get full meal three times every day. This is reflected in physical growth not positively compatible with age in most of the cases. Because of arrested growth, most of them especially the girls and women look under-aged against their actual age.

### 9. Cooking Fuel

Traditionally, the Chain continue to use biomass—firewood, crop residue or cow dung—as their primary cooking fuel. This resource is available at almost no out-of-pocket cost, which explains its high usage rate. Though firewood and cow dung are cumbersome to obtain and use as well as health hazards of the resultant smoke pollution are there, the ‘free factor’ appears to override all other considerations. What stands in the way of their migration towards cleaner and convenient cooking fuels like Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) or Piped Natural Gas (PNG) are factors of affordability, availability, awareness, and to some extent, acceptability.

All stakeholders—governments, industry (Beedi), and social activists—must work collectively and concertedly to alleviate some of these barriers. In the short run, technologies that harness the use of affordable fuels like biomass in a high-efficiency, low-emission mode, must be promoted. And then, there will be fire, but no smoke in the Chain kitchens. Awareness of Bio-gas Chullahs is to be created and the same to be provided by the Govt. at the subsidized rate. The availability of LPG and PNG in their villages has to be ensured in the long run at subsidized rate.

### 10. Drinking Water

Almost no Chain in rural areas has access to an improved source of drinking water such as piped water into dwelling or yard/plot, public tap, etc. They mostly depend on tube wells, unprotected dug wells and surface water. Even 5% of the households do not have their own well. Tube wells are usually not protected by a platform around the well, which can lead spilled water away from the borehole and prevents infiltration of run-off water at the well head. Lack of access to safe drinking water leads to additional health risks. Infection of water-borne diseases commonly results during bathing, washing, drinking, in the preparation of food, or in the consumption of food thus infected. Various forms of waterborne diarrheal disease affect mainly the children, subjecting them to chronic and severe malnutrition. Most of the Chains, who are infected by a waterborne disease, are usually confronted with related costs and very often with a huge financial burden. The financial losses are mostly caused by costs for medical treatment and medication, costs for transport, special food, and by the loss of manpower. Many families must even sell their land to pay for treatment in a proper hospital.

Awareness should, therefore, be created among the mass by the Govt. agencies and the NGOs to have pure drinking water by boiling, chlorination, etc. It is to be ensured by convincing people and the local Govt. that the dug wells are to be protected from runoff water by a well lining or casing and a platform that diverts spilled water away from the well. It is also to be covered, so that bird droppings and animals cannot fall into the well. Isolation and safe disposal of feces to protect local water resources has to be ensured. Villagers should be encouraged to build up drainage system in their premises to dispose of liquid waste and rain water. Water quality through better sanitation services and greater regulatory and enforcement capacity has to be protected. The *Panchayats* (local rural Govt.) have to take necessary steps for supply of pure drinking water to the people.

### 11. Houses

As noted earlier, the Chains live in rural areas, preferably near or on the riverbank and economically they are poor. Therefore, they cannot afford to build *pakka* houses excepting in a few cases as such structures are expensive to construct because of costly materials and more labor. They usually go for *kachcha* building made of natural materials such as mud, grass, bamboo, thatch or stick and are therefore a short-lived structure. The advantage of a *kachcha* is that construction materials are cheap and easily available and relatively little labor is required. Since it is not made for endurance it requires constant maintenance and replacement, which is not always possible because of low income. During rainy season or flood, collapsing of mud walls is a common phenomenon. As the thatched or tiled roof is not always maintained for financial reasons, rainwater pours into rooms causing people suffer heavily at night. However, now the situation has improved a little. Care is not usually taken to provide the houses with doors and windows in sufficient number and proper size, previously in apprehension of theft and pouring in of rainwater and strong wind and now out of traditional house-building concept. Such nominal doors and windows naturally do not admit sufficient ventilation, and light. Moreover, the Chains are used to be indifferent about fitting the doors and windows with proper closing mechanism. The result is that interiors are either excessively heated or cooled. The floor is traditionally almost an earthen one. Many of them do not have even sufficient space in the room for accommodating their family members and thus healthy living and privacy cannot be maintained in many cases. Many of the families do not have sufficient number of sleeping cots for all the family members. As a result, some of the members, particularly the women and their kids, have to sleep on the earthen floor. Bedding materials are also minimal. What ordinarily constitutes their bedding materials are mattresses and quilts made by themselves with old, worn-out cloths, one/ two bed sheets, one purchased quilt and one mosquito net. Many Chain homes lack a closed kitchen and cooking is often done in an open area. Separate cattle sheds are also lacking in some of the households. Thus, insufficiency of space in the room, sleeping on earthen floor, insufficient bedding materials, lack of enough ventilation and light, instant ability of repair of damaged roof, occasional sharing room with cattle, unwanted heat and cold – all these combine to affect the health and mind of the Chain population to a great extent.

To improve the housings condition, the people have to be made aware of building up and maintaining a healthy living condition in their houses very much within their capacity. The needy persons must take the privilege of *Indira Awaas Yojana* (IAY), a Government of India social welfare programme to provide housing for BPL population in the villages.<sup>22</sup> Additional financial assistance is also provided to compulsorily construct sanitary latrine and smokeless *chullah* (oven) along with each IAY house.

### 12. Sanitation

Sanitation is very important in order to keep good health and also for dignity and respect. However, approximately more than 5% of the Chain rural households have neither latrine of their own nor are there available any public or shared latrines for them in the

places of their living. Most of the household latrines have been constructed on a financial incentive of 91.5% per unit, provided to below poverty line (BPL) families jointly by the Central Govt. and the State Govt. for construction of toilets under the total sanitation campaign. The rest of the families still practice open defecation (defined as defecation in fields, forests, bushes, etc.). Interestingly, some families could be found building their houses with bricks and having mobile phone but without private latrines of any sort because they, especially the male head of the family, does not think it a necessity and does not bother to listen to the women's problems of open defecation. Before taking food, no one ever bother to wash their hands with soap and sometimes not even with water, especially the workers while engaged in rolling Beedi. The Chains are very indifferent about building drainage in their dwelling system for easy, safe flow of waste water and rain water, thus causing an unhealthy atmosphere throughout the year and a muddy surface, especially in rainy season. They also tend to dump domestic waste material including cattle excreta at some open, surface adjacent to their houses and do not care to keep the inner and outer part of their household that clean. Equally careless are they about maintaining personal health and hygiene such as washing hands when required, occasional cleaning of body with soap, washing clothes and bedding materials as per necessity, cutting nail, cleaning and combing hair at a regular interval. Since time immemorial they are used to provide insufficient number of proper windows and doors in their houses, which creates a poor-lighted, suffocating atmosphere in the living rooms. One noticeable thing is that in many cases, bricks have replaced mud or straw as the material to build the houses but the surroundings, usually dirty, has remained the same.

The following steps may be taken into consideration to improve the sanitation problems. Awareness should have to be created in the community regarding clean hygienic toilets. The community should take collective action to improve sanitation, build community consensus to eliminate open defecation and mobilize as a community to demand sanitation services and infrastructure. The Gram Panchayets, the community, the Civil Society Organization and the faith-related organizations should trigger the Chain community to understand the economic benefits of sanitation, encourage them to invest in household toilet and teach children proper hygienic behaviour, such as hand washing. Every household should join with others to demand sanitation infrastructure from the authority concerned. Isolation and safe disposal of feces to protect local water resources has to be ensured.

The Local Rural Government (*Panchayet*) should, with all sincerity, honesty and impartiality, identify all the BPL families in the Gram Panchayets and ensure them incentive for construction of toilets under the total sanitation campaign. They should also build up safe, clean and free toilets for the families without facilities of personal toilet. Villagers should be encouraged to build up drainage system in their premises to dispose of liquid waste and rain water. Wherever practicable, financial assistance should be extended to the poor people to build up the same. Master plan is to be undertaken to build up proper drainage system in the whole village with connection to the individual drainage system.

Awareness programme should also be organized highlighting the proper waste disposal techniques. Steps need to be taken to encourage each household to have a specific a dump pit for safe disposal of organic wastes and if possible, to produce manure from it and use or sell the same. Consciousness about the domestic animals and their excreta are to be created so that they are collected and be dumped on large scale to make bio-gas which is to be used by each family as fuel for easy sustenance. Creation of awareness is also necessary through theatrical and musical performances among the people regarding keeping personal health and hygiene and their household surroundings clean. In every school - private or public - special care is to be taken so that personal cleanliness is maintained by every child. Teachers should teach children that using a toilet and washing their hands keep them healthy and encourage them to spread the message in their families.

People should be made aware of providing with, while constructing their houses, doors and windows with proper circulation of air and pouring in of sunlight. Use of plastic should also be banned; if somehow it is not practicable or not implementable, the *Panchayat* should employ a person to collect all plastic material from a specified area and send it to the recycling plant to be set up at every block.

### 13. Health System

The Chains as we know live mainly in rural areas. Around half of the people do not have the capacity to get nutritious food nor do they have any idea of what is meant by nutritious food. By the term they refer to only non-vegetarian items, which is not the case always. Even a good proportion has to remain half-fed. They usually collect water from unprotected tube well or dug wells. They also collect surface water from rivers, tanks, canals, stream and wetland. Water from these sources is not safe for drinking and therefore, need to be purified by boiling, filtration and chlorination. However, the Chains are used to take water collected directly from these sources and almost never think about purification because of lack of awareness, fuel and money. Naturally they are affected by several water-borne diseases. Moreover, they do not also observe the minimum norms of health and hygiene as well as sanitation and the result is suffering from several diseases.

Tuberculosis (TB), Diarrhea, Anemia, skin diseases, Asthma, Night blindness, worm infestation, etc. are the common among the Chains. Anemia is basically found among the women while the children are more vulnerable to night blindness. TB is wide-spread both among men and women due to under-nourishment, tobacco-inhaling while Beedi-rolling, having food with unwashed hands and in dishes not duly cleaned, spitting and coughing here and there leading to spread of germ as well as defecation and urination in open space. Asthma is caused by dusty environment, Tobacco-handling and -inhaling in public places, severe cold for insufficient winter garments, sleeping on the floor and taking bath in late hours, malnutrition, kitchen-smoke, etc. It may turn into TB too.

Diarrhea is also rampant among them because of factors such as unhygienic food, unhygienic cooking, polluted drinking water, deposition of waste around the house and surroundings resulting in breeding of flies, consuming of uncovered and stale food with unclean hand, defecation in open field, irregular and inconsiderate food-taking, etc. Bathing in polluted water, non-use of soap when needed, being mostly in bare body, using dirty cloths, infection from deposited water, etc. are the causes behind skin diseases.

Because of child-birth at a very young age mostly by 16/17 and that too within a close space, large number of young mothers usually suffers from anemia. Child-bearing year after year without any special food ever and without any rest from the routine works always keeps the women in poor health susceptible to diseases. Insufficient food preceded/followed by alcoholic drink also greatly affects the health of many men and subjects them to pancreatitis, cirrhosis, etc.

There are high rates of child malnutrition and anemia among the Chains. These can be partly attributed to the high percentage of girls (almost half) who marry before age 18, become teenage mothers, and adopt poor infant feeding and hygiene practices. Children who are undernourished, not optimally breastfed or suffer from micronutrient deficiencies have lower chances of survival as they are more likely to suffer from serious infection and die from such common childhood illnesses as diarrhea, measles, pneumonia and malaria, as well as HIV/AIDS.

In the face of all these, the Chains are, so to say, helpless. In most cases, they do not think of preventing disease due to lack of awareness. Financial problem and proximity also compels them to visit the quacks in the locality and keep them without proper treatment. The district and sub-divisional hospitals being 30-50 kms. away, most of them cannot visit the same because of communication and financial problem. The primary health centres (PHC) are not even that near nor are also minimally-equipped. There is supposed to be one doctor in the centre but surely not available all the time; one or two nurses and other lower staffs in same number actually run the centre. In some cases, the PHCs are seen frequently closed without any notice. A few ordinary medicines of low cost might or might not be available.

Concerned Govt. agencies, NGOs and local schools should come forward to create awareness among the Chains about health, hygiene, sanitation and locally practicable balanced diet in an attractive way including musical and theatrical performances. Quality food items need to be distributed among them at subsidized rate through public distribution system. Provision for pure drinking water, well-maintained public toilet and construction of subsidized, low cost latrines for individual needy families should also be made available. More and more Govt. hospitals properly manned and equipped are to be set up in the rural areas within easily reachable distance. Strong demand has to be regularly raised to the existing and prospective public representatives and political leaders to ensure proper mechanism towards good health of the people. It is an established fact that most of the govt. services do not reach to the people. The enlightened section of the society, the NGOs, the public representatives and the political leaders have to play a very effective role in this regard out of a sense of genuine commitment to the society. Health-fairs which are sometimes organized at the Govt. initiative for the benefit of the common people are usually skipped by the prospective beneficiaries due to their preference for domestic/ field work and non-allowance of the womenfolk to go outside. The ASHA workers and the enlightened people should impress upon them about the benefit of such programmes and ensure their participation in all possible ways. The Panchayats can in no way avoid its bounden duty of seeing that the benefits of ICDS programmes are reaching to all the beneficiaries properly. The Chain people have to be freed from a mythical belief that by nutritious food it refers to only non-veg. food. That balanced or nutritious food may consist of food very much within their reach such as rice/bread, pulses, green vegetables including papaya, green banana, plantain flower (*mocha*), inside-stem of a plantain tree (*thor*), fig (*dumur*), pots herb, papaya and fruits like wood apple and other locally available fruits. As source of non-veg. food, they may rear cattle, poultry, etc. without incurring any cost; they can also easily filter drinking water simply by adopting the indigenous method such as filtering water through a few layer of clean cloth. In a word, the people are to be motivated in a collective way towards a better health habit. Without education, people cannot easily switch over to newer but a better health culture and informal methods of education may be the way to educate the mass.

The Government has to address the issue of child malnutrition. Nutritional rehabilitation centres have to be created, where severely acute malnourished children can receive immediate treatment if necessary. Individual families should identify positive nutrition practices which can be adapted by the larger community. Mothers have to be educated about proper nutrition and child care. Village health workers should show families how to administer oral rehydration salts and zinc tablets, supplied by UNICEF, to halt potentially deadly cases of childhood diarrhea. The proportion of fully immunized children has to be increased to a great extent.

#### 14. Education

The rate of literacy among the Chains is very low as they are not in a position to take necessary advantage of the modern education due to lower income. Many parents are sending their children to schools. However, children in large number don't and cannot attend classes regularly, because they have to work at home to increase their parents' low income. Their illiterate, hand-to-mouth parents also do not understand the importance of regular attendance in schools and devoted studies at home and thus have a strong tendency to subordinate their study to work for income. Lack of sufficient, clean school dresses as well as of reading and writing materials, food problem in school time, discouraging teaching-learning atmosphere in schools, no detention policy of the Government up to class VIII, etc. also stand in the way of their regular attending of schools.

No drop-out usually occurs up to classes VII/VIII in case of around 40-50% children. But the reasons of this seemingly pleasant scenario are elsewhere. Midday meals are provided to the children of 0-6 age-group thrice a week at the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) centre (3 days veg. and 3 days non-vegetarian including egg). Interestingly, children or on their behalf parents visit the centres mostly to collect the food. The food, if of low quality which is not so unoften the case, is collected just for feeding the cattle. There is also provision of free midday meal and school dress in primary and secondary schools up to VIII for the girls of General category and for both boys and girls of the S. C./ S.T. category. Dress is sometimes substituted by cash for the same. However, lack of interest frequently coupled with misuse of money on part of the implementers of the mid-day meal policy defeats the very purpose. Unfortunately, mismanagement in mid-day meal also badly affects classes. Cash for school uniforms is mostly used or misused for other purposes. Students whose parents or who themselves are Beedi workers, are entitled to some scholarship, an incentive that inspires them to go to school. Again it is not properly used as in the cash for uniform. Lack

of congenial infrastructure and atmosphere at home such as narrow space, no furniture for study, poor light, suffocating room environment, no looking after by the parents engaged in work, frequent engagement in domestic work repulse the students in serious study at home. Lack of teaching-learning atmosphere in rural Govt. schools and the resultant, epidemic dependence on private tuition for good result leads to frustration and dropout of the poor students. Interestingly, drop out of boys are far more in number than the girls at secondary level. Still the girls cannot make much progress in their studies as around 80% of them get married in the age group of 13 -16 under different social factors such as preference for such brides because of their blooming youthfulness and supposed unquestionable loyalty to in-laws, prospects of no or nominal dowry, fear of elopement, many number of girl children, etc. Thus whatever education the Chain boys and girls receive is scanty and so poor in quality that it does not help them in building a good career. Moreover, the poorly-qualified matriculates, graduates or microscopic post-graduates can neither successfully compete for good white-collar jobs nor think of earning their livelihood by pursuing their traditional occupations like agriculture or some ordinary menial jobs, thus becoming a psychologically-handicapped burden in the society. Thus, a smaller proportion of the Chains are becoming educated, but quality of their education is absolutely low. The net result is that in a population of around 25 lakh, there cannot be found any class I officer in central or State service excepting two university and four college teachers, two MBBS doctors, a handful of engineers, etc. This few also could not have reached their present position if special privileges in the form of Scheduled Caste status had not been given to the Chain community in 2003 because of their long-drawn movement.

Some are, of course, getting jobs but what is observed is that they are mostly from a better socio-economic situation, which has enabled them to provide modern education. On the other hand, many others are taking admission in schools but due to poverty as well as other backwardness, they cannot continue the education or carry on their studies in proper way, which is necessary to earn skill. As a result, they are failing to qualify in the competitive examinations, though the reservations that they are entitled to cannot be availed of.

To extend educational privileges to the Chains as a community, they should be declared as scheduled caste all over West Bengal instead of the four districts of Malda, Murshidabd, Nadia and South Dinajpur where this constitutional privilege is available for them. This will help all the members of the community to progress taking its advantage and make them feel as belonging to the same community. Otherwise a Chinese wall would be building up between the SC-Chains and the non-SC Chain irrecoverably in the same state in terms of development. Issue of SC certificates has to be expedited for the deserving candidates without subjecting them to any delay or harassment. Special official camp needs to be organized in different Chain-dominated localities for this purpose only. Chains, economically and educationally backward and basically settled in rural areas far away from town or local administrative offices, are not at all aware of the benefits and privileges the SCs are entitled to. Awareness programme should be taken up by the different Govt. agencies in this direction, especially highlighting grant, fellowship, educational loan, concessions in admissions and recruitments, etc.

Vocational courses and of course computer should be taught in school to help students to find some suitable employment in future. Rural libraries need to be set up in all sizable villages to attract the people in acquisition of knowledge through books, journals, magazines, newspapers, etc. and thus to spend away their leisure in some healthy and constructive ways. More and more and more schools and colleges should be set up in the localities so that the distance factor and safety factor do not discourage the students, especially the female students, in getting formal education. In one word, educational institution should reach to them who find it very difficult to reach to the institution.

Cycles may be provided to the needy students to facilitate their easy and quick arrival to the institution. Time and energy thus saved can be utilized both in household and profitable work and this will remove a great obstacle for education from the mind of the students and specially the guardians. Govt. supply of books should be made in time to get the students rid of awkward situation in classes. Improved drinking water, regularly maintained latrines and urinals and regular classes have to be ensured to make students take school as a pleasant shelter of learning. There should be the provision of electricity in the villages with the provision of electric supply to the needy families with school-going children free of cost or at subsidized rate. The Government has to be very strict in preventing marriage of the girls before the legal age of 18 so that the girls may continue their studies for a few years more and have an educational degree to dream of a career.

The existing community organizations, which are very few in number and mostly in name, should organize and activate themselves towards the real welfare of the community, including in their agenda the issue of spread of education in the community. The local clubs, libraries and organizations are ought to be involved in this Himalayan task. It is also the bounden duty of the enlightened section of the community to think beyond their individual interest about the development of the community through education.

## 15. Women

Birth of girls as the first child or in many numbers in the family is not welcome in the Chain society, which prefers male children and usually gives them preferential treatment. The girls are traditionally undervalued in the Chain society and simply taken as such a member of the family as to be somehow brought up till their marriage at the age of 13-15. Naturally they are not given proper care and attention, sufficient and nutritious food, sufficient dresses, higher education or better medical treatment. Quite common is the scene in which most of the girls up to the age of seven or eight is found with a short pant as their only dress. Worse is the condition of those daughters who are unwantedly born one after another in many a number due to desperate wish of their parents for at least one male child.

It is observed that the female children have not only to do the household works, but also have to do something for income, mostly from Beedi-rolling. Interestingly, the Beedi-worker women among the Chain are somewhat like bonded labours. They do everything for manufacture of the Beedi but the wages thereof are usually collected and spent by their male guardians the way

they like. The Chain girls and women tend to take food not in time and sometimes they even eat less or skip the eating to save food for other members of the family for the next time. Monotonous, poor menu also does not attract them to sufficient consumption of food.

The Chain has a long-cherished tradition of early marriage, especially of the girls. A popular Chain proverb goes: “*Saat mya sona, aat mya rung, lyau mya dulaaha dharike aan*” (As a bride, the girl at seven is as good as gold and at eight, copper. But if she is as old as nine years, the groom has to be searched and brought for her). Approximately, 50% of the girls have to enter into wedlock at the age of 13-15, 30% at 16-17, 16% at 18-19 and the rest beyond 19. More than one quarter of girls are married to men who are ten or more years older. A formal marriage or union before 18 years of age is defined by UNICEF as child marriage. The causes of child marriage among the Chains are as follows: A girl child is generally considered to be a burden, which is to be removed off by getting her married as early as possible. The demand for a younger bride creates an incentive for her early marriage. If the girl is young, she is thought to have a blooming grace in her look and have no opinion of her own. Hence, one has to pay lower dowry in her marriage, though giving or receiving dowry is a crime under the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. Safety of the girl child from sexual violence, pre-marital sex or deviation off the track after reaching teenage as well as inability of the parents to guarantee such safety is yet another cause. Lack of education and awareness about the consequences of the child marriage, poor implementation of the law and lack of will and action on the part of the administration also contributes to the continuation of child marriage. Anyway, child marriage denies the girl her basic rights to childhood, good health, nutrition, education and freedom from abuse and exploitation. It also causes her to lead the family life regardless of her likes and dislikes. Child Marriage results in early motherhood that leads to the girls’ suffering of health complications, to the baby’s low birth weight, malnutrition, and late physical and cognitive development as well as occasional infant mortality and maternal mortality. Young Chain girls in a child marriage experience more domestic violence in their marriages as opposed to older women.

Child marriage may be prevented by taking the following steps: (i) To create awareness on the consequences of Child marriage on overall development of girl child; (ii) to create awareness among the public about the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 by conducting workshops and awareness camps; to mobilize parents, children, teachers and village health care workers against child marriage. (iii) Arming the girls with necessary information while simultaneously educating the community and creating an environment in which alternatives to early marriage are supported; (iv) There must be Zero tolerance of the Government towards any incidence of Child Marriage and the total commitment of the Government to prohibit and prevent this rampant social evil by implementing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006. Child Marriage Prohibition officers should be appointed at State, District, sub-division and block levels; (v) Persons who are involved in any way in child marriage must be punished under the law; (vi) Organizations like International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), CARE and Save the Children who have turned their attention to the issue as well as the community organizations should come forward to address this problem of the Chain. (vii) To eradicate female child marriage, the state should create an action plan that includes keeping girls in school and expanding their economic opportunities to ensure that marriage is not seen as the only option, particularly for poor families. *Apni Beti, Apna Dhan* (“Our Daughter, Our Wealth”) programme should be implemented among the Chains. It is one of the first “conditional cash transfer” programs the Indian government implemented specifically to delay girls’ marriages and change how parents view their daughters. It’s an incentive to encourage parents to value their daughters.

Because of early marriages and lack of awareness in birth control, almost all the female teens among the Chain are pregnant by age 19.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the girls are subjected to pregnancy or child-bearing at regular intervals but they are not given any special care, sufficient nutritious food or rest from the routine family work even during those critical periods. As a result, more than 80 per cent of the pregnant women are anaemic.<sup>24</sup> The net result is that most of the Chain girls and women are under-nourished and least conscious and therefore, cannot manage the family and bring up the children in desired way.

Education is one of the most important pre-requisites for women’s development. According to scholars, the major factor to improve the social and economic status of women is literacy. However, the female literacy rate among the Chain is much, much less than that of the male literacy. The Chain girls might get admitted in the schools but usually required to subordinate their studies to work at home and give up education to get married early. Parents think higher education will undermine her ability to be a traditional wife and mother. Both child marriage and child labour, mostly as Beedi-workers, discourage girls’ education. Being a *young mother* also affect one’s education. Teen mothers are more likely to drop out of high school.<sup>25</sup> The correlation between earlier childbearing and failure to complete high school reduces career opportunities for many young women.<sup>26</sup> Daughters born to adolescent parents are more likely to become teen mothers themselves.<sup>27</sup> It is observed that the younger sisters of teen mothers were less likely to emphasize the importance of education and employment and more likely to accept human sexual behavior, parenting, and marriage at younger ages. Under the circumstances, it is imperative to create awareness among the Chain that if the girls are given proper education, they can not only be as good as the sons fulfilling the expectations of the parents but also be capable of making their own family life happy. The Govt. has to establish more school and colleges exclusively for the girls within reachable distance. Under the Non-Formal Education programme (NFE), more NFE centres should be set up and 40% of the centres are to be exclusively reserved for females. Education up to class XII may be made compulsory for the girls, giving their needy fellows all the necessary things like dresses, books, cycles, etc. Barriers to female education like inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities), shortage of female teachers and gender bias in the curriculum (female characters being depicted as weak and helpless) are also to be removed. Child Protection committees may be set up in villages to discuss children’s right to education and the harm caused by child labour and child marriage.

Domestic violence in India is endemic and widespread predominantly against women. Around 70% of women in India are victims of domestic violence, while among the Chain it is over 90%. Child marriage, lack of education, traditional concept of women being a free labor in the family, tolerance to this violence in apprehension of broken marriage, etc are the factors behind this phenomenon. However, this all occurs despite the fact that women in India are legally protected from domestic abuse under the



Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Without proper education of the girls, prevention of child marriage, change of the patriarchal mentality of undervaluing the girls, interference of community -, women organizations and the Government, this inhuman menace is to go on unabated.

#### **16. Scheduled Caste Category**

The Chains have been given the status of scheduled caste only in four districts (Malda, Murshidabad, South Dinajpur and Nadia) out of nineteen districts in West Bengal. This constitutional privilege can play an important role in the development of the Chain. However, most of the members of the community are still not in receipt of S.C. certificates for reasons such as discouraging administrative outlook, lack of consciousness among people about the benefits of the reserved category, lack of sustained initiative of the community and other organizations in this direction, etc. Even the S.C. certificate-holders also are not in a position to avail of the same due to lack of knowledge about their entitlement. As ameliorative measures, special camp should be organized by the Govt. in the Chain-dominated areas to ease and expedite the process of issuing certificate. Awareness camp should also be launched at the Government and N.G.O. level to make people knowledgeable about various types of facilities for the S.C.

#### **17. Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment is an important factor for development of a backward community. However, the Chains are far, far away from this. The Chain population in West Bengal is about 25 lakhs and a few constituencies of the State Legislative Assembly in the districts of Malda and Murshidabad are considerably populated by the Chain voters. In the last 65 years after India's independence in 1947, neither the ruling party nor the main opposition party ever fielded any candidate from this community in the parliamentary election as well as in the Assembly election; the only exception was the Manikchak Assembly constituency which could send a Chain member of a particular political party to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly four times in the last four decades. In the last assembly election of 2011, no Chain candidate was given nomination by any of the above-mentioned parties and consequently there is no Member at present in the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal, belonging to this community. Very recently a few of the Chains are coming to power in 3-tier Panchayet due to seat-reservation for the SCs, but none of them has ever been elevated to the post of Zilla Sabhadhipati or Sahakari Sabhadhipati in last four decades. It is evident that being microscopic in number in the elected body as well as of no weight in local politics, they have never been in a position to reach any decision-making position at sub-divisional, district or national level, which is held by power elite mostly hailing from the traditional upper classes. Anyway, the problems of the Chain community never get highlighted on the proper forum and proper actions, therefore, not taken. It is worth mentioning that there has never been shortage of deserving candidates in this community with the same qualification and experience as was the case for the winning candidates till now. However, they could not make a little mark in electoral politics as they could never present themselves as an organized vote bank, gain confidence to reach their voices to the authorities concerned and bring about a workable, communal unity on the issues of common interest and as they kept remaining divided and engaged in intra-communal disharmony because of lack of education and consciousness as well as invisible hands of the vested interest.

In order to secure political participation and adequate representation of the Chains in the elected Government bodies, the community itself has to take the proper initiatives. They have to take much more active and sustained interest in party politics and area development activities with an aim to reach the leadership position. The enlightened section of the community should sit together keeping aside their narrow, personal differences and interests and chalk out the practicable strategies for solution of burning problems of the community and for playing a decisive role in electoral politics. If S.C. certificates are issued to most of the deserving members of the community, a few constituencies are likely to be earmarked as SC constituencies and this may offer the Chain as the numerically dominant community an opportunity of party nomination in election. The community organizations should come forward to create awareness among their members about the factors responsible for their highly inadequate representation in the central and state legislature and keep impressing upon the political parties to seriously and effectively think about the electoral prospect of the Chain community.

#### **18. Moral Standard**

There has been a remarkable, negative change in moral standard of the Chains over the years. The practice of stealing, which was a very rare phenomenon among the Chains, has alarmingly increased, especially among the women and children of poor families. Equally rare was alcoholism to which are now addicted more than 60% of the Chains in rural areas. Even a number of women do not hesitate to join with their male family members in alcoholic drink, a phenomenon which was once more than unthinkable in such a traditionally conservative society as the Chains. Gambling has also gripped much wider section of the society. This sometimes leads to stealing and not so unoften even in one's own family in addition to occasional torture of wives for money of gambling. In the past, the Chain women and girls got never engaged in earning money excepting under unavoidable circumstances. But now they are an important pillar of family income especially as Beedi-rollers, but contradictorily not the decision-maker as before even on the question of her own earning. The tradition of domestic violence against women hasn't minimized even a little bit. Elopement was once regarded as the greatest dis-reputation for the family and the clan, even for the whole village. It is now quite common, bringing no such lasting stigma in the society and rather relieving the dowry-burdened parents instead. Many of the male members whose predecessors once took pride in their industriousness and duty-bound commitment to the family, now idle away their time in the tea-stalls, leaving the womenfolk at home for both for income and household work. Bride-price was the time-honoured custom in the Chain society even a few decades ago. Now to them, groom's price is as good as the capital for the marriage as well as for the personal luxury items. Parents are least bothered today about the wrong-doings of their kids. If anyone point out to such things, it is likely to invite quarrels and counter-allegation against him/her

who might have wanted to correct the child's unacceptable behavior and practices. Many of the Chains, even the educated one, could be purchased on money or wine for doing something morally not permissible. The more the Chains have become economically disadvantaged, the more they have morally degraded.

### 19. Conclusion

The Chain is one of the indigenous communities in India that could not adapt well to the changes that the new independence as well as modern science and technology brought in the country. Migrating from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar long back, they have lived in West Bengal from generation to generation but could not join the mainstream of the land due to long geographical and cultural isolation. Chain population went on increasing, so also did the necessities. On the other hand, land ceiling was introduced and the remaining land kept fragmenting among the newer members; or it was sold to meet other various costs or lost in river erosion. By natural process, family costs were gradually diversifying and multiplying to an enormous extent. Though dispossessed of land, the Chain could not make any remarkable shift to non-farming jobs and did not, therefore, migrate to other places with better job opportunities and infrastructure of better living. With no change in traditional concept of occupation and habitation, serious interest could not grow in education too. With family income lowering and population increasing, we find a gradual, shift to wage-labour and participation of women and child in work for income. Further, lagging behind in education for poverty and geographical remoteness, tradition of child marriage and undervaluing of girl children went uninterrupted. Failure to emerge as a bargaining vote-bank resulted in lack of political empowerment and kept them way from decision-making position. No community organization came into being that could think of and lead towards total development of the community and chalk out the necessary programmes. No social reformer of clear development vision and unifying leadership capability has ever flourished in the community, which is ill-famed for jealousy and back-biting. All this combined to plunge the community into more and more backwardness. They are gradually lagging behind not only materially, but also culturally as they are on the verge of losing their ethnic identity with gradual extinction of their own language, rich oral literature, musical and theatrical tradition, handicrafts, social values and religious belief and practices as well as with complete beggarly surrender to the local great traditions.

To bring about the desired development of the community, planned and committed steps on part of the Governments and the NGOs as well as socio-political movement is a must. The people have to be made aware of what a developed life is, what is there in themselves to make it a reality, what good they should learn from other developed community and what more they are entitled to from the state and others in this direction. India still being a caste-dominated and caste-centric society, the onus first rests on the intellectual, educated and conscious sections of the community because they know the community's problems and prospects much better and are likely to be accepted to the people more easily and respectfully. But this galaxy of ethnic stars have not only to keep aside their narrow personal interests and join hands in a sustained, concerted effort to make people development-conscious, but also carry on movements to pressurize the government and other agencies to give whatever the Chains deserve to enjoy. No one is expected to give someone his due out of his conscience and sense of duty. Here lies the pressing necessity of movement for fulfillment of one's own rights and privileges. Besides, the Govt. should make necessary provisions for safeguarding the rights and special interests of the Chain in order to lift them up to the level of general mass of the country. The act and orders should have two groups--(a) Protective measures and. (b) Ameliorative or concessional measures. The Governments must have also to ensure that the benefits of its developmental activities are reaching to all the deserving members and sections of the society in the way and to the extent it ought to be. There must be total commitment of the Government to implement the existing acts relating to Child labour, Child Marriage, Dowry Prohibition, Domestic violence against women, privileges of the Scheduled Caste category, etc. There should be available to the Chain sources of communication such as radio, television, microwave systems, printing press, newspaper, which plays a great role in disseminating the information quickly as well as effectively. The NGOs and higher educational institutes have also very important roles to play in identifying problems and prospects of development of the Chain community, highlighting the same on the proper forum and putting into reality whatever is possible for them. Only the persistent and intensive efforts of all concerned can usher in the dawn of actual and total development of a highly undeveloped community like the Chains.

### 20. References

1. The Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are two groups of historically-disadvantaged people recognized in the Constitution of India. They comprise about 16.6 percent and 8.6 percent, respectively, of India's population. Since independence, the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (the three categories combined constitute about 60 percent of India's population) were given reservation in India to improve their well-being.
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2. James Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (London: Harrison and Sons, St. Martin's Lane, 1883), p. 250.
3. H.H. Risley, H.H., *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol. I* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press. Reprint, Calcutta, 1891), p. 166.
4. F.H. Buchanan, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India, Vol. I* (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1838), p. 173.
5. James Wise, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
6. *Ibid.*

7. Patrick Carnegy, Notes on the Races, Tribes and Castes Inhabiting the Province of Avadh, Lucknow, Printed at the Oudh government Press, 1868), 94 pages.
8. Ibid.
9. E.A., Reade, Notes on Inferior Castes, & c, in the North West Provinces (1857), p. 39. Mr. Reade was the Commissioner of the Benares Division and later Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces.
10. G.F. Magrath, Memorandum on the Tribes and Castes of Behar, published in the Bengal Census Report of 1872.
11. W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. IX, p. 56.
12. K.S. Sing, People of India: West Bengal, Vol. XXXXIII, Part I (Calcutta: Seagul Books (Anthropological Survey of India) 2008), p. 303.
13. G.E. Lambourn, Bengal District Gazetteers: Malda (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1918), p. 31.
14. In Hindu society, the term **gotra** means clan. It broadly refers to people who are descendants in an unbroken male line from a common male ancestor.
15. Wise, op. cit., p. 251.
16. Mandal, Sunil Chandra, Paschim Banger Chain Samajer Bhasha, Sahitya o Sanskriti (Calcutta: Swadesh Charcha Kendra, 2001), p. 118).
17. Ibid, p. 19.
18. Ibid, pp. 12-13.
19. Dadan Labourer means a person recruited on the basis of a contract (either express or implied) for doing any skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual work outside the State.
20. Daal is a ready source of proteins for a balanced diet containing little or no meat.
21. Dish of leftover rice soaked in water to prevent spoiling generally served with salt, onion and Chili.
22. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indira\\_Awaas\\_Yojana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indira_Awaas_Yojana).
23. Pregnancy in a female under the age of 20 when the pregnancy ends is known as Teenage pregnancy, which is identified as a social problem.
24. In West Bengal, teenage mothers between 15–19 years old were more likely to have anemia, preterm delivery, and low birth weight than mothers between 20–24 years old \*(Banerjee, B.; Pandey, G.; Dutt, D.; Sengupta, B.; Mondal, M.; Deb, S. (2009). Teenage Pregnancy: A Socially Inflicted Health Hazard." Indian Journal of Community Medicine 34 (3): 227–231).
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26. Ibid.
27. Ibid; Furstenberg FF, Levine JA, Brooks-Gunn J (1990)." The Children of teenage mothers: patterns of early childbearing in two generations." Fam Plann Perspect 22 (2): 54–61)