



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)
A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal
ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)
Volume-II, Issue-III, November 2015, Page No. 263-271
Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711
Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

An inquiry into the demography of Jangal Mahal as a source of underdevelopment of the region

Koushik Dan

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Economics, Jhargram Raj College, Jhargram, West Bengal, India

Abstract

One of the least developed regions of West Bengal, a state of India, is Jangal Mahal. Among various factors responsible for its underdevelopment or anachronism the present paper deals with some of the important demographic character of the region. Here rural-urban population distribution, categorical distribution and gender wise distributions has been highlighted. After detailed inquiring it is seen that tribal and so called lower class dominance of population of the area may have some bearing on its anachronism.

Key Words: Jangal Mahal, underdevelopment, anachronism, demography, urbanisation, gender.

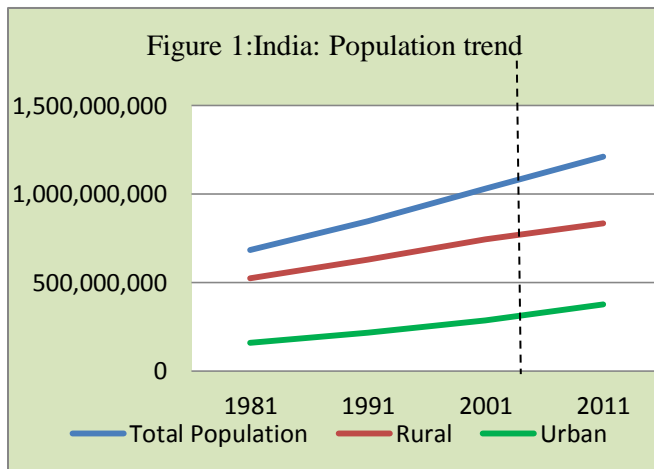
1. Introduction: The state of West Bengal in India exhibits considerable amount of heterogeneity as far as intra-regional development is concerned. Among various underdeveloped pockets of the state one of the least developed regions is Jangal Mahal. Though there is no official recognition, the forest and hill based areas of districts of Paschim Medinipur, Bankura and Puruliya of West Bengal is presently known as Jangal Mahal.

The state of development or anachronism¹ of any region is largely influenced by its demographic character. Demography includes various areas of research such as study of population, its growth, distribution, age and gender wise composition of population and family formation, problems related to urbanisation and migration and others. With the help of secondary data and primary survey here I am going to enquire into the demographic character of the region on its underdevelopment.

¹ Anachronism of any community refers to practicing such custom and styles that are virtually obsolete in present. That is when a region or community exhibits characteristics that are presently obsolete then the term; anachronism may be assigned to them.

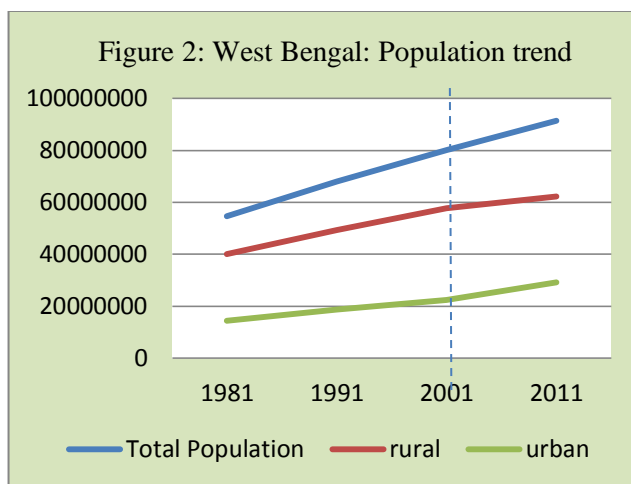
2. Comparison of rural urban distribution of population of Jangal Mahal²:

To start with let us first look into rural urban population shift of India. Indian population has maintained its steady growth path in the last 30 years³. Rural and urban populations are also showing rising trend. Up to 2001, trend lines for rural and urban population are roughly parallel to each other. After that it is seen that growth rate of rural population is slightly decreasing and that of urban population, it is slightly increasing. From the diagram it seems that India is gradually shifting towards urbanisation and the pace of it has increased since 2001.



Source: Census of India

Unlike national trend up to 2001, growth rate of rural population was slightly higher than that of urban in West Bengal but after 2001 growth of rural population has been tending towards stationary state and as a result urban population is experiencing considerable increase.



Source: Census of India

2

1. Population										
Year	India		West Bengal		Bankura		Paschim Medinipur		Puruliya	
	Rural	Urban	rural	urban	Rural	urban	Rural	urban	rural	Urban
1981	523866550	159462547	40134000	14447000	2193568	181247	...	...	1688736	167018
1991	628691676	217611012	49370364	18707601	2572587	232478	...	...	2014571	210006
2001	742617747	286119689	57748946	22427251	2957447	235248	....	....	2881090	255426
2011	833087662	377105760	62213676	29134060	3295613	300679	5228308	714992	2554584	373381

³ (i) 1981 Census was not conducted in Assam, interpolated figures for Assam was included in total population figure of India. (ii) No census was held in 1991 in Jammu & Kashmir. The projected figure of Jammu and Kashmir was included in all India censuses.

This is however not a unique case for India. In 2000, in Asia, Africa and in Latin America a jump is observed in the percentage of population residing in urban areas. The incidence was well projected by United Nations⁴ in 1993. Up to 1990 most developed countries and other developing countries maintained a steady state of growth but in the next two decades developing countries has been superseding developed countries with respect to the urban population growth.

Table 1: Percentage of population residing in urban areas

	1980	1990	2000	2010
World	39.4	43.1	47.6	52.8
Developed Countries	70.2	72.7	75.8	79.1
Asia	26.2	31.2	37.1	43.8
Africa	27.3	32	37.6	44.2
Latin America	65.0	71.5	76.6	80.4

Source: World urbanisation prospect, UN

Now let us turn our attention towards urbanisation trends that has been observed in Jangal Mahal. In doing so a problem is encountered in examining rural-urban population trend in Jangal Mahal. At present we know that the area of Jangal Mahal of west Bengal is known to compose of three districts of Bankura, Puruliya and Paschim Medinipur. But the district of Paschim Medinipur was created in 2002 from the erstwhile Medinipur. So, at least, up to 2002 we cannot find population data for the district separately from Census. For simplicity here I take population data of Bankura and of Puruliya as a representative of population data of Jangal Mahal up to 2002.

The above mentioned three districts are mainly composed of rural areas. According to 2011 census more than 87 % of the population of these districts reside in rural areas. In 2001 the ratio was even higher. The proportion is significantly higher than State as well as National level⁵. Apart from rural concentration these districts are largely inhabited by Tribes, scheduled castes and backward communities. For instance in Jhargram subdivision, scheduled tribes form 31 percent and scheduled castes 20 percent of the population. Among the other caste-groups, there are communities like Mahato, Kumbhar, Teli, Tanti, Bagal, Raju, Khandayet, Tambuli etc. The Mahatos constitute the largest caste group. It seems that in Jhargram and Puruliya, they form one fourth of the total population.

Among the tribes there are Santals, Mundas, Mahali, Lodha, Sabar and others. Of them Santals are the largest communities. Among the Scheduled castes there are Bagdi, Jele, Mal Dom, Bauri and others.

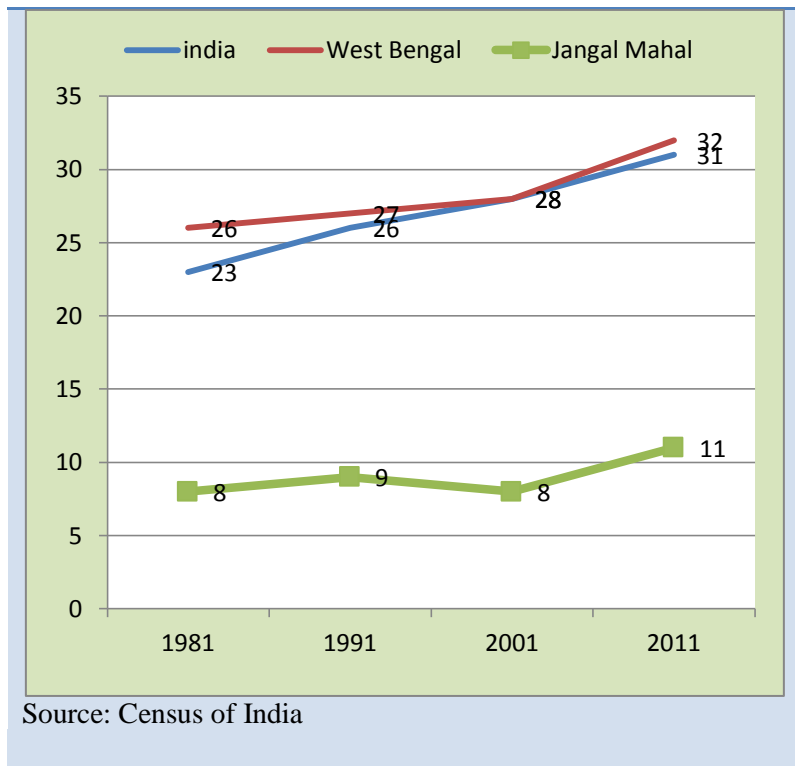
Among other backward classes Mahatos are the largest community.

⁴ World Urbanisation Prospects- The 1992 Revision, UN, New York

⁵ According to Census 2011 in West Bengal and in India respectively 68.11% and 68.84% resided in rural areas

The graph represents percentage of urban population out of respective total population of India, west Bengal and Jangal Mahal respectively. The graph clearly shows that compared to the country and the state, proportion of population residing in urban areas is much less in Jangal Mahal. In the country and in state during 1981 around one fourth of the respective population resided in urban areas. The proportion has gradually increased to one third in 2011. This urbanisation trend is quite significant and comparable to the global trend. But when we look towards Jangal Mahal the picture is found to be entirely different. In 1981 only 8% of population of Jangal Mahal were resident of urban areas. The proportion has slightly increased to 11% in 2011. This indicates that Jangal Mahal is far from the process of urbanisation as has been seen elsewhere. So the area is mostly rural and 90% of the population of the area is residing in those areas.

Figure 3: Proportion of Urban population in respective total population: India, West Bengal and Jangal Mahal



In 1981 only 8% of population of Jangal Mahal were resident of urban areas. The proportion has slightly increased to 11% in 2011. This indicates that Jangal Mahal is far from the process of urbanisation as has been seen elsewhere. So the area is mostly rural and 90% of the population of the area is residing in those areas.

Rural living of most of the population is however not indicative to underdevelopment. In modern approach, if inhabitants though residing in rural areas enjoy basic needs like gainful employment, food, health care, freedom etc. at reasonable price then the area are regarded as developed. But in India dualistic structure is seen everywhere. Basic needs are found to be scarce in rural areas where as these are relatively abundant in urban parts. There are areas where both rural and urbanised features are seen in India. These areas are now known as ‘Rurban’ and not all but some basic facilities are available in these areas. Villages of Jangal Mahal cannot however be categorised even as rurban. Moreover there is acute problem of communication of this area. Hence rural living, particularly in this part may contribute to the incidence of anachronism.

3. Category wise distribution of population: These districts are largely inhabited by Tribes, scheduled castes and backward communities. As per 2001 Census Scheduled Caste (SC) population constitutes 23.02% of the total population of the State of West Bengal. In the district wise distribution of SC population it is seen that the highest representation of SC population is in the district of Cooch Behar (50.11%) followed by Jalpaiguri and South 24-Parganas. The other districts having high concentration of Scheduled Caste population are Bankura, Nadia and Birbhum.

In the state, the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population constitutes 5.51% of total population. Due to low growth rate, the proportion of ST population reduces from 5.59% during 1991 to 5.51%. From the district wise distribution of ST population it can be seen that the highest representation of ST is in the district of Paschim Medinipur (17.52%) followed by Jalpaiguri (14.56) and Puruliya (10.52%). Bankura has also considerable representation of ST population.

From the table (Table: 2) it is seen that according to census 2011, compared to all India level both West Bengal and Jangal Mahal are the home of relatively far more numbers of Scheduled Caste population. In this respect the area of Jangal Mahal maintains parity with the state.

In contrast it is seen that with respect to the country (8.2%) there are comparatively less number of ST population in the state of West Bengal (6.0%). Jangal Mahal is however found to be the home of relatively much more number of ST populations compared to both national and state level. As we have found earlier that within this area there has been high concentration of STs in the districts of Paschim Medinipur and Puruliya.

	% of SC population in respective total population	% of ST population in respective total population
India	16.2	8.2
West Bengal	23.5	6.0
Jangal Mahal	22.0	15.0

Source: Census of India 2011

Apart from SC and ST population Jangal Mahal is the home of considerable number of Other Backward Classes (OBC) population. There is however ambiguity regarding actual number of OBCs residing in Jangal Mahal. Unfortunately and purely because of election politics the data of Caste census has not been made public. There might have been fear among the politicians that revealed data may instigate OBCs to demand for higher representation at the legislature⁶. Moreover the condition of economic backwardness may not be found to be fulfilled for various caste groups within OBC in our country.

The survey⁷ conducted in the area across 30 villages has revealed some of the important demographic features of villages of Jangal Mahal. It is found that most of the population in rural area of Jangal Mahal belongs to ST, SC and OBC-B category. These sections of rural population belong to economically weaker section.

Among the tribes there are Santal, Munda, Mahali, Lodha, Sabar and others. Of them Santals are the largest community. Among the Scheduled castes there are Bagdi, Jele, Mal, Dom, Bauri and others. A few among them are fortunate enough to get organised nonagricultural jobs. Others depend only on agriculture and petty agriculture related jobs.

In the Jhargram subdivision of the district of Paschim Medinipur scheduled tribes form 31 per cent and scheduled castes form 20 per cent of the population. Among the other caste-groups, there are communities like Mahato, Kumbhar, Teli, Tanti, Bagal, Raju, Khandayet, Tambuli etc. The Mahatos constitute the largest caste group.

⁶ To estimate number of OBCs in the country, from the 1931 census data the Mandal commission extrapolated that OBCs were 52 per cent of the population. If they demand for higher representation then that would result in the shrinking of opportunity for upper castes.

⁷ The survey was an inclusive part of a broader research conducted by the present author on the Anachronism of Jangal Mahal.

Mahatos form a special caste group. Mahatos call themselves as 'Kurmikshatriya' and their ancestors were mainly nomadic professional soldiers. As far as their physical appearance, culture, language there have been high resemblance with other tribes of the region but the interesting fact is that up to 1931 this community was considered as tribe but according to tribal anthropologists no such list was existed before independence. There has been confusion and debate among anthropologists regarding considering Kurmis as tribe or not. According to some, Kurmis use to speak a mixed language, known as 'Kurmal' which is composed of Bengali, Hindi, Oriya and Majhi. On the other hand tribes speak their distinct languages.⁸ Some anthropologists emphasised on resemblance of superficial physiological features of kurmis to tribes.⁹ Kurmi community is largely found in other Indian states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. During peace time the community use to cultivate lands allotted by landlords. After independence with the abolition of zamindari they got ownership of land in most of the occasion. As this community identifies themselves as 'kshatriya', the objection of enlisting them in Scheduled Tribe came from the community itself. Finally considering poor economic conditions of most of the Kurmis, Backward Classes Welfare Department of Govt. of West Bengal enlisted them into OBC category in 19th October, 1994. In the central list of 1996 Kurmis are also enlisted in OBC category. Later with a notification of 24/09/2010 gov. of West Bengal¹⁰ further classified Other Backward classes in two categories, namely, More Backward (OBC A) and Backward (OBC B). Most of the Muslim Backward communities fall in first category and Kurmi along with other Hindu backward classes fall in OBC B category.

4. Gender wise distribution of population of Jangal Mahal:

Attitude towards women may be considered as one of the indicators of progress of any society. In ancient period men and women both enjoyed equal rights. They had their own jobs and a natural division of labour maintained the sustainability of society. In the later Vedic period, around from, 500 BC, during ages of 'Smriti' some dictates were imposed on women. But that was not so

Year	Sex ratio	Year	Sex ratio
1901	972	1961	941
1911	964	1971	930
1921	955	1981	934
1931	950	1991	927
1941	945	2001	933
1951	946	2011	940

Source: Census of India 1991

prominent until the emergence of 'Middle ages'. Gender disparity was almost inexistent until then. The ill cultural stagnation of 'Middle age' had brought various complexities in Indian societies. It was dictated during this phase that women should be kept under the control of men in their all phases of life. Among various oppressive customs one of the most fatal was considering birth of girl child as curse. Since

then women were neglected as well as looked down socially, economically and politically. Women were forced to confine themselves under the veil of 'Pardah' and forced to alienate from economic and political activities. Since then incidence of infanticide has become alarming in India. This phenomenon was not however unique for India. In China, Georgia, Armenia, and in various countries such cruel practice was observed since historical ages. In this context however

⁸ Salkhan Murmu, Santali Bhasa Morcha

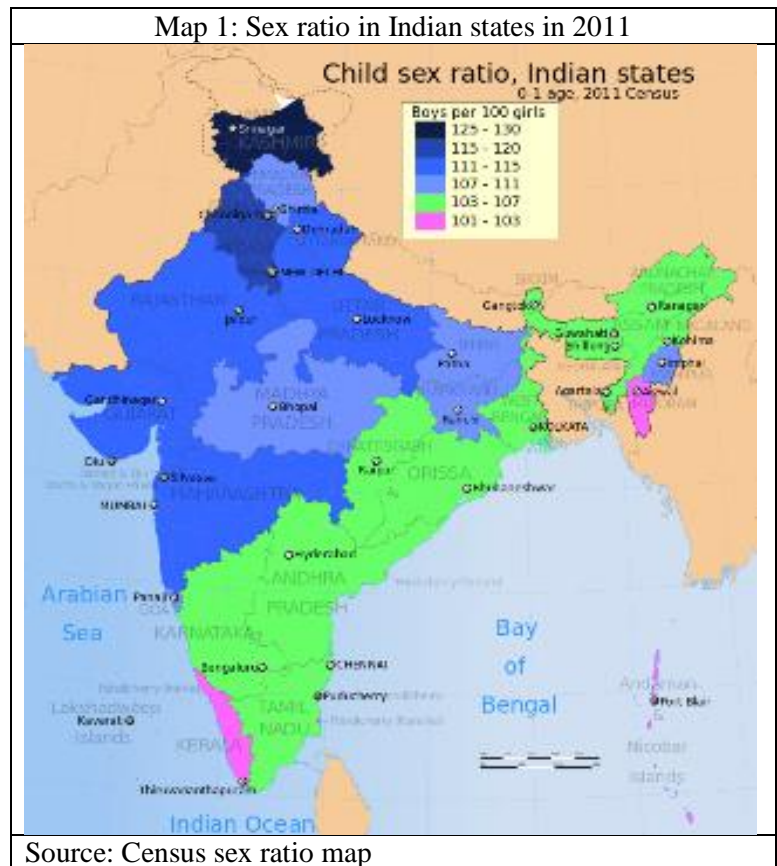
⁹ Risley, H. H. (1851-1911); The Imperial Gazetteer of India

¹⁰ Notification no. 6309-BCW/MR-84/10, Dated: 24.09.2010.; Backward Classes Welfare Department, Govt. of West Bengal.

unavailability of evidences is the main problem before the researchers. With the emergence of enlightenment wave of 19th century such practice was slightly got shaded. After independence it was expected that attitude towards women would improve but it is seen that between 1901 and 1951 sex ratio has deteriorated from 972 to 946.

After 1970 with the development of ultra sound technology it was easy to determine sex of the unborn baby and as a consequence the practice of infanticide was transformed into female foeticide. Govt. of India also supported the practice as a family planning drive. Later with against movements everywhere to stop the practice Govt. of India enacted Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PCPNDT) in 1994.

In fact during the period of planned economic development sex ratio has been continuously deteriorating in India. In 1991 it had supposed to reach its minimum of 927 per thousand. Since then the ratio is gradually improving. There exists regional disparity in sex ratio in India. Sex ratio is worse in North and North-Western states compared to Eastern and Southern states. Among Indian states the best sex ratio is found in Mizoram and in Kerala. The worst is observed in Jammu and Kashmir. From the census map of India we can see that in Eastern and southern states except Manipur sex ratio ranges between 103 and 107 per hundred women. This ratio is considered to be ideal for any society. On the other hand all the northern, western and north western states sex ratio ranges between 107 and 130.



Here a comparison is given to identify position of Jangal Mahal with all India and state level with respect to sex ratio. I have computed sex ratio of Jangal Mahal by averaging number of females per thousand of the three districts. From the table we can see that sex ratio in the state of West Bengal is found to be slightly better than the country. And in Jangal Mahal it is quite impressive compared to both state and national level. In fact 2011 level of Jangal Mahal is equal to 1921 level of the country.

	Female per thousand male
India	940
West Bengal	947
Jangal Mahal	956

Source: Census 2011

The comparatively higher sex ratio in the region may be attributed to dominance of tribal culture among the large section of inhabitants. In tribal society lower mixture of blood is observed and hence the vices of female foeticide, dowry related torture, kanyasulkam etc are less observed compared to societies dominated by, so called, and developed upper castes. Moreover these societies are mostly matriarchic which prevents the incidence of gender discrimination in large extents.

As per the survey findings it is seen that there are 753 male and 715 females across those 300 households. The gender ratio is quite conformable with the census data. Among the households head of families are mostly found to be male. Out of 300 households 274, i.e.,

Percentage of male among HoF	91%
Average age of male Head of Family	50.2
Average age of female Head of Family	57.6
Source: Survey data	

around 91% are male. Average age of these male head of family is found to be 50.2 years. On the other hand average age of female head of family is found to be 57.6 years. Both of these ages are however less than national average of life expectancy. Comparatively higher sex ratio coupled with low average life expectancy resembles itself with ethnic communities.

5. Conclusion: With all its ethnic character villages of Jangal Mahal exists. Inhabitants enjoy rural living. During survey around 93% of households responded positively about their affection towards rural living. In other parts of Bengal trend of growing urbanisation indicate that a section of villagers are increasingly shifting to neighbouring towns. But in this part, where, considerable part of population, carrying characteristic of comparatively lower mixture of blood with other groups of population, this trend is less prominent. It seems from responses of villagers that they are satisfied with their present status and are reluctant to choose urbanised life. It cannot be denied that rural living in those distant rural pockets must be accompanied with various kinds of material lacking. But still they opt for that only because of their attitude to avoid urbanised culture and to alienate themselves into an anachronistic world.

6. Acknowledgement: The Koushik Dan is grateful to University Grants Commission, Govt. of India, for the financial support as Minor Research Project grant (PHW-215/13-14).

7. References:

- 1 Bagchi, Amiya Kumar. Studies on the Economy of West Bengal since Independence; Economic & Political Weekly (Nov. 21-Dec. 4 1998) at 2975.
- 2 Banerjee, A. K. Red Ferruginous Soils of Midnapur Uplands of West Bengal by A. K. Banerjee, The Indian forester; 1975.
- 3 Bhattacharya. Ajay, "What are the cultural factors that influence social changes?" <http://www.preservearticles.com/201101183500/cultural-factors-that-influence-social-changes.html> retrieved on 13/03/2013.
- 4 Census 2001., Population, Decadal Growth Rate, Density and General Sex, Urban Rural, West Bengal / District 1991--2001
- 5 Census 2011.
- 6 Das, HariSadhan. BankuraDarpan; 1986.
- 7 Das, HariSadhan. MidnapurDarpan; 1986.
- 8 Das, HariSadhan. PuruliaDarpan; 1986.
- 9 District Human Development Report: Bankura; Development and Planning Department, Govt. Of West Bengal; 2007.

- 10 District Human Development Report: Paschim Medinipur; Development and Planning Department, Govt. Of West Bengal; 2011.
- 11 Dyson, Tim., India's Demographic Transition and its Consequences for Development; Golden Jubilee Lecture Series of the Institute of Economic Growth, Delivered at IEG on 24 March 2008
- 12 Economic Review 2011-12.
- 13 Economic Review 2011-12; Statistical Appendix; Department of statistics & programme implementation.
- 14 Gupta, Monobina. Left Politics in Bengal: time travel among bhadrolok Marxists Orient Black swan. 2010.
- 15 Hirschman, Charles., The uses of demography in development planning; reprinted for private circulation from Economic Development and Cultural Change, April, 1981
- 16 Human Development Report 2013; UNDP.
- 17 Human Development Report, West Bengal-2004.
- 18 India Brand Equity Foundation: West Bengal; November 2010.
- 19 India Human Development Report 2011, Institute of Applied Manpower Research Planning Commission, Government of India; Oxford University Press.
- 20 Lemke. J. L., Discourse, Dynamics and Social change; academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/education/jlemke/cult-dyn.htm retrieved on 23/03/2013.
- 21 O'Maley, L S S. Bengal District Gazetteer: Bankura.
- 22 O'Maley, L S S. Bengal District Gazetteer: Birbhum.
- 23 O'Maley, L S S. Bengal District Gazetteer: Midnapore.
- 24 Savyasaachi. Struggles for Adivasi Lively hood: reclaiming the foundational value of Work; EPW; August 4, 2012.
- 25 Statistical Handbook: West Bengal: 2005 & 2006; (Combined); Bureau of Applied Economics & Statistics; Government of West Bengal.
- 26 Status on land: Department of Land and Land Reforms; Government of West Bengal.
- 27 The 2011 Census Results (Provisional); India's Urban Demographic Transition, NIUA, December 2011
- 28 Towse. Ruth, A Textbook of Cultural Economics, Cambridge Univ. Press 2010.
- 29 UyiEdigin, Lambert. Role of Culture in African Development; Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences, 2010 Volume: 7 Issue: 4.
- 30 West Bengal Human Development Report 2004; Development and Planning Department, Govt. Of West Bengal.