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## **An Issue Of Social Inclusion: A Case Study Of Bediya Tribe Of A Part Of Sundarban Region In West Bengal**

**Mousumi Naskar** Assistant Professor in Geography, Acharya Prafulla Chandra College, West Bengal.

**Ranajit Sardar** Assistant Professor in Geography, Acharya Prafulla Chandra College, West Bengal.

\*corresponding author: email- [ranajitsardar1404@gmail.com](mailto:ranajitsardar1404@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

Culture and society are always dynamic in nature thanks to exposure, invention, experimentation and change in the surrounding environment of the people. Tribal societies in India are also no exception. The Case study on the Bediya Tribe is focussed in the context of stigmatisation and discrimination through three different dimensions: social, political, and economical. Traditionally tribal societies were self-sufficient: they did not feel it essential to interact with mainstream society for their social, cultural and physical existence. This very nature of tribal people kept themselves away from the rest of the society. The intervention policies particularly through education has provoked them to penetrate the mainstream culturally (example of inter-cultural marriages being on the rise) through assimilation process, economically through employment in government sectors and politically by active participation. The Sundarban Region is the study area with focus on blocks of Hingalganj and Sandeshkhali-I of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. Primary data was collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and House Hold Survey (HHS) and Secondary data based on Census of 2001 and 2011: both qualitative and quantitative methods have been applied. This tribe has been purposely chosen as it is the dominant one population wise. Now Bediyas are educated and better off economically; they are working in different Government and Non-Government sectors. They are actively participating in social organizations for furthering improvement in their society. They are commanding in political governance at local level through active participation. Social inclusion is increasing and at the same time exclusion is decreasing through such processes as revealed from the analysis of the data.

**Keywords:** Bediyas, Social Inclusion. Social Exclusion, Intervention Policies.

### **Introduction**

'Social inclusion' and 'social exclusion' are terms most widely used by politicians, social scientists and even the public. The term **'social inclusion'** originated in French social policy in the 1970s. It came into play in the 1980s' economic crisis (Benn 2000:310) when state sponsored republican tradition of solidarity was in vogue (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997:414) and by the 1990' s the term was theorized by scholars one among them being Luhmman who clarified the concept of inclusion being achieved individually (Luhmman 1990: 34) through access to the benefits and dependence of individual modes of living on them. The World Bank Group (2014) (<https://www.worldbank.org>) defined Social Inclusion as:

1. The process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society.
2. The process of improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity to take part in society.

Different countries have different social structures, some more diverse than others. Cultural diversity in India is much more calling for a myriad of policy interventions. The Bediyas of India live in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Mohdipahar of Hazaribagh District, Western India who later moved to Chotanagpur plateau of Bihar and then to Sundarban Region and settled thereafter clearing the forests in West Bengal; they are also known as Bahurupi, distributed in the districts of Medinipur, Purulia, West Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and especially in North and South 24 Parganas of Sundarban Region.

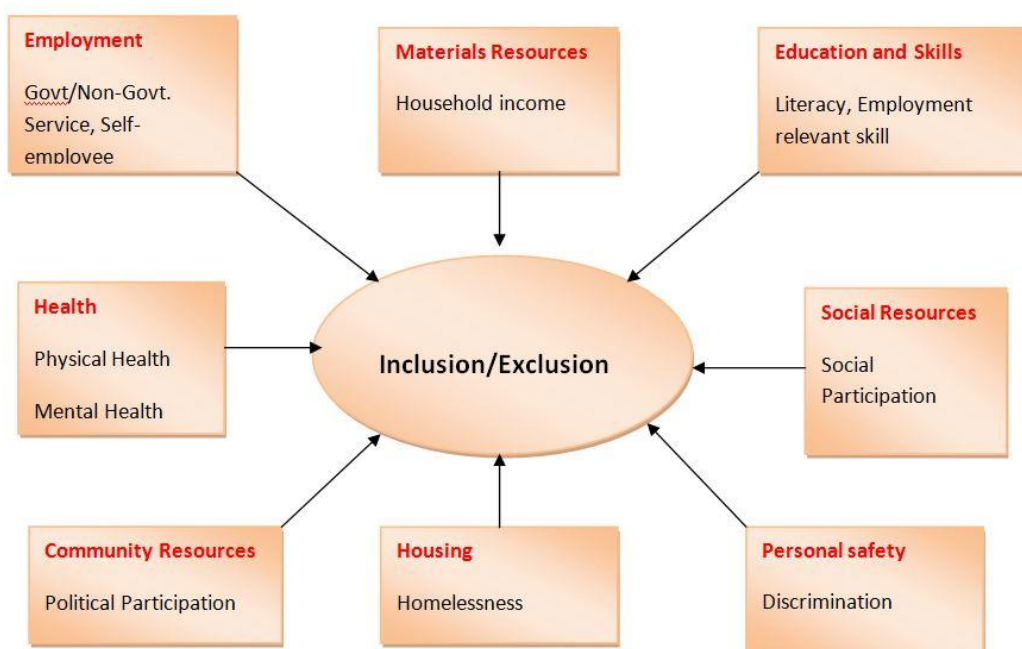
Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes (STs) as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. The essential characteristics, first laid down by the Lokur Committee (1965), for a community to be identified as Scheduled Tribes are (i) indications of primitive traits; (ii) distinctive culture; (iii) shyness of contact with the community at large; (iv) geographical isolation; and (v) backwardness. All these traits of Social exclusion were seen among the Bediyas too. Different constitutional safeguards are: (i) the right to representation, in proportion to their population in the Union and the State Assemblies, ministries and local bodies; (ii) the right to representation, in proportion to their population, in the various public services under the centre and the state and all other local authorities; (iii) the special responsibility of the state to provide funds for higher education in the country and also abroad for members of these communities; and (iv) appointment of a special officer to keep a watch over the status of the safeguards enumerated above (Saksena, 1981). Mention must be made of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who played an important role in the cause of the Scheduled Tribes in India.

### **Conceptual Background**

**Social inclusion** is the process of improving the terms on which individual and groups take in a society (i) improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of those disadvantaged

on the basis of their identity. The vision of inclusive growth, poverty reduction and bridging the gaps in society can only be achieved if there is significant improvement in the quality of governance. The Intervention Approach includes: electoral interventions, legal empowerment; budget; information; communication technology (i.e. technology interventions); natural resource management, interventions in the sphere of service delivery, etc. Electoral interventions include building new democratic spaces for citizen engagement, empowering local voices, civic culture, avoiding elite capture (i.e., manipulation by political elites), positive attitude towards government, social cohesion (transforming state-society relationship is a long-term process). Through the 73<sup>rd</sup> & 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts establishment of elected institutions of local self-government, representatives of the weaker sections have taken place. The success however, depends on involvement of these representatives in planning, implementing and supervising the delivery of these essential public services. Development aims at creating a suitable and enabling environment for promoting long, healthy and creative lives. Governance, in any society, aims to ensure this through the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority (<http://www.phileconsociety.org>). Democracy, development and governance are interrelated goals.

Ronald Labonte et al (2011) have worked on social inclusion/exclusion. They have taken various domains and their indicators regarding conceptual framework of social inclusion and exclusion. We adopted this concept and applied it in this research paper in the following way



**Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of Social Inclusion/Exclusion**

**Source:** Labonte. R et al.2011.

**Research Question Formulation:** As the tribal people in general and the Bediyas in particular have been deprived socially, politically and economically in the past, the focus is on two definite problems:

1. To know about the inclusion status of the Bediyas.
2. To study the implications with respect to inclusion

To look into these questions the techniques of multiple method of researching has been adopted:

### **Methodology**

A systematic approach to synthesize evidence based on social inclusion indicators has been adopted. Our search strategy incorporated elements of qualitative systematic reviews. Such reviews utilize findings from studies that do not necessarily meet the normal inclusion criteria for quantitative studies. Hence quantitative methods have been also used based on domains and indicators of social inclusion after Atkinson et al (2002). MINITAB.14 Version software has been used to justify the nature of inclusion through Social, Political and Economic domains (after Labonte. et al. 2011). The Social Indicators are social resources, community resources, skill, housing and personal prestige /safety. The Economic Indicators are employment, income and independence of using it, while Political Indicators incorporated freedom of movement, economic stability, decision making power and participation in society' s activities. Primary data was collected using the method of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) the group consisting of members belonging to different ages, different occupations and both male and female section of the target population. We have taken eight villages; each with fifty members in one focus group, so total target population was 400.The secondary data was collected from the Census (2001 and 2011).

### **The Study Area**

To answer the research queries for fulfilling the objectives the study area was finalized and intensively field study was done on two community development blocks (Hingalganj and Sandeshkhali-I) of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal comprising eight villages (Rupamari, Kothabari, Bishpur, Durgapu Bailani, and Dakshin Akhratala, Kalinagar, Bounia Abad, Boyarmari Abad). These villages have been purposely selected based on accessibility and demography characteristics. Both these blocks are reserved for Scheduled Tribes and/ Scheduled Castes in the Assembly constituency [always for ST in Sandeshkhali-I which has 25.94% (42,674) as tribal population] while Hingalganj ST/SC [as per population criteria has 7.30% (12,743) tribal population to total population

in 2011]. Among the plain districts maximum concentration of tribes are found in both North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas according to 2011 Census. It is noticed that tribal people of Sundarban Region have developed quite fast and that rapid change in their cultural custom in terms of social inclusion is more than that which has happened in North Bengal and plateau region of West Bengal. In this regard the Sundarban Region has been chosen as the study area.

**Table: 1 Domains and sub-domains questions related to tribal inclusion/exclusion**

Domains	Sub-Domains or Indicators	Sub-Domain related Questions
Social	Literacy	Are you literate? How far have you read?
	Social Resources, Community Resources	Do you think you are a resource in your society? Are you participating in any community work?
	Skill	Are you computer trained?
	Housing	Do you have own house? Your house is constructed by own finance or other financial support.
	Personal Prestige/Safety	Do you feel any problem regarding personal safety and security?
Economic	Employment	Are you a government employee? Are you self dependent?
	Income	Is the source regular in nature?
Political	Participation in politics.	Do you participate in local Gram Sabha meetings? Do you participate in local and assembly political meeting? Do you participate in legislative politics? Do you participate in Parliamentary politics?

## Result and Discussion

## **Social Inclusion of Bediya Tribe**

Social inclusion is the process by which people can enter the mainstream of our civic society while social exclusion describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate in social, economic, political, and cultural activities at a level considered to be normally acceptable. It is a broader concept than poverty, encompassing some characterizations of alienation and distance from mainstream society. To gauge into the state of this social inclusion/exclusion of the Bediyas study on the different schemes and strategies adopted and implemented was done which included the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) Strategy implemented since 1974-75. It is a multi-pronged strategy which includes support for education, health, sanitation, water supply, livelihood etc., and the state of West Bengal is covered under it.

The tribal groups are at different stages of social, economic and educational development and to gauge the development of the Bediyas we have taken specific social indicators of social resource, community resource and skill. On the basis of the FGD only a very few aged (> 59years) people have entered the mainstream of the society; within the young age groups of 15 to 59years it is more and it is growing. This young age group is now raising voice in favour of social inclusion. Skill is the main pillar to promote or provoke in individuals as social resources or community resources as a whole, because when individuals are coalesced with each other they turn into a big social as well as community resource. Literacy rate leads to develop the skill of people and skill is one of the indicators of social inclusion domain. Literacy rate of the Bediyas is quite high in both blocks. According to 2001 and 2011 Census literacy rate of blocks of Sandeshkhali-I and Hingalganj are 61.67% and 64.70% respectively, the corresponding all India and West Bengal figures being respectively 47.10% and 43.40% for 2001 and 58.95% and 57.93% in 2011. Male and female literacy rate of Sandeshkhali-I are 70.53% and 52.57% respectively while that of Hingalganj are 74.99% and 54.28% respectively. Hence literacy is now increasing. Therefore, with the educational skill and knowledge gained the Bediyas are uplifting.

Regarding social security, Government of India has launched several Social Security Schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), Pradhan Mantri Jivan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikash Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jana Dhan Yojana and Atal Pension Yojana (APY), etc.

The Department of Housing, Government of West Bengal launched Akanksha, Gitanjali, Amar Griha besides the Central Government's venture of schemes implemented on the basis of monthly income of the family in rupees : (i) Economically weaker section (EWS) income up to 10,000, (ii) Low income group (LIG) income between 10,001 to 15,000, (iii) Middle income group lower (MIG-L) in between 15001 to 25000, Middle income group upper (MIG-U) in between 25000 to 40000 and (iv) High income group (HIG) with income of 40000 and above. As per field survey and FGD, housing pattern has changed. One third (30%) of houses are pacca and rest are normal i.e. (mud)

kuccha. Of the 30% of pacca houses, two thirds are constructed based on funds from Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and rest with their own financial support.

Housing pattern is one of the indicators of social inclusion or exclusion. The collecting Gram Panchayet data represents that housing pattern is transforming to pucca one gradually; hence the physical quality of life is also being raised. In all the studied villages falling within the two blocks only about 5% households have got the opportunity. Rupamari village of Hingalganj block has got more benefit from both central and state housing scheme (10% households) due to priority of Panchyat Pradhan compared to the other villages. Similar is the case of Bayarmari Abad village of Sandeshkhali-I block (10% to 12% households) according to Gram Panchayat' s information. Through the Block and Gram Panchayat information, housing related beneficiaries from both government schemes increased from 3% in 2015-16 to 20 -25% households in 2018-19. Hence the Bediyas here are entering gradually into the normal societies in terms of housing; however, the share of benefit is low which testifies that still social exclusion prevails. Regarding personal prestige with regard to the practice of untouchability or using abusive words, the mainstream society is now cordial there was no discrimination felt said the respondents. This is as per their psychological feeling related to their personal safety while interacting in the public arena. This indicates socially included attitude towards them.

### Data analysis

The secondary data regarding social inclusion indicators are all strongly committed to inclusion. So also, is the primary data collected through household survey. The correlation matrix has been chosen to prove that the tribal people are penetrating into the main stream society. If p-value is  $>.05$  then people are included hence null hypothesis is true as seen in the table (Table-2)

**Table: 2 Correlation matrix table for data analysis**

Main Domains	Indicators	p-value
Social inclusion	Education	0.227
	Skill	0.405
	Community resource	0.581
	Housing	0.405
	Personal safety	0.581

Source: Data compiled from house hold survey.

Earlier tribal people depended on traditional treatment towards their health. But nowadays they have changed their medical treatment procedure due to change in medical technology and spread of awareness. About 90% of the sample of our tribal people preferred allopathic treatment, 8% Homeopathic and only 2% are still depending on tradition medicine.

### **Economic Inclusion of Bediya Tribe**

Economic Inclusion is the process by which people can participate in the common economic sector. India has recently instituted laws and schemes to support the ability of the most vulnerable to access their rights (Mehta et al 2011). These include the 2005 National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (now known as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act-MGNREGA), which obliges the state to guarantee hundred days paid employment each year to chronically poor rural households while providing sustainable infrastructure to rural areas. Some of the most important programmes relevant to employment and food security are the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) Programme, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and the Annapurna Scheme; Mid-day meal (MDM) programme and the National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS). The provision of food subsidy is through Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). The launching of National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in 2011 needs also to be mentioned as it has an impact.

Another Financial Inclusion Programme is Stand-Up India Scheme (15<sup>th</sup> August, 2015) by which people can get Bank loan between Rs 10 lakhs to Rs 1 Crore and at least one ST person can get loan from one branch in their locality. In case of non-individual enterprises at least 51% of shareholding and controlling stake should be held by either an SC/ST or women entrepreneur. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (2014), Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (2015) etc are the important Economic inclusion schemes in our country. Two percentage of Tribal people are getting these types of opportunities for economic development in our study area. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (2016) has been introduced for development of agriculture production. In this scheme, Government of India is supporting sustainable production in agricultural sector by providing financial support to farmers suffering from crop loss/damages arising out of unforeseen events and stabilizing the income of farmers to ensure their continuance in farming. About 20-25% tribal households achieved this opportunity.

The Department of Information and Cultural Affairs of West Bengal (2015) have launched a scheme (Folk Artist) for tribal people. They have made a group and each Folk artist group should have a minimum of 11 and maximum of 15 members. The male and female ratio of these groups is 2:3. In these groups, each member should be a tribe. They are performing their dance in various governmental programme and other programmes. They are getting remuneration per month of Rs 3500 per member for their



performance. In this regard, women work participation rate is greater than men. These dance groups also promote the tourism in Sundarban Region. They are also now earning the money from the public tourism sector. It is a good example of economic inclusion of Bediya tribe of Sundarban Region.

About 5% people are engaged in Government service and 15% people are engaged in Non-Governmental Service. Rest 20% people are self-employees (self help group and shop owners) and 60% people directly or indirectly are working in agricultural field. Therefore, it is clear that economic inclusion is growing in different sectors. Government service is increasing slowly among Bediya tribes but NGOs and Self-Employment is increasing at a faster rate compared to Government Sectors.

A different kind of schemes and primary data from HHS has proved that tribal people are being included through governmental interventions. With help of the binary logistic model established the financial inclusion of tribal people is shown in Table 3 where all three indicators are positively associated with economic inclusion.

**Table: 3 Binary logistic regression models for economic inclusion**

Economic inclusion	*Odds ratio	(95% *CI)	*P
<b>Indicators</b>			
Government Employee	2.310	1.04-5.15	.041
Self-dependent	4.670	2.36-9.25	.011
Income	8.979	2.31-8.25	.012

Source: Compiled based on sample data

{\*OR: odds ratio, \*CI: Confidence interval}, \*P- Hypothesis null or alternative.

### **Political Inclusion of Bediya Tribe**

Political participation includes a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the world and how it is governed, and tries to take a part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives. These activities range from developing thinking on various social issues at the individual or family level, and campaigning at the local, regional or national level, to the process of formal politics, such as voting, joining political party, or contesting in elections.

Political inclusion is the capability of all citizens to participate in making collective decisions about any matter that effect their life. Political right includes right to speak, assemble, vote, hold office. More basic right to the rule of law (to be safe from state violence and crime, to move about or to occupy public space) are broadly inclusive. Politically inclusive development should improve governance; bad governance certainly impedes development (Kurtz and Shrank 2007). It has been seen that women turnout

during India's parliamentary general elections was 65.63% compared to 67.09% turnout for men. India rank is 20<sup>th</sup> from the bottom in terms of representation of women in Parliament. As per the Government of India reservation rule 8.1% of tribes have entered India's Politics. Our Study area, women political participation (33% reservation for women) is fully absorbed. So, it is clear that there was no discrimination regarding political participation. So also, political inclusion is growing in nature: rather than being excluded. Male and female both in our study area are fully absorbed. In Hingalgunj block, 12 male and 16 female candidates are elected on the other hand in Sandeshkhali Block, 12 male and 16 female candidates are also elected through democracy of Panchyat election in 2017. One person Sukumar Mahato was elected as a member of legislative assembly (MLA) in Sandeshkhali-I block in 2016.

Therefore, if tribal people are socially and economically strong; there is no doubt concerning their political involvement. We explored how tribes directly or indirectly are involved into the political empowerment by taking variables of i) Freedom of free movement ii) Economic security and stability iii) Support by family/freedom from domination iv) Decision making in daily life and v) Participation in society activities.

### Logistic regression analysis through Binary Logistic Regression Model

**Table 3: Dimension of empowerment associated with political inclusion**

Political involvement of tribal people			
Independent variables	OR*	(95 % *CI)	P
Dimension of tribal empowerment			
Freedom for free movement	4.18	(1.42-12.31)	0.009
Economic security and stability	8.98	(1.52-53.20)	0.016
Support by family/freedom from domination	0.59	(0.12-3.03)	0.529
Decision making in daily life	15.45	(4.54-52.55)	0.001
Participation in society activities	7.73	(1.52-39.38)	0.014
	7.73	(1.52-39.38)	0.014

Source: Compiled based on sample data

{\*OR: odds ratio, \*CI: Confidence interval}

Table 3 show the binary logistic regression analysis on empowerment associated with political involvement (independent variable) with four control variables. The two factors that were significantly associated with the political participation are (i) Decision making power in daily life and (ii) economic stability. Both are highly associated with the political

participation and directly correlated with the objective. The former is more than the latter. Participation in society activities is also positively and significantly associated with the political command. Women who are not able to get support from the family and do not have freedom of movement are less associated with political participation. Sixty-Five women participants (16.25%) answered that they are politically attached at the local level. One is the Upa Pradhan (Susmita Sardar) in Bailani Gram Panchayat and her husband is secretary of Local committee in ruling party (TMC). Sanatan Sardar is the Panchayet Pradhan of Rupamari Gram Panchayet of the same party. Although this percentage is very low but it is symbol of political women empowerment or political inclusion and at the same time, they are participating in community activities (39.68%) and are aware of community activities (44.97%). Awareness of community activities such as "Birsa Munda Birth Day", celebration of "Hull Dwibas" etc.; are the efforts to keep alive their sole identity in the main stream society.

### **Conclusion**

We know that society is not static; it is always changeable. The tribal culture and their society are no exception. Changes of tribal culture will happen through social inclusion /exclusion process. Discussion of social exclusion and inclusion relates citizenship debates, particularly in terms of dichotomy between individualism and collectivism. Walker and Walker (1997: 8) mentioned of the dynamic process of being shut out from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. We have studied three basic dimension (Social, Economic and Political) and also related indicators about tribal people. There are more changes: the extent and intensity of such changes primarily depends on a society's need-based integrity to its cultural components and way of life. Accepting new culture and changing surrounding environment; tribal people are changing their society. With the positive discrimination at present, they are experiencing detribalization and identity crisis. However, this issue has not been dealt with in this paper.

The Indian village community is changing rapidly with the advent of participatory politics. Participation has been identified as the most important element in development programmes. Participation may extend to the involvement of beneficiaries in information sharing, consultation, decision making, initiating action in the programme activities, etc. It fosters individual and community empowerment, overall economic and environmental benefits, greater target population outreach, improvement in access to resources, improvement in management and organizational skills, strengthening local organizations. Equity & inclusiveness is crucial for the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of the society to have the opportunities of well-being along with the mainstream society (Basu, 2014). This is particularly so in the service delivery with a positive impact on uptake and use of services in the various sectors (e.g; in education the involvement in the management of this service has resulted in a greater enrolment rate.)

## **Recommendations**

It is the bureaucracy which should work effectively as the link between the people and their representatives. Creation of an orientation of the right type for bureaucracy is vital for the success of any decentralization process. In Panchayati Raj Institution this is crucial (D. Sundar Ram 2007(Ed) as it is the bureaucracy which translates the aspirations of the people into reality ([www.developmentfirst.org](http://www.developmentfirst.org)). Several reports such as the Annual Report of 2014-15 by the Tribal Welfare & Development now indicate weakening of institutions specifically meant for delivery of goods and services to tribal population i.e. Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA)/Integrated Tribal Development Projects/Tribal Research Institutes (TRI) and other Micro Projects. The political intrusion of non-tribal into the tribal authorities made the tribal people vulnerable to socio-economic exploitation. Thus, they adopted the strategy of entering the mainstream society for their survival and for a better quality of life by accepting jobs, education and non-traditional way of life. The study on domain showcasing that the Bediyas have adopted a mainstream way of life is a good sign. However, blending of the traditional and the modern, needs to be local specific and context specific.

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Business Standard.com august 09, 2019 Mamata Banerjee committed.