



Comparative Analysis of Habitat Quality of Different Social Groups: Case Studies from Hirbunth C.D. Block of Bankura District, West Bengal, India

Dr. Manjari Bhattacharji
Dr. Sudipta Halder
& Dr. Indranil Mondal

Abstract

The study centers on the theme of unequal distribution and access to agricultural land in a socially stratified hierarchical rural society with special reference to India. The hypothesis states that the land capability of a tribal habitat (areas with high concentration of tribal population and a tribal way of life) is inferior to that of a nontribal habitat in terms of agricultural productivity, the principal economic base of a rural society. The study tests it through analysis of distribution and ownership of different categories of agricultural land among the tribal and non tribal population of Hirbandh C.D. Block, Bankura District, West Bengal, India.

Analysis of the data in terms of the % distribution of productive agricultural land to the total land of the study units, reveal that the quality of the tribal habitat is relatively inferior to that of the SC and other than SC & ST habitats. This indicates equity in the distribution and access to the resource base. However, detailed analysis of ownership pattern of various categories of land among tribal and non tribal population in each habitat reveal that best quality of agricultural land is in possession of the non tribal population even in the traditional tribal habitats. This indirectly proves our hypothesis

because the benefits so derived are garnered by nontribal population.

Introduction

In rural India, agriculture is the principal economic activity and hence it represents the principal resource base. It generates resources to fulfill the survival needs of the people of rural areas. Therefore distribution of land in terms of its quantity and quality among people belonging to the different social strata, reflect their differential access to the principal resource base.

The relation between land quality, size of landholding and position of a person in the social hierarchy needs to be seen with reference to certain historical antecedents. The reasons for this have been very succinctly given by Subba Rao (1958:8-10). He states that this issue is closely intertwined with the impact of historical factors in the spatial distribution of the specific groups of population in India. Each wave of foreign invasion in India led to displacement of the indigenous population to geographically isolated areas with limited natural resource endowment. Areas with abundant natural resource endowment came to be occupied by the invaders, who were understandably in an advantageous position in terms of military might and resource appropriation techniques and processes. This group of population eventually occupied the higher rungs of the social hierarchy

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Dr. Manjari Bhattacharji, Associate Professor, Dept. of Geography, Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, West Bengal, Dr. Sudipta Halder, Assistant Master in Geography, Hare School, Kolkata, West Bengal, Dr. Indranil Mondal, Part Time Teacher in Geography, Suri Vidyasagar College, Suri, Birbhum, West Bengal

thereby exercising greater control and command over resource appropriation, management and distribution. They therefore became the principal decision making bodies of the polity and nation. In a nutshell, the spatial distribution of the various social groups in India shows that the people occupying the higher rungs of the social hierarchy occupy resource rich areas and those in the lower rungs occupy relatively resource scarce areas. Since land is the principal resource base of rural India, this pattern translates into a positive relation between agriculturally productive areas land and higher social class. In other words, higher the productivity of land higher is the social position of its occupants and vice versa. This is an established truth at the macro level in India. However whether this is true at the micro (village) level or not is the subject of enquiry here.

Hypothesis of the Study

In the light of the preceding discussion, the hypothesis of the present study states that land capability of a tribal habitat (areas with high concentration of tribal population and a tribal way of life) is inferior to that of a non tribal habitat in terms of agricultural productivity, the principal economic base of a rural society.

Objective

The study tests the aforesaid hypothesis through analysis of distribution and ownership of different categories of agricultural land among the tribal and non tribal population of Hirbandh C.D. Block, Bankura District, West Bengal, India.

Study Area

Six villages of the Hirbunndh C. D. Block of Bankura District, West Bengal, constitute the study area. These villages are grouped into three categories of two villages each as shown in the table 1(Fig.1).



Fig.1: Location of West Bengal

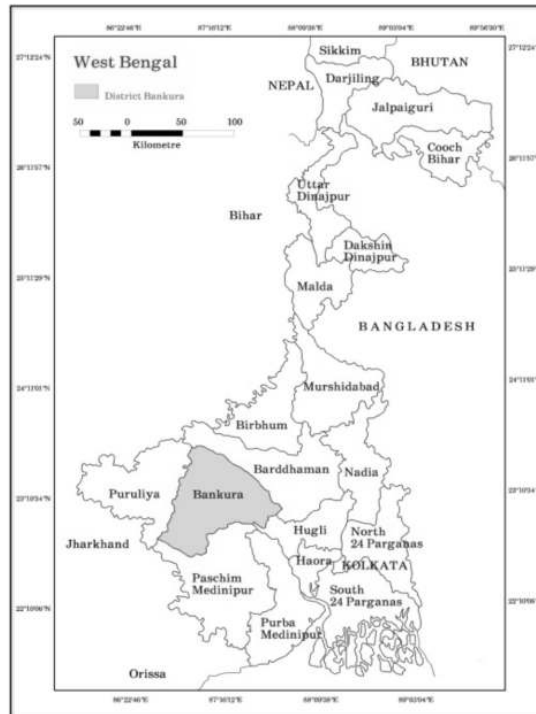


Fig-2: District Bankura in West Bengal

Table 1 Study Villages and their Categorization

Social Groups	Names of the Villages
Scheduled Tribe (ST)	Bangopalpur
	Rangamati
Scheduled Cast (SC)	Benagaria
	Khayer Kundi,
Other than ST & SC	Lachaipur
	Husumdanga

Method

The study has been carried out at three levels. At level I, Agricultural Land Classification on the basis of its quality and potentials for agricultural activities has been obtained.

At level II the % area under different categories of land to the total area of the villages dominated by each resident social group has been analysed to assess the quality of their respective habitats.

At level III the pattern of recorded ownership or possession of the different grades of agricultural land among the different social group in each study village has been analysed. This

will help to determine, differences in the level of access to the resource base, between the different social groups.

Database

Data used in the study has been obtained from the Block Land and Land Reform Office, Hirbunth C. D. Block of Bankura District, West Bengal. Agricultural land classification and criteria for classification are based on the information provided by the respective Settlement Officer.

Findings and Discussion

Scheme of Land Classification

The land in this region has been classified into six broad (Table-2) categories according to relative elevation.

Habitat Quality vis-à-vis Social Groups

Habitat in this study is coterminous with the study villages. Habitat quality has been defined in terms of the percentage distribution of the different categories of land to the total land in each study village.

Table 2 Land Classification

Land Classes	Elevation & Slope	Soil & Water Retention Capacity	Agricultural Quality	Remarks
<i>Sol</i>	Low elevation & slightly flat slope	Greater depth of soil & higher moisture retention capacity	Best Quality Grade - I	Considered Suitable for Double crop
<i>Kanali</i>	Relatively high elevation & high Slope	Fairly deep soil & fairly good moisture retention capacity	Good Quality Grade - II	Considered Suitable for Monocrop
<i>Baid</i>	High elevation & high slope	Shallow depth of soil & low moisture retention capacity	Moderately good Quality Grade - III	Considered Suitable for Monocrop
<i>Tora</i>	Very high elevation & high slope	Negligible depth & very low moisture retention capacity	Poor Quality Grade IV	Gullied land ; Considered unsuitable for cultivation
<i>Bastu</i>	-	-	-	-
Others	-	-	-	-

Source: Block Land and Land Reform Office, Hirbandh C. D. Block, Bankura District

Table-3 : Habitat Quality: Distribution of Land among the Trophic Level

Habitat under	Name of the Villages	Sol	Kanali	Baid	Tora	Bastu	Others	Land Under Govt./ Local Authority		Total								
		A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	
ST	Bangopalpur Rangamati	13.10	6.85	11.60	6.06	90.20	47.15	42.87	22.41	4.70	2.46	6.65	3.48	22.20	11.60	191.31		
		17.07	13.40	—	—	23.63	18.55	35.64	27.97	3.44	2.70	9.86	7.74	37.76	29.64	127.40		
Average % of the ST SC		10.12		3.03		32.85		25.19		2.58		5.61		20.62				
	Bena-garia Khayer Kundi	13.36	9.41	1.85	1.30	52.83	37.20	3.50	2.46	3.62	2.55	2.25	1.58	64.62	45.50	142.03		
		5.05	15.20	—	—	13.34	40.14	5.99	18.03	1.13	3.40	6.21	18.69	1.51	4.54	33.23		
Average % of the SC Other than ST & SC		12.29		0.70		38.67		10.23		2.97		10.12		25.02				
	Lac haipur	10.08	9.54	—	—	58.12	55.02	6.67	6.31	4.91	4.65	11.72	11.09	14.14	13.38	105.64		
Average % of Other than ST&SC	Husum-danga	19.30	16.30	2.93	2.47	26.91	22.72	15.77	13.32	2.02	1.71	0.68	0.57	50.81	42.91	118.42		
				12.92		1.24		38.87		9.81		3.18		5.83		28.15		

Source: Block Land and Land Reform Office, Hirbandh C. D. Block, Bankura District

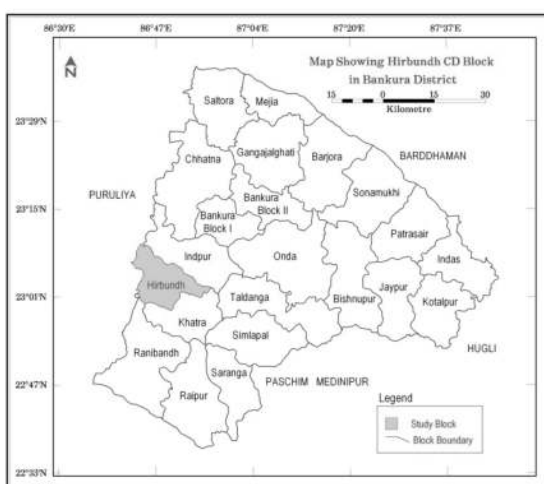


Fig.3: Hirbandh C. D. Block, Bankura District

Our hypothesis states that the lower rungs of Indian society comprising ST and SC population live in areas which are topographically less accessible, has low water availability with thin soil cover and where the land is not very fertile and rather unfit for agricultural activities. To test this empirically, the distribution of the relative proportion of the different categories of land among the habitats of the three social groups is shown in Table-3.

Table-3 has been analysed on the basis of a scheme of composite score (Table 4) to facilitate comparison of habitat quality of the three social groups under consideration. The scores range from 1 to 4, commensurate with quantity and

Table 4 Determination of Habitat Quality through Composite Score Index

Habitat under	Proportion of land in different categories to total village land (%)	Score	Categories and Quality of Agricultural land				Score	Composite
			<i>Tora</i> (Grade IV)	<i>Baid</i> (Grade III)	<i>Kanali</i> (Grade II)	<i>Sol</i> (Grade I)		
ST	0 - 10.5	1			3x1	4x1	7	18 Score
	10.5 - 20.5	2					0	
	20.5 - 30.5	3	3x1				3	
	30.5 - 40.5	4		2x4			8	
SC	0 - 10.5	1	1x1		3x1		4	20
	10.5 - 20.5	2				4x2	8	
	20.5 - 30.5	3					0	
	30.5 - 40.5	4		2x4			8	
Other than SC & ST	0 - 10.5	1	1x1		3x1		4	20
	10.5 - 20.5	2				4x2	8	
	20.5 - 30.5	3					0	
	30.5 - 40.5	4		2x4			8	

Note: Numerals are scores assigned to signify quality.

Higher scores signify better quality of habitat and greater quantity of land in particular category.

quality of land. Better the quality and higher the quantity, higher is the score and vice-versa. Accordingly, the *Sol* category of land has been assigned a score of 4 and successively lower scores are assigned to *Kanali*, *Baid* and *Tora* categories of land which are successively inferior in natural quality as far as agricultural productivity is concerned (Table 2). The quantity of land has been classified into four classes as shown in the matrices (Table 4).

On the basis of the composite score we see that the habitat quality is the same (Composite score of 20) as far as the SC dominated habitats and other than SC & ST dominated villages are concerned. With a composite score of 18 the tribal habitat quality is relatively inferior to that of the habitats of the other social groups. This conforms to our hypothesis.

However, to determine the nature of access of the different social groups to the various categories of agricultural land, a detailed analysis of the distribution of various categories of land

among the various social groups is attempted in the following section.

Caste Wise Distribution of Different Categories of Land

The distribution of different categories of land among the different caste groups as shown in Table-5.

The most significant feature emerging from the table 5 is that in the tribal habitats, the highest percentage of the best quality agricultural land, i.e. *Sol* lands are occupied by the other than ST & SC population i.e. those occupying the higher rung of the social hierarchy though nearly 100 percent *Bastu* lands are in possession of the ST. This implies that, though the population other than ST & SC are non-residents in the tribal villages they hold the largest share of best quality agricultural lands while the ST are doomed to hold the 2nd grade agricultural land or the *Baid* lands and the 4th grade land or the *Tora* lands. This feature of land distribution also implies that the population other than ST & SC indirectly

Table 5 Caste Wise Distribution of Land Holdings of the Study Villages

Habitat under	Name of the Village	Caste	Sol	Kanali	Baid	Tora	Others	Bastu						
			A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
ST	Bangopalpur	Gen	9.8	74.8	10.5	90.0	15.7	17.4	25.0	58.1	4.6	69.8	0.7	14.7
		SC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
		ST	3.3	25.2	1.2	9.9	74.5	82.6	18.0	41.9	2.0	30.2	4.0	85.3
		Total	13.1		11.6		90.2		42.9		6.7		4.7	
	Rangamati	Gen	11.2	65.5	—	—	3.3	14.0	12.1	34.0	9.9	100	—	—
		SC	—	—	—	—	0.2	0.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
		ST	5.9	34.5	—	—	20.2	85.4	23.5	66.0	—	—	3.4	100
		Total	17.1				23.6		35.6		9.9		3.4	
SC	Benagaria	Gen	2.9	21.8	—	—	11.8	22.3	0.2	5.7	0.3	14.7	1.3	35.4
		SC	9.1	68.2	1.9	100	29.9	56.5	3.3	94.3	1.8	81.8	2.3	64.7
		ST	1.3	10.0	—	—	11.2	21.2	—	—	0.1	3.6	—	—
		Total	13.4		1.9		52.8		3.5		2.3		3.6	
	Khayer Kundi	Gen	0.3	5.2	—	—	1.7	12.4	0.1	0.83	2.6	42.2	0.2	13.3
		SC	4.8	94.9	—	—	11.5	86.0	5.9	99.2	3.6	57.8	0.8	72.6
		ST	—	—	—	—	0.2	1.6	—	—	—	—	0.2	14.2
		Total	5.1				13.3		6.0		6.2		1.1	
Other than SC & ST	Lachaiapur	Gen	9.5	94.4	—	—	48.9	86.5	6.6	99.2	11.7	99.8	4.1	83.7
		SC	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.3	0.5	—	—	.02	0.4
		Total	10.1				56.5		6.6		11.7		4.9	
	Husumdanga	Gen	19.3	100	2.9	100	26.6	99.0	15.0	95.3	0.7	100	2.0	100
		SC	—	—	—	—	0.2	0.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
		ST	—	—	—	—	0.1	0.4	0.7	4.7	—	—	—	—

Note: A = Amount of land holdings in each category (Land in Hectare)

B = Percentage of land holdings in each category to the total land of the same category

Source: Source: Block Land and Land Reform Office, Hirbandh C. D. Block, Bankura District

exercise their influence in the local economy and society in the Scheduled Tribe inhabitants villages.

Concerning the SC dominated villages, the maximum portion of the lands suitable for agriculture are occupied by the SC themselves though the population other than ST & SC also are in possession of about 20% of the grade I agricultural land. The percentage of land occupied by the ST is negligible in the SC dominated villages.

Another significant observation is that in the other than ST & SC inhabited villages, 100 percent of the agricultural land and Bastu lands are occupied by the other than ST & SC themselves and the proportion of land holdings under the ST and SC are negligible in these villages. The people occupying the higher rungs of the social hierarchy are thus in effective control of the best quality agricultural land irrespective of their place of residence.

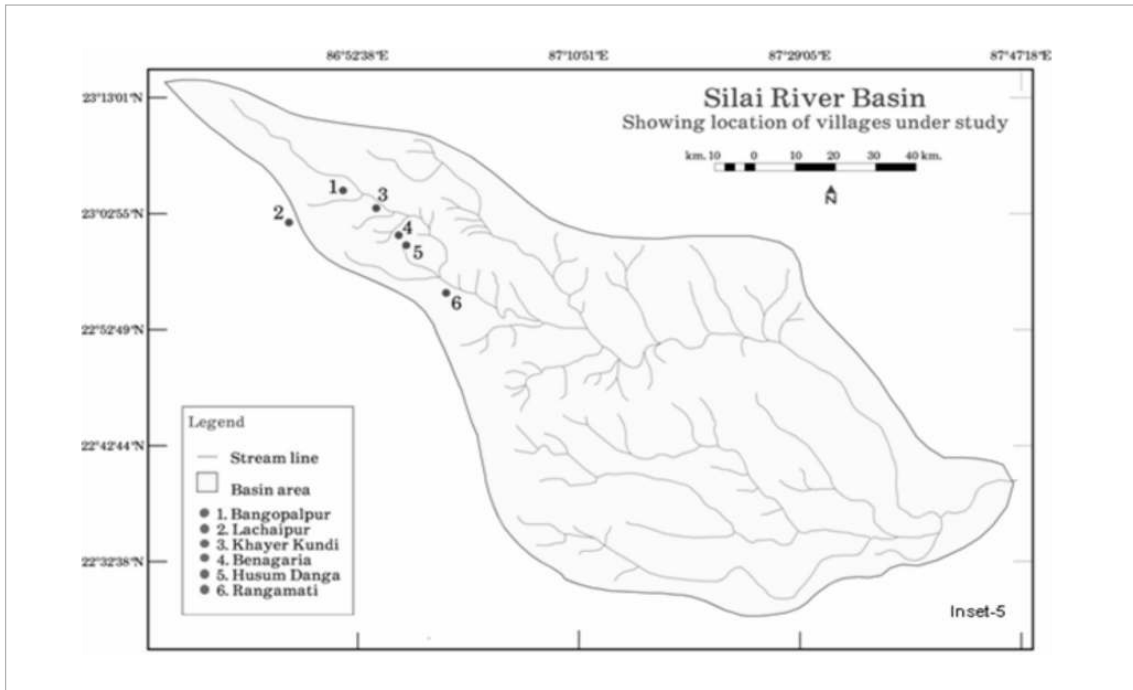


Fig.4 : Silai River Basin

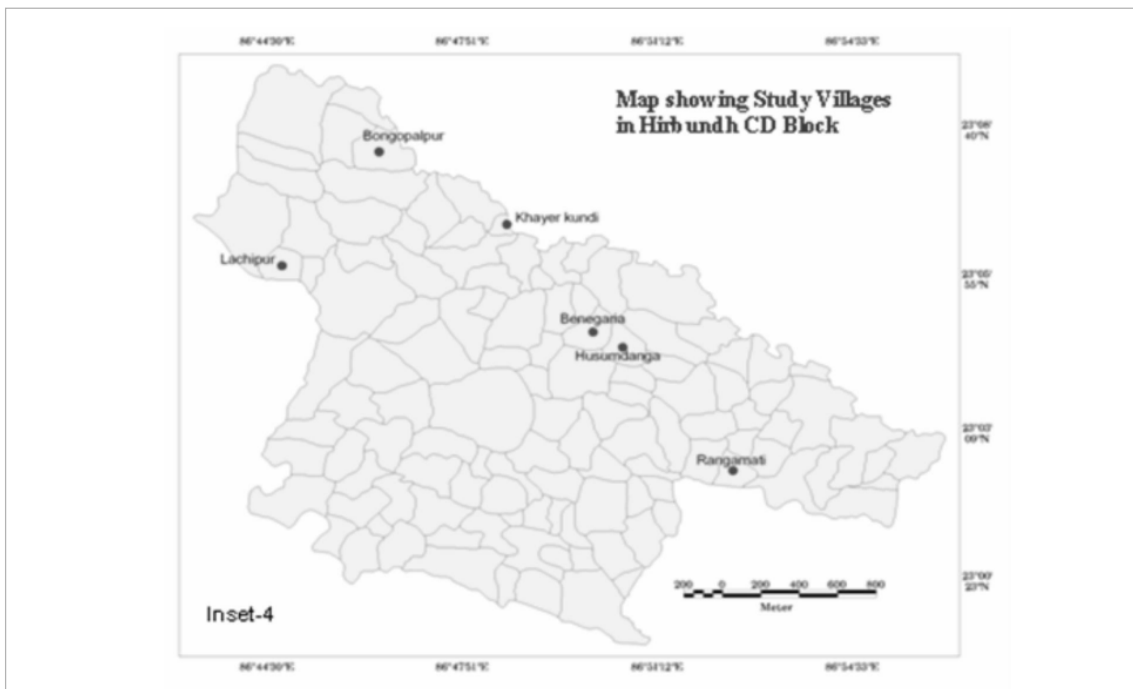


Fig.5: Study villages of Hirbunh CD Block

Conclusion

From the preceding discussion the study concludes that data analysis at level II indicates that the quality of the habitat of all the social groups is more or less the same, thereby apparently disproving the hypothesis. However detailed analysis of the data at level III, on the pattern of recorded ownership of the different grades of agricultural land among the different social groups reveals that there are differences in the level of access to the land resource among the different social groups. Precisely stated, it is seen that the lion's share of the superior quality of land holdings is in the possession of General Castes in their own habitat as well as in the habitat of the tribals. In reality, the people occupying the higher rungs of the social hierarchy are in possession of the better grades of agricultural land even in the habitats of the lower

rungs of the social hierarchy where they are non residents, thereby exercising effective control on them. The tribals on the other hand are restricted to their respective habitats alone. This implies that the tribals do not have effective access to their land resources even in their own habitats it. The hypothesis in the final analysis thus stands proved.

Reference

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