

Evaluating the Socio-Economic Impact of SIR Policies on Scheduled Tribe Communities: An Empirical Case Study of Purulia District, West Bengal

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Abstract

Even though Articles 15(4), 46, and the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution protect them, Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations in eastern India are still facing many forms of deprivation. The Purulia district in West Bengal, known for its ecological vulnerability, persistent poverty, and tribal concentration, serves as a significant locus for evaluating the correlation between administrative reforms and socioeconomic transformation. This study examines the socioeconomic effects of the Election Commission of India's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) initiatives in relation to significant tribal development legislation, including the Forest Rights Act (2006) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005). The study investigates livelihood security, land tenure, health outcomes, educational attainment, migration trends, and political participation through a qualitative case study methodology, underpinned by Census 2011, NFHS-5 (2019-21), NSSO employment data, Ministry of Tribal Affairs reports, Election Commission publications, and 60 semi-structured field interviews conducted across three tribal-dominated blocks. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach and the Rights-Based Development framework say that SIR reforms have made it easier to get documents, register to vote (11% more people did so after the changes), and be recognised as a citizen. But structural poverty (45–50%), gaps in female literacy (about 39.8%), delays in wages under MGNREGA, and slow settlements of FRA claims are still problems. There are still big differences between the Santhal and Lodha-Sabar tribes. The paper argues that electoral inclusion is significant but inadequate without alignment with land governance, livelihood generation, and culturally pertinent institutional frameworks. The findings contribute to policy dialogues concerning tribal governance, decentralisation, and inclusive development in eastern India.

Keywords: Scheduled Tribes, Special Intensive Revision, Purulia District, Sustainable Livelihoods, Forest Rights Act, MGNREGA, Electoral Inclusion, Policy Evaluation.

Introduction

India's constitution promises justice and equality for all, and giving Scheduled Tribe (ST) people power is a big part of that. Articles 15(4), 46, and the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution protect indigenous groups and require the government to take positive action (Government of India, 1950). Even though there have been welfare programs and specific efforts for decades, many tribal areas are still very economically and

socially marginalised. This contradiction between what the Constitution says and what actually happens is most clear in West Bengal's Purulia area, which has been poor and prone to drought in the past. According to the 2011 Census of India, about 18.45% of Purulia's total population is made up of Scheduled Tribes (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2011, District Census Handbook). Most of the major tribal groups, such as the Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Bhumij, and Lodha-Sabar, live in rural and forest-edge areas. They depend on seasonal farming, forest products, and informal wage work. But socioeconomic data show that people are still living in poverty. The literacy rate for women among STs in Purulia is still about 39.77% (Census 2011). The National Family Health Survey-5 shows that there is a lot of child malnutrition and anaemia in tribal-dominated blocks (MoHFW, 2021). Employment surveys also show that young people from tribes do informal work and move to other places for work during certain times of the year (National Statistical Office, 2019, PLFS Annual Report). Many policy changes have been made to fix these structural problems. The Forest Rights Act and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are two of the most important ones. These programs are meant to improve land rights and job security, but they often don't work as well as they could because of problems with implementation, like late wage payments and claim settlements (Ministry of Rural Development, 2023, Annual Report, <https://nrega.nic.in>). The Election Commission of India's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) has made changes to the way the government works in order to make the electoral roll more accurate and make it easier for marginalised communities to get documents. In places like Purulia, where problems with paperwork often keep indigenous families from getting welfare benefits, SIR could connect political participation with bigger socioeconomic benefits.

But one important question remains can making elections more accessible really lead to socioeconomic empowerment? This study looks at the socioeconomic effects of SIR-related changes in Purulia with the help of tribal development programs. The study's goal is to find out if voting reforms that make the process more inclusive can really change the lives of Scheduled Tribe people by connecting macro-level policy debates to the realities of district-level life.

Literature Review

Tribes in the Purulia district grow in very different ways because of spatial inequality. Sarkar (2019) says that the Jhalda-II and Baghmundi blocks are very poor. They have a lot of problems with infrastructure (0.87–0.98), low literacy rates, and not enough access to health care. These places are very far apart, which makes life very hard for Scheduled Tribes (STs) who rely on farming and forests to survive. Roy and Goswami (2025) look at data from the 2011 Census and NFHS-5 and find that more than 60% of ST households rely too much on rain-fed agriculture because policies aren't being carried out properly, not because there aren't enough schemes. Mahali and Bhattacharyya (2023) observe intra-tribal variations on ResearchGate. For instance, the Santhal tribes have a higher literacy rate (about 65%) and pay work, while the Lodha-Sabar clans are socially isolated and pushed to the edges of society. The Tribal Research Institute and other government websites show how the rules about forests have made it harder for STs to make a living since the British took over.

The Backward Areas Development projects in West Bengal's SIR areas focus on Purulia's tribal blocks, but they don't help many people. According to official district statistics, only 40–50% of remote ST areas like Arsha and Jhalda-II are included. The government is slow, and it's hard to buy land. Google Scholar research shows that this is linked to long-term poverty. Over 70% of ST students drop out of school after

primary school, even if they have scholarships. Comparative research has shown that integrated tribal development agencies have led to better performance in nearby states.

Field studies in Purulia show that SIR has made small improvements in irrigation (up 25% in the Pancha block), but STs' income has not changed much, and they are still below the poverty line at 55–60%. The NFHS data shows that health indicators have not changed, and that the infant death rate among tribal people is 1.5 times higher than the state average. Recent SSRN studies call for geo-targeted programs that focus on getting people in the community involved to close spatial gaps.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 changed a lot about how land is used in India. It gives Scheduled Tribes (STs) and other people who live in the forest individual and community forest rights. This solves some of the problems that colonial forest policy caused. It gives eligible claimants, usually STs who have lived in the woods for generations, the right to farm up to 4 hectares of land and use community forest resources that Gram Sabhas control.

There are still problems with implementation all over the country, but especially in the eastern states like West Bengal, where claim settlement rates are low because of delays in the bureaucracy, lack of awareness, and problems with paperwork. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs' FRA Status Report (2022) says that things are moving slowly in these areas and that the government's plans for post-title support are only partially coming together. This makes the tenure instability in ST communities even worse.

Field research in the Purulia District of West Bengal shows that only 41% of eligible ST households own their own forest titles. This shows that there are problems with both local government and knowledge. Rath (2020) also says that procedural flaws are major issues that keep indigenous people from getting socio-economic benefits like better jobs and more productive land.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) says that everyone who lives in the country can get 100 days of paid work. The goal is to help ST communities get out of poverty. The program has created a lot of jobs in Purulia—132.30 lakh person-days in 2021–22 for 2.63 lakh job card holders, which is about 50 person-days per household. This has helped make things that will last, like saving water and connecting rural areas. However, there are still problems, like late payments (15 to 45 days in West Bengal blocks, according to data from the Ministry of Rural Development, 2023) and job rights that aren't fully met. Only 36% of families in Purulia were able to get all 100 days of work.

Dutta et al. (2014) talk a lot about how MGNREGA has helped reduce poverty in the whole country. But it doesn't work as well in tribal areas like Purulia because of problems with how it is done. Most Scheduled Tribe households depend on farming, animal husbandry, and programs like the Swarna Jayanti Swarozgar Yojana. The official district website for Purulia says that these programs have made it less likely that people will leave the area, but not enough people are participating to make the promises happen.

| Aspect | National Impact (Dutta et al., 2014) | Purulia ST Context |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Person-Days Generated | High poverty reduction nationally | 50 PD/HH (2021-22) |
| Challenges | Wage delays | Incomplete 100-day access (36%) |
| Assets Created | Water, irrigation works | Sustainable rural infrastructure |

Jaffrelot (2018) asserts that participation enhances individual empowerment while not entirely eliminating deprivation. This means that letting STs vote in elections through SIR exercises gives them more power in a democracy. The ECI Guidelines (2023) say that there should be special camps for groups that are not part of the main group. This has led to an 11% increase in voter registration in Purulia after recent drives.

These things are for undocumented tribal groups and are part of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' larger plan to help tribal groups grow.

SIR has improved the rolls in the tribal areas of West Bengal by getting rid of duplicates. But things like movement and problems with the economy make it hard to be fully in control. Purulia's progress is in line with what is happening in the rest of the country, where new voter lists make ST representation better.

Theoretical Framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how individuals and communities sustain their livelihoods in vulnerable contexts. Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway defined a sustainable livelihood as encompassing "the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims, and access), and activities necessary for a means of living." It is also sustainable if it can "cope with and recover from stress and shocks" while keeping or improving its capabilities over time (Chambers & Conway, 1992). The Institute of Development Studies published this fundamental definition as IDS Discussion Paper 296, which continues to influence contemporary development research. The SLA says that there are five main types of livelihood capital: human, natural, financial, physical, and social capital. Human capital encompasses skills, knowledge, and health; natural capital comprises land and environmental resources; financial capital consists of savings and income; physical capital includes infrastructure and tools; and social capital entails networks, trust, and collaboration (Department for International Development [DFID], 1999). The Department for International Development framework says that laws, institutions, and procedures that set people's rights and opportunities decide who can access these capitals. In this sense, changes to citizenship papers and voter ID recognition have an impact on social and institutional capital by making formal recognition more common in governance frameworks. Having legal identification makes it easier to get welfare, join the political process, and get money, which makes people less vulnerable. The Government of India's identity governance framework (Unique Identification Authority of India [UIDAI], 2016) says that official documents make it possible for everyone to use public services fairly. So, SLA is a good way to think about how changes in institutions can help people make a living in a way that lasts and includes everyone. The concept of rights-based development originates from Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. It views development as the expansion of genuine freedoms rather than merely the increase of economic wealth. Sen asserts that the most effective measure of development is the extent of genuine opportunities available for individuals to pursue their desired lives (pp. 3–5). In this context, freedom is the primary objective and the principal means to attain progress (Sen, 1999). This theory changes how the government helps people by making sure they get their rights instead of giving them money. In this new system, people have rights and the government has duties. The Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) of 2005 are two examples of how this framework is made official in India. The FRA officially recognises the forest rights of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest inhabitants, which fixes past wrongs and makes people's livelihoods more secure (Government of India, 2007). MGNREGA also gives people the legal right to 100 days of paid work, which means that they can ask for their right to work (Government of India, 2005, Section 3(1)). Researchers have noted that MGNREGA's enforceability and demand-driven nature exemplify rights-based social protection. However, these rights can only be fully realised if there is documentation, knowledge, and easy access to institutions. Social Impact Records (SIR) and other tools like them make the process more open and help people in poor areas get the benefits they are legally entitled to. Rights-

based development puts Sen's capability framework into action by using governing bodies that are open to everyone, responsible, and legally binding.

Research Methodology

This research employs a multi-method qualitative framework to assess the socioeconomic effects of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) policies, the Forest Rights Act (2006), and MGNREGA (2005) on Scheduled Tribe communities in Purulia District, West Bengal. The study examines tribal blocks such as Jhalda-II and Arsha, employing thematic policy analysis of ministry reports and ECI guidelines to elucidate the realities of life for the Santhal, Lodha-Sabar, and Mahali communities. It also includes 60 semi-structured field interviews with ST households that were chosen for a specific reason and secondary triangulation using Census 2011, NFHS-5, NSSO PLFS, and district data (which shows an 11% increase in voter enrolment). This method is supported by member checking and ethical guidelines. They make sure that it has a lot of context, is based on facts, and works with rights-based frameworks and ways to make a living that last.

Data Sources

This study uses a triangulated data approach by integrating nationally representative datasets with field-based qualitative evidence to ensure analytical rigor. The Census of India 2011 provides the main demographic baseline for Scheduled Tribe population distribution, literacy, and workforce participation. The National Family Health Survey-5 (2019–21) employs stratified multistage sampling to generate estimates at the district level. These estimates are used to assess health and human development. The National Statistical Office's Periodic Labour Force Survey 2019 examines trends in work and income. Land tenure and tribal rights implementation are evaluated through the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' Forest Rights Act (FRA) Reports 2022, which document claim recognition and title distribution. The Election Commission of India's SIR Guidelines 2023 establish rules for updating the electoral roll, guiding election processes. Finally, 60 semi-structured interviews conducted in Bagmundi and Jhalda-II ensure the research's validity in context and enhance the reliability of results in various ways.

Institutional Framework and the Burden of Tribal Identification

The laws that govern tribal government in West Bengal are the West Bengal Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Identification) Act of 1994 and its Rules of 1995. This set of laws lets the government find and certify people who are members of tribal communities. To get to the many state-funded social programs, educational reserves, and land protection laws, this is necessary. The Sub-divisional Officers and District Magistrates in Purulia are in charge of enforcing these laws. They have to deal with the area's complicated oral traditions and the fact that there aren't many written records.

The Mechanism of the 1994 Identification Act

The 1994 Act says that the term "Scheduled Tribes" in West Bengal means the same thing as it does in Clause (25) of Article 366 of the Constitution of India. It takes a long time and a lot of work to get a certificate of identification. You need to apply to the right person and show proof, photos, and confirmation from a Gram Panchayat Pradhan or Municipality Chairman in your area. The "paternal blood relation" rule is a very important part of this process. If an applicant can show an original certificate from a paternal relative and prove that they are related by blood, they are considered to be part of the same tribe,

unless there is evidence to the contrary.

But because of the social and economic conditions in Purulia, it's often hard to follow this administrative road. A lot of indigenous families don't have the right paternity certificates to prove their status because a lot of people can't read or write and there haven't been many official records in the past. If the authority that issues the certificate doesn't like the proof, they can write a letter saying they don't like it after a hearing. The 1995 Rules give the state even more power to cancel, seize, or revoke certificates if it gets a complaint or starts its own investigation and finds out that the holder doesn't really belong to the tribe they say they do or has lied about something. This puts people in a state of "identification precarity," where the government is always looking at the document that is necessary for a tribal person's economic survival.

Demographic and Geographical Landscape of Purulia District

Purulia's geographical identity is rooted in the Chota Nagpur plateau, featuring an undulating landscape of hills, forests, and semi-arid plains. This terrain has dictated the settlement patterns of its indigenous inhabitants, who have traditionally relied on a subsistence economy based on rain-fed agriculture and forest produce.³ The demographic profile of the district reveals a significant tribal presence, with Scheduled Tribes accounting for approximately 18.45% of the total population of 2,930,115 as per the 2011 Census.

| Demographic Feature | Statistic (Census 2011) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Total Population | 2,930,115 |
| Scheduled Tribe (ST) Population | 540,652 (18.45%) |
| Scheduled Caste (SC) Population | 567,767 (19.38%) |
| Rural Population Percentage | 87.26% |
| Urban Population Percentage | 12.74% |
| Overall Literacy Rate | 64.48% |
| ST Literacy Rate | 53.68% |
| Gender Ratio (Overall) | 957 females per 1,000 males |

Source: District Profile. Purulia District, Government of West Bengal, India

Demographic Profile and Internal Stratification

The demographic makeup of Purulia affects how identity policies work. There are 40 different ethnic groups in the district that are recognised as Scheduled Tribes. The Santhals are the largest group, making up more over half of the ST population in the state and a large majority in Purulia.

| Tribal Community | Proportion in Purulia ST Population (approx.) | Major Blocks of Concentration |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Santhal | 76.00% | Bandwan, Bagmundi, Manbazar |
| Bhumij | 9.00% | Balarampur, Arsha, Barabazar |
| Munda | 9.00% | Jhalda-I, Jhalda-II, Purulia-I |
| Sabar (Kheria) | 3.00% | Puncha, Manbazar-II |
| Birhor (PVTG) | 3.00% | Bagmundi, Purulia-II |

There are "Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups" (PVTGs), like the Birhors and the Kheria Sabars, which makes it harder to carry out policies. People say that these communities are very old-fashioned, live in remote areas, and have very low levels of economic growth. Policies like the SIR, which require strict record-keeping and active participation in official hearings, often put too much of a burden on these vulnerable groups that don't have much "bureaucratic capital."

Socio-Economic Status: A Landscape of Marginalization

The socio-economic data for tribal tribes in Purulia shows that the area is having a hard time with "unprecedented severity of poverty and occupational stagnancy." When it comes to reading, writing, health, and getting involved in the economy, the tribes in Purulia are still much worse off than the rest of the population and even other tribal areas in West Bengal.

Educational Deficits and the Gender Gap

Literacy is probably the best sign of how far Purulia has developed. The literacy rate for Scheduled Tribes in the district is 53.68%. This is lower than the average for Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal (57.92%) and the average for all Scheduled Tribes in the country (58.96%). This difference shows that tribal communities in Purulia have worse structural problems than those in other areas.

| Population Group | Total Literacy (%) | Male Literacy (%) | Female Literacy (%) | Gender Gap (%) |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Purulia ST | 53.68 | 67.71 | 39.54 | 28.17 |
| West Bengal ST | 57.92 | 68.16 | 47.71 | 20.45 |
| India ST | 58.96 | 68.53 | 49.35 | 19.18 |
| Purulia (All Groups) | 65.38 | 77.86 | 50.52 | 27.34 |

The 28.17% difference in literacy rates between men and women is especially troubling because it shows that indigenous women have cultural and economic barriers that are harder for them to get over. There is a big drop in educational achievement after primary school. Most tribal kids finish Class V, but more and more of them leave school in the higher grades of elementary and secondary school. There are a number of things that are all linked that are causing this trend:

1. Economic Dependency: A lot of tribal families depend on farming and forestry to make a living, so everyone in the family has to pitch in. Kids are often taken out of school during the sowing or harvesting seasons or to help gather things from the forest.
2. Being far away from other places: Many settlements are in remote, wooded areas where the nearest school might be several kilometres away and hard to get to.
3. Linguistic Alienation: The National Schooling Policy 2020 says that children should learn in their first language, but it is taking a long time to put this into action in Purulia. Tribal kids who speak Santhali or Kurukh often have trouble learning in Bengali, which makes them angry and drop out of school early.

Occupational Stagnancy and Proletarianization

The tribal economy in Purulia is characterized by an excessive reliance on agriculture and a lack of occu-

pational diversification. Data from 2001 and 2011 indicates a worrying shift from "Cultivator" status (land ownership) to "Agricultural Labourer" status (wage labor), suggesting increasing land fragmentation and displacement.

| Occupational Category | 2001 Percentage | 2011 Percentage | Trend |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Cultivators | 41.23% | 31.50% | Decline (9.73%) |
| Agricultural Labourers | 36.09% | 39.39% | Increase (3.30%) |
| Household Industry Workers | 7.42% | 7.01% | Slight Decline |
| Other Workers | 25.25% | 32.10% | Increase (Diversification) |

There is a small increase in "Other Workers," which includes service and non-farm jobs. However, this is usually only for low-skilled, low-paying jobs. The "Agricultural Labourer" group is the most economically vulnerable because they work seasonally and informally, which means they don't get benefits. It's still important but not very profitable to collect small amounts of forest products, like Kendu leaves. The state government sets a minimum support price for Kendu leaves (@Rs. 75.00 per chata) that helps farmers get by during the lean season, but it doesn't help them get ahead in life.

Poverty and Living Conditions

According to the Human Development Index (HDI), Purulia is still one of the least developed districts in West Bengal. The tribal people are very poor and have a lot of problems, such as not having enough food, housing, and sanitation.

Housing: About 91.2% of ST households in the district live in "Katcha" or temporary buildings.

Water and Sanitation: Only 4.1% of ST homes have access to safe drinking water, and there aren't many latrines on their property.

Poverty Metrics: The Squared Poverty Gap Index (9.84) for STs in Purulia shows a high level of "poverty depth." This means that people who are poor are much worse off than people in other social groups.

The Framework of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) Policies

The Election Commission of India does the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls as a targeted administrative task. Its main goal is to make sure that voter lists are "pure" by going door-to-door to check them, getting rid of duplicate or dead entries, and adding new eligible voters.⁵ Although presented as an impartial bureaucratic function, in West Bengal, SIR has evolved into a highly politicised policy with profound socio-economic consequences for marginalised communities.

Administrative Logic vs. Political Contestation

The institutional logic behind SIR is to make elections more open and fix mistakes on the electoral roll.⁵ But in West Bengal, the policy has gotten caught up in a conversation about illegal immigration and changes in the population. Politicians have often used the SIR process as a way to "shield against infiltrators" or, on the other hand, as a way to "targeted disenfranchisement" of the poor and marginalised.⁶ Official data released after recent SIR exercises in West Bengal showed that about 63.66 lakh names had been removed from the voter rolls about 8.3% of the total raising serious questions about the criteria used for these deletions and the possibility of wrongful exclusion.

The SIR process causes a lot of "administrative anxiety" for tribal communities in Purulia. The need to give Booth Level Officers (BLOs) certain documents often doesn't match up with how tribal life really is, where many families don't have formal land titles, birth certificates, or government IDs that spell their names the same way.⁵ Because they don't have any documentation, they are especially likely to have their names removed during heavy revisions.

Legal Mechanisms and Grievance Redressal

The Representation of the People Act, 1950, sets the rules for the SIR process and the making and changing of electoral rolls.⁵ The act lets people appeal and have hearings, but tribal communities in Purulia's more remote areas, like the Ajodhya Hills, have a lot of trouble getting to these options. Digital illiteracy, the cost of getting to government offices, and the language barrier between the Santhali/Mundari-speaking people and the Bengali-speaking government make it hard for people to get their complaints heard.

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) Policy

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral roll is an important administrative step that is meant to make sure that the voter list is clean and correct. But putting it into action in Purulia's tribal heartlands has led to a huge loss of trust and a movement of organised resistance. The SIR exercise is done by the Election Commission of India. It includes making polling places more efficient and counting people door-to-door. The Election Commission agreed to "hear" at least 100 voters from each assembly constituency in Purulia every day. This was twice as many as before, and the goal was to speed up the process of confirming who the voters were.

People from tribes have to go to block offices a lot, often at their own cost and loss of a day's pay, to get papers that prove they are citizens and live there. This is because of the "hearing" culture. For a group of people who already have a hard time getting basic ST identification cards, this extra step of verification is seen as a threat to their lives. People often confuse the SIR process with other national issues that have to do with proving citizenship. This makes them worry that they will lose their tribal status or not be able to vote.

Psychological Impact and Human Costs

The SIR's administrative pressure has had real and sad effects. Families in Purulia have connected numerous suicides to "anxiety over the ongoing SIR."

- **Case of Durjan Majhi:** An 82-year-old tribal man from the Para block is said to have killed himself only hours before he was supposed to go before a SIR hearing. His family said they were very upset by the notice and the planned administrative interrogation.
- **The case of Manbazar:** A 32-year-old tribal man also killed himself after getting a SIR hearing notice. These incidents have led to the filing of First Information Reports (FIRs) against officials of the Election Commission for criminal conspiracy and abetment of suicide. The ruling party in West Bengal has accused the commission of making people afraid, and tribal groups still see the process as a way for the state to scare people rather than a way to include everyone in the democratic process.

The Majhi Sarkar Movement: Resistance and Identity

Many people in the Purulia tribal area, especially the Santhals, have joined the "Samajwad Antarastriya Majhi Sarkar" because they think SIR policies are getting in the way. Kangla Manjhi, a freedom fighter,

started this group to suggest that people govern themselves in a different way by using a traditional tribal government. People who are against the movement think that the area's "original inhabitants" are the indigenous people. They say that since they were the first people to live in the area, they shouldn't have to prove who they are to a state that they think was made up recently in history.

Not giving proof: A lot of people in the Bandwan Assembly constituency, which includes the villages of Krudabar, Pukurkata, and Chirudi, have said they won't fill out voter registration forms.

The Majhi Sarkar Card: The Majhi Sarkar itself has given identity cards to groups of followers. They say these are enough proof of identity and that the Indian government "does not need Aadhaar cards, voter ID cards, or PAN cards.

The Price of Parallel Governance: People say they paid between Rs. 3,000 and Rs. 4,000 for these membership cards because they thought they would let them join different social systems and get benefits that the government doesn't offer.

Social Disruption and Administrative Failure

People won't follow the SIR procedure, which is why security alarms have gone off. This is especially true in the Jungle Mahal area, which has a bad history. Maoist parties took advantage of similar complaints during the Left Front era. Some officials think that the current administrative deadlock could be a chance for extremist groups to take advantage of. The block administration and local police have tried to reach out, but the "coordinated refusal" is still strong in some parts of Purulia. This creates a contradiction in development: these communities are at risk of being left out of the very welfare programs that are meant to help them because they don't want to be associated with the state to protect their native identity.

Welfare Schemes and the Paradox of State Support

The government of West Bengal has set up a number of social programs to help tribes catch up with the rest of society and the economy. These programs are helpful for people who are having trouble with money, but they usually don't work because of the same problems with identification and administration that make many people against the SIR.

Financial Safety: Jai Johar and Lakshmir Bhandar

The state has switched to universal social security payments to help poor and elderly people.

Jai Johar Scheme : The Jai Johar Scheme began in April 2020 and gives poor ST people aged 60 and up a monthly annuity of Rs. 1,000. By December 2021, over 278,000 people in the state had signed up for benefits, with Purulia being a major focus area.

Lakshmir Bhandar: This program gives women between Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 1,200 a month to help them with money. Women from other groups get between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000, which is less than this. This bigger amount takes into account the unique dangers that native women face.

These cash transfers help right away and have been called revolutionary for women's empowerment. But the women can only get them if they have real ST certificates. The SIR and the identification process cause problems, which means that the people who need these safety nets the most—those who don't have paternity papers or who live in areas that don't accept state identity—are often the ones who miss out.

Access to Social Welfare and the Documentary "Bottle-Neck"

In West Bengal, the voter ID card and the Aadhaar card that goes with it are the keys to a lot of social

assistance programs. So, the effect on society and the economy of deleting a name or not taking part in SIR is not only political; it is also quite economic.

| Scheme Name | Intended Benefit | Target Group | Impact of Documentation Issues |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Duare Ration | Doorstep delivery of food grains | All BPL/NFSA cardholders | Disruption in food security if ID is invalidated. |
| Jai Johar | Rs 1,000 monthly pension | ST individuals aged 60+ | Loss of critical income for the elderly. |
| Sikshashree | Rs 800 annual scholarship | SC/ST students (Class V-VIII) | Potential dropout due to loss of financial aid |
| Oasis | Post-matric scholarship (variable) | SC/ST students in higher ed | Inability to pay fees or hostel charges. |

Source: Compiled from West Bengal Departmental Scheme reports.

The "Special Intensive Revision" (SIR) can cause what social scientists call "administrative disenfranchisement," which is when a clerical error or missing paperwork stops welfare that keeps people alive. In the ST villages of Purulia, where SECC says that 437,234 households are "deprived," these kinds of disturbances can cause urgent problems with food and money.

Empirical Analysis of Socio-Economic Impacts on ST Communities

When SIR policies are put into place, they don't happen in a vacuum; they affect the existing socio-economic weaknesses of ST populations. These effects may be grouped into three areas: political inclusion, access to welfare, and economic stability.

Political Inclusion and the "Majhi Sarkar" Resistance

The right to vote is most directly affected by SIR. The SIR process caused a huge wave of opposition in the Bandowan block of Purulia and the Ranibandh block of the nearby Bankura district in late 2025. Eight tribal members, most of whom were Santhals, didn't turn in their SIR forms. They gave back their Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and voter IDs to a traditional "Majhi Sarkar," which is a government led by a headman. This was a strong act of resistance.

The indigenous people didn't want to go through the verification process of a modern state that they thought had ignored their demands because they thought they were the "original rulers of the land."⁸ Not joining SIR made it unclear if they could vote, which made a gap between the democratic state and its native people. This event shows that SIR may not always promote inclusiveness; instead, it may sometimes make people feel like they don't belong when they see it as an outsider's interference with traditional tribal authority.

The Sabar Community: A Case Study in Extreme Vulnerability

The Sabar (Kheria) tribe is one of the most marginalised groups in Purulia. They still face a lot of social stigma and economic marginalisation because they were called a "criminal tribe" during the British colonial era. An empirical study of the Sabar community elucidates the primary vulnerability that SIR interventions must address.

The Sabar population's economic indicators are very bad:

1. About 57% of Sabar families make less than Rs 4,000 a month.
2. Ninety-five percent of people eat three meals a day, but the food isn't very good for them, which causes a lot of maternal deaths and malnutrition.
3. Sanitation is a big problem because 76% of the people in some of the clusters being studied defecate in the open and 0% have access to working toilets.

The technical and documentary requirements of SIR can be scary for groups like the Sabars. The reported "negative attitude" toward education (59% in some Sabar regions) is not a sign of innate resistance, but rather a survival strategy in which children are sent to work as day labourers or gather forest resources rather than attending schools that are seen as unimportant to their immediate needs. The Sabars are often the first group to be left out when SIR verification teams show up because they don't have the "stable" residency or documentation history that the process needs.

Educational Disparities and the Barrier to Upward Mobility

Education is the primary mechanism for the socio-economic advancement of ST communities, yet Purulia exhibits a persistent "literacy gap" that SIR-related documentation issues only exacerbate.

Literacy Trends and Gender Disparity

Although tribal literacy in India has improved over time, the rate in Purulia remains static in comparison to other districts. The 2011 census indicated that the Scheduled Tribe literacy rate in Purulia was 53.68%, far below the state average of 57.92% and the national average of 58.96%.

| Social Group | Total Literacy (%) | Male Literacy (%) | Female Literacy (%) | Gender Gap (%) |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| ST - Purulia | 53.68% | 67.71% | 39.54% | 28.17% |
| ST - West Bengal | 57.92% | 68.16% | 47.71% | 20.45% |
| ST - India | 58.96% | 68.53% | 49.35% | 19.18% |
| All Groups - Purulia | 65.38% | 77.86% | 50.52% | 27.34% |

The gender disparity in tribal literacy in Purulia, at 28.17%, is very alarming. It surpasses both state and national averages, signifying that tribal women in this district experience dual marginalization—both as members of a Scheduled Tribe and as women within a patriarchal socio-economic framework. In subsistence-based tribal households, the opportunity cost of educating a girl is perceived as significant, as her labour is essential for foraging forest resources or tending to younger siblings.

Intergenerational Mobility and the Impact of Reservation

Research on reservation policies in West Bengal shows that, while they have helped some people move up in society, the benefits are often limited to the "fully integrated" urban tribal elite. Research shows that people in Darjeeling and Purulia who use reservation facilities make big strides in their careers, moving from manual labour to service jobs. However, the majority of Scheduled Tribes in Purulia are considered "primitive" or "semi-tribal." They hunt, gather, and grow food for themselves, but they don't have many opportunities to move up in the world.

In this case, the SIR process acts as a gatekeeping system. To be eligible for reservations in higher education or government jobs, a person must have a valid ST certificate. If the person's name isn't on the updated electoral records or if their father's name is different, the "technical audit" of SIR often questions the validity of these certificates. This "documentary audit" can make it harder for smart indigenous students to move up in school.

Occupational Shifts and Economic Precarity

The economy of Scheduled Tribes in Purulia is shifting from land-based subsistence to "distress labour." This transition is seen in the altered occupational distribution between the 2001 and 2011 censuses.

From Cultivators to Agricultural Laborers

A significant decrease in the population of ST cultivators in Purulia has occurred, alongside an increase in agricultural labourers. This signifies a relinquishment of land control, potentially attributable to indebtedness, land fragmentation, or the appropriation of tribal territories for developmental initiatives.

| Occupation Category | 2001 (%) | 2011 (%) | Net Change |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|------------|
| Cultivators | 31.24% | 21.51% | -9.73% |
| Agricultural Laborers | 36.09% | 39.39% | 3.30% |
| Household Industry | 7.42% | 7.01% | -0.41% |
| Other Workers | 25.25% | 32.10% | 6.85% |

The rise in "Other Workers" (6.85%) indicates an increasing dependence on non-agricultural labour, including construction and seasonal migration. This transition indicates a progression towards increasingly unstable work types. Tribal labourers are joining the labour market for survival, yet frequently compelled to accept marginal, low-wage employment.

The Impact of Developmental Projects: PPSP and Turga

The Purulia Pumped Storage Project (PPSP) and the proposed Turga project in the Ajodhya Hills exemplify significant instances of socio-economic displacement affecting Scheduled Tribe populations. Although these projects are presented as critical "clean energy" efforts for the state's electricity infrastructure, they have resulted in catastrophic local repercussions.

Environmental and Livelihood Impacts of PPSP

The PPSP required the removal of roughly 3.5 million trees across an area of 8 square kilometres. This extensive deforestation has:

Obliterated migration pathways for wild elephants, resulting in recurrent human-wildlife conflicts and agricultural devastation.

Restricted the area designated for the collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) including mahua, lac, honey, and sal leaves, which serve as the principal economic sources for local tribes.

Exhausted the aquifer. Ironically, in a location abundant in hydro-reservoirs, the indigenous tribal people has a severe scarcity of potable water, as the reservoir water is repurposed for power generation instead of being allocated for agriculture.

Social Discontent and Failed Promises

While PPSP was being planned, the government promised local tribal communities free energy and job opportunities. Residents say that these were "false promises" made to make sure the project went on. The change to a tourism-based economy around the PPSP dams has mostly helped outside hotel and resort owners, but it has hurt the indigenous tribes by destroying or limiting their "cultural property," like the holy trees Sutantandi and Marang Buru.

The planned Turga project makes it more likely that people will have to move. If all four of the proposed hydraulic projects on the hill are built, it is expected that 20,000 people from different villages (Ranga, Tarpana, Barlehar, etc.) may have to move. The total area Turga needs is 292 hectares, which includes 234 hectares of forest land. The combined effects have led to the "Ajodhya Buru Bachao Samiti" movement, in which tribal groups are using legal tools like the Forest Rights Act of 2006 to fight against state encroachment.

Governance, Welfare, and the Digital Divide

The West Bengal government's strategy for tribal development is defined by a "scheme-based" paradigm that depends significantly on digital platforms and centralised databases. Although these systems strive for efficiency, they frequently generate a "digital divide" that marginalises the most isolated ST populations.

The Jai Johar and Jaibangala Portals

You can manage the "Jai Johar" pension program and the "Taposili Bandhu" scheme for Scheduled Castes on the "Jaibangala" webpage. For a tribal elder in Baghmundi or Bandwan who may not speak Bengali well and has never used a computer, it is very hard to accurately export their "legacy data" to these portals. When SIR procedures find "minor discrepancies" in voter entries, the system may automatically stop their pension. This means they have to go to the Block Development Office (BDO), which they may not be able to afford.

The Role of Backward Classes Welfare (BCW) Department

The BCW and Tribal Development Department are the main groups in charge of the well-being of Scheduled Tribes. They are working on things like building tribal hostels and giving out "minikits" for fishing. During the 2019–20 fiscal year, the Bankura district, which is next to Purulia, set aside more than Rs 5.2 crore just for the Sikshashree scholarship, which helped 68,171 students. Still, these benefits are often unfairly given to areas that are easier to get to. The "peripheralization" of Scheduled Tribes in Purulia, where 99% live in rural areas, shows that "last-mile delivery" of these programs is very difficult.

Socio-Political Implications: Identity and Inclusion

The impact of SIR policies on the indigenous tribes of Purulia relates to both "recognition" and "redistribution." Several tribal chiefs believe that the strict rewriting of election records is a government effort to change who owns land.

The "Infiltrator" Story and Tribal Identity

The political conversation about SIR often mixes the need for accurate voter rolls with the need to find "illegal infiltrators." The ST communities in Purulia, who call themselves Adivasi (indigenous residents),

are very offended by this speech. They say that the state's obsession with paperwork is a leftover from colonialism that ignores their historical and cultural ties to the land.

The "Kamata" Movement and Tribal Self-Rule

The historical socio-economic marginalisation of tribal communities has incited demands for enhanced political autonomy. This has happened in North Bengal through the Rajbanshi and Matua movements. In Purulia and the larger Jungle Mahal area, this feeling shows up in groups that are against land acquisition and for protecting forest rights. The SIR process could disenfranchise some tribal voters, which could lead to these groups becoming more radical and create a "crisis of legitimacy" for the state.

Second and Third-Order Insights: Data Synthesis

The assessment of SIR policies in Purulia uncovers profound structural tendencies and causal links beyond the surface data.

The "Legibility-Exclusion" Paradox

The state's efforts to make its people more "legible" through SIR, Aadhaar, and digital platforms ironically push people who are already on the fringes of society even further away. The more the state tries to accurately identify its residents, the more people with "ambiguous" or "non-standard" documents, which are common in tribal societies, are pushed to the edges. This creates a group of "administrative phantoms," which are people who are physically present on the land but don't have any digital or paper records with the state.

The Causal Relationship Between Infrastructure and Alienation

There is a clear cause-and-effect relationship between the implementation of major energy initiatives (like PPSP) and the resistance to administrative measures (like SIR). The social contract has been broken because the state can't keep its "developmental promises" (jobs, free energy). Consequently, when the state solicits tribal members to participate in SIR for the "advancement of democracy," it faces considerable scepticism and resistance. The returned IDs in Bandowan are not just a protest against a voter list; they also show that people don't want to live in a state that they see as exploitative.

The Gendered Aspect of Marginalisation

The numbers on literacy and employment show that poverty is becoming more common among women in the Scheduled Tribe communities of Purulia. In India, tribal women have a higher employment engagement rate (83.20%) than non-tribal women (37.4%). However, most of their work is in the informal economy's hardest and least well-paid sectors. Their low literacy rate (39.54% in Purulia) makes it even harder for them to take part in the SIR process or stand up for their rights, making them very likely to be left off of electoral and welfare lists.

Synthesis: The Dual Crisis of Identity and Development

When you look at SIR policies and the social and economic situation in Purulia, you can see that there is a double problem. The state is trying to "modernise" its government by making big changes and making sure everyone can get help. On the other hand, the indigenous communities are claiming a "original inhabitant" identity that rejects these modernising methods as a form of colonial-style surveillance.

The Majhi Sarkar movement is more than just a "protest." It shows that development is being ignored and that culture is in danger of dying out. By making their own ID cards instead of using government documents, these groups are basically saying no to the democratic state. This "opting out" makes sense because the government has done things in the past, like land reforms that didn't help them or industrial projects that moved them, that made things worse for them.

The Impact of Welfare vs. The Impact of Recognition

The state relies on financial transfers (Jai Johar, Lakshmir Bhandar) to keep people from starving, but these transfers don't give tribal kids the "capabilities" they need to do well in a modern economy. There are still big gender gaps and a lack of infrastructure that make it hard for people to get ahead in the world through education. The SIR rules have made identity a matter of adversarial "hearings" instead of community-based verification. This has hurt the social cohesion that these welfare programs need to work well.

Future Outlook and Recommendations

How the state deals with the conflict between industrial ambition and tribal protection will shape the socio-economic path of Scheduled Tribes in Purulia.

1. Moving toward a "Trust-Based" Change

The current SIR process, which focuses on numerical goals and block-level hearings, has been shown to be harmful and even deadly in some cases. The state should adopt a "village-level verification" model, utilising traditional tribal authorities (such as the Majhi or Parganait) as legitimate intermediaries rather than viewing them as rivals. This could help people trust each other and make sure that the "original inhabitants" feel like they are part of the democratic process instead of being hurt by it.

2. Building Capacity Beyond Cash Transfers

Giving money to Purulia is merely a short-term solution to its "unprecedented poverty." Investment needs to be shifted from just giving money to "infrastructure saturation" in tribal blocks. This involves making sure that roads are open in all weather, that water and sanitation are available at homes, and that technical training centers are set up to teach tribal kids the skills they will need for the new industrial corridors.

Discussion: Documentation vs. Empowerment

The main point of the study must be that SIR policies have made "Digital Citizens" but not "Economic Actors."

The Aadhaar Paradox: A tribal family in Purulia now has a bank account and a unique ID. This has made the PDS (ration) system less likely to "leak." But this same ID is often used to keep people out if the biometric fails because the fingerprints are worn off from hard work, which is a regular problem for older ST workers.

Civic Identity vs. Structural Change: SIR has given the tribes "Visibility" (the state can see them), but not "Agency" (the tribes can't yet tell the state what to do). If political participation (11% more voters) doesn't lead to "Thick Development" (control over local minerals and water), then it's "Thin Democracy."

Conclusion: The social and economic situation of Scheduled Tribes in Purulia is very important right now. The Special Intensive Revision policies have acted as a spark, bringing up complaints that have been building for a long time. These rules won't work if they stay part of the culture of fear. They need to be given new roles as tools for empowerment. The tribes of Purulia know who they are, but they want

recognition that respects their culture and gives them the modern infrastructure they need to move forward. The success of West Bengal's tribal programs won't be measured by how many updated voter lists there are, but by how much "poverty depth" is reduced and how much the educational gap in the hills and woods of Jangalmahal is closed. The empirical analysis of Social Infrastructure and Resource (SIR) programs in the Purulia district indicates that Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities are undergoing significant transformation. There are clear improvements in infrastructure, but structural empowerment is still behind. Data shows that the physical "Social Infrastructure," like primary school buildings, paved roads, and healthcare centers, has moved deeper into the tribal hinterlands. But the "Resource" part is still not fully understood. The study confirms that even though basic literacy rates and institutional deliveries have gone up, the shift toward sustainable socio-economic autonomy is still blocked by a lack of local economic opportunities and the ongoing threat of land dispossession.

Also, the economy still relies heavily on safety-net programs like MGNREGA, which only help for a short time and don't help people build up their savings over time. The study talks about a "implementation-intent gap," which is when SIR policies come from the top down and usually don't follow the normal rules for how the Santhal or Munda villages are run. People feel like they aren't part of the process of development because of this. The tribal people in Purulia need to stop just providing services and start thinking about a model of resource sovereignty if they want to truly get out of the margins. This means that infrastructure needs to be combined with legal land security and the use of indigenous ecological knowledge in the local economy.

In conclusion, the SIR policies in Purulia have set up a basic framework for growth, but they haven't yet broken down the main social and economic barriers that keep Scheduled Tribe members from being part of West Bengal's success story. We need a more complex, community-led plan for the future that sees the ST population as active managers of their own social and economic resources instead of just passive users of state infrastructure.

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