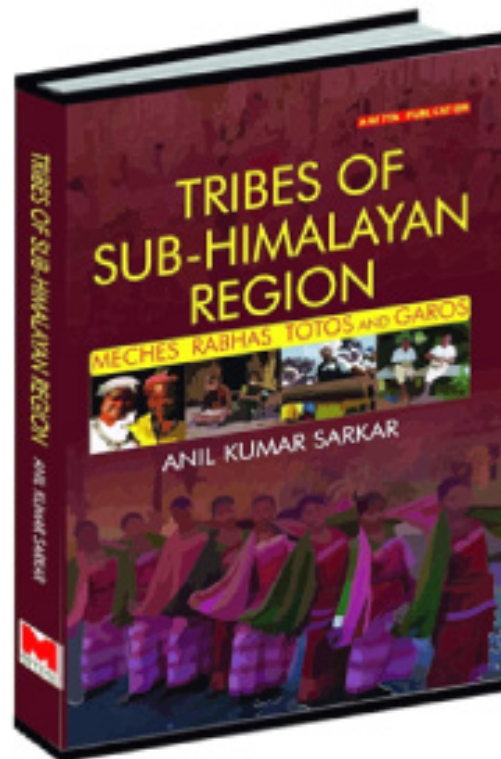


Sarkar, A. K. (2021). Tribes of the Sub-Himalayan region: Meches, Rabhas, Totos and Garos. New Delhi, India: Mittal Publications. ISBN 9788194936084. (195 pp.)



OVERVIEW AND SCOPE

Tribes of Sub-Himalayan Region is a scholarly anthropological and sociological work that examines four indigenous communities of the Sub-Himalayan North Bengal region, the Meches, Rabhas, Totos, and Garos. Tracing their historical trajectories from antiquity to the early twenty-first century, the book offers a comprehensive analysis of their origins, belief systems, traditional customs, and socio-economic organization. Moving beyond descriptive ethnography, the author critically engages with the dynamics of cultural transformation, highlighting how colonial interventions, processes of modernization, and contemporary socio-economic pressures have profoundly influenced and reshaped the traditional life worlds of these tribal communities.

Content Summary

The book is systematically organized around key thematic areas that provide a holistic understanding of the selected tribal communities. It begins with an exploration of origins and ethnogenesis, where Sarkar situates the Mech, Rabha, Toto, and Garo communities within well-defined historical and linguistic frameworks, linking them to wider tribal formations of the region. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of religion and tradition, encompassing belief systems, rituals, folklore, and folk medicine, and demonstrating the continued relevance of indigenous cosmologies and healing practices in the contemporary context. The author then examines social institutions, analyzing family structures, clan organization, marriage practices, and community hierarchies to illuminate the internal social dynamics of these tribes. A significant portion of the book is devoted to economic and cultural change, highlighting transformations in livelihood patterns and assessing the impact of development policies, urbanization, and globalization on traditional crafts, arts, and cultural expressions. Finally, the book addresses challenges and contemporary issues, critically discussing marginalization,



DOI: 10.5530/jcitation.20260287

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socio-economic disadvantages, and the role of governmental and non-governmental organizations in shaping the developmental trajectories of these indigenous communities.

Strengths of the Book

The book's major strength lies in its comprehensive ethnographic coverage, as it consolidates scattered and often inaccessible information on lesser-studied tribal communities, thereby serving as a valuable resource for scholars, students, and field practitioners interested in the tribal societies of North Bengal. Another notable contribution is its emphasis on cultural detail; the rich and nuanced descriptions of customs, artistic expressions, and ritual practices play a crucial role in documenting and preserving intangible cultural heritage that might otherwise remain underrepresented in academic discourse. Additionally, the book's contextual analysis effectively situates tribal life within wider historical and socio-economic frameworks, enabling readers to understand how traditional practices and identities have evolved in response to colonial influences, modernization, and contemporary transformations.

Limitations

Despite its significant contributions, the book has a few limitations. One noticeable concern is the limited availability of

academic reviews and critical reception, which makes it difficult to fully assess the book's scholarly impact and positioning within the broader field of tribal studies. Additionally, the book faces the common challenge of balancing depth and breadth in multi-tribe research. While it successfully covers multiple tribal communities, certain sections could have benefited from more in-depth quantitative data or comparative analysis with other ethnic groups to further strengthen the analytical framework.

CONCLUSION

Tribes of Sub-Himalayan Region: Meches, Rabhas, Totos and Garos stand out as a thoughtful and informative contribution to the field of Indian tribal anthropology. The book functions as an accessible and valuable reference for both researchers and general readers, offering rich cultural insights and a nuanced socio-historical understanding of underrepresented tribal communities of the Sub-Himalayan belt. By effectively combining detailed ethnographic description with critical discussions on socio-economic change, Anil Kumar Sarkar's work deepens our understanding of how indigenous identities and cultural practices continuously evolve in response to modern influences and developmental pressures.

Correspondence:

Dr. Debdas Mondal

Librarian, S.R. Fatepuria College,

Murshidabad, West Bengal, INDIA.

Email: research.libraryscience24@gmail.

com

ORCID: 0000-0003-3321-979X

Cite this article: Mondal. Sarkar, A. K. (2021). Tribes of the Sub-Himalayan region: Meches, Rabhas, Totos and Garos. New Delhi, India: Mittal Publications. ISBN 9788194936084. (195 pp.). Journal of Data Science, Informetrics, and Citation Studies. 2026;5(2):227-8.