

# Battle Between Didi's Sarna Promise and RSS Sanatana Dharma

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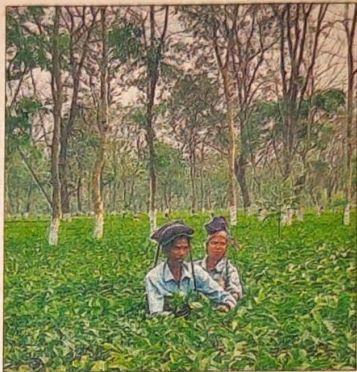
**Alipurduar:** In the Alipurduar district that is home to over 63 types of ST communities and many tea gardens, there is a battle brewing between TMC that has promises to give recognition to the Sarna religion followed by the many ST communities here, and the and RSS volunteers who have been working in the hills among the members of the ST community to keep them within the fold of Hinduism.

Additionally, in this district where the BJP led in all the five Assembly seats in the last Lok Sabha elections, the plight of the tea garden workers, and defections and recent joining by some influential leaders into TMC and BJP have created the buzz. The deciding factor in the district will be the SC and ST community who comprise more than 80 per cent of the population.

The BJP, according to its internal assessment, is hoping to sweep the region - at least 45 of the 54 seats. Home minister Amit Shah is expected to camp for two days in Darjeeling in the coming days to amplify the party's campaign in the remaining seats.

CM Mamata Banerjee had recently said that the TMC will listen to the demands of the ST communities demanding recognition of it as a definite faith for a long time. Currently, there are codes for solely six religions: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. "We have formed laws so that none could take away the land from adivasis. I have also written a letter for giving recognition to Sarna Dharma. I have done everything for you," Banerjee said, while speaking at Falakata.

Speaking to ET, Joy Prakash Toppo, general secretary of the TMC's ST morcha said the ST communities of Alipurduar were worshippers of Sarnadev, and village deities such as Dharti ayo or Chalapachho Devi, and have great regard for the Sal tree, the sun



and other elements of nature, and celebrate sarhul not durga puja. "They have their own flag and their rituals are very different. Instead of preserving this adi-dharma, the RSS temple is building hanuman temples here and telling the people here they are all part of sanatana dharma. This is because they want to do the politics of numbers. Academi Debdin Bose who has worked in Alipurduar among major ST communities such as Mech, Garo, Hazong, Chakma, Megh, Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Malpahari, Bhumij, Khe-urua, Doha and Kora said it was the threat of christianity that made the RSS start work in the hills of North Bengal in the seventies. "Now, the TMC is playing into the hands of divisive forces. We have studies these communities in detail and their deities are similar to ours..Hinduism is diverse and there are no set rules. All of these tribes have a purohit called adhikari or prahan..they celebrate anaprashan of infants and also, have extensive religious ceremonies for their departed."

Bose admitted that the Hanuman temples are a recent phenomenon in the hills. "But it is wrong to assume that he is not their deity. In fact, they worship the wind. Their gods and goddesses have very similar lores with mainstream hindu deities. We are only telling them worship your gods, don't convert. We have already lost parts of Rabha and mech tribes to christianity just because they gave them new clothes and chocolate drinks."

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