

PROSPECTS OF TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CURRENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT: Tribals in India, geographically and culturally, are at widely different stages of social as well as economic development. The tribesman lives not only for himself alone, but also he is an integral part of the community to which he belongs. Though the tribals are the sons of the same soil and the citizens of the same country, they born and grow as the children of the nature. Education is a crucial requirement for the sustained growth of a developing society and lack of it is largely responsible for the exploitation and pitiable plight of the tribals. Healthcare is a major problem in far flung isolated tribal areas. Lack of food security, sanitation, and safe drinking water, poor nutrition and high poverty levels aggravate their poor health status. The greatest challenge that the Government of India has been facing since independence is the proper provision of social justice to the scheduled tribe people, by ameliorating their socio-economic conditions. Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and denotified tribes constitute the weakest section of India's population, from the ecological, economic and educational angles. They constitute the matrix of India's poverty. A review of the tribal situation would indicate that the strategy for development would require an intensive approach to the tribal problems in terms of their geographic and demographic concentration, if the faster development of the community is to take place.

The policy of the State Govts towards the scheduled tribes is governed by the board directives laid down in the Indian constitution. It provides that; "The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the people and in particular of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and shall protect them from social injustices and all forms of exploitation." The social dynamics of tribal welfare and development implies a broad social consensus about the basic rights and opportunities that tribals should enjoy and the responsibilities that should be taken by different individual and social groups. Tribal culture is our indigenous cultures and traditions and if we do not take the effort to preserve them then we would lose a life that was once an integral part of our everyday existence. The goals should be to let people develop along the lines of their own ingenuity and avoid imposing anything on them and to encourage their traditional art and culture, their land and forests respected to the maximum. The different prospects which are stressed in this essay while studying about tribal communities is the impact of environmental degradation on them, tribal reservation in current scenario of modern education and job system, concepts of modernity and its impact on the tribal culture and traditions and lastly status of tribal women empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The tribal population is an integral part of India's social fabric and has the second largest concentration after the African continent. It is more than the total population of France and Britain and four times that of Australia. The population of tribal communities scheduled in the Constitution of India and known as Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 8.43 crores as per 2001 census and accounts for 8.2% of the total population.

Tribals have traditionally lived in about 15% of the country's geographical areas, mainly forests, hills and undulating inaccessible terrain in plateau areas, rich in natural resources. They have lived as isolated entities for centuries, largely untouched by the society around them. This seclusion has been responsible for the slower growth, dissimilar pattern of their socio-economic and cultural development and inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of their involuntary integration into mainstream society and economy. Tribals continue to be socio-economically backward.

Dwelling amidst hills, forests, coastal areas and deserts, tribals have gained vast experience in combating environmental hardships and leading sustainable livelihoods. Their wisdom is reflected in their water harvesting techniques, agricultural practices, irrigation systems, construction of cane bridges, adaptation to desert life, utilization of forest species like herbs and plants for medicinal purposes and meteorological assessment. This invaluable knowledge needs to be properly documented and preserved to prevent it getting lost as a result of modernization and the passage of time. Tribal communities have a close dependence on biological resources related to flora and fauna. Their livelihood and lifestyle depends upon and is shaped by these resources. Their survival and sustenance is intricately linked to conservation and utilization of these resources.

Adivasis are believed to be the “original people” of the land. Tribal groups follow customs and practices that not only are distinct from mainstream Hinduism but also tend to vary from tribe to tribe. The adivasis are geographically separated, frequently living in hill communities at a significant distance from Hindu villages, and subsist on forest produce. The geographic separation was sharpened by the creation of scheduled areas for tribal people under the British government¹.

II. IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON TRIBAL POPULATION

Today, the tribal people of India and elsewhere in the world confront with the basic issue of maintaining their identity which is closely linked to the natural resources and the environment they live in. Their cultural systems ensure that the resources continue to remain as the ingredients of their day to day life for several generations but what is of concern to day is that the main-stream society in any country seems to consider those natural resources as ready raw materials for the production of consumer articles. This is where the struggle begins. The tribal areas, once largely inaccessible, have been put under man’s reach by modern means of technology. The rich mineral deposits have attracted the greedy multinational corporations and entrepreneurs. In fact, the predominantly tribal areas are found to be encroached by Governmental agencies and trans-national corporations. As a result, the planners and policy makers in the name of developmental programmes often fail to take into account the interest of the tribal population and their age-old economic and cultural rights.

Acquisition of lands without taking the tribal community into confidence has become a serious issue in recent years. The Land Acquisition (Amendment) Bill, 1998 targets to accelerate the rate of land acquisition and to facilitate the big business groups and multinational companies to become the ultimate beneficiaries. The tribal areas are the repositories of 80 to 85% of the country’s total mineral resources, thus resulting in large scale land alienation, mass displacement, deforestation and migration of tribes to the cities and towns. Being landless and poverty stricken, the tribes migrate in considerable numbers to the cities and towns in search of a livelihood. Gradually they settle down in the city slums where the conditions of living are almost precarious. They lose their identity and are forced to cope up with a lifestyle which is unknown to them.

One major problem today is that there is no land ceiling for plantation as a result more and more plantations is taking place in agricultural lands. And all these commercial plantations by the contractors in the tribal lands are in no way going to help the tribals. Therefore, there is a need of a national forest policy which should be more rational and humane so as to cater adequately to the needs of the tribal population. Indigenous people attach great importance to their forests and its resources. They use their forest products in a judicious way. In fact, the planet’s healthiest ecosystems tend to be found on indigenous lands.

III. TRIBAL RESERVATION NEEDS RECONSIDERATION

Indian society suffers from substantial inequalities in education, employment, and income based on caste and ethnicity. Compensatory or positive discrimination policies reserve 15% of the seats in institutions of higher education and state and central government jobs for people of the lowest caste, the Scheduled Caste; 7.5% of the seats are reserved for the Scheduled Tribe.

The past century has been characterized by a massive worldwide educational expansion. Increasingly complex economies demand a better-educated workforce. Moreover, in a globalizing world culture, nation-states are increasingly expected to take over the duty of educating citizens².

The reservations, or quotas, for dalits and the adivasis relate to three broad categories: employment, educational, and political, the first two being the most significant for the bulk of the dalit and the adivasi populations³. In addition to employment and educational quotas, the government has also instituted a variety of programs to help defray the cost of education. These include a number of schemes such as the provision of scholarships and fellowships at all levels, midday meals, uniforms, stationery, and books. In theory, these various policies should lead to increases in dalit and adivasi educational attainment. However, little is known about changes in these differences over time.

The first thing to be questioned is: Do the benefits of affirmative action, if any, percolate to lower-income groups, or are they limited to the “creamy layers” of the dalit and adivasi populations? While the illegitimate use of the affirmative action programs by upper-income dalit and adivasi families remains a running theme in the Indian discourse on affirmative action, its echoes are also found in the many other discourses around the world. For example, in the United States, attempts are being made to focus on class rather than

¹Beteille A. Castes: Old and New, Essays in Social Structure and Social Stratification. Bombay: Asia Publishing House; 1969.

²Meyer JW, Ramirez FO, Soysal YN. “World Expansion of Mass Education, 1870–1980” Sociology of Education. 1992.

³Thorat S, Aryama, Negi P. Reservation and Private Sector: Quest for Equal Opportunity and Growth. Jaipur: Rawat; 2005.

race as an axis of affirmative action in such programs as the revamped University of Texas program following the Hopgood decision⁴; and in Brazil, attempts are made to reserve special quota for AfroBrazilians within programs that focus on the poor⁵. We examine changes in educational inequalities at various income levels to see if upper-income dalits and adivasis have disproportionately benefited.

Second issue to be raised is that: How long should the SCs or STs or any other be benefited by these reservation policies? I believe that there should be reservation in the educational system of India. Due to which they can also get good and higher education, but at the time of the jobs/ public service there should be no reservation. A person has got almost 22 to 25 years benefit of reservation policy and had completed his studies. Now he should stand on his own feet and should face the competition in the market. They have got all the things which a person born in other cast has got by now. Now if you consider the theory of John Rawles of justice then he has clearly said that “*starting line should be / must be the same for all the Persons.*” By providing reservation in the educational systems we are giving the same line to all the persons. He further also said that by providing equality in education they are providing equal chance to start to all the persons and further there is no need of reservation in service also.

Third and an important question: Are these policies aiming to form a casteless India or they are going to be like life supporting systems even through the years ahead? Now days politicians are playing a major role in reservation policy. The reservation policy was only for 10 years after the independence, for upliftment of SC and ST but till now it is continue and no one has taken any step to amend it or revise it or to change it. The reason behind this is the population of SC and ST in country. Nearly 33% voting is done by SC and ST so now if they make any change in the reservation policy against the SC and ST then they have to suffer a lot for the same. So they are not taking any steps against the reservation policy.

If government still wants to keep reservation policy then now it should not be based on caste or class, it should be based on the annual income of the person. If the person is earning less than he requires more money for his family and children and this thing he can get only by a job or in public service. By this means only such persons can provide good education to their children.

IV. HOW MODERNISATION IS AFFECTING TRIBAL COMMUNITY

Tribal Culture: The tribal people express their tribal culture and distinctiveness in their social organisation, language, rituals, and festivals. It is a precondition for members of a tribe to process a strong feeling of identity for a tribal society to form.

It is being widely seen today that the traditional features of tribal life is gradually changing from being deeply ingrained in tribal customs and traditions to something that is more modernised, in a developmental sense, due to adaptation of modern ways of living and altered life-style pattern.

As a result of progress the tribals have gone through some changes not only changes occurred in their relation with land but also in their relation with forests. Tribal people were very much dependent on forests for their day-to-day requirements, including food, shelter, equipment, medicine, and in some cases even clothes. As long as the tribes were in control of forest and open use of its produce, they had no difficulty meeting these needs. In return they conserved the forest as it was their life support system. For all the tribes, the religious concepts, terminologies, and practices are different and various, but all the members of these groups contribute to somewhat which is common in them, they are below regular stress from the main prepared religions, like Hinduism and Christianity. Some of this force is intentional, as the missionaries work among tribal group to gain converts. Most of the pressure, however, comes from the process of integration within a national, political and economic system that brings tribes into increasing contact with other groups and different, prestigious belief systems. In general only those tribes that remain geographically isolated in desert, hill, and forest regions or on islands are able to retain their traditional cultures and religions for longer periods. Those tribes that make the transition away from hunting and gathering and toward agriculture, usually as low-status labourers, find their ancient religious forms in decay and their place filled by practices of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism.

Modernisation has its positive aspects too, modernisation has brought along with it education and literacy which has helped the tribes to get themselves better living conditions and has also aided them from being exploited by the non-tribal groups.

But it is sad that new generation who are highly educated youths is not that much aware of their own tribal religious culture and practices. Most of them do not know even their tribal languages; they do not know the significance and the importance of many religious practices, the cultural ceremonies and many more activities practiced in their day to day life. They are losing control over their own dialect and adopting mixtures of other languages.

In the words of Steve Irwin, “*My dad taught me from my youngest childhood memories through these connections with Aboriginal and tribal people that you must always protect people’s sacred status and culture.*” Wherever we go, whoever we become, whatever we

⁴Tienda M, Leicht KT, Lloyd KM. “Before and After Hopwood: The Elimination of Affirmative Action and Minority Student Enrollment in Texas.”. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America; Atlanta. 2002.

⁵Boston T, Nair-Reichert U. “Affirmative Action: Perspectives From the United States, India and Brazil” The Western Journal of Black Studies. 2003

achieve, we must not forget our roots. All of us are branches of some or other tribe, we should develop in such a way that we remain connected to our ancestors since they have taught us that we must *return to nature*.

V. STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

For the accelerated socio-economic development of any community, the active participation of women is essential. In a social set up like India's, their participation has to be ensured through tangible measures, taken at various levels, which result in their empowerment in the real sense. Empowerment includes higher literacy levels, education, better healthcare, equal ownership of productive resources, and increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living, self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Raising the status of tribal women is not just a moral imperative but also a strategic one. Within the framework of a democratic policy, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining their status. Tribal women, while being a disadvantaged and vulnerable group are, nevertheless, better placed, in many respects, than their counterparts in the general population and are, in certain areas, more empowered. They do not suffer segregation or lower status. This is reflected in their higher sex-ratio vis-à-vis the general population (977 as compared to 933 - 2001 census). The child sex-ratio for tribal women also compares favourably vis-à-vis the general population, being 972 as against 919 for the general population - 2001 census. However, the negative practices of the mainstream population seem to have started percolating to the tribal population as well. The child female to male sex ratio shows a decline from 985 (per thousand males) in 1991 to 972 in 2001 while in areas such as education and health tribal women lag behind significantly.

Poverty, deprivation and now the reduction of government expenditure on basic medical health facilities is reflected in the absolutely poor health condition of adivasi women and children. Child bearing is in this 21st century still a risk to the life of the woman. Health institutions are few and far between. Also, low literacy especially among tribal girls and high dropout rates at elementary and higher levels are areas of serious concern. Due to backwardness whether in terms of culture or technology has rendered them cut off from the rest of globe, leading to heinous crimes and atrocity against women which they don't even know. Witch-hunting, forced marriages of teen girls and pressure to bear child at tender age gambling and losing one's wife are provoking. Many cases of rapes, and domestic violence remain within four walls due to lack of connectivity and ability to understand it as crime. It is rather sad that we are yet to act on these things stringently.

Girls' education, inclusive of context-specific traditional and innovative interventions should be focused. Special and sustained education initiatives/drives in low female literacy tribal pockets should be launched. Because education is a tool that can eradicate most of the problems. Women should be made aware with their rights and made capable to claim them.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said "*Tribal people's should develop along the lines of their own genus and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way, their own traditional arts and culture. Tribal people rights in land forest should be respected*". Their holistic approach to ecosystems, wild life and forests form the very basis of sustainable development. Scientists say, the huge medicinal knowledge of indigenous community may help to find answers to some of the incurable diseases like Cancer and Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome(AIDS). The State should look upon the tribal community as an asset and not a liability.

In a nutshell, what can be squeezed out of the above discussion is that the need for empowerment of tribals hardly needs justification but in such a way so as not to sweep away their individuality. Their primitive way of life, economic and social backwardness, low level of literacy, outdated system of production, absence of value systems, sparse physical infrastructure in backward tribal areas and demographic quality of tribal areas make the development of tribals and tribal areas essential. Tribal people should not be pestered in the name of administration or by overwhelming them with too many schemes and work in cooperation with their own social and cultural institutions. The development factor should be judged according to the perceived indices of actual level of human development seen in the context.