

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

We have completed 60 years of India's Independence and are planning for the Fifth Five Year Plan; it has become necessary to think over the social policy guidelines for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and denitrified tribes, which constitute the weakest section of India's population from the ecological, economic and educational angles. They constitute the matrix of India's poverty. From the historical point of view, they have been subjected to the worst of exploitation and social injustice.¹

Believing that there is a similar pattern of poverty and exploitation, two ethnic groups of Scheduled Tribes/Castes have been lumped together for the purposes of diagnosing their maladies and improving their socio-economic conditions. To my mind, it is an inappropriate approach, as it blurs the correct understanding of their problems, and steps taken for their amelioration become inadequate and faulty. Ecologically, castes are exposed. Demographically, the farmers are concentrated in certain continuous geographical areas, while the latter occupy the lowest rung in the caste hierarchy and suffer from social disabilities and loss of self-respect. To a social doctor they will appear as two groups suffering from two distinct types of maladies deserving different therapies. Here, I will be chiefly concerned with the policy regarding the Scheduled Tribes of Bihar.²

Since independence, we have actively thought and planned for the upliftment of our tribal people. Our beloved leader, the late Shri Jawaharlal Nehru gave serious thought to the problems of tribal welfare and suggested

his own enlightened approach, "to develop the tribals along the lines of their own genius and expressed his disapproval of our false idea to call some people primitive and to think of ourselves as highly civilized.³

For the past 25 years the central and the concerned state governments have made efforts to alter the fate of 38.2 million tribes (1971) living in different parts of India. What the union and state governments have done in the name of tribal welfare can be had from several reports like the annual reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from 1950 onwards, report of the Backward Classes Commission 1955, reports of the study team on social welfare of Backward Classes 1959,⁴ Forty Eighth Report of the Estimates Committee of Parliament 1959, report of the Committee on Special Multipurpose Tribal Development Blocks 1960, report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribe Commission 1960-61, report of the study group on the Welfare of the Weaker Sections of the Village Community 1961, report of the seminar on Employment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1964, report of the Committee on Tribal Economy in Forest Areas 1967, report of the study team on Tribal Development Programme 1969, reports of the Parliamentary Committee on the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1970 and a few reports released by the respective state governments. From all these reports as well as our personal experience about the tribal scene in the country it becomes evident that the desired results have not been achieved and our objective, to do good to the tribals, has suffered all three levels (i) Policy; (ii) Implementation; and (iii) Recruitment and Training of Personnel.⁵

Reasons for Poor Impact:

The Principal deficiencies of the earlier plans in brief are: ⁶

1. Lack of special attention to tribal and scheduled areas in spite of Constitutional provisions;
2. Very inadequate allotment of funds in both general and special sectors to cover all aspects of development of the tribal areas. As for example, in the Third Plan the per capita expenditure on the tribals comes to Rs. 13.081 when both State and central sectors are added together.
3. The major programmes of Tribal Development Blocks with a coverage of 25,000 tribal population per block was not significant enough for carrying to the tribal areas all the services essential for their full developments;
4. Inadequate administrative machinery to integrate all the sectoral programmes. Coupled with it is the lack of coordination and integration and inter and intra departmental levels within the state, as well as at the sectoral levels of the state and the centre;
5. Lack of effective personnel policy of the government which is reflected in the frequent transfer of key personnel in administration, inadequate incentives to work in and for tribal areas, lack of specialised training in tribal culture as well as non-inculcation of the spirit of social service in them.
6. Failure on the part of the Government to adopt scientific planning and to ensure implementation based on research materials and findings; and

7. Excessive politicisation of the tribal issues and failure on the part of tribal societies to throw up dedicated, articulate and enlightened local leaders.

If we really want to combat the problem of poverty prevalent among the tribal communities such an unimaginative, unscientific and unsympathetic approach to tribal problems must go perhaps under such realization. The then Minister for Social Welfare, Prof. Nurul Hasan in his recent inaugural address at a conference of anthropologists in New Delhi observed:

I have an uneasy feeling that our approach to tribal welfare and development has become reutilised and it is not producing results. In the mean time, however, the situation in the country and in the tribal areas has changed so much that a new strategy of tribal development has become inevitable.⁷

Area Development Approach:

In the light of a laudable object but poor performance, it is evident that the entire question of tribal development needs a fresh look.

It is high time that the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas are classified in terms of ecosystems and levels of development. The Constitutional configuration of "Scheduled Areas" needs rethinking as it excludes certain tribal areas, which could have been declared as "Scheduled" in view of its tribal concentration and ecosystem.⁸ The divisions of tribal areas under Tribal Development Blocks, delineated on national criteria earlier, have been realized, of take, by the government of India as too

small for planning integrated economic development of the area. In the new area development approach, these Tribal Development Blocks may constitute for the purposes of Planning and implementation "micro-areas". Such a macro area may fall within or coincide with the district boundary. A still larger area of tribal concentration (e.g. 50 per cent of the total population) may be termed as macro-Development Region. "Within this macro-development Region." Within this macro-development region a categorization of extremely backward and backward areas may be envisaged. I feel that criteria for the classification of "regions" and "backwardness" require more careful study. The following diagnostic feature, however, may be suggested.⁹

- a) Proportion of tribal population engaged in the primary sector of economy (hunting, food gathering, shifting cultivation, agriculture, crafts, etc.)
- b) Percentage of literacy to be determined with reference to average literacy in the state as well as average literacy of tribals at the all-India levels.
- c) Eco-social system, topography, soil climate, drainage, density of population, nature of labour supply etc.
- d) Health and sanitary conditions;
- e) Nature and extent of drinking water supply.
- f) State of irrigation and power'
- g) State of industry.
- h) Condition of roads and state of transports.

- i) Percentage of urban population and employment in urbanized industries.

In the light of adequate materials, the areas of tribal concentration are to be grouped into Development Regions considering the coverage of area, population, ethnic composition and other factors of natural resources, level of development, and other factors of natural resources, level of development and other related factors. They are to be further classified in terms of macro-and micro-regions for the purpose of planning and implementation of schemes through suitable administrative machinery. In the case of Bihar, for example, the existing region of Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana may be carved out as one such Development Region.¹⁰

Welfare Vs. Development

Along with acceptance of the area development approach as envisaged above, the concept of 'welfare' needs to be partly replaced by that of 'development'. The existing approach of giving doles to tribals has not yielded the desired results. This emphasis on development of tribal and tribal areas will need changes in the government policy, reorganisation of their department and intensive training programmes for officers who will work in tribal areas.¹¹ The whole training programme in the tribal areas needs to be reviewed and reinforced along with the question of personnel policies to ensure the implantation of the accepted policies. For example, it is conceded by everyone that better officers should be posted in tribal areas and that such areas should not be treated as places for punishment postings. It is regrettable that there is indifference if not acquiescence, to this aspect of personnel management in respect of tribal

areas. It is, therefore, necessary to devise an institutional frame for the implementation of policies accepted in principle for tribal areas.

It is also envisaged that in view of the simplicity of the tribals, a unified single line administration for tribal areas should be thought out. The head of the regional authority should be made responsible for the implementation of tribal policies and programmes. As such a level, an expert in tribal culture should function as his advisor, who should also share his responsibility in the implementation of the programmes. In the allocation of funds both the general and supplementary sectors should be equally emphasised and free flow of funds from both sector should be ensured to develop the tribal regions.¹²

In the light of the new strategy for tribal development, these and other related issues should be carefully studied with the help of expert on tribal culture, tribal economy, personnel management and tribal administration. And a blue print should be prepared for this purpose as a scientifically integrated project providing the king pin for achieving the objective of tribal development.

Origin of the term "Scheduled Tribe"

The need to specify tribes and tribal communities as "Scheduled Tribes" arose only after the Constitution of India came into force on January 26, 1950. In the Government of India Act, 1935 a reference was made to the "Backward Tribes" and the Thirteenth Schedule to the Government of India (Provincial Legislative Assemblies) Order, 1936 specified certain tribes as Backward in the then provinces of Assam, Bihar,

Orissa, Central Provinces and Berar, Madras and Bombay. However, the first serious attempt to list "Primitive Tribes" in the country was made during the Census of 1931.¹³

Specification of Scheduled Tribes:

Article 342 of the Constitution provides that the President may with respect of any state or Union Territory specify the tribe or tribal communities or parts or groups within tribes in relation to the State or Union Territory. In pursuance of this provision the President made an order in 1950 called the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 in relation to the then Part 'A' and Part 'B' states. In the following years a similar order was issued in respect of the Part 'C' States.¹⁴

Revision of List of Scheduled Tribes:

Under the Constitution, the Presidential Orders, specifying the Scheduled Tribes, once issued can be varied only by a Law of Parliament. The need for varying the order first arose when Andhra State was formed in 1953 and again on the creation of the new State of Himachal Pradesh a year later. The implementation of the recommendations of the Backward Classes Commission necessitated a further revision of these orders in 1956. These orders were revised once again on the creation of the new states of Maharashtra and Gujarat by the Bombay Reorganisation Act, 1960. Separate orders were made also for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 1959 and for Dadra and Nagar Haveli in 1962. The reorganisation of Punjab in 1966 resulted in the transfer of lists of Scheduled Tribes from Punjab to Himachal Pradesh. More recently five tribes in Uttar Pradesh

and an equal number of tribal communities in Goa, Daman and Diu have been declared as Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Uttar Pradesh) order 1967 and the Constitution (Goa, Daman and Diu) Scheduled Tribes Orders, 1968 respectively.¹⁵

The history between the interactions of the two is long. The government started tribal development in the form of Nation Extension Schemes in 1951. The objective of the NES was to intensify the block level development activities to raise the general standard of living of the weaker section. The Community Development Projects (CDP) followed the programme. It was soon found that block level programmes became a blocked to the development of the weaker sections a new scheme was reinstated in the name of the Tribal Development Block in 1962. These blocks were able to initiate some efforts on the Social Welfare front of tribals. However, since these programmes were patterned after the development efforts attempted in the earlier periods, they turned out to be not in tune with the tribal primordiality. There was, therefore, a structural constraint. However, the experiment of TDP very clearly brought have the fact as Alexander Verghese, observes that: ¹⁶

"... The emancipation of tribal communities was a complex process with serious socio-political and economic implication. The powerful feudal and vested economic interests, therefore, had to be fought against and new modes of role relations had to be established to ensure tribal claims in each such sub-plan areas. For each one of these projects, Integrated Area Development Programme (IADP) focussing attention on the specific problems of the tribal people is that area has been formulated. The

programme has completed by now a period of about twelve years. It is necessary to find out as to what is its level of success in terms of the Interaction between the development forces and the primordial structures?

Development, Primordially and Social Change:

We have argued all through this paper that the tribal ethnic identity is retained through the survival of its primordial practices. However, primordially or the tribal genius is not static. It has always been changing but at the same time retaining its form. In some cases there has been crude tribalisation or indigenisation of the modernisation processes. Or in some instances development programmes have strengthened the tribal genius. Let us examine the resultant structures of the interactions between development and primordial structures.¹⁷

Though the social legislation or marriage permits polygamy to the tribals, there is enough research evidence to show the present trend. These sporadic and isolated attempts could have only nominal impact on the welfare of the tribals.

The Tribal Integrated Development (projects ITDP) has their origin in the failure of NES and CDP. The scheme came into existence in 1972 by the special convocation of the Tribal Development Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs with the consultation of various state level tribal development departments. But following the same line of experience as over the proceeding years has proved that areas developed without developing the tribals therein can not succeed. Yet all of this seems to have got overlooked in the new level of sub-plan Scheme for Tribal

Development (SSTD) in 1975 without defining the area coverage and plan objectives.¹⁸

Of very late the new sub-plan under the main plan (of State and Union Government) started functioning in almost all states under the new name Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP). Without project officials consent, control and manage the development activities of the various state and union developments are possible.

According to the new strategy, area-sub plans comprising several projects are prepared for or tendency of marriage towards the practice of monogamy. Quite a decade back, if a tribal had managed to accumulate some money, nobody could restrain him to go for a second wife. Larger the number of wives, greater was his prestige in his own society. Correspondingly more the production of children in his family, higher was his societal esteem. The status attached to polygamy and larger size of family is looked with contempt by the tribal society. Actually, the contact of tribals with the non-tribal people has created disrespect for the practice of polygamy among them. Even today a tribal is likely to enjoy some higher status in his own society by having two wives, but his frequent interactions with the wider society make him shy – a laughing stock. There are, however other factors also. Economic largely manifest in the form of bride price, which discourages him to contract for a second wife. The polygamous attribute of primordially is gradually but surely losing ground in the wake of market economy.¹⁹

Bride. Price, yet another ethnic attributes is increasingly getting strengthened. Its amount, which was barely around Rs. 500/- to Rs.

1500/- and more. Similarly the tribal customary laws are also challenged in the court of law. The tribal however today would at the first instance, refer his dispute to his traditional Panch. But when he not satisfied he would not wait any more to court. This has also belittled the status of tribal bhanjgar as negotiators. The development of the institution Panchayet Raj has also weakened the tribal leadership and its influence. Similar is the set back suffered by the tribal Bhopa the priest who works a Spirit suffered by the tribal Bhopa the priest who works a spirit medium to the village deity. ²⁰

The tribal language known as Bhili has come into crisis owing to the introduction of Hindi as a common language of interaction used by the personnel of development agencies, traders and Missionaries. The tribals have entered into government services and have migrated to plains and urban centres have been obliged to give up their primordial tongue. They take pride in speaking through Hindi as it displays them 'modern' and forward looking gentleman. What they retain in the name of their ethnic tongue to day is only the accent and the particular word pronunciation. The linguistic identity, therefore hardly exists among them.²¹

Religion has perhaps been a greater casualty. Leaving aside a few native tribals who are in capsulated in the hills and forests the rest of them – a larger section have accepted Hindu practices of religion or Christianity.²² Even the census enumeration is not in terms of tribal religion but only a Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Christian and Sikh. There are systemic tribal conversion movements run by fundamentalists. The compulsions for the tribals are so strong that there are hardly any alternatives for them

to continue with their religious practice. This primordial identity which was stronger than any other is getting extinct.²³

The development programmes have introduced the tribals to modern capitalist economy. Their agriculture is now technological-intensive. The subsistence character of economy is on the whole declining. But the capitalist economy has its own impact. It has accelerated inequalities among various segments of the tribal society. The poorer sections among them, the small and marginal farmers and also the wage earners have to give up agriculture as a major source of livelihood. The land possessed by them is economically now viable. And this created a situation of land dispossession because the peasant prefers to lease out or sale out the uneconomic holding and take to migration for non-agricultural occupations.²⁴

The only identity left with the common tribals today is their existential situation increasing poverty, unemployment. Illiteracy and destabilisation including depeasantization resulting from dispossession of land and increasing marginalisation. The loss of primordial attributes is massive. The only bond which keeps the tribals together today are the constitutional safeguards.²⁵

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