

THE TRIBES OF WEST BENGAL

The state, with great care will look after the educational and economic right of the weaker section specially the Scheduled Community of the country and protect them from all types of social injustice and exploitation.¹

Again in Section 342 it has been said, "If the President, by public notification legally identifies an aboriginal, the aboriginal community or a part of that community, then they will be considered as Scheduled Tribes".

In the "Scheduled Tribes Order" section 342 of the Constitution proclaimed by the president in 1950, only seven communities from West Bengal are mentioned. They are: 2

Santal, Munda, Oraon, Lepcha, Bhutia, Mech and Mru. According to the recommendation of the Backward Classes Commission, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendments Act) was introduced in 1956. Thus apart from these seven communities another twelve communities were enlisted. They are:

Ho, Kora, Lodha, Kheria or Kharia, Mal Pahariya, Bhumij, Chakma, Garo, Hajong, Magh, Mahali, Nagesia and Rabha. After the reformation of dialect based states "Scheduled Tribes Order, 1956 was initiated and twenty two more communities were registered. The people of these districts of Bihar, which were incorporated to West Bengal, were enrolled according to this order. So forty-one aboriginal communities came under the West Bengal Tribal Order. In the latest phase, thirty-eight communities were kept under the "The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order" Amendments of 1976".

What should be the method of Tribal Welfare? Instead of following the "National Park Policy or serving them as Museum specimens, plans are made for them social, economic and political developments. In 1958 the last Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru told about five basic doctrines, which are known as the "Tribal Panchaseel".³

- (1) Tribal Welfare should awaken their own creative instinct. Nothing should be imposed from outside. They should be encouraged to express their own crafts and culture.
- (2) Recognition should be given to their rightful claim over land and forestry.
- (3) For administrative and development projects, the suitable man should be chosen and trained from among the tribals. Initially it is necessary to recruit a few outsiders in the field of technology: but too many outsiders should never be allowed to infiltrate in tribal infested areas.
- (4) The tribal population should not be charged with extra administrative load or the pressure of multifarious projects. The spirit of competition should be given up and they should be uplifted in their own socio-calcified in their own social-cultural order.
- (5) Tribal welfare should not be measured according to the statistics of money spent on them; the criteria should be the flourishing of their moral excellence.

Approaches to the Study of Tribal Development in India

India has one of the largest concentrations of tribal populations in

the world (38 million). According to 1971 Census the numerical strength of the Scheduled Tribe population in the country is 38,015,162. They constitute 6.93 percent of the total population. This element comprises 212 groups listed as "Scheduled Tribes". The major concentration of tribal population continues to be in the north-eastern Himalayan belt as well as in Orissa (23.11 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (20.14 per cent), Gujarat (13.98 per cent), Rajasthan (12.13 per cent), Bihar (8.76 percent), Maharashtra (5.86 per cent) and Himachal Pradesh (4.09 percent).⁴

On this occasion when we have complexes about 60 years independence it becomes our task as anthropologists to review the nature and extent of tribal development that has taken place in independent India and suggest new strategies for the modernisation of tribal society. Since our independence we are actively thinking and planning for the development of our tribal people. Even before independence social workers, Missionaries and British colonial administration in their own humble way were active in this field and had developed their respective lines of approach.⁵

The Approaches:

The Approaches to the tribal may be separately considered in the context of pre-independence and post-independence periods. Historically there have been three main approaches:

1. Policy of Segregation:

- i) In pre-independence period;
- ii) In post-independence period.

2. Assimilation:

A result of constant contact of the tribes with the rest of the Indian population and the efforts of social reforms.

3. Integration of the tribes in regional and non-regional setting.

Policy of Segregation:

In pre-Independence period: The policies adopted by the British rulers to isolate the tribals from the general masses. The policy of isolation by Britishers was largely dictated by their deliberate efforts not to develop communication in the tribal areas, which, as a result, remained cut off from the rest of the population. This isolation resulted in exploitation by non-tribal moneylenders, contractors, zamindars and middlemen. A few roads that were constructed were for security purposes and to enable contractors to exploit the forest produce. Elwin (1939) supported the establishment of a sort of 'National Park' of the tribals and advised their contact with the outside world should be reduced to the minimum. Again in 1941 he (Elwin 1941) supported the idea of "isolationism' to a great extent.⁶

In post-Independence period:

The Government of India after independence also adopted the policy of isolation of course in a slightly murdered form. Special welfare measures, which resulted in a separatist move, i.e., the demand for independence Naga state and an autonomous Jharkhand followed the partial exclusion of large-tribal areas. The Adviser on tribal affairs to the Government of

Assam, Verrier Elwin, and recommended isolation of a few particular areas of tribal concentration as scheduled areas and tribal areas "is also an example of partial isolation. In the various Five Year Plans tribal development-faced financial segregation. The fund meant for "Tribal Welfare" was kept reserved for tribal development and the general fund was not utilised for developmental work among them.⁷

The Assimilation:

The assimilation of the tribal people with the rest of the population is another approach and is a continuous process and the culture contact with the neighbouring population is held responsible for it. In India, the tribal people have come in contact with various communities and situations lending to assimilation in different part. Some tribals have gradually accepted the Hindu way of life and others gave accepted Christianity. Mazumdar (1947), Dube (1960 and Ghurye (1963) opine that this culture contact has created a self different types of tribes on acculturation level. Ghurye characterised the tribals as backward Hindus (1963) and argued that any attempt to isolate them from the mainstream of Indian life would be meaningless while sections of these tribes are properly integrated in Hindu society very large sections in fact the bulk of them are rather loosely integrated. Only very small sections, living in recesses of hills and forests have not been influenced by Hinduism.⁸

Integration of the Tribes in Regional and National Setting:

The ultimate way in which the tribals were approached is the integrational one. The past experiences of the policies of isolation and

assimilation and their results forced the planners and social reformers to take a middle way, which might have been more fruitful. The base of the Indian culture being "unity in diversity" the social reformers, anthropologists as experts on the tribal ways of life and the administration combined their skills and adopted an integrated approach towards the tribals. The latest approaches i.e., i) single like administration; ii) comparatively small districts due to communicational difficulties; iii) area development approach to develop the areas in its locality in the Fourth Plan and drawing the sub-plan's in the Fifth Five Year Plans are a clear reflection of the policy of integration with the regional and national setting.⁹

In the background of pre-independence thinking about the tribals the first Prime Minister of India gave a serious thought to the problems of tribal development and suggested his own enlightened approach to develop the tribals along the lines of their own genius (Vidyarthi, 1968) and expresses his disapproval against our false idea 'to call some people primitive and to think of ourselves highly civilised' (ibid.).

The development of the tribal people is not mere implementation of the work programme. It involves social processes to be set in motion. Without a proper understanding of the people themselves it is possible that the measures. However well intentioned, may not bring out desired results. Workers have to intimately know the people among whom they have to work. Not only the schemes for their betterment have to be in consonance with their culture but they should also be initiated after full consideration of susceptibilities of the people. Without these the measure for their betterment may be self-defeating. It is necessary to introduce

new technology with their consent and participation while preserving their native culture forms. So that their latent creative energies are released for a fuller and more prosperous life.¹⁰

Indian Constitution and the Tribals:

The anxiety to develop the so-called weaker sections of India's population found expression while framing the Constitution for the Republic of India. The Constitution of India provides "The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation" in the first instance a period of ten years was given to achieve the goal, but as the problem was not of a simple nature to be solved in a single decade, it has evidently persisted through decades.¹¹

A number of articles of the Indian Constitution provide proper safeguards for the tribal people. Though the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15) equality of opportunity in matters of public employment (Article 16), abolition of untouchability (Article 17), prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour (Article 23) to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people (Article 38) and protection of interests of minorities (Article 29) are of general nature, they still incorporate in themselves the people. The articles of the Constitutions, which are directly related to safeguarding tribal interests, are those, which promote their educational and economic interests (Article 46). Special provisions for the appointment of a minister to look after the tribal incrust exclusively (Article 164).

Special administration of Scheduled Tribal Areas (Article 244) grants from the union to certain states (Article 235), reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in the House of the people (Article 330) and in the Legislative Assemblies of the state (Article 332) reservation of seats and special representation (Article 334), special claims to service and posts (Article 335) special officers for them (Article 338), control of the centre over the administration of Scheduled Areas and the welfare of Scheduled Tribes (Article 339) and special provision for Nag land (Article 371) Article 342 of the Constitution is concerned exclusively with the Scheduled Tribes. Hence there may be made of some orders issued by the president such as Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950, Constitution (Scheduled Tribes, part states) Order 1951 as amended by modification Order 1956 read with the Bombay Re-organisation Act 1960, the Constitution (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) Scheduled Tribes Order 1959, the Constitution (Dadra and Nagar Haveli) Scheduled Tribes Order 1962, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes of Uttar Pradesh) Order 1967, the Constitution (Goa, Daman and Diu) Scheduled Tribes Order 1968 and recently Constitution (Nagaland) Scheduled Tribes Order 1970.¹²

Administrative Set-up and other Agencies for Tribal Development

A Constitutional provision led to the development of an administrative structure suitable for safeguarding the interests of the tribals and accelerating the tempo of social and economic change. The present structure of the administrative set-up for tribal welfare has evolved through interactions among the national leaders, social workers, tribal leaders