CHAPTER V

PROBLEMS OF TRIBALS
For the successful formulation and implementation of a tribal development plan, it becomes essential to identify the root problems of a particular area. A number of problems usually play a negative role in the development of tribals and tribal areas.

It is essential for the project to lay bare all the practices which may bring about exploitation of the tribals. These are the major factors which play a negative role in tribal development. These are problems of land alienation, indebtedness, shifting cultivation etc.

Here some general problems are discussed.

PROBLEM OF SHIFTING CULTIVATION

Shifting cultivation is a practice prevalent throughout the world, particularly in hill areas, inhabited by tribals. In shifting cultivation, cultivators do not stick to a particular piece of land for cultivation. A patch of land is selected, all the shrubs herbs and trees are cut down and then set on fire. The clearings thus obtained is taken up for cultivation. This type of tillage known to anthropologists as slash-and-burn, or swidden cultivation. Shifting cultivation
which is known by different names; Jhum in Assam and Tripura, Bewar or Dahiya in Madhya Pradesh, Koman or Bringu in north Orissa; Gudia in south Orissa and Podu in Andhra Pradesh.

It has been estimated by some scientists that about 2.6 million tribal people living in the interior hilly areas, practice shifting cultivation in India. About 1.35 million acres of land, in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura, Bihar, Orissa, Kerala and Karnataka is affected.

Several tribes of Andhra Pradesh were traditionally podu cultivators. In the districts of Srikakulam, Visakapatnam, Khammam, West Godavari and East Godavari shifting cultivation is still the main method of tillage of a number of tribal communities and is carried on side by side with plough cultivation wherever tribals are in a state of transition between the two systems. In East Godavari District, the areas under 'podu' are far larger, and mainly in the hills of Rampa-chodavaram mandal. Restrictions imposed by forest officials are here not very rigorous.
The following are the important problems caused by shifting cultivation (Podu).

a. Damage to the vegetative cover which leads to soil erosion, depletion of nutrients in the soil and floods.

b. There is reduction of the forest cover thus creating difficulties of accelerated erosion, wastage of valuable herbals, timber and other forest products.

c. There is loss of fertility of soil in the areas of slash and burn cultivation. The content of total sesquioxides, calcium, iron, aluminium, potassium, phosphorous and cation exchange capacity is very low in comparison to other forest areas.

d. Slash and burn cultivation affects the wild life. It disturbs the fauna of the area.

e. It also creates environmental problems.

Chaturvedi and Uppal (1953) hold the opinion that "the correct approach to the problem of shifting cultivation lies in accepting it not as a social evil, but recognizing it as a way of life, not continuing it as an evil practice but regarding it as an agricultural practice evolved as a reflex to the physiographic characters of the land".
In the draft VII Five Year Plan, it is aimed to attack the practice of slash and burn cultivation on two main grounds. They are individual family oriented schemes and community oriented schemes.

Under individual family oriented schemes, planned development of material assets such as cottage industries, piggery, poultry, plantations, terraced lands etc., and development of human skills such as tailoring, carpentry, blacksmithery, etc., to giving training to cultivators for better agricultural practices.

Under community oriented schemes, development of community infrastructure such as roads, schools, houses, hospitals etc. Under this plan, the states are to be given the flexibility to frame their own plans and programmes based on local conditions for controlling shifting cultivation.

Slash and burn cultivation has remained a constant problem in the process of agricultural development. New forest laws have banned the process of shifting cultivation. And the hilly tracts do not provide any other economic pursuits for the tribals. Hence the tribals either to disobey the laws or go hungry.
The nature of human society is such that mutual dependence is inevitable among the people for meeting their multiple needs. Some poor relatively lowly placed, have to depend upon others for their survival and development. These needs are both economic and social besides cultural and religions. Perhaps there is little to bother about such a mutually related interactional situation. But if the consequences of the poor class depending upon the rich class would mean exploitation of the former by the latter then there is violation of the principles of ethics, morality, equity, trust and humanity (Mumtaz Ali Khan, 1981).

Indebtedness relates to one such problem. The problem arises in the context of money lending transactions where the money lenders are said to have exploited the debtors in such a way that the latter are virtually ruined and left with no hopes of survival (Ibid, Page.2).

Indebtedness is almost universal, recurring and almost inevitable. Exploitation of the debtors by the creditors, though arising in the context of economic transaction is nevertheless a typical example of a social problem. Indebtedness becomes a permanent
condition for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and is even passed on from father to son. The situation is due to economic factors and large scale exploitation (Government of India Report, 1967, P.No.75).

The money lenders and traders still remains the major source of small loans in the tribal areas. The money lenders have no hesitation in advancing loans, for not only heavy compound interest, but also preemptive rights to purchase the standing crops at rock-bottom price are their privilege. The tribal people approach the local money lenders for small loans such as festivals, marriages etc. The tribal people are illiterates. They don't know arithmetic. Due to this they always leaves a comfortable arrear in favour of the creditor. Loan is available at all times and under any circumstances and the procedure is also so simple. So money lender easily attracted to the tribal people.

One of the effects of indebtedness has been the increase in their poverty. Out of their inadequate incomes, some money goes to the money lenders by way of interest and thereby making them still poor.

In spite of the massive efforts launched by banks and other organisations, most of the tribal people find it difficult to escape the clutches of the money
lenders. In many areas, Governmental institutions have not been able to enter the interior tribal areas is also leads to increase the problem of indebtedness in the tribal people.

PROBLEM OF ILLITERACY

The rate of illiteracy among the Scheduled Tribes has been very low. Almost 90 per cent of the tribal people are illiterates in 1961. The literacy level range from 8.5 per cent to 16.3 per cent among the Scheduled Tribes during 1961-1981. The levels of literacy among females rose from 3.2 per cent to 8.04 per cent during the last decade.

Education helps all-round developments of mind, body, culture and ultimately it leads to the welfare of individual and society, through with people can enjoy the economic fruits of their efforts. Economic development of a nation always depends on education. If people are illiterate, the concerned authorities cannot implement strict economic policies and programmes.

Prior to 1950, the Government of India had no direct programme for the education of tribal people, with the adoption of the constitution, the promotion of Scheduled Tribes has become a special responsibility
of both the Central and State Governments.

Educational opportunities have not been equal for all, especially the tribals. Most of the tribal children run the race under severe handicaps owing to circumstances of family, peer group or social environment.

For a tribal family, to send its grown up girl or boy to school is essentially a matter of economics, and entails dislocation in the traditional pattern of division of labour — many parents can not just afford to send their children to school (Elwin 1963, 84). Lack of education is a stumbling block to the tribals in attaining a higher standard of life. Though some of the tribal settlements have elementary schools within short distances and though education is free, many tribals refrain from sending their children to schools due to many reasons — 1. Loss on good chunk of their labour force. 2. The fear of expenditure on education. 3. The problem of motivating the children to take their studies seriously are the most important amongst them (Jacob John Kaltaka, 1983).

Several expert bodies have made recommendations in respect of tribal education, the last comprehensive exercise having been done by the Sivaraman Committee which
made forty four useful recommendations for improving the literacy rate in the tribal people.

Though many developmental programmes have taken place in tribal areas, still then majority of tribal people illiterate.

PROBLEM OF LAND ALIENATION

Transfers of tribal land to non-tribals has been taking place in the tribal areas of the country for a long time. The problem has existed in varying degrees in the tribal areas of the various states. A member of existing laws not allowed the transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals; or in some cases, all transfers are banned; unless permitted by an appropriate authority but some practices may lead to transfers.

Alienation of land not only deprives several tribal communities of their means of livelihood, but also sometime leads to serious law and order problem. Tribal lands have been acquired by non-tribals through loopholes in the law and through various illegal and fraudulent means — at times by way of oral transactions which have no legal sanction. In complete and unsatisfactory land records have merely aggravated the problem of land alienation (Dubey S.N, Murdia Ratan, 1977).
Land alienation in tribal areas is caused by rampant indebtedness among the tribals and by their deep-seated honesty informal and informal dealings. Unless indebtedness is checked, there will be no permanent solution of the problem of land alienation. Several high power committees such as the Baua and Appu Committees have examined the issue and have made several recommendations to solve this problem. The committee suggested that production and consumption credit should be made available to tribals in an integrated manner at the field level with a view to ensuring that they keep away from moneylenders (Ibid., p. No. 25).

A study conducted in various parts of the state by the Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute (T.C.R.T.I.), Hyderabad, brought to light the following types of land transfers in the scheduled areas inspite of the operation of the land transfer regulations.

1. Benami transfer of land in the name of certain individuals.

2. Transfer of land from tribal to non-tribals in the form of lease and mortgage.

3. Encroachment is another mode of dispossessing the tribals from their land and this is adopted by non-tribals taking advantage of lack of land records.
The landlords and moneylenders devised obvious method by means of which they develop spurious material relations with tribal women folk to purchase the land in their names as the regulation does not prohibit transfer of land from one tribal to the other. All these non-tribals, though already married, enter into wedlock into a tribal women in order to acquire lands without any legal complications. In the names of tribal wives the landlords enjoy all modern inputs from developmental agencies free of cost or subsidised rates. The officials are not able to implement fully the provisions of protective legislation as several non-tribal landlords and sources are breaking these protections by entering into the social fabric of tribal communities (Mohan Rao, K. 1983).

There are a number of commendable legislations restricting alienation of tribal lands. But these legislations serve limited purpose in the context of the fact that certain policy formulations of the pre-independence period, in respect of the tribal lands, still remain to be rescinded and as a result, survey and settlement operations in many areas are marked by some ambiguities. This has caused misgivings among tribals and in many areas, faced by their resistance, the survey and settlement operations have been suspended. On the other hand,
in the absence of statutory records of rights, the commercial banks and their financial institutions find it difficult to provide long-term loan in a form as would serve the interest of the tribal mass in general (Roy Burman, B.K., 1985).

PROBLEM OF HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Despite the constitutional protection promised to the tribals of India, they after more than four decades of independence, are the most backward ethnic group of India, on the major indicators of development—income, literacy, nutrition and health.

The health conditions of the tribals are not in a good condition. Most of the tribal people in India are illiterates. They believe in faith cure and age-old methods. And also depends on local herbal medicines. Diseases are common between the tribal and non-tribal population. However, there are some diseases peculiarly prevalent in the hill areas. Malaria has been recently reduced, of not altogether eliminated. But there are certain social customs which facilitate propagation of diseases in the tribals. Diseases of the lungs are common among the tribesmen, even in the hills.

Nutritional problems are also faced.
tribals. Due to lack of balanced diet, tribals suffer various vitamin deficiency diseases. Ex: Night Blindness.

Modern medicine has largely replaced the traditional practices of healers (veju), and belief in such magicians has considerably declined.