

## Tribal Development : Prespective, Programmes and Critique

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### Introduction

Tribal development has been a catch word in development literature during the post-independence era. Planners, bureaucrats, academicians, NGO activists and others engaged in tribal issues invariably invoke the phrase as a panacea for tribal maladies. It is a very comprehensive term and includes all measures directed to solve tribal problems and promote tribal welfare. The significance of welfare of the tribes was well recognised by the national leaders also prior to independence and special provisions were made for it at the time of framing the Constitution. There was concern for tribals right from the First Five Year Plan and 0.06 per cent of total plan outlay was allocated for tribal welfare.

The present paper is an attempt at analysing the tribal development policies, strategies and programmes formulated and implemented in independent India. The term tribe here is used to denote scheduled tribes as enlisted in the Constitution of India. The analysis in the paper is based entirely on secondary data.

The paper is divided into five sections. Section-I introduces the research problem. Section-II outlines the perspectives of approaches, strategies, constitutional provisions and institutional arrangement for tribal development. The following section highlights the contemporary tribal problems in different regions of the country. Section-IV presents a critique of tribal development model adopted in India. Section-V is the concluding section.

### I. Tribal Development Perspectives

The tribal population (STs) constitute 8.6 per cent of India's total population and live in plains and hills of 27 out of 29 states and 3 out of 7 UTs. From amongst these STs, 75 tribal groups in 17 states and one UT, according to the guidelines issued by the Government of India during the Fifth Five Year Plan have been enlisted as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs later designated as **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups**) for special attention to their development. They mostly are from Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, Aryan Negrito, Austroloid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid racial groups. From occupational point of view, these tribes can be categorised as the forest hunters, hill cultivators, plain agriculturists,

simple artisans, pastoral and cattle herders, folk-artists, agricultural and non-agricultural labourers and skilled white-collar job holders and traders (Vidyarthi and Rai,1985).

Tribe as a social category was a colonial construct in census reports during the early 20th century. The colonial ruler did not pay any attention to the welfare of these people. However, the national leaders among the freedom fighters were concerned for the welfare of these marginalised groups of people and championed their cause for the following reasons:

- (i) They are mostly poor and are under constant threat of exploitation by plains dwellers.
- (ii) The distinct social customs, social organisations and religious beliefs of the tribals need to be preserved.
- (iii) They need to be enabled financially and otherwise to solve their own affairs through local councils.

No doubt, we find various Constitutional provisions and safeguards with the avowed objective of ameliorating the general socio-economic conditions of the tribals. The Constitutional safeguards precisely are protective, ameliorative and concessional in nature. Constitutional safeguards for the SCs and STs have been spelt out at least in 22 Articles and two Schedules, the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution. Various laws have been enacted on subjects relating to their welfare. Sub-plans, schemes and many enabling policies have been formulated during the Five Year Plans to fulfil the Constitutional obligations towards these people. (See Mohanty, 2011 for approaches to tribal development in India).

The constitutional safeguards can be classified under four heads: social, educational and economic, political, and other safeguards. Articles 14, 15(1),15 (11),17, 23 and 25 deal with social problems like abolition of untouchability, prohibition of discrimination on grounds of caste, race, sex, unrestricted access to public places, Hindu religious institutions, wells, tanks, hotels and restaurants, forced labour etc.

Articles 15(4), 16(1), 16 (4), 16(4) A, 29, 46 and 335 deal with both educational and economic safeguards of tribal people. These include reservation for admission in educational institutions, reservation of jobs in public employment, protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Articles 164 (11), 330, 332 and 334 are concerned with political safeguards and provide for reservation of seats in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies along with other elected bodies.

Besides, there are some other constitutional safeguards enshrined in Articles 244,275,338,339,340,341,342,366 and 371, and the two schedules for administration of scheduled areas and tribal areas, grants-in-aid, formation of National Commissions, and special provisions for the states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, etc. These Constitutional safeguards protect the interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the country. All these safeguards have been provided to facilitate implementation of the Directive Principles of State Policy contained in Article 46 of the Constitution. The Principles read:

*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'. Further, these safeguards also fulfil the assurance of justice, social, economic and political which has been held out by the Preamble to the Constitution.*

The approaches to tribal development in the country did not stay the same over time. The following policy changes are observed in planned development of the tribals from time to time. Three different approaches to tribal development programme may be distinguished.

- i. **Isolationist approach:** In this approach, the tribal people are allowed to stay the same way they lived without outside interference. The approach was a legacy of the British regime, described as 'leave them untouched'. The policy was to isolate the tribal population from the masses. This approach was based on Elwin's earlier study of Baiga tribe of Madhya Pradesh. In his study (1934), Elwin advocated for the establishment of a sort of 'national park' or 'specimens in a human Zoo' of the tribals and advised that their contact with the outside should be reduced to the minimum.
- ii. **Integrationist approach:** Otherwise known as **Tribal Panchsheel**, this approach to tribal development again was propounded by Elwin in the second edition of his book *A Philosophy for NEFA* published in 1959. Nehru also endorsed it in the preface to the edition. Elwin realized that isolation of tribal people was no longer a practicable policy for tribal development, even though it seemed to be the most obvious option. He advocated spread of education and other facilities among the tribes for enabling them to attain the same level as other sections of the population. He dismissed any other policy for tribal development. This

approach had two interrelated objectives, namely, protective and promotional. It aimed at bringing up the tribals out of poverty, ignorance and disease.

This strategy was followed in principle for tribal welfare in the Second Five Year Plan. As enshrined in the Plan document, it reads as follows:

- (1) "People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
  - (2) Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
  - (3) We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
  - (4) We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
  - (5) We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved."
- (iii) **Assimilationist approach:** This approach aimed at assimilating the tribal people with the mainstream India. It was propounded by Thakkar Bappa, a disciple of Gandhiji. It emphasized on integration of the tribals with the national economy and political system such that they would enjoy the same rights, privileges and status as others in the society.

However, both the isolationist and assimilationist approaches were rejected for administrative reasons.

Focus of Planning in India keeps on changing in terms of paradigm, approach and strategy; and so is the case with tribal development. In the Sixth Schedule areas, the general plan programmes are followed with special concessions for tribals within the frame of Constitutional provisions and safeguards (Sharma, 1986-87). The Sixth Schedule provides for autonomous administrative divisions for the tribal areas covered under this Schedule. These areas have district as well as regional councils. In the Fifth Schedule areas, programmes and strategies specifically meant for the tribals are being formulated and implemented through Special Multi-Purpose Tribal Development (SMPT) Blocks (2<sup>nd</sup> Plan), Tribal Development Blocks (3<sup>rd</sup> plan), Tribal Development Agencies (4<sup>th</sup> plan) Tribal- Sub Plan (5<sup>th</sup> plan onwards). This

Schedule contains provisions relating to the administration and control of Scheduled areas and Scheduled Tribes and provides for Tribes Advisory Council.

These earlier approaches emphasised on growth and the strategies were formulated mainly to realise **development around people**. The intellectual idealism of the 1950s yielded place to techno-bureaucratic coordination in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Later on, the strategy focussed on participatory sustainable development, livelihood security, human development, inclusive growth, equality and so on. The shift of paradigm has been from **development around people** to **people around development**, i.e., people centric **development**.

In course of time, the perspective of tribal development changed from particularised achievement to holistic development of people and community. Focus of the strategy shifted from centralised planning, macro aggregates and sectoral coverage to decentralised and micro level planning for integrated development of the tribals. The goals of programmes and schemes changed from target achievement to beneficiary upliftment. New institutions like Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were put in place. To safeguard the interests of the tribes, two Acts, namely, the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, (PESA), 1996 and Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 were enacted. Employment and income generation programmes like Mahatam Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), asset creation programmes like Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Prime Minister Gramya Swarojagar Yojana (PMGSY), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) were introduced for rural poverty alleviation.

In the Sixth Schedule areas, these general programmes were implemented with concessions and subsidies. (For a detailed discussion on the topic, see Suresh, 2014; Behera, 2013 & 2006; and Mohanty,1991).

## **II. Contemporary Tribal Problems**

Despite these development programmes, tribal society is still besieged with various problems. The old problems continue and new ones keep on cropping up. As a result, tribals continue to grind under poverty, and face land alienation, displacement and exploitation as bonded labour by moneylender etc. These problems have been enumerated in the following paragraphs.

### **1. Poverty**

Poverty is rampant in tribal areas as the tribal people find it hard to earn their livelihoods from the shrinking traditional sources and do not have the expertise to be absorbed in the modern industrial sectors. About 70 per cent of them have been recorded to be living below the poverty line.

### **2. Land alienation**

Land alienation is a burning problem in tribal India. Whether they practise agriculture or depend on forests, land is virtually the single source of their livelihoods. Banerjee (2011) contends that 90 per cent of the tribals in Assam depend on agriculture and about 70 per cent of the tribal families have been practically rendered landless. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, 2004-2005 has registered 86, 291 cases of land alienation involving 10,48,93 acres of land in undivided Bihar (including Jharkhand), the maximum tribal land alienation cases in an Indian state.

While referring to a sample survey conducted by the Department of Rural Development, Government of India in 1988, Rath (2010) mentions of 30 to 55 per cent of tribal households being affected by land alienation, and about 80 per cent of their land has passed on to the non-tribals.

Hussain (2008) gives an estimate of acquisition of huge tracts of tribal land (approximately 7015.60 acres) by the Government of Assam for commissioning of Kopili Hydroelectric Project. The construction of capital complex in Guwahati due to shift of capital from Shillong in Assam during 1973 displaced and alienated 1,00,000 people, mostly Bodo tribals of their land. The land acquired for the purpose is estimated at about 48,000 acres, out of which more than 43,000 acres were part of Kamrup tribal belt.

### **3. Indebtedness**

Tribal economy was mostly based on barter system, where borrowing was virtually non-existent. However, with the introduction of money, indebtedness crept into it, more so when it was linked to market. According to a survey, indebtedness among the tribals was 34.42 per cent and average loan size of a tribal family ranged from Rs.2000 to Rs. 3000 in 2000-2001. Rath (opp. cit) found that about 85 per cent of tribal families are indebted, out of which approximately 72 per cent were indebted to private money lenders and the remaining to shopkeepers, friends and other sources.

However, indebtedness is not a very serious problem in the north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram etc. because these regions were closed to the middlemen and contractors during the British rule. Otherwise, tribal indebtedness is an all India phenomenon. The Koltas of Jaunsar-Bawar (Iyer, 2013) are the classical examples of the worst sufferers across generations on account of indebtedness.

#### **4. Unemployment and migration**

Migration is another feature of contemporary tribal India. Most of the tribals are landless labourers. Wage employment opportunities being very limited in the interior tribal areas, the tribals face unemployment and food insecurity problems in their habitats. As a consequence, they are compelled to migrate to the plains, both inside and outside the state in search of wage employment. Labour contractors take advantage of their helpless predicament and encourage migration. According to the findings of a recent research study in Odisha, majority of migrants from the state, about 70 per cent are circular migrants (Jena, 2012). A survey by Action Aid (2005) estimates that nearly 2,00,000 people annually migrate from the western Odisha to brick kilns around the major cities of Andhra Pradesh. In a similar research study under the DFID-funded Western Odisha Rural Livelihoods Project (WORLP) in undivided Koraput district, STs and SCs were found dominating the migrant population (Panda, 2006). Jena (op.cit) recorded that out of a sample of 100, 70 per cent of the ST migrants to Andhra Pradesh were from Koraput.

#### **5. Inequality**

Inequality manifests among tribal population along rural-urban divide with the tribal elites in the urban areas at one end and PTGs in the inaccessible mountainous terrains at the other end.

Though traditionally the tribal communities were not egalitarian, nevertheless, they were undifferentiated economically; but at present, class formation is visible even to a casual observer. (Misra,1993; Behera and Basar,2009). There are tribal households enjoying all the amenities of a decent life in urban areas, while their counterparts strive at subsistence level in rural areas. The case of literacy gap among tribals across gender and rural-urban divide in Arunachal Pradesh can be cited as example in this context. The gender gap among the ST category, as recorded in Human Development Report, 2005 is 18.2. Even in many interior villages, more than 50 per cent of the population are illiterate.

#### **6. Bonded labour**

The practice of bonded labour is common in many areas of India. As per the report of the National Commission on Labour, 1969, the system of bonded labour is a consequence of helplessness of the tribals and deprived communities at subsistence level. Normally a landless labourer or an average agricultural family borrows at the time of distress. As the borrower does not have any security to offer, he mortgages his labour to the creditor against the loan.

A study in 2005 in Jaunsar-Bawar region reports that tribal Kolta, Das and Bajgi communities are entrapped as bonded labour to the rich for generations. Usually they are given food and clothing by the creditor, but no wage. The loan is interest-free, but as the borrower is not paid any wage for the work

done by him. The situation is almost like slavery among the Khundit-Mundit belonging to this group (Iyer, opp.cit.)

### **7. Women Trafficking**

Human trafficking is a heinous crime in any civilized society. It has become a matter of serious national and international concern. Sources confirm that nearly 800,000 victims are annually trafficked across international borders worldwide and around 150,000 of them within and around the borders of South Asian Countries alone.

In reply to a query by the opposition in Chhattisgarh Assembly (on July 12, 2007), it was reported that about 2,000 girls went "missing" in Raigarh and Jashpur districts during 2006 and 2007 and most of them were tribals. It was further informed that NGOs were involved in taking these girls to cities. A similar allegation also was reported in *Hindustan*, a Hindi daily from Ranchi on the 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2012.

### **8. Education**

Literacy level of the tribal population is low, far below the national average. The 66<sup>th</sup> Round of NSS, 2009-10 records that ST literacy is 63.1 per cent against the national average of 72.8 per cent. Some micro studies also record poor state of tribal education. A few tribals have access to higher education and many remain excluded. (Behera and Basar, 2009).

Working Papers, NCW, 1988-89 gives an overall idea about dropout rates of the ST children. The drop-out rate for tribals at the secondary level is as high as 87 per cent and 90% for the girls. Consequently, there is a negligible per cent (0.06 per cent) of tribal women in institutions of higher education.

### **9. Health**

Health centres are far and few between in tribal areas. The norm for establishment of health centres is unfavourable to these areas because of sparsely distributed population in the mountainous terrains, the traditional habitats of the tribals. At present, the norms for Primary Health Centers (PHCs) is 1:20,000 i.e. one PHC for every 20,000 population and 1:3,000 for sub-centres in tribal areas, lower than the norms for other areas. But given the low density of population, at times there would not be a PHC within 100 km radius of a tribal habitat.

The Bulletin on Rural Health Statistics in India, 2005 gives a comparative picture of health indicators of SCs, STs and all categories. A few health indicators like infant mortality rate, under five mortality rate and under nutrition in these communications is presented in table-1.



Table – 1

**Child Health Indicators across Communities**

Categories	Infant Mortality Rate	Under-5 Mortality Rate	Under- nutrition
SC	83.0	119.3	535
ST	84.2	126.6	559
ALL	70.0	94.9	470

**Source :** Bulletin on Rural Health Statistics, 2005, Govt of India.

**10. Development induced displacement**

Mega development projects are the recognised models of economic development throughout the world. It may be hydro-power projects like Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat and Hirakud Hydro-Power Dam Project in Odisha, industrial houses like Rourkela Steel Plant of Odisha or Bhilai Steel Plant in Chhatisgarh or BHEL in Andhra Pradesh and mining projects in Odisha as well as in other states. These activities are generally carried out in tribal areas for reasons of closeness to raw materials. Millions of tribal people have been displaced from their land, homes and source of livelihoods to make way for project execution.

There are different estimates of displaced persons in the country. According to an estimate by Mahapatra (1999), 25 millions persons were displaced in the country because of developmental works. Fernandes' (2008) estimate puts the figure at 60 millions between 1951 and 2000 and contends that out of this 40% are tribals.

In addition to this, a new development intervention, namely, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) has emerged as a cause of displacement on an unprecedented scale. Protected areas are also emerging as substantial people-displacing projects. The protected areas alone displaced as many as 600,000 tribal population (Tripathy, 2012).

**11. Intellectual Property Rights, Patents and Traditional Knowledge**

Conservation and sustainable use of biological resources based on indigenous knowledge and practices is ingrained in tribal faiths, beliefs and way of life. But in the present era of globalisation, tribal

communities have been exposed to a serious threat from the outsiders for commercial use of biological resources in tribal areas. India is a signatory to the convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), 1992. Accordingly, India has enacted Biological Diversity Act, 2002. Provisions under Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), it has failed to protect the intellectual as well as customary rights of the tribals. Because of ignorance, they have been victims of bio-piracy and piracy of their age-old traditional knowledge. Naga shawl and identity marker of Naga weaving tradition, for example, are being manufactured in Jalandhar factories. Pharmaceutical companies have been making use of the traditional knowledge of the tribal people to identify plants and their ingredients to develop medicines. Bengwayan (2003) cites the case of patenting of a tree extract by a foreign corporation. He informs that for more than 2,000 years the tribal communities in India have been using the sap of the Commiphora Mukul tree to reduce blood cholesterol level and treat a few other forms of illness. But the New Jersey-based Sabinsa Corporation owns patent on the use of extracts from these trees.

#### IV. A Critique

In view of ever changing development perspectives and competing paradigms, tribal development strategy has been discontinuous. (Behera, 2006, Mohanty, 1991). Development of tribal people demands sustained people-centric programmes. But experience in India is different - discontinuity in growth-oriented programmes and broken *promises of unbroken history* (Sharma, 2010) even with the same approach to development. It makes a difference in resource use and management. Participatory forest management in Arunachal Pradesh has turned out to be a mechanism to legitimise centralisation of forest management within decentralised frame (Basar, 2011). The perspective on tribal welfare, coined as tribal development later on has been a concomitant to changing national development perspectives patterned after ever changing international development paradigm.

There is also confusion in the government's perspectives on tribal development. True, tribes are considered a category by themselves and separate policy is needed for their development. Ironically the first ever draft national tribal policy, 2006 could not be finalised. The two tribal specific Acts mentioned above, of course, have tried to solve the recognised problems of the tribals and helped strategy formulation for their development. But, other policies and regulations in the sphere of forest, land, etc. are of general nature without any tribal specific provisions. The general formal system of governance has failed to take care of the non-formal system of functioning of the tribal communities. This led to the exclusion of the tribals from the development process. Forest laws, for instance, alienated them from

accessing common property resources, their traditional source of livelihoods. Further compensation for land acquisition did not accrue to them as they did not have legal rights over the land on which they subsisted over generations.

Problems of tribal people are diverse and complex because of historical reasons as well as contemporary compulsions. Historically internal problems of the tribal societies got amplified in the contemporary situation. The tradition of drinking among the tribals, for example, has led to the problem of alcoholism and drug addiction among many tribal youths. This problem has emerged as a mechanism of their increasing exploitation. Funds are flowing into tribal areas for development works. These funds instead of being channelized into productive activities get diverted for unproductive purposes under one pretext or other and become a source of easy money in tribal societies. This becomes a source of tribals' exploitation through market link. Traditional home brewed drinks yield place to the Indian Manufactured Foreign Liquor (IMFL) available in the market and the business community takes advantage of the situation.

Exploitation has given rise to economic, social and political problems in tribal societies. This classification is not exclusive, but overlapping and interrelated. Though unemployment is an economic problem, it causes social unrest and political disturbances. Similarly, development induced displacement is as much an economic problem as a social issue and has political dimensions. In the process of development, tribal elites have emerged as agents for sustenance of the process (Behera and Basar, (opp.cit.)).

## **V. Conclusion**

Government's approach to tribal development has kept on changing over time British policy was to leave the tribals as they were in their pristine natural environment. Tribal development was given impetus in the post-independence era when various measures were taken to ameliorate the measurable socio-economic predicament of the tribals. Policies and acts were framed to protect the tribals and to lift them out of abject poverty and despondency through an integrationist approach known as tribal Panchaseel and outlined by Nehru and Elwin. Efforts were made to put an end to the isolation of tribals by mainstreaming them.

In the early post-independence years, the strategy for tribal development stressed on 'development around people' under centralised planning. But with passage of time, the strategy changed to 'people around development'. Focus of this strategy was on 'sustainable livelihood security', inclusive growth and human development through participatory planning.

But in spite of those promotional efforts, the tribal societies continue to be characterized by unemployment, indebtedness, poverty, backwardness, and exploitation. Application of uniform laws in many sectors has led to loss of autonomy in governance of tribal societies, so dear to them. Further, with constitutional provision of right to property, the tribals were dispossessed from their land which they traditionally cultivated for generations, but had no ownership right over it. They were displaced from their traditional habitats for execution of large projects. Policy measures designed for the development of the tribals have not been very effective in helping them out. Solution to the problems of the tribals does not lie in mere pronouncement of high sounding policy measures, but on effective implementation of the same with concessions for tribals in a participatory and transparent manner.

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