
SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

The tribes in India have been influenced by certain traditions of the communities around them. Major neighboring community in all the areas has always been Hindus. As a result from the very period there have been several points of contact between the Hindus of the area and tribal communities living within it. The nature and extent of contact the pattern of mutual participation and characteristics of revitalization movements have been different in different parts of India.

The ethnographic records establish that the contacts varied from semi-isolation to complete assimilation. The numerous castes among Hindus have emerged out of the tribal stratum. The recent studies of tribes of Himalayan western and middle India have left no doubt that some of the tribes are Hinduized to the extent that they have been assimilated with the different castes at different levels in the caste system.

The study of two major Central Himalayan tribes Tharu and Khasa reveal that though they have a tribal matrix and continue to practice certain distinctive tribal customs they have been accepted as Kshatriya. Their culture have been modeled on the ways of living of the Rajputs and Brahmins of the neighbor plain areas. With their fast adoption of the Hindu names and establishment of social connections with the Rajputs and Brahmins of the plains.

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They declare themselves as Rajputs and with Brahmins constitute the apex of the social order. With the long and continuous contacts with the regional Hindu castes the tribal's of Kharwars has long been assimilated as Rajputs castes. There are numerous other tribes which have undergone selective acculturation and have added selected traits or features of the regional Hindus to their respective traditional cultures. In this practice of acculturation most of them failed to occupy any rank in the castes hierarchy while few of them were integrated into the lower strata of the Hindu social system.

For ages tribals are considered primitive segment of Indian society. They lived in forests and hills without any contact with civilizations. During British rule they consolidated their position and their political aspirations and administrative needs necessitated to open up the entire country. The British introduced the system of landownership and revenue. Annual tax was trebled which was beyond the paying capacity of tribal cultivators. Many nontribals began to settle in the tribal areas offering credit facilities. Initially it provided relief to tribal's but gradually the system became exploitative. Over the years the tribal population faced all types of exploitation. This aroused the tribal leaders to mobilize the tribal's and start agitations.

FACTORS OF EXPLOITATION OF TRIBES

- Indifference from administrators and bureaucracy in dealing with tribal grievances.
- Harsh and unfriendly forest laws and regulations.
- Lack of legislation to prevent the passing of tribal land into the hands of non-tribal's.
- Lack of credit facilities.
- Ineffective government measures to rehabilitate tribal population.
- Delay in implementation of recommendations of different committee
- Discrimination in implementation of reform measures.

What are tribes?

A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarious stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor.

In Ancient and Medieval Periods: In none of the Indian languages there was a term for tribes. In earlier times, they were known by their specific names such as the Gond, the Santhal, the Bhil etc. In modern Indian languages, new words like Vanyajati, Vanvasi, Pahari, Adimjati, Adivasi,

Anusuchit jati, have been coined to designate the people called as tribe. Though much work on the history of tribes has not been done, the

names of tribes like the Kurumba, the Irula, the Paniya in South India; the Asur, the Saora, the Oraon, the Gond, the Santhali, the Bhil in Central India; the Bodo, the Ahom in North-East India, occur in old classical Indian literature. Some of the tribal populations, like the Gond in Central India, the Ahom in North-East India, had large kingdoms. The Banjara, a nomadic trading community, covered a wide tract in Western and Central India. In brief, in ancient and medieval periods of

India it appears that the so-called tribal populations interacted with other populations in a variety of ways in the region of their habitation.

During the British Rule: The modern phase of the tribal history begins with the advent of the British. The British were keen to establish their rule in all parts of the country and were also looking for resources for their industries. In the process, vast areas of India were opened up and brought under centralized administration. They not only levied new rents for land but also made new land settlements. The areas, which were relatively secluded but rich in natural resources, experienced entry of a new variety of people, namely forest contractors, laborers, officials, neo-settlers, moneylenders etc. In many places the indigenous populations resented new regulations, new levies and new settlers in their areas and they rebelled.

In Independent India: Following Independence, the policy of protection and development for the population identified as tribe has been made into a constitutional obligation. A list of tribes was adopted for this purpose. In 1950, this list contained 212 names, which was modified by successive presidential orders. In 2003, the list contained 533 names. The Constitution, however, does not provide a definition of a tribe. The people who have been listed in the Constitution and mentioned in successive presidential orders are called scheduled tribes. This is the administrative concept of a tribe.

Understanding of the Concept of Tribe by Some Scholars: Academics too have been making their efforts to define tribe. Tribes have been defined as a group of indigenous people with shallow history, having common name, language and territory, tied by strong kinship bonds, practising endogamy, having distinct customs, rituals and beliefs, simple social rank and political organisation, common ownership of resources and technology. Such definitions are not very

helpful because when the situation of tribes is examined carefully not only do we find a lot of variations in their life styles but also many of these features are shared by the caste people. This raises the problem as to how to distinguish them from castes.

D.N Majumdar defines tribe as a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions ruled by tribal officers hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes. According to Ralph Linton tribe is a group of bands occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in a culture, frequent contacts and a certain community of interests.

L.M Lewis believes that tribal societies are small in scale are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal and political relations and possess a morality, a religion and world view of corresponding dimensions. Characteristically too tribal languages are unwritten and hence the extent of communication both in time and space is inevitably narrow. At the same time tribal societies exhibit a remarkable economy of design and have a compactness and self-sufficiency lacking in modern society.

Some features of tribes in India by T.B Naik are given as: A tribe should have least functional interdependence within the community; tribal economy should be at an underdeveloped stage; they should have a common dialect; it should have customary laws; they should be politically organized and community panchayat should be influential and there should be a comparative geographical isolation of its people. Naik argues that for a community to be a tribe it should possess all the above mentioned characteristics and a very high level of acculturation with outside society debars it from being a tribe. Thus term usually denotes a social group bound together by kin and duty and associated with a particular territory.

Problems of tribal communities

Land Alienation: The history of land alienation among the tribes began during British colonialism in India when the British interfered in the tribal region for the purpose of exploiting the tribal natural resources. Coupled with this tribal lands were occupied by moneylenders, zamindars and traders by advancing them loans etc. Opening of mines in the heart of tribal habitat and even a few factories provided wage labor as well as opportunities for factory employment. But this brought increasing destitution and displacement. After the British came to

power, the Forest policy of the British Government was more inclined towards commercial considerations rather than human. Some forests were declared as reserved ones where only authorized contractors were allowed to cut the timber and the forest -dwellers were kept isolated deliberately within their habitat without any effort to ameliorate their economic and educational standards. The expansion of railway in India heavily devastated the forest resources in India. The Government started reserving teak, Sal and deodar forests for the manufacture of railway sleepers. Forest land and its resources provide the best means of livelihood for the tribal people and many tribes including the women engage in agriculture, food gathering and hunting they are heavily dependent on the products of the forest. Therefore when outsiders exploit the tribe's land and its resources the natural life cycle of tribal ecology and tribal life is greatly disturbed.

Poverty and Indebtedness: Majority tribes live under poverty line. The tribes follow many simple occupations based on simple technology. Most of the occupation falls into the primary occupations such as hunting, gathering, and agriculture. The technology they use for these purposes belong to the most primitive kind. There is no profit and surplus making in such economy. Hence there per capita income is very meager much lesser than the Indian average. Indebtedness is almost inevitable since heavy interest is to be paid to these moneylenders.

Health and Nutrition: In many parts of India tribal population suffers from chronic infections and diseases out of which water borne diseases are life threatening. They also suffer from deficiency diseases. The Himalayan tribes suffer from goiter due to lack of iodine. Leprosy and tuberculosis are also common among them. Infant mortality was found to be very high among some of the tribes. Malnutrition is common and has affected the general health of the tribal children as it lowers the ability to resist infection, leads to chronic illness and sometimes leads to brain impairment.

Ecological problems: The ecological imbalance like cutting of trees have increased the distances between villages and the forest areas thus forcing tribal women to walk longer distances in search of forest produce and firewood.

Education:

Educationally the tribal population is at different levels of development but overall the formal education has made very little impact on tribal groups. Earlier Government had no direct programme for their education. But in the subsequent years the reservation policy has made

some changes. There are many reasons for low level of education among the tribal people: Formal education is not considered necessary to discharge their social obligations. Superstitions and myths play an important role in rejecting education. Most tribes live in abject poverty. It is not easy for them to send their children to schools, as they are considered extra helping hands. The formal schools do not hold any special interest for the children. Most of the tribes are located in interior and remote areas where teachers would not like to go from outside.

Cultural Problems: Due to contact with other cultures, the tribal culture is undergoing a revolutionary change. Due to influence of Christian missionaries the problem of bilingualism has developed which led to indifference towards tribal language. The tribal people are imitating western culture in different aspects of their social life and leaving their own culture. It has led to degeneration of tribal life and tribal arts such as dance, music and different types of craft.

Tribal Struggles: Numerous uprisings of the tribal's have taken place beginning with the one in Bihar in 1772 followed by many revolts in Andhra Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland. The important tribes involved in revolt in the 19th century were Mizos (1810), Kols(1795&1831), Mundas (1889), Daflas (1875), Khasi and Garo (1829), Kacharis (1839), Santhals (1853), Muria Gonds (1886), Nagas (1844 & 1879) and Konds (1817).

After independence the tribal struggle may be classified into three groups:

- Struggles due to exploitation of the outsiders.
- Struggles due to economic deprivations
- Struggle due to separatist tendencies

The tribal movements may also be classified on the basis of their orientation into four types:

- Movements seeking political autonomy and formation of separate state.
- Agrarian movement
- Forest -based movements
- Socio-religious movements

Most of the tribal movements were result of oppression and discrimination, neglect and backwardness and apathy of government towards tribal problems.

TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Development Programmes Funding of Tribal

1. State Plan
2. Special Central Assistance
3. Sectoral Programmes of Central Ministries/Departments
4. Institutional Finance.

The State Governments are required to quantify the funds from State Plan for tribal area development in proportion to percentage of tribal population in the states.

Construction of the Hostels for Tribal students: Construction, Maintenance expense is to be borne by the State Governments/Union Territories. The rates for construction of the hostels are fixed which are different for the plains and the hills. It has been represented by various States that these rates are not workable any more in view of the escalation of prices of building materials and long distance involved particularly for the hilly areas. It is, therefore, proposed to revise the norms and to adopt the State PWD schedule of rates as in the case of construction of Ashram Schools.

Grant-in-Aid to state Tribal development Cooperative Corporation and others: This is a Central Sector Scheme, with 100% grant, available to the state Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation (STDCCs) and other similar corporations of State engaged in collection and trading of minor forest produce (MFP) through tribal's Grants under the Scheme are provided to strengthen the Share Capital of Corporations, construction of Warehouses, establishment of processing industries of MFPs etc. to ensure high profitability of the corporation so as to enable them to pay remunerative prices for MFPs to the tribal's.

Village Grain Banks: This Scheme provides Grants for establishment of Village Grain Banks to prevent deaths of STs specially children in remote and backward tribal villages facing or likely to face starvation and also to improve nutritional standards. The Scheme provides funds for building storage facility, procurement of Weights & Measures and for the purchase of initial stock of one quintal of food grain of local variety for each family. A Committee under Chairmanship of village Headman runs the Grain Bank thus established.

Grant-In-Aid to Voluntary Organizations: As many as 27 types of projects with focus on tribal education, literacy, medical & health care, vocational training in agriculture, horticulture,

craftsmanship etc., are being supported by the Ministry under this Scheme through registered Non-Governmental Organizations.

Research and Training: Under the Scheme "Research & Training" the Ministry provides financial assistance under Grants to Tribal Research Institutes on 50:50 sharing basis; for conducting Research & Evaluation Studies, Seminars, and Workshops etc. Award of Research Fellowship to Tribal Students on 100% basis registered in Indian Universities. Supporting projects of All-India or Inter-State nature on 100% basis to NGOs/Universities etc. for conducting research on tribal matters, Travel Grants and for Publication of Books on tribal's.

Development of Primitive Tribal Groups: Under this Scheme cent per-cent assistance is provided to NGOs and other institutions for under-taking projects on development of PTGs on activities mainly focusing on their food security literacy, agriculture technology up gradation, etc.

Post Matric Scholarships, Overseas Scholarships and Book Banks: The post-matric scholarship Scheme provides financial assistance to all ST students for pursuance of post-metric studies in recognized institutions within India. The Scheme provides for 100% assistance from the Ministry to State Governments and UT Administrations implementing the Scheme, over and above their respective committed liabilities. The Ministry also gives financial assistance for setting up Book-Banks in institutions running professional courses like Medicine, Engineering, Law, Agriculture, Veterinary, Chartered Accountancy, Business Management, and Bio-Sciences. Annually, Ministry provides financial assistance to 9 meritorious ST students for Post-graduate, Doctoral and Post-Doctoral studies in foreign universities/institutions of repute.

Tribal Advisory Council (TAC): Eight states having scheduled areas, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar (now Bihar & Chhattisgarh), Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (now Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh), Orissa & Rajasthan and two non-scheduled area states, namely, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have constituted TAC. The TAC consists of not more than twenty-five members of whom as many as three-fourth members are scheduled tribe representatives of the state legislative assembly. The governor of the state may refer matters concerning to administration of welfare of tribal's to the TAC for recommendations. The ministry issues guidelines for TAC. As per latest guidelines the TAC should meet at least twice a

year and discuss the issues concerning tribal interests and making appropriate recommendation for protection of tribal interests.

CONCLUSION

Establishment of different universities in northeast India has promoted the growth of social science disciplines, including Sociology. However, local-centric or state-centric nature of the universities has undermined the idea of university as a centre where students and faculty from diverse social backgrounds engage in learning and research. The quality of social science teaching and research is affected also by facilities and intellectual training that students receive at under-graduate level and the availability of qualified manpower at the university level.

Social science research in general and the discipline of Sociology in particular have made certain progress. By and large, the progress has been in gathering and compounding empirical data on some of the tribal societies. There are many tribal societies which are yet to be scientifically studied. Even in the case of those tribal societies which have been scientifically studied, the data available is sufficient enough to proceed to the next level of theoretic station. The other aspect linked with theoretical studies is having sufficient knowledge of the vernacular languages of the region. Majority of scholars are yet to acquire the knowledge of vernacular languages and discern the meanings of the vernacular terms and expressions. In this sense, the progress of social science research seems to be stymied by several factors.

Lastly, tribal societies of northeast India have been going through various processes of social transformation, giving rise to new issues. Absence of reliable data on these issues affects our understanding of the processes of change and the emerging issues in the region. The future of Sociology depends on how we overcome these challenges. Thus, one can argue that the status of Sociology today and tomorrow would depend on how it can overcome these challenges.

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