

Tribal Development in India - Status and Strategies

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Abstract

India has the world's second largest tribal population next only to the African continent. As per the census of 2001, Scheduled Tribes population constitute 84.32 million which is about 8.2 percent of India's population. There are 664 tribal communities of which 75 are categorized as primitive Tribal Groups. The tribal communities speak in about 105 native languages. It is estimated that the tribals inhabit in about 15% of the geographical area of the country. A vast majority of the tribal population of the country is concentrated in eight states viz., Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan and West Bengal. The principal goal of tribal development policy is to create sustainable improvement in the quality of life among tribal people. Much emphasis is given to beneficiary oriented programmes to facilitate increase in per capita income of tribal families. Attempts are also made to reduce economic disparities, increase education levels and also expand accessibility to health services. In spite of all these attempts, tribal people continue to earn their livelihood by practicing traditional professions viz., sale of minor forest produce, grazing of livestock, sale of agricultural and household implements, dispensation of herbal medicines, rendition of folk arts, singing devotional songs etc.

Problems of Tribals

Tribal communities in India are geographically isolated, economically weak, socially ignorant, politically indifferent, culturally rich, behaviourally simple, trust worthy and leading their life in the lap of nature. They encounter difficulties/problems in the context of socio-economic, cultural and political development. They are considered as weaker sections of the society and lead a life at bare subsistence level. They exist in a situation featured with poverty, deprivation, disadvantages etc., which can not be tackled effectively on their own; hence there is a need for the Government and the society to intervene for mitigating their miseries and facilitating development process.

Land occupied by tribals constitutes about 20 percent of the area of the country. Availability of precious minerals in different tribal regions causes exploitation of tribal land for commercial purposes leading to serious repercussions for socio-economic organization of tribal communities. The land hungry non-tribal money lenders, liquor contractors, merchants who buy forest produce and sell domestically are exploiting tribals and extract forced labour by paying insignificant or no wages. This results in limited access to means of livelihood and in effect tribals have no access to their land and land-based resources.

Further, the problem of land alienation is very serious in tribal communities. The rich and powerful forcibly occupy their land on the pretext of environmental conservation; thus denying them the genuine land rights. Another serious problem is indebtedness among tribal communities due to illiteracy, poor or no knowledge in handling money, ignorance and backwardness. In several cases even the institutional mechanisms evolved to provide loans, with low rates of interest and easy installments, are also not of much help.

Education and health are major parameters in the development of tribal communities. Education is not only the indicator of development but also a process of empowerment and participation in development. Change in dietary habits and declining forest food resources result in malnutrition. Inaccess to modern health care and superstitions lead to diseases and death which need to be paid immediate attention and emphasise to the tribal people.

Development: Policies and Programmes

Development activities for the tribal communities received priority and special attention. Different approaches were used for the welfare and development for safe - guarding their interest, ameliorate their conditions and bring them into the manifold of national life. These provide equal opportunities to the disadvantage section of the society and access the development process and its fruits.

Two different approaches were suggested on the policy for the development of scheduled tribes. On one hand, the policy of segregation was suggested wherein the tribal identity and heritage should not be disturbed leaving them alone with minimal interventions; on the other the policy of integration/assimilation was suggested wherein they should be integrated into the main stream of the national life. However, a middle path has been

adopted in consonance with the policy evolved on the basis of 'Pancha sheela' of Pandit Nehru, a great visionary and first Prime Minister of India. The basic tenets of this policy are :

- i. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and
- ii. Tribes should develop their own culture and make their contribution to the cultural richness of the country.
- iii. Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected.

Hence, the present policy is to bring the tribals into mainstream and make them participate in the development process while making efforts for preserving their identity and heritage.

In the post-independence India a number of plans and programmes have been devised under special provisions of the Constitution of India for the socio-economic development of the scheduled tribes.

The first five-year plan (1951-1956) was launched with the programmes for planned change in India for improving the quality of life and basic amenities, laying emphasis on sectoral programmes such as agriculture, health, education, drinking water, housing and communication in the country including tribal areas.

During the first year of the plan (1951-1952) Community Development Programme was initiated with the active participation of the people. The community development blocks were constituted throughout the tribal areas in the country to implement the above sectoral programmes. In 1954, the special Multipurpose Tribal Development Blocks (43) were constituted exclusively for the development of tribal predominant areas of the country. It is the first significant step for focussed tribal development in India.

The community development project accelerated the speed of agricultural development in the tribal areas. The department of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in various states dealt with the problem of education of the tribal children. State programmes of tribal education included the creation of residential education ashrams, vocational and technical training schools and hostels for tribal students. A patent programme of health education with the assistance of mobile dispensaries and the gradual introduction of regular medical services provided the advantages of scientific methods in dealing with problems of health and diseases of the people.

In the second five-year plan (1956-1961), through special Multipurpose Tribal Development Programmes certain special efforts were made for the development of tribals. 500 tribal development blocks established during this plan period are geographically demarcated administrative units with majority tribal populations. Provision of post metric scholarships for scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and other backward classes, production of text books in tribal dialects, improvement of the curriculum for the tribal schools, and research work in tribal activities are some of the important features in the education sector. The health services included the setting up of dispensaries, mobile health units and sinking of drinking water wells in tribal areas. A number of schemes were sponsored by the Central Government for tackling special problems of tribal people in more intensive manner. These include multipurpose projects like colonization schemes, construction of houses, construction of new roads and improvement of existing means of communications in scheduled tribe areas, opening of new medical and health units to eradicate diseases such as leprosy, V.D. etc, sinking of drinking water wells, development of cottage industries, vocational and technical training of welfare workers. The economic upliftment of scheduled tribes encompass the schemes such as the establishment of multi-purpose co-operative societies, forest co-operatives, training cum production centers for various cottage industries and grants for economic aids to the trainees to enable them to settle in small industries. Financial allocation were also made for opening technical schools in order to train tribals in mechanical and civil engineering disciplines and for providing certificate courses in training of tribals in agriculture and for teachers training.

During third five year plan (1961-1966), broad policies for the development of tribal populations and tribal areas had been reviewed by the study team on social welfare. The scheduled areas and schedules tribes commission, set up in April 1960, submitted an interim report which emphasised that programmes should be undertaken in tribal areas for land improvement, land reclamation and soil conservation, minor irrigation, supply of improved seeds, manures, implements and bullocks, provision of facilities for training, demonstration of improved agricultural practices, development of cattle, fishes, poultry, piggeries and sheep-breeding, organization of training cum production centers and provision of assistance and advice to village education.

In the medical and public health programme the working group also suggested priority for preventive measures for diseases common in each area, provision of mobile units, establishment of maternity and child welfare centers and provision of safe drinking water.

During the intermediate annual plan periods, as sequel of plan holiday, between the third and fourth five year plans sectoral programmes were continued for strengthening the tribal economy and improvement of social services sector.

During the fourth five – year plan (1969-1974), focus shifted from area development approach to area and group specific approach. During this phase six Tribal Development Agencies were started in predominantly tribal areas across the country which are similar to that of small farmers development agencies in rural areas. The Planning Commission has constituted a study team on tribal research institutes to examine their research and training activities, functions and actual working; to explore the problems of scheduled tribes and to examines the

need for setting up a central research and training institute for coordinating the activities of the regional institutes and for training personnel.

In earlier plans tribal development programmes were tailored more or less along those for scheduled castes and other backward classes. However, in the fifth five – year plan (1974-1979), programmes were formulated exclusively for the special needs of the tribal communities, with the focus shifting from sectoral approach to an integrated area development. Realizing the need for a more focused attention on tribal development, a distinctive, revolutionary approach known as Tribal Sub-Plan Approach was initiated. The salient features of the integrated Tribal Sub-Plan strategy include an area and group specific approach in a balanced and integrated manner in a cohesive operational area taking cognizance of the resources and needs of the local populations. Tribal Sub-Plans incorporating programmes of particular significance to the tribal economy were prepared for areas with large concentration of scheduled tribes in 16 states and 2 union territories. These programmes were funded through provisions in the state plans and central assistance.

The main objective of the sixth five – year plan (1980-85) was to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tribals and to bridge the gap between tribal and non-tribal populations. In view of this, special component plans were formulated as part of various programmes to enable scheduled caste/scheduled tribe families to cross over the poverty line. For the scheduled tribes, the sub-plan approach which operated through tribal development projects was continued. Development programmes in the fields of education, health and sanitation; employment generation programmes such as horticulture, piggy and poultry received greater attention. Increased attention was also given for the promotion of indigenous tribal crafts and related activities. The main thrust of the policy for the development of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes during this plan was i).integration of services for developing self reliance ii). development of skills and iii). introduction of latest technology, based on local materials and local skills, to reduce drudgery of workers.

During seventh five-year plan (1985-1990), special consideration was accorded to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the integrated rural development programmes. In the wage employment programme of Jawahar Rozgar Yojana priority was accorded to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and bonded labourers. In this plan priority was given to social service sector and the existing programmes were strengthened and broadened for protecting the tribal population from exploitation. Tribes who continue to live below the subsistence level received greater attention. 75 Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG'S) were identified across the country and group-specific programmes were initiated.

During the eighth five-year plan (1992-1997) problems of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were tackled by stream lining the mechanism of planning and implementation of programmes of special component plan, tribal sub-plan, and the schemes specially targeted for the welfare and development of SC's and ST's.. Programmes for educational development were intensified and a number of Residential and Ashram Schools were expanded in the tribal areas. Tribal research institutes were established to carry out research and to serve as inputs for a balanced and speedy development of tribals. The importance of voluntary organizations was recognized and substantial financial support was extended to those organizations for promotion of tribal welfare. These voluntary organizations are contributing in some of the important areas such as education, health and modernization of local skills.

The main objectives of ninth five – year (1997-2002) was to intensify the efforts to bridge the gap between scheduled castes/tribes and the rest of the population. There was a policy shift towards micro-planning and on concepts such as community participation, transparency, accountability and participatory management. The grass root decentralized democratic institutions were made active agents in the process of development. Efforts were refocused for improving the quality of life, employment generation and self reliance in order to minimize regional imbalances.

Special training was imparted through the department of Teacher Education Research and Training to the teachers working in Adi Dravidar and Tribal Schools employing modern methods of teaching and new techniques. Strengthening of infrastructure facilities like construction of school buildings, additional class rooms, laboratory buildings, provision of lab equipment, computers, furniture etc., opening of residential schools, construction of vocational training centers, provision of basic amenities like toilets, drinking water etc. was given priority.

In the field of economic development, financial assistance was offered to SCs and STs for undertaking economic activities viz., distribution of plough bulls, milch animals and starting of petty traders. Distribution of free house site pattas, construction of houses for poor Adi Dravidars and Tribals and provision of infrastructure facilities to SC and ST habitations were the prime priority areas during this plan. Mobile dispensaries and medical camps were organized to attend health problems of the tribal communities since tribal habitations are located in isolated hill and forest areas. Direct programmes for the welfare and development of primitive tribes and dispersed tribes were launched to supply of safe drinking water, health coverage, educational facilities housing etc.

In the tenth five-year plan (2002-2007), the focus is on sustainable management of natural resources like

water and land and increase in forest cover. Major approach in this plan is to ‘ resolve the unresolved issues’ and ‘solve the persisting problems’ through i. social empowerment, ii. economic empowerment and iii. social justice.

It appears from the foregoing that elaborate efforts have been made during different five-year plans by implementing tribal development policies and by infusing huge financial inputs for welfare and socio-economic upliftment of tribals.

Participation of tribals in developmental activities

Sustainable development process involves participation of all the concerned people. Tribal development and their participation has to go harmoniously together. Some of the features for their participation are:

- i. Tribals are needed to be involved in all aspects of the developmental programmes.
- ii. Tribals are to be provided with empowerment and restrain them from silent participation.
- iii. Reorient the existing administrative machinery which could take effective, punitive deterrent action against the predatory money lenders, traders and contractors.
- iv. Constitution guarantees tribals protection and development which form the basic policy on tribal development. Hence they need protection from all sorts of exploitation from non-tribals.
- v. Tribals are needed to be imbued with and strengthen the confidence.
- vi. Tribals’ command over existing resources viz., land, water and plantation are to be ensured as they used to enjoy earlier.
- vii. For sustainable development of tribal regions, tribals are needed to be involved in regeneration of natural resources for saving ecology and protect the environment.

Such holistic and coordinated approach towards development and their active participation is imperative for integrated development of tribal. Such development leads to their self-reliance, self-support and self-esteem.

Strategies and suggestions

The strategy for tribal development is to improve their quality of life especially in the field of education and health and to spare them from exploitation from outside non-tribal elements.

Notwithstanding the achievements and deficiencies in the development of tribals in the last six decades, the existing policies and strategies should be strengthened. Keeping these in view, the following suggestions are made for tribal welfare and development.

i) Educational

- Tribal education should be given in the language of the tribal and in their own cultural background.
- Educational contents should be related to their unique socio-economic cultural matrix of each tribal community.
- Curriculum and pedagogy should be sensitive and appropriate to tribal values, concepts, knowledge systems, and history.
- Curricula for meta skill up-gradation of tribal children should include aspects of tribal games and sports, archery, art and culture, folk dances, folk songs, folk paintings etc.
- Institutes should be established for imparting technical and commercial education for tribals which include subjects like forestry, horticulture, dairying, veterinary sciences etc.,
- Religious dogmatism and superstitions should be removed through scientific education

ii) Health

- Providing medicines, safe water, nutritious food, clean and properly ventilated houses etc.,
- Promote modern health care system and a synthesis the Indian systems of medicine like ayurveda and siddha with the tribal systems.
- Strengthen allopathy system of medicine in tribal areas with the extension of the three-tier system of village health workers - auxiliary nurse, mid-wife and primary health workers.
- Expand number of hospitals and health institutes in tune with rough topography and scattered nature of population.
- Traditional medicines of tribals should be validated, encouraged, documented and patented.
- Promote cultivation of medicinal plants and related value addition strategies through imparting training the youth.
- Encourage qualified doctors from tribal communities to serve tribal services.
- Strengthen research on diseases affecting tribals and initiate action programmes for eradicating endemic diseases on war footing.

iii) Economic

- Mobilising and organizing the poor scheduled tribe families into Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
- Improving the capacity and ability of the tribal people to manage risks and promoting self reliance and thrift.

- Providing support in infrastructure development and other assistance for improving the income generating capacity of ST families living below poverty line.
- Improving the skills of STs by providing training and imparting wide range of captive job-oriented vocational training to the educated unemployed youth among tribal people.
- Providing linkages for job placement and self-employment through EDP.
- Imparting entrepreneurial skills and providing financial and non-financial support to start small and medium scale enterprises in industrial and social sectors.
- Providing technical help and education to improve the condition of tribal crafts and provision should be made for marketing the goods produced by them.
- Encourage tribals to adopt modern methods of cultivation.

iv) Housing:

- Assignment of house site pattas and construction of houses.
- Provision of basic amenities like drinking water, link roads, electricity, street lights to ST habitations..
- Provision of burial ground and laying path ways to burial ground to habitations.

v) Social:

- Evil customs of bride price, magic and ritualism, child marriages, prostitution should be discouraged and eradicated through social awareness programmes.
- Religious dogmatism and superstitions should be removed through scientific education.

vi) Administrative

- An effective administrative framework should be redesigned with the nuclear links between the departments of tribal development and all other welfare departments and nation – building departments to avoid bureaucratic bungling and wastage of resources.
- Schemes under TSP should be implemented with the active involvement of the ITDP level administration and the tribal people.
- Programme of institution building (role and responsibility of public services) should involve the representation of the tribal people in the decision making process at appropriate levels.
- Government officials posted in tribal areas misuse the ignorance of tribal people and exploit them. Hence, Government should appoint officials who are conversant with the tribal culture and intend to improve the conditions of the tribal people

Conclusions

In the post –independence India a lot of plans and programmes have been devised under special provisions of the constitution for socio-economic development of the scheduled tribes. In spite of those concerted efforts and huge financial investments, a large majority of the tribal populations are still deprived of decent quality of life. The process of tribal development is slow and uneven, marked with imbalances at the regional and group levels. Such a situation is attributed to the large number of problems and inadequacies at the implementation level marked with low commitment at the government level and personnel at the field level. Apart from these, inadequacies of the target populations in seizing and making optimal utilization of the opportunities are also responsible for such a situation.

High incidence of indebtedness, land alienation, educational backwardness and lack of communications are major inadequacies in the process of tribal development. Though the TSP strategy yielded the results, they are not commensurate with the intellectual, administrative and the financial inputs. The legislations made to provide protection to the tribals from exploitation by non-tribals are not properly implemented.

Considering the inadequacies and failures of the past, planners, administrators, social workers and non-government organisations should be careful in identifying the problems of the tribal populations and then to understand the response of these tribals for whom the plans and programmes are made. A clear appreciation of the entire process yields better perspective for proper planning and execution without which any substantial development programmes and policies can not be executed for these down trodden people .

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