



Tribals in India

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Abstract:

The tribals are an indispensable part of our whole population there are a huge number of tribes and sub tribes prevailing in India having their own culture, language, names, dialect etc. The population of tribals according to 2011 census is 10.43 crores constituting 8.6% of the total population of the country. Majority of them (89.97%) live in rural areas while 10.03% live in urban areas. The decadal increase of the tribal population according to the census 2001- 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.65% of the entire population. The tribal development programmes launched by the govt. since independence have not been able to uplift the tribals in a pure sense and proletarianisation still persists in the tribes. There is need of the tribal upliftment to make their social inclusion possible with the whole population.

Keywords: Tribal upliftment, Assimilation, Development Approach, Infrastructure Development, Inclusive Policy.

Introduction:

A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliations, endogamous in character with no functional specialization, ruled by tribal heads, recognizing social distance from other tribal groups and having their own traditions and customs.¹ The words like Jal, Jangal and Zamin' are the three words which show us the very essence of tribal way of life. These three are the sources of food, livelihood and housing of the tribals who love to live close to nature. They live in different ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. Tribes are often known by many different names like Adivasis, Vanvasis, Pahari, Anusuchit jati, Adamjati and many other names. India has the second largest tribal population in the world after Africa. Some of the tribes in India are Gonds, Bhils, Santhals, and Great Andaman's Tribes, Khasi Tribes, Angami, Mundas, Garo tribes and many more. There are at least 705 tribes in India. According to the Census 2011, Bhils constitute 37.7% of the tribal population is the dominant tribe in India with a population of 4,618,068 lakh.² The central India tribal belt stretches from Gujarat in the west to Assam in the east and spreading in the states of MP, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. This region is the poorest region of the country. Majority (over 90%)

¹ Majumdar, D.N (1950), "The Affairs of a Tribe: A study in tribal dynamics", universal publications.

² Ibid.

of the tribal population has agriculture as their main occupation. The tribal's have their own rich cultural heritage with unique lifestyles and customs. Despite having regional variations, they share the same common traits like geographical isolations and are relatively more homogenous. Tribal's are at different stages of socio economic and Educational development. Most of the tribes live in forests and mountain areas. Their economy is based on agriculture and hunting and gathering. The British and the post-independence governments realized the need of protecting the tribals from land alienation and predation by outsiders. Britishers established hospitals, schools in tribal areas which made the tribals to convert to Christianity. Broadly, the STs in India live in central India and the north-eastern areas. More than half of the STs are living in central India i.e., MP (14.69%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), Jharkhand (8.29%), AP (5.7%), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Gujarat (8.55%), Rajasthan (8.86%). The other distribution area is the North East (Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh). There are some 573 communities recognized by the govt. as STs and are eligible for special benefits and to compete for reserved seats in legislatures and schools. In 1950, the policy of protection was adopted in India for the tribal protection. With reference to tribals in India, Nehru wrote, "There is no point in trying to make them second rate copy of ourselves.....they love to enjoy life by singing and dancing and do not like to sit in stock exchanges, shout at each other and think themselves civilized". The term Scheduled Tribe appeared in the constitution of India in 1949. Article 366(25) defined STs as such tribes or tribal communities or groups within such tribes and tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be STs for the purpose of constitution.³ Article 342 specifies the ways in which a tribe may be kept under Scheduled Tribes Act. The main features laid down by the Lokur committee to recognize any community as Scheduled tribe are (a) Geographical isolation (b) Primitive traits (c) Distinctive culture (d) Shyness of contact with larger population (e) Backwardness-Social and economic.⁴ The tribals are still behind in the level of development based on technology, education, economy and culture. Their potentiality and susceptibility varies from region to region and tribe to tribe, so it makes difficult to access the development level or planning for their development. Some of the tribal communities have got mixed with the main population because of the nearness with the main population and they have adopted their ways of life. There are still various tribes who have very low literacy rate, meager level of economy and are very less in population. They are termed as Primitive Tribal Groups.⁵ After independence; the government took many initiatives during Five Year Plans for the welfare of the tribes. The Constitution of India has made the states responsible for protection of educational and economic interests of the STs. from exploitation. Since independence, the GoI has been actively drawing plans for their upliftment.

³ Rath, Govind Chandra (2006), "Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate", Sage Publications, New Delhi.

⁴ Mann, Ram Singh (ed.1996), "Tribes in India: Ongoing Challenges", MD Publications, New Delhi.

⁵ Chaudhuri, Sarit Kumar (2005), "Primitive Tribes in Contemporary India", Vol.1, Mittal Publications.

Tribal Population in India

Year	Tribal Population	% Age of Total Population	Decadal Growth Rate
1951	19,111,498	5.29	41.19
1961	30,130,184	6.86	33.84
1971	38,015,162	6.94	24.80
1981	51,628,638	7.83	24.69
1991	67,658,638	8.08	23.79
2001	84,326,240	8.20	22.7
2011	10,43,000	8.61	23.7

Source: Census of India from 1951-2011, Govt. of India

Approaches to Tribal Development:

During the British period and also before them, the tribals lived an isolated life all over the country which resulted in their backwardness, extreme poverty, exploitation and ignorance at various levels. The Britishers adopted the **policy of isolation** for the tribes which is also called the National Park Theory as was popularized by Dr. Verrier Elwin. The Britishers acquired land and forests but they established hospitals and schools in tribal areas which made them to convert to Christianity and the tribals remained victims of colonial-feudal domination, illiteracy and isolation. The GoI Act 1935 provided for the creation of 'Excluded' and partially excluded areas with separate political representation of the tribes. The Britishers used isolation policy for the tribals and didn't build any communication with them. The Christian Missionaries were successful in proselytizing the tribes to a great level.

Policy of Assimilation:

Nationalist politicians and various social workers like A.V. Takkar advocated the assimilation policy for the tribal development. G.S. Ghurye also was of the opinion that assimilation process would bring reforms in the tribals and there is need of continuous social and economic reforms for their upliftment and to assimilate them with the main population. The tribals in many parts of the country slowly and steadily came in contact with various communities and situations leading to their assimilation with the general population. Also many of them slowly with time adopted the Hindu religion and others Christianity which made their assimilation more easy with the main population and they adopted all the cultural ethos of the main population which led them to development path **Policy of Integration:**

The integration of the tribes started after the independence with the efforts of the government, social workers, political workers and others. The policy was in favour of preserving the tribal identity with integration. Nehru ji firmly believed in the "Unity in Diversity" in which people from different cultures, different identities and different ethnic backgrounds are living cordially. He campaigned for the

development of the tribal areas and laid five guidelines for their development. Nehru being secular and compassionate in character wanted to include the tribals in the greater India and giving them all the basic facilities of life which they needed. He gave more emphasis on the preservation of the tribal language and their cultural ethos. Nehru's Panchsheel Yojna for the social transformation of the tribals was based on five principles.

1. Avoid imposing of the culture of the majority on the tribals but try to encourage their own cultural values.
2. Give them their rights on land and forests.
3. Give training to the tribal leaders in the administrative activities and developmental activities and integrate them politically and emotionally with the Indian constitution.
4. Avoid over administering of the tribal areas and give them reservation in politics, employment and education.⁶
5. Judge the results not in the money you spent on them but on the quality of human character evolved.⁷

Constitutional safeguards for tribes: The Constitution of India provides economic, social and political safeguards to the tribals for their welfare and their development.

Economic safeguards:

1. Art.46 makes provision of promoting special care in education and economic interests of SCs and STs.
2. Art 295(1) makes Grant in Aid available for SCs and STs for their welfare services.
3. Art.335 makes provision for the reservation in the appointment in services of both the SCs and STs.

Social safeguards:

1. Art14 provides guarantee of Equality before law for all the STs.
2. Art15 (4) makes provision for the advancement of SCs and STs who are socially and educationally backward.
3. Art16 (4) gives reservation to the SCs and STs in employment.
4. Art16 provides equality of opportunity for all the SCs and STs.
5. Article 338A makes provision for the National Commission for the constitutional safeguards of the STs.
6. Article 342 gives specification of some particular tribes as Scheduled Tribes.⁸

⁶ Zacharias, Thundy, P (1981), "Aboriginal Groups in India", Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine, sep1

⁷ Prasad, R.R. et al (1993), "Tribal Situation in Forest Areas: Changing Subsistence Strategies & Adaptation", Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi

Development strategies during the Plan Periods:

During the Fifth Plan (1980-85), credit cum marketing services were developed in the tribal areas to prevent them from exploitation. The credit and marketing services were reorganized into Large Agricultural Multipurpose Societies (LAMPS). The development of agriculture in tribal areas was taken up as a major issue and they were given ownership rights and completion of land records was taken up. The Govt. developed local industries in the tribal areas to generate employment in horticulture, poultry, and cottage industries. The Tribal Sub Plan approach which was applied in 17 states and 2 UTs has the main components like Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs), Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) and Pockets and Primitive Tribal Group Projects. During the Sixth Plan, fifty percent of the tribal families who are living below poverty line were provided assistance to cross the poverty line. The Plan laid emphasis on tribal economic activities rather than on infrastructural development. During the 7th Plan (1985-90) period, the target of providing economic assistance was fixed at 41.56 lakh families. For primitive tribes, special micro projects were formulated. The Plan performance was not up to the mark. There was lack of progress in projects and lack of coordination between tribal programmers. The Plan laid emphasis on the social justice and self-reliance of the tribals. The Plan also gave importance to the development of village and cottage industries, horticulture and social forestry. Also steps were taken up to curb exploitation of tribals by moneylenders. In the Eighth (1992-97) Plan, efforts were made to bridge the gap between tribals and the general population through enhanced development works in tribal areas so that the tribals may be brought at par with others. The Ninth Plan (1997-02) put emphasis on social and economic empowerment of tribals with also providing social justice to them. The Tenth Plan (2002-07) was guided by the Mid Term Appraisal of the 9th Plan which stated that ‘A small bunch of bureaucratic programmers has done little for the tribal welfare and their empowerment and to avert their exploitation ‘The tribals are still under the long remaining problems of poverty, indebtedness, land alienation and displacement. These are ‘Unresolved Issues of Tribal Development’. The plan gave priority to poverty eradication and putting an end to the tribal exploitation through different means and sources (Approach Paper, 2012). In the 11th (2007-11) Plan, Inclusive Growth Approach was taken up to provide social justice to the tribals and focused on the problems in educational expansion, exploitation, marginalization and governance in the tribal areas. Social empowerment of the tribals was given more emphasis by providing education and health facilities among them. The boys and girls were provided free hostels, free coaching is being given to them. On economic side, employment increased by implementing the income generating schemes. The Plan focused on 1) Retail Marketing in the tribal areas. 2) Marketing of forest produce. 3) Giving vocational training to the tribal youths. 4) Emphasis on Research and Development, Intellectual property rights.

⁸ Thakur & Thakur (2009), “Tribal Law & Administration”, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi.

During 12th (2012-17) Plan, strengthening of the administration in tribal areas was given more focus for implementing the centrally sponsored schemes. The Plan also focused on the funds to be provided for tribal development through different schemes and providing of basic services like education, transportation, health facilities and public distribution system. The Plan focused on better road and aerial connectivity, giving rights to the tribals on the forest produce, covering MGNREGA with artisanal work to provide livelihood to the tribals.

Fund Allocation for Tribal Development

Plan Period	Total Fund Allocation	Allocation of Tribal Development Programmers	% Age
1 st plan (1951-56)	2069.00	13.93	0.06
2 nd Plan (1956-57)	4800.00	49.92	1.08
3 rd Plan (1961-66)	7500.00	50.53	0.60
Annual Plan	2081.54	32.32	0.48
Annual Plan	2246.00		
Annual Plan	2359.00		
4 th Plan (1969-74)	15901.47	79.5	0.5
5 th Plan (1974-79)	38853.24	1157.67	3.0
Annual Plan (1979-80)	12176.00	855.16	-
6 th Plan (1980-85)	97500.00	3640.25	3.7
7 th Plan (1985-90)	180000.00	6744.85	3.8
Annual Plan (1990-91)	65714.50	NA	NA
Annual Plan (1990-91)	73482.15		
8 th Plan (1992-97)	434100.00	22409.65	5.2
9 th Plan (1997-2002)	859200.00	32087.26	3.7
10 th Plan (2002-07)	1618460.00	1481.00	0.09
11 th Plan (2007-12)	3644718.00	3633.00	0.09
12 th Plan (2012-17)	3568626.00	-	-

Source: Document of Planning Commission for 1st plan to 12th plan, Govt. of India.

Problems faced by the tribals:

Despite all the initiatives taken since independence by the respective governments, the problems with STs remain as such. Some main problems which the tribals all over India still facing are

1. Indebtedness
2. **Involuntary Displacement and Rehabilitation:** Acquisition of tribal land by the govt. and setting up of different projects has led to the large scale tribal displacement. The tribal pockets in Chotta

Nagpur region, Orissa, WB and MP suffered the most. No settlements were provided to them and they migrated to nearby states in poverty.

3. **Erosion of identity:** The coming up of modern institutions in the tribal belts has led to the extinction of the tribal dialects and language which is a cause of concern of their identity.
4. Social, Economic and technological backwardness
5. Lack of control over natural resources
6. Poverty and Exploitation
7. Problem of health and nutrition, High Infant Mortality Rate and anemia
8. Land Rights: Land rights have declined due to the increase in population, Alienation of land due to indebtedness and taking of tribal land by the government. Also the tribals have not been involved in any decision making process or in the implementation of the plans and the programmers at any level which has resulted in the less development and non-integration of the tribals with the main population.

Conclusion:

The tribals who were kept isolated by the Britishers from the main society and were not put on development agenda of the Britishers until they left India. After independence, the respective govt. tried to Integrate the tribals with the main society through the development initiatives. Most of the committees and commissions of the govt. emphasized on preservation of tribal culture and not to intervene in their social institutions and put emphasis on the development of infrastructure in tribal areas. The Five Year Plans put a good share of financial resources for the tribal upliftment. Variety of tribal development approaches like top-down approach, regional planning, target group approach, integrated development, poverty alleviation and family oriented programmes have been implemented from time to time in the tribal areas. In spite of all the massive investment in the tribal regions of the country, the results have not been so encouraging. There is need of tribal participation in all the decision making processes and their involvement is very necessary and then the development projects and other investments made can have positive results.
