

Problems and Challenges Tribal Community in India

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Abstract

Tribes are generally backward, economically as well as educationally. The situation is not uniform in all the parts of India. In the north-east, the situation has been disturbed for several years, whereas in the mainland (central India) problems related to poverty, unemployment, indebtedness, backwardness and ignorance are acute. The tribes of the northeast have a high level of politicization, literacy and a high standard of living compared to their counterparts in other parts. The tribes were alienated from their own lands. The landlords and moneylenders of the plains gradually replaced the tribal landowners. This article describes the problems faced by the people in the tribal community of Indian society.

Keywords: illiteracy, assimilation, poverty, identity and exploitation

Scheduled Tribes

Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. This Article says that only those communities who have been declared as such by the President through an initial public notification or through a subsequent amending Act of Parliament will be considered to be Scheduled Tribes. Article 342 provides for specification of tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which are deemed to be for the purposes of the Constitution the Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory. In pursuance of these provisions, the list of Scheduled Tribes are notified for each State or Union Territory and are valid only within the jurisdiction of that State or Union Territory and

not outside. The list of Scheduled Tribes is State/UT specific and a community declared as a Scheduled Tribe in a State need not be so in another State. The inclusion of a community as a Scheduled Tribe is an ongoing process. The essential characteristics, first laid down by the Lokur Committee, for a community to be identified as Scheduled Tribes are — a) indications of primitive traits; b) distinctive culture; c) shyness of contact with the community at large; d) geographical isolation; and e) backwardness. Tribal communities live, in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. Tribal groups are at different stages of social, economic and educational development. While some tribal communities have adopted a mainstream way of life, at the other end of the spectrum, there are certain Scheduled Tribes, 75 in number known as

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), who are characterised by: a) pre-agriculture level of technology; b) stagnant or declining population; c) extremely low literacy; and d) subsistence level of economy.

Distribution of Tribes

The Scheduled Tribes are notified in 30 States/UTs and the number of individual ethnic groups, etc. notified as Scheduled Tribes is 705. The tribal population of the country, as per 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribal's from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the entire population. The sex ratio for the overall population is 940 females per 1000 males and that of Scheduled Tribes 990 females per thousand males. The trend in ST population since Census 1961 is illustrated in S1.1. From 30.1 million in 1961, the ST population has increased to 104.3 million in 2011. Since tribal people are at different social, political, economic and ecological levels, their problems also differ in degree from each other. These differences can be seen in terms of hill tribes and plainsmen; between those who are engaged in forest-based economic pursuits and the ones who are employed as settled agriculturists; or between those who are Hinduised or converted to Christianity; and those who are adhering to an unadulterated tribal way of life (Sharma, 2008). Despite these distinctions, some common problems of the tribal people are:

Social Problems

Tribes in India differ from one another in racial traits, language, social organization, cultural patterns, etc. The dominant racial type among tribes is the proto- Australoid. In the sub-Himalayan belt, the Mongoloid type is preponderant. Several anthropologists have observed social stratification among the members of a specific tribe. However, today, a paradoxical situation exists. Protective discrimination isolates the tribal people from the non tribes men, but in course of time this very policy would bring the tribal's at par with the non tribal's. The dominant thinking today is in favour of assimilation of the tribal people into the national mainstream without any disruption. It is not easy to have both dissolution and assimilation at the same time.

High Incidence of Illiteracy and Gender Gap

Early participation of children into work, abject poverty, lack of supportive education culture at home and in the community have contributed to the high incidence of illiteracy and very high rate of early dropout among the tribal population in the region. The reservation in educational institutions and in government jobs and the provision for education stipend for the tribal children remain under utilized. In very recent years, the spread of primary schools and Sarva Siksha Kendras (SSKs) down to the villages, and the introduction of mid-day meals have contributed to the increase of enrolment of children enormously. The catholic missions too have set up schools in remote areas and have been encouraging the tribal children to go for higher education with economic and other infrastructure support. Some positive results are being noticed in recent years, yet the tribal communities in the region are way behind the students of upper caste groups in the field of education.

Problems of Assimilation with the Non-Tribal Population

The tribal's have largely come under the impact of the dominant cultural streams of India. New divisions have been created among the tribal's due to cultural change in their ranks. Stratification in tribal society in India has its roots in British policy, unevenness due to the impact of economic development, and varied cultural contact with the wider society. Modernization and industrialization has apparently reduced the gap between the tribal's and the non- tribal's, but it has also created new problems. The tribal's, who have been uprooted from their lands, have not been absorbed in the new system. Hence, they are facing a new form of pauperization without a traditional support base.

Naxalism

After independence this problem has been raised in Indian tribals. Now a day's tribal's caught between two lobbies i.e., police authority and naxal persons. Most of the tribal peoples getting suffered and psychological disorder. Naxals directly kill, exploit and threaten for fulfillment of their aims. Another side policemen torture creates doubts to the tribal's. In this way the tribal persons totally disturb and confused. There are various causes, effects and remedies about this problem.

Poverty

Poverty is a main disease of tribal's. There are various causes behind this problem. Majority of tribes live under poverty line. Primary occupations, lack of resources and industrialization, derogated social and economic life, illiteracy are the various factors related to it. Due to poverty malnutrition, high crime and death rate, physical and psychological disorders have been facing by tribal's.

Erosion of Identity

Most of the Indian tribes have been in contact with other populations since time immemorial. In some cases, the contact has been very intimate. As a consequence identity of tribal communities in respect of society and culture has been eroded gradually. It is practically not possible to specify the zero point of culture change. It is also not easy to say definitely which culture traits were taken by the tribals from non-tribals and vice-versa (Majumder, 1937). In Indian context, the impact of Hindu society on tribal culture has immensely been observed. As Hindus are dominant in larger society except for North-Eastern region, emulation of lifestyles and thinking process carried with it great amount of prestige. Consciously or unconsciously, tribal people began to imbibe Hindu ideas and observe festivals and worship some Hindu Gods. In certain areas, a social stratification system resembling those of Hindu caste system evolved.

Drug Addiction

Consumption of alcohol is a part of social rituals among the tribal communities. At the national level it is noted that about half of Scheduled tribe men (51%) consume some form of alcohol. The prevalence of alcohol consumption was found to be much lower among non- Scheduled Tribe men (30%). Therefore, such a pattern of drinking alcohol among Scheduled Tribe men has negative effect on their health. The estimated prevalence among Scheduled Tribes is found to be higher in the eastern states like Assam (70%), West Bengal (70%), Orissa (69%), and Jharkhand (67%). In a few exceptional cases like Sikkim, Manipur, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Goa, a higher proportion of urban Scheduled Tribe men drink alcohol as compared to their rural counterparts.

Economic Problems

The tribal people had strong sense of community life before the British rulers and Hindu zamindars and moneylenders intruded

into their lives. Exchange of goods and transactions at weekly markets and fairs was the basic mode of economic relations. However, the British took over the forests on which they depended for their livelihood. The money lenders brought them under their control by extending loans at exorbitant interest rates and then by mortgaging their lands, alienating them from land they cultivated. Indebtedness led to exploitation and pauperisation of the tribal people. Hinduisation has also contributed to indebtedness and exploitation, as the tribals adopted Hindu ways of life and rituals which forced them to spend life as the Hindus did. Tribals occupied a very low rank in Hindu society after they copied Hinduism.

Loss of Control over Natural Resources

Before the coming of the British, the tribals enjoyed unhindered rights of ownership and management over natural resources like land, forests, wildlife water, soil, fishes etc. Collection of forest based products and living with forests; dependent on nature were the basic features of tribal resources. Indigenous peoples have an intuitive relationship with nature, a wealth of traditional knowledge, and have used natural resources for their livelihood. They have their own knowledge about management practices for centuries to preserve their lands.

Poverty and Exploitation

Poverty refers to the condition of not having the means to afford basic human needs such as clean water, nutrition, health care, clothing and shelter. This is also referred to as absolute poverty. Relative poverty is the condition of having fewer resources or less income than others within a society or country, or compared to worldwide averages. Generally poverty is measured by Below Poverty Line (BPL) indices in rural areas. Below Poverty Line is an economic benchmark and poverty threshold used by the government of India to indicate economic disadvantage and to identify individuals and households in need of government assistance and aid. It is determined using various parameters which vary from state to state and within states. In tenth five-year plan (2002-2007) survey, BPL for rural areas were based on the degree of deprivation in respect of 13 parameters, with scores from 0-4: landholding, type of house, clothing, food security, sanitation, consumer durables, literacy status, labour force, means of livelihood, status

of children, type of indebtedness, reasons for migrations, etc.

Land Alienation

Under the reign of Koch kings, there were two kinds of lands in accordance with revenue systems, namely (1) Revenue free land and (2) revenue paying land. Revenue free lands were given some special cases to the tenures namely Brahmattor, Devottor, Pirpal, Lakheraj and Petbhata. Brahmattar lands were those which would be given to the Brahmans for their livelihood so that they could pursue knowledge and were hereditary from generation to generation. Devottor tenure was granted for religious purpose such as worship of idols etc. Pirpal tenure was same as Devottor but it would have been granted for the Muslims. Lekhraj tenure was granted as a satisfactory service to the royal kings, Petbhata tenure was granted to the members of the royal family or relatives only for their maintenance of livelihood. Huge amounts of such revenue free lands were converted to revenue paying holdings by the Britishers. There were five kinds of revenue paying land namely, Khalsa, Khangir, Khasbas, Sairati and Baje Mahal. Government possessions' lands were khalsa. Khangir was a demesne land of the king. Khasbash and Bajemahal were two distinct parts of khangir. Sairati lands were those which were covered by tanks (Sutradhar, 2013).

Lack of Awareness About Government Schemes

In the Indian context, scheduled tribes have the special provisions, constitutional rights for their social, economic and educational promotion. Recent tribal welfare schemes are: a) Pre-metric and post-metric scholarship for scheduled tribes students, b) Boys and Girls hostel for tribal dominated areas. c) Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Scheme for tribal students in higher studies, d) Establishment of Ashram school in tribal sub plan area, e) Vocational training in tribal areas, f) Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana, g) Tribal forest Dwellers Empowerment Scheme, h) National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) self employment scheme, i) Eklavya Model Residential School for tribal students, j) Sikshashree for tribal day scholars, k) Old age pension scheme for tribal people from BPL families with age of 60 years or above, l) Development of particularly primitive

vulnerable tribal groups etc. Besides, there are other general social and economic developmental schemes.

Subsistence Economy

Tribal economy is characterised as subsistence oriented. The popular forms of subsistence economy are that of collecting, hunting and fishing or a combination of hunting and collecting with shifting cultivation. Even the so-called plough using agricultural tribes do often, wherever scope is available, supplement their economy with hunting and collecting. Subsistence economy is characterised by simple technology, simple division of labour, small scale units of production and no investment of capital,

Health Issues

The status of health among tribals is in general very poor. This is predominantly so among the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). This is mainly because of their relatively isolated and remote living, unaffected by the process of development. Tribals are highly vulnerable to diseases. Their misery is increased by poverty, illiteracy, ignorance of causes of diseases, difficult geographical terrains and harsh climatic zones, lack of safe drinking water, poor sanitation and certain blind beliefs. Culture plays an important role in tribal health and medicine. Attitudes, beliefs and values affect the willingness of tribal people to take voluntary action concerning their health and that of other members of their family. Non-biological human factors (social, cultural and behavioural factors) are essential to determine many diseases. How people live, what they eat, believe, value, and what resources they have at their end, are significant determinants of their individual and collective health. A reason for the inappropriately designed and poorly managed health care in Scheduled Areas is the near complete absence of participation of Scheduled Tribes people or their representatives in shaping policies, making plans or implementing services in the health sector. Coverage with medical insurance remains extremely low in the Scheduled Areas. Thus, the Scheduled Tribes populations are almost completely without financial protection against acute and catastrophic illnesses.

Religious Issues

Tribal people belief in the existence of super human or supernatural power, due to contact

with other cultures, the tribal culture is undergoing a revolutionary change. 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.

Social Issues

Child marriage among tribes still exists. Polyandry and polygamy exists in some tribes of Himalayas. Infanticide, homicide, animal sacrifice, black magic, exchange of wives and other harmful practices are still found among tribes.

Migration

Tribal people suffer predominantly from the phenomenon of poverty — induced migration on account of rain-fed agriculture and absence of other avenues of employment. Fragmentation of land, loss of land due to acquisition and illegal land alienation by non-tribals also cause people to migrate. Deforestation and decreasing access to forests and drought are other contributory factors for tribal migration. It is estimated that, in the last decade, about 3.5 million tribal people are leaving agriculture and agriculture-related activities to enter the informal labour market. Tribal people faced with influx of immigrants, fear loss of identity, land, destruction of forests, jobs and losing political control. Process of involuntary displacement on the name of development is also burning issue among tribes of India.

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. Most of them live under abject poverty and are in debt in the hands of local moneylenders and Zamindars. In order to repay the debt they often mortgage or sell their land to the moneylenders. Indebtedness is almost inevitable since heavy interest is to be paid to these moneylenders.

Child Abuse and Exploitation

Child abuse and exploitation is very common in

tribal communities. Due to the concept 'kids are the natural gifts of god' the number of children are more among the tribal's. Children are neglected and avoided from their basic human rights. In spite of education they are involved in various types of works with their parents. Problems and exploitation of Children.

Unemployment

The tribes are basically hill and forest dwellers. There are no industries and no opportunities of jobs so the tribes unemployed. They use secondary source of income such as husbandry, poultry, farming, handloom, weaving and the handicraft work for their livelihood.

Housing Problem

House is the basic need for every human being which protects him from seasonal effect and other dangers. The tribes face a lot of problems related to their house such as they live in one room and two room huts, don't have houses made from bricks from leaf and roots and branches of trees, can't protect them from seasonal temperature and they live with their cattle/ farm animals so it's difficult to them to maintain cleanliness and healthy environment.

Drinking Water Problem

Scheduled tribes don't have the regular drinking water supply. They are inhabited of using the water which is collected in small ditches. this proves hazardous to their health.

Transport Problem

The road facilities are inadequate and a large number of villages are still unconnected with the network of existing road system.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Inclusion of local culture, folklore and history in the curriculum can help in building confidence of tribal children and enhance the relevance of education in their lives. Music and dance are a central part of tribal life. Therefore, storytelling, theatre, painting, music and dance performances should be promoted. It may help in increment of literacy rate of tribes of India. Similarly, sports such as football, archery and other popular local sports are extremely beneficial and therapeutic for children, and should be promoted.

A tribal community needs a special health plan. Such a "Health Plan" should be constructed on the basis of needs of tribal peoples. Focus should be given on the delivery of health services in tribal areas, which is very poor. This "Tribal

Health Plan” should become an essential feature of the National Health Mission and of the Tribal Sub Plan. There is a dire need to establish agro-based training institutions and related labour-intensive processing industries in tribal regions. In order to make use of land available with the tribal farmers, they should be motivated to undertake organic farming and eco-forestry. This requires concerted efforts by the Departments of Agriculture and Forest to motivate the tribal farmers to undertake such activities. Data on development parameters with respect to STs are not available for the purpose of policy planning and implementation. Therefore, a National Institute of Tribal Development, an autonomous research organization, has to be set up exclusively for undertaking research on STs. Water for agriculture is the greatest impediment in production. Micro watershed development program with people-centered participatory approach is a good method for poverty reduction through natural resource management in tribal regions. Therefore, micro watershed should be given topmost priority in tribal areas to enhance agricultural productivity.

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