

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF TRIBALS IN INDIA

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Abstract: Tribes in India have been studied and written about by many scholars. In this research paper discuss some of the major issues concerning the tribal communities in India. They are largely excluded from the mainstream of social life and are often deprived of their indigenous sources of livelihood. They are quite frequently uprooted from their socio-cultural traditions. They experience loss of their dignity and independence. The government policies have had both negative and positive impact on tribal societies resulting in varying tribal responses to these policies. The great deal of concern among the policy-makers continues to be for the tribal upliftment.

Keywords : Alienation, livelihood, Rehabilitation, Dignity and Independence.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The tribal communities, especially in the central belt of India, are characterized by declining access to land and other resources due to land alienation and increased diversion of forest and other common property resources for development projects. As a result, a disproportionately high percentage of the tribal population has been displaced from their traditional pattern of livelihood without proper rehabilitation.(Sarap, 2017). Of the total 104.3 million people belonging to various tribes (705), about four fifths live in the heart of India comprising the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha and West Bengal (Government of India, 2011).

The socio-economic conditions of the tribal's living in these states are, in several ways, different from those living in northeast India. That is, since these are predominantly forest-based areas with high concentration of poverty, the tribal's in these regions stand, both socially and economically at a much lower level as compared to those in northeast India. The problem of poverty confronting them is multidimensional in nature including income, and human vulnerability. (Kannan & Raveendran, 2011; Radhakrishna 2015, and Sarap, 2017)

The adivasis living in the hinterland of the states are characterized by low level of asset holding, low level of human capital, lack of political participation in the decision-making process and no political voice (De Haan & Dubey, 2005). In addition, they are subjected to multiple deprivations (Bakshi, Chawla & Shah, 2015) and human vulnerability. (Sarap, 2017). Major causes of tribal poverty are lack of access to secure productive resources, such as land, forests, other common property resources like grazing grounds, ponds, tanks etc.

Most important is their insufficient participation in the decision-making process. The loss of entitlement to resources has not only affected their livelihood but also made them poorer. There is continuous erosion in their access to different types of resources on which the tribals depend for their livelihood. The level of poverty among the tribal communities central India is higher as compared to other regions. (Radhakrishna, Ravi & Reddy, 2013). They are marginalized because of land alienation and indebtedness (Sarap, 2017). There is distress sale of their agricultural and forest products by middlemen to the local traders. Even the tribal labour as marketed (Sarap & Springate-Baginski, 2013). The state sponsored programmes have poor performance in tribal areas. Their performance in forms of human development like health education and training is ineffective (govt. of India 2014).

The literacy rate among tribal communities is rising but at a slow pace, as compared to other communities in this nations. (Sarap, 2017) There is difference in the levels of literacy among different tribal communities in addition to the difference between male and female literacy rates of tribal people. The health indicators like infant mortality, morbidity, skilled health care, are the worst. Female-headed households can be seen amongst tribed community. The child poverty and

disadvantage based by women are very high. The women themselves suffer from multiple burdens of being located in remote areas in disadvantaged groups. They receive insufficient access to education and quality of health care (De Haan 2004) The World Bank, 2011). The tribal households tend to be poorer inspite of various welfare programmes and some changes in their demographic, occupational and educational levels. (Kijima, 2006). The tribal dominated areas in central India are characterized by poor access to roads, markets, medical and educational facilities.

The infrastructural deprivation of tribal areas increases both transportation and transaction costs of production and marketing of commodities, and creates difficulty in accessing basic services for the tribal people. The remoteness of tribal areas precipitates their commercial and transnational problems. This reduces the possibility the transformation of tribal economy. Given the low agricultural productivity and low returns for their labour (Kijima, 2006, see Sarap, 2017), the net surplus available to the tribal people is marginal or negative.

The adivasi regions are rich in mineral and other resources but, historically, the tribal communities have been denied a share of this wealth. Such resources are owned by them as they are found under the land they possess but they are excluded from the use of small resources. They are not permitted to extract minerals and water resources for power generation and irrigation. As a result, they have been displaced and subjected to 'adverse incorporation', which has pushed them to the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy (Chatterjee, 2008).

In tribal areas, there is absolute deprivation as a result of loss of land and habitats, and from the fragmentation of homesteads due to dams, mines and industries (Munshi, 2012, see Sarap, 2017). These adverse changes have led to dispossession of individuals and communities. There is also the relative deprivation resulting from lack of opportunities, that is, social exclusion from the processes and benefits of developmental programmes. There are number of factors including policies, as discussed below, responsible for decline in the conditions of livelihood of the tribal communities.

2. Issues Relating to Access to Livelihood

Access to the source of livelihood of the tribal people depends on sectoral institutional and governmental (supports). They should not only improve their sources of livelihood but also facilitate mainstreaming i.e bringing them closer to other people and integration of tribal communities with other communities and societies. There is also a need to enhance their capacities. The governmental policies including agrarian, forest and development policies are crucial for providing these communities with opportunities for their sustainable socioeconomic development. (De Haan & Dubey, 2005)

3. Agrarian Policies, Land Laws and Land Alienation Among Tribals

The land as a major source of livelihood plays a direct and an indispensable role in agricultural production and prosperity but the agrarian policies of the states have been relatively ineffective in broadening the access to this source of livelihood to a large section of tribal population. The reason can be attributed to the fact that post independent. Indian states have encouraged private property regime but the state property regime continued and the communal land tenure system was not accepted.

As a result, land not settled as private property automatically became state property which included forestland also (Ekha, 2011; Kumar & Kherr, 2013; Sarap & Sarangi, 2010). Although the forestland was primarily owned by the tribal communities. In many adivasi areas, requisite surveys were never done. Thus, people's rights over vast tracts of land were never recognized, though the land was customarily owned by these tribal communities (Xaxa, 2007, Sarap, 2017). Further, the increasing pauperization and marginalization of peasantry has been affecting the livelihood of the tribals. The National Sample Survey Office data shows an increasing trend of landlessness among the tribal households, leading to their pauperization. The percentage of households without any cultivated land (landlessness) has been increasing. It is noteworthy that the percentage of households that do not have cultivated or agricultural land increased from 28 per cent in 1987–88 to 39 per cent in 2011–12 (Karat & Rawal, 2014). Similarly, adivasi households that do not possess any land have increased from 13 to 25 per cent and such households that do not own any land have increased from 16 to 24 per cent during the same period (Sarap, 2017).

4. TRIBES AND FOREST

Some tribal groups practice hunting and food gathering as their sole occupation but majority of them are cultivators and agricultural labourers. The rest are engaged in household industry, construction work, plantation, mining and quarrying and in other services. A small section of them receives benefits from the protective measures of the government, such as, reservation in educational institutions, employment and political reservation but majority of them are marginalized by the process of so-called development of the last seven decades since independence (Munshi *ibid*).

Most tribal groups derive their livelihood from agriculture and forest as compared to non-tribal agricultural communities. Their dependence on the forest serves variety of purposes. The dependency on forest and other natural resources is substantial. Their agricultural activities are closely interlinked with the forest. The forest has been, and continues to be, a major source of food, timber for house construction and agricultural implements, fuel wood, medicines, and other necessities of everyday life. The leaves, fruits, flowers, roots, tubers from the forest constitute an important supplement to the otherwise meager diet of the tribals, especially during the lean season and periods of drought. Wild fruits, berries and honey are collected and eaten.

The bamboo and timber are necessary for making agricultural and fishing tools. The herbs serve as medicines for several ailments; The oil and soap are also gathered from the forest. Around fifty to eighty per cent of food requirements of the tribals may, in fact, be provided by the forest. The sale of forest produce like bamboo, fuel wood, tendu leaves (leaves plucked from its shrubs used to wrap bidi/cigarette) and variety of nuts are important sources of income. The tribal people have the belief that gods and spirits reside in the forest, trees and animals. They are also their object of devotion. The forest resources are the major sources of material and spiritual existence of tribal communities (ibid).

There are several regulations passed in the mid-nineteenth century during the colonial rule; with the object to protect and regenerate forests for ecological reasons and to facilitate the production of timber on a sustainable basis, for both revenue and imperial purposes. The laws relating to the management of forests and forest produce were subsequently consolidated in the Indian Forest Act of 1927. This resulted in the large scale restriction on the removal of fuel wood and bamboos and prohibition of shifting cultivation.

In many instances, grazing lands were included into 'unreserved' and 'protected' forests, thereby seriously affecting the existing grazing arrangements. The creation of a large scale of 'reserved' forests in India under the control of the state, supervised and managed by the forest department resulted in the restriction of the customary rights of the forest communities endangering their very survival. These communities suffered great hardships at the hands of forest officials who enforced the restrictions with great severity and even a minor breach of regulation was treated as a crime.

The forest management introduced by the British resulted in the enhanced commercial value of the forest and opened up an important source of revenue for the government. The increasing demand from urban centers, military cantonments and hill stations, from the railways, and the rising commercial value of teak and other minor forest produce added to the economic value of the forests.

The increased policing by the forest department inevitably resulted in more and more forest crimes and offences being committed by those dependent on the forest. The land and forest under tribal control were brought under state control and management. During the colonial rule and after independence, lineage/ village ownership of land was not recognized. In addition, the non-recognition of shifting agriculture as a legitimate agricultural practice existed except in the north east. Paradoxically, the post colonial Indian state has continued with the colonial policy with the result that lakhs of shifting cultivators have no legitimate rights over the forests that have been their own for centuries.

The traditional rights of the tribal people over land and forest were neither recognized nor recorded. The creation of national parks and sanctuaries on forest lands further excluded these communities from their survival base. The conservation of the flora and fauna was recognized as an urgent need but the settlement of tribal rights to forest and its produce was not undertaken with sincerity and seriousness that it deserved and those who continue to use forest land were deemed 'encroachers', stripped of any security rights (ibid).

5. Loss of Land and Livelihood

There was loss of the source of livelihood since the tribal's were kept away from the shifting cultivation as it was considered wasteful and destructive but the British government considered it as a source of regular revenue, and therefore, the tribal's were encouraged to take up land for cultivation but on lower rates of assessment. However, the lack of agricultural implements, poor quality of soil, frequent crop failure and rigid revenue demands, often forced the cultivators, both tribals and non- tribals, to turn to money lenders to provide them with money at high rates of interest to buy seeds, consumption items, and even money to pay revenue to the government. In several parts, the trend of increasing indebtedness and transfer of land for cultivation to the money-lending classes increased.

In this way, a powerful class emerged which amassed large amounts of land and wealth through combined activities of money-lending, trading and liquor selling. This trend reduced the tribal's to the position of bonded labourers and tenants. Thus, from a low subsistence, the tribal's became totally dependent on the landlord- money lenders, traders, shopkeeper, for their survival. The exploitation and oppression by the money-lending class not only reduced them to extreme poverty but also removed their self respect.

6. Loss of Land and Livelihood in Pre-Independent India

The necessary pre-condition for the dependence and bondage was the alienation of the adivasis from their means of subsistence, forest and land and other resources. Their alienation was almost complete by the end of the 19th century. In many parts of the country, the tribal's joined the non-tribal's to revolt against the local oppressors and administrators. They demanded land, forest rights, lower taxes, lower prices for food etc. In spite of the legislations preventing alienation among the tribal's, they continue to lose their land and the sources of their livelihood.

7. Loss of Land and Livelihood in Post-Independent India

The decade following Independence were the decades of intense development planning in India. This was also the time of marginalization of tribal communities from mainstream development through the agenda of nation building centered around industrialization and urbanization. What accompanied this process was building of large dams, large industrial complexes, infrastructure, opening of mines and forest for the market and over exploitation of natural resources to satisfy the expanding urban and industrial demands in the tribal inhabited areas where most of the rich natural resources lie.

The adverse effect this process on tribals in India has been reported by the International Alliances of Indigenous Peoples of the Tropical Forests. It was reported that the building of industries, mines, townships, dams, forest depots was both by decision and default imposed on the tribal people. The tribal communities carried the burden of the economic growth of the nation. The land acquisition, a piece of colonial legislation, used to acquire lands for the Crown. It was the power as a tool in the hands of the colonial state to take over the resources to divert their benefits to the advanced and advancing sections (Munshi 2013). More than 10 million people were displaced and lost all that they had and millions of tribal communities to the brink of ethnocide. There was a simmering discontent in almost the entire middle Indian found themselves pushed tribal belt, particularly on the issues of land and forest and their alienation from these. In some cases there was a near confrontation between the people and the state marked by intermittent eruption of violence. The tribal people are continuously losing command over their resources in almost all counts with utter disregard of their traditional rights over land and national resources. There was virtually forced displacement in favour of a variety of development projects (Munshi, 2013). The public and private sectors undertakings, development projects and industries have contributed to the process of impoverishment of the tribals.

The state which is supposed to protect their interest has immensely contributed to their exploitation. The depletion and destruction of forest have eroded the already fragile survival base of the tribal communities. The most affected are the tribal women who must now work harder to meet the fuel, water, food and fodder requirements of the family and their cattle. A large number of tribals are forced to migrate seasonally or permanently to other rural areas, urban fringes, or cities in search of work opportunities because of being deprived of their traditional sources of their livelihood. They constitute a large army of 'footloose workers, a part of the expanding unorganized sector, with little security and protection (ibid).

It is noteworthy that the situation in the north-east tribal belt differs from that of central and southern India. Except Tripura, Assam and Manipur, this region did not experience much migration even in colonial days. Although in more recent times, alienation of land and other resources has occurred. But it is not as widespread as in the rest of the country, in particular by the central tribal belt. The tribals in this region, according to Pathy, control the resources for their survival. The tribals are in majority in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. They struggle here also but they have little to do with land alienation and expropriation of resources by the state. They focus more on their political involvement. (ibid).

The policy of globalization and liberalization has only accelerated the process Tribes of alienation of the tribals from their natural resources and created greater insecurity for them. The free movement of human resources, commodities, finance and technology across national, regional and local boundaries have adversely affected these communities. It is observed that large scale transfer of tribal land is going on. This alienates as them from their land. There is now moves to amend the fifth schedule and structure of forest management projects in order and is resources to include the interests of large private firms like the Indian Tobacco company in Andhra Pradesh. The Jindals have procured tribal land through benami transactions in Chhattisgarh for their steel plant.

The Sahara Housing Limited grabbed 3,760 acres of tribal and forest areas in Maharashtra for a tourism project (ibid). The government has effectively carried out a massive eviction of tribal people in order to clear the way for the big multinational mining companies and their Indian partners, who are coming to India to exploit its iron-ore, coal, bauxite uranium and other bio-diversity. The Odisha government has already given mining rights for iron and steel production to 35 companies, including a grant to POSCO and to large number of aluminium companies.

Mining and quarrying has recently attracted a lot of attention. It has emerged as a major profit- making industry often combining force and fraud, legal and illegal means to carry out its activities. Although, mining areas are the site of

violent political clashes between the local people on the one hand, and the private capital and the state on the other. The ecological destruction, loss of traditional livelihood of tribals and their displacement have taken place.

Chhattisgarh is one such site which has witnessed clashes between the local people and police. In fact, this place has also seen the massive state repression to crush the Maoist influence in the region. It is reported that in the first four and half decades after independence, mining had displaced about two and a half crore people, and less than 25 per cent of them had yet been rehabilitated. More than 50 per cent belonged to tribal communities. It was estimated that 1,64 lakh hectares of forest land has already been diverted for mining in the country (ibid). The tribals protests led by Maoists have brought to the centre stage the problems of continuing illegal acquisition of land from scheduled areas by private interests as well as the state, and the resulting alienation of tribal communities from their resource base. The areas most politically volatile are those which are forested and rich in other natural resources, and which have been home for tribal communities (ibid).

Box 1.1: Impact of Industrialization

The installation of industries in Santal dominated areas was another very important factor of change and modernization. These industries provided jobs to both educated and illiterate and offered a new source of mobility. Moreover, these industries were free from one or another religious domination. They promoted caste-free and class-free occupation. A large number of Santal found jobs in them. These industries, having recruited local tribals; provided an opportunity to the people to further cement their traditional linkages: in fact, these industries were the 'world of kinsmen'. Santal identity was further strengthened by the tribal-workers.

The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution grants tribals complete rights over their traditional land and forests and prohibits private companies from mining on their land. Only a small number of tribals have benefitted from the welfare measures of the state. A small proportion of young adivasi men and women do not want to continue with their traditional lifestyle but majority of the tribals feel they are deprived of their traditional sources of livelihoods against their wishes. They are forced to take up employment which offer them little security and quality of life. Thus, millions of tribals have been displaced in the last few decades making way for development projects, industrial activities, forest conservation and the processes of development to proceed unhindered. However, these developments are but all at the cost of tribals. The short-sighted policies of the states have resulted in destruction of natural resources and displacement.

The experiences of the tribal communities can best be described as the 'loss of nerve.' After displacement, the resettlement of the tribals is a painful experience because the conditions in the resettlement sites are often so abysmal that the majority of the tribal people want to return to their villages, kin group, forest areas where they may feel satisfied. They may also like to move out of resettlement to work as casual labour in plantation and industries and as domestic servants, rickshaw pullers and construction workers in the alien surroundings (Munshi ibid).

8. Regulations and Resistance

There has been, of late, a growing awareness of the environmental problems facing the country, especially the depletion of our forest resources. The conflict and tension is growing among contending tribal groups because of deprivation and lack of access to resources and power. (Guha, R. 2013). The task of fulfillment of tribal 'rights'; and the loss of their control over their natural resources have evoked a sharp reaction from the tribal forest communities. There have been revolts in different tribal areas centered around the question of forests since the early days of forest administration. For instance, in Garhwal, the reservation of forests in 1913 was followed by extensive social movements in 1916 and 1921, coinciding with the first non-cooperation movement, engulfing large areas of Garhwal and Kumaon. These upsurges forced the government to de-reserve large forest areas. The discontent among the tribal people due to forest restrictions manifested in the unwillingness of the villagers to cooperate with the Forest Department in its task of forest conservation (ibid).

The state in many areas has made over some forests as village forests under the settlement for the use by villagers but the loss of community ownership of forests had effectively broken the link between man and forest. This alienation of man from forest can be compared to the alienation of the primary producer being separated from the means of production as conceived by Marx. As a result, there were sporadic forest movements in Tehri Garhwal since the early years of the century. This history of conflict and struggle can be seen essentially as emanating from alienation, property rights and obligation (ibid).

9. New Kind of Struggle on the Issue of Land

A new form of struggle on the issue of land has started within some of the tribal communities where the tribal women are struggling to gain ownership rights to land. The denial of land rights to tribals/ adivasi women has been a matter of great concern. The studies by Kishwar on Ho tribal community (1987:200) argue that Ho men's increasing control over land and other income generation activities has resulted in 'greater exploitation of Ho women despite women's far greater contribution to the family's livelihood. There are instances of tribal women like the Santhals of Bihar who are supported by men from the tribal community to launch a campaign to fight for their right to land (Munshi 2013).

10. Tribal 'Unrest'

With increased forest exploitation, the forest tribal communities have experienced a progressive loss of their control over their habitat. This deprivation has been manifests in a series of movements. There has been intermittent uprisings in the fifties and sixties. Currently we find 'unrest' in most areas. These movements, ranging from Uttarakhand in the north to Jharkhand in the east and Thane/ Dhulia in the west, have been studied and reported. The increasingly militant struggles have centered around the question of regaining community control over land and forest. The state's reaction has been one of increased repression and the use of armed force to suppress these movements as was the case of the Gua firings of 1980. The state has given greater powers to armed forces, forest department and police bureaucracy (Guha, R.2013).

11. Conclusion:

With the verity of cultural, dialectical, political and geographical differences of the tribal people it is very sensitive and challenging work for the government to develop this community. The tribes of India are now way forward of development but still they need more push and support from the government. Only government are not enough to develop this community the private players are also need to come in the picture, with the help of govt. and private player, both will be able to develop the tribal people.

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