

ISSUES OF TRIBAL INTEGRATION AND AUTONOMY IN INDIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Historically, it is seen that the people considered tribals were living in remote forest and hilly areas as part and parcel of India population. As Indian tribal communities are deeply rooted with nature, indigenous livelihood, folk culture oral and little traditions and they are mostly confined to their own people. They had enjoyed an autonomous life of their own pattern Living in rural simplicity, in colonial ethnography and Anthropology, they offer invaluable heritage and rich culture to our country along with historical significance through participation in Indian freedom movement Colonial policy towards tribes resulted in exploitation of the tribes and breakage of their nexus with the ecological environment. The past experiences of the policies of isolation and assimilation followed by the colonial government introduced disparities in tribal situations. The western notion of modernity followed by the administrators and missionaries resulted in attempts to assimilate them to the national mainstream. Issues of tribal development integration and autonomy had been highly complicated since the inception of the British rule in India complexity of Indian tribal population made the task of integration and autonomy even difficult Independence the Government of India had to deliberate a lot of issues before coming with a policy for the tribal development and still evolving to suit to best of the cost the theoretical basis after development away in context of Indian tribals is the issue to make the balance between the autonomy and integration.

KEYWORDS: Tribal, Indian, Autonomy, Integration, Government.

Introduction

Historically, it is seen that the people considered to be tribals were mostly living in remote forest and hilly areas and their traditions, cultures, habits and lifestyles form part and parcel of India's population from non-tribal neighbours was different. He had enjoyed an autonomous life of his own. Colonial policy towards tribes resulted in exploitation of tribes and their disconnection with the ecological environment. The task of integrating into the mainstream the different conditions under which the tribal people live in different parts of the country, as well as their different languages and distinct cultures, was extremely difficult. According to the 2011 census, the total population of tribes is 10.43 crore, which is 8.6% of the total population of the country. They have the largest group in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, North Eastern India, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal. Past experiences of the segregation and assimilation policies adopted by the colonial government presented many inequalities in tribal conditions. Following the western notion of modernity, administrators and missionaries tried to assimilate them into the national mainstream. Some tribes were left isolated and others like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of the North East received modern education.

The Issue of Autonomy and Integration

The issues of tribal development, integration and autonomy were highly complex in India since the inception of the colonial period. As a result, the British rulers changed their attitude towards tribalism from time to time. The complexity of the Indian tribal population made the task of integration and autonomy even more difficult. Ethnic tribal sub-nationalism was another issue that independent India had to address. After independence, the Indian government had to deliberate a lot on these issues before

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coming out with a policy for tribal development. This policy was fine for years, and is still evolving to suit their best interests. Autonomy is desired so that development policies are basically appropriate to the tribal culture and livelihood, on the other hand there is also an argument that the tribals are living in their state which will depend on the development divide between the mainstream and a tribal. In order to stay ahead, the means of integrating them should be preserved so that they can come out of the state of backwardness or isolation.

Ghurye, who was the father of Indian sociology, has criticised the framers of the Constitution for the autonomy provisions included in the Constitution. According to him, it works against national unity and will promote separatism. He also criticised Nehru for speaking about tribal integration, while in fact he supported tribal autonomy as envisaged in Schedules V and VI. Ghurye considered the tribals to be backward Hindus, though they had assimilated the rites and rituals of Hindu society, yet they could not assimilate Hindu epistemology like Karma, Samsara and Moksha. According to him, there has been a cultural fusion of tribal and Hindu cultures.

All this forces social thinkers and social reformers to intervene which may be more abundant. The ideal of "unity in diversity" was followed to harmonise various interests with Indian nationalism. Social reformers, politicians, anthropologists combined their expertise as experts in the tribal livelihood and administration and adopted an integrated approach towards the tribals. Therefore, the policy of integration has gained acceptance especially after independence. The basic premise of this policy is to integrate tribal groups into the national mainstream without compromising on their identity. This policy gets its broad concept from the "Tribal Panchsheel" of late Jawaharlal Nehru. "That is, the five fundamental principles for tribal regeneration, as an integrated approach that was later confirmed by the researches of anthropologists. The principles are:

- People should grow according to their talent and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage their own traditional art and culture in every way.
- Tribal rights to land and forests should be respected
- We should try to form a team of our people to do the work of administration and development. Undoubtedly some technical personnel from outside will be required, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid including too many outsiders in the territory.
- We should not over-administer these areas and do not impose many kinds of plans on them. Instead we must work through them, not in competition with their own social and cultural institutions.
- We must judge the results not by the figures or the amount spent, but by the quality of the developed human character.

Tribal development programs initiated after independence were aimed at spreading the fruits of development without compromising on the identity of the tribes. The term tribal welfare has been used to cover the all-round development of tribals as a weaker section of the Indian population. The Constitution of India has also given the nation two courses of action with respect to the Scheduled Tribes who have been protected in that particular way of life: to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation and discrimination and to bring them at par with the rest of the nation so that so that they can be integrated with national life in the sense of how policies at least in the long run fostered both solution and convergence.

Therefore, the Constitution of India gives a special status to the tribes for the purpose of their development without directly interfering in their social life. At the ideological level, all these initiatives should be in line with the policy of integration,

Special approach, i.e: (i) single-line administration, (ii) relatively small districts due to communication difficulties, (iii) area development approach to develop the area as a whole in the Fourth Plan and preparation of sub-plans in the Fifth The Five Year Plans are a clear reflection of the policy of integration with the regional and national systems. It is also a good sign that recently all the three districts of Nagaland have been divided into seven districts and a big district of Madhya Pradesh i.e. Raipur has been divided into two districts. The single district Bastar has been made under the commissioner. In Bihar too, the number of districts has been doubled to give better administration and speed up development.

Certain constitutional provisions like the 5th Schedule promise separate administrative structures for scheduled and tribal areas. Thus, keeping the tribes isolated. Sub-Committee, Shri A.V. Thakkar, as president, it was emphasized that the greatest need of the tribals was the transfer of land under moneylenders and protection from virtual slavery. This clearly indicates that the Constituent Assembly never recommended the isolation of any region as a specific area, but only wanted an end to exploitation.

According to Xaxa tribal integration in the post-independence period has only been a constitutional prescription and not an empirical reality. Despite the tall plans suggested by Alvin and others that there should be specific blocks in the First Five Year Plan (FYP) for tribal development, the consequent adoption of Tribal Sub Plan from the Fifth Five Year Plan and the diversified approach from the Ninth Five Year Plan have all proved inadequate. Instead, the indiscriminate development process has threatened their identity and is not at the expense of the tribes, but at the expense of the tribes, and has made them second-class citizens. While linguistic factions have been successful in creating their own kingdoms, tribals still struggle for meaningful autonomy.

Even Verrier Elwin, who in some extreme cases advised the Assam government on tribal matters regarding the segregation of tribal groups, was later revised by him in the second edition of his book (1959), he said, " We do not want to preserve the tribals as museum specimens, but at the same time show the right time to the clock of development. The issue of tribal autonomy and integration was identified by the national leadership even before independence. Autonomy and Integration taking the two together is a difficult balancing act as they are somewhat conflicting paradigms in the context of tribal development. Too much focus on autonomy sometimes leads to separatist tendencies and also gives rise to the development of a narrow caste outlook. Integration, on the other hand, could threaten their cultural identity, which they have preserved for thousands of years. There is no denying the fact that the policy is one of integration if one looks from a broader perspective in the last seventy years of planning.

Policy of Assimilation

The assimilation of tribal people directly or indirectly with the rest of the population is another trend that has taken place first as a continuous process of cultural interaction with neighbouring populations and secondly as a result of government policy, though not intentionally. The land gets submerged due to the construction of developmental projects. Unfortunately, the submerged area falls under tribal areas. Entire villages and close tribal communities are displaced and uprooted from their place of residence. Similarly large-scale mining of coal, iron, bauxite, copper, limestone and diamonds which has already taken place in tribal areas is destroying large areas and displacing local communities. Exposure to the same education system has also created problems such as perceived threat of identity.

Forest and Tribal

Immediately after independence, the Government of India considered formulating a new forest policy at the time of launching a planned development effort. The proposal for the National Forest Policy seeks to represent the same rethink, which appears to be an extension of the colonial policy as a whole. The resolution claims to take into account factors such as population pressure, the climatic importance of forests, their economic importance and the country's defense needs. Destruction of forest for construction of roads and other large projects was justified in the name of national interest, while cultivation of land shown as forest land without any tree cover was treated as encroachment. As far as the tribals are concerned, the salient features of the policy were as follows:

- This policy completely banned the release of forest land for cultivation.
- The needs of the villagers were not to be met at all by the reserve forests and only the village forests were (almost negligible) to meet the needs.
- Rights/privileges became rights and concessions and their recording procedures were made difficult. Grazing has been completely banned.
- Water rights, digging of wells, collecting dead wood, fishing, hunting etc. were also curtailed.
- The private forests of the tribals were also controlled.
- This policy opposed shifting cultivation which was further restricted.

But the Commission for Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes (1961) brought changes in the rights of tribal communities over forest and forest produce. He highlighted the reluctance of forest officials to reduce their rights and claims and allow the facilities. The Commission specifically referred to the

notification of vast areas of treeless forests and large areas which were never actually forested by the Forest Department. The commission also pointed out the condition and inadequacy of rural forests, the existence of close land-slavery in forest villages and other problems faced by the tribals.

However, the report of the National Commission for Agriculture (1976) on Forestry took the opposite view. The commission recommended drastic reduction in the rights of forest people, further strengthening of forest laws and more effective commercialization of forests. The Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 put a complete ban on any conversion for any other use of land notified under forests. The law has made it difficult to obtain even small pieces of land required to provide basic infrastructural facilities like power lines, schools, etc. in tribal areas. However, some states like Gujarat, taking shelter under legal loopholes, are releasing forest land for big projects without any regulation by the Centre.

The Ministry of Home Affairs had appointed a committee under the chairmanship of eminent anthropologist to suggest guidelines to re-orient the forest policy to serve the tribal economy. Dr. B.K. Roy Burman. Its report (1982) emphasized the importance of forests in tribal life and pointed out that apart from obtaining wood for fuel, fodder, housing and other needs, tribals earn one-third of their income from MFPS. The Committee noted that forestry is gradually being linked to the consumption of wood in urban areas and industries. He felt that efforts had not been made to develop imaginative forestry programs for the benefit of the tribals and recommended that:

- The Triangular Forest Policy should have individual tribal, local tribal community and national interest as its three corners;
- The forest policy should meet the needs of ecological security, food, fruits, fuel etc. and the needs of cottage, medium and large industry,
- The participation and role of the community in forestry should be made clear and proactive;
- Social forestry should be expanded to ensure the supply of community needs.

The National Forest Policy 1988, is significant in that it removes some of the forest policy's insensitivity towards the tribals and introduces a new strategy. The objectives of the policy include maintenance of environmental sustainability, conservation of natural heritage, checking soil erosion and denudation, large-scale afforestation and social forestry programs to meet the needs of rural and urban populations, efficient use of forest described more clearly. To create and build mass movement to achieve these objectives. However, the policy relates the rights/concessions of local communities to the carrying capacity of the forest which is a very controversial issue and an ambiguous test. Tribals feel that defining this concept should not be left to forest officials alone. In addition, the proposal emphasizes social forestry as the main source for meeting the needs of forest dwellers. But the development of social forestry is, again, in the hands of the forest department, which it has seen in many tribal areas. Bastar, Nilgiris etc. have planted commercial species like pine and eucalyptus which are of no use to the tribal families. This is seen even when forest produce obtained from reserved and protected forests is given at throwaway prices for industrial use, the needs of tribal handicraft workers are met at exorbitant prices. There are some other difficulties with this policy as well. It completely prohibits entry of tribals into reserved forests and grants them rights/concessions only from forest depots. It is known that these depots are inadequate in terms of number and locations and tribals have to face exploitation and oppression in these depots.

The 1988 policy broke a new ground in the case of Jhum cultivation. It makes a general resolution to find a way to discourage shifting cultivation and adopt social forestry and plantation in areas damaged by shifting cultivation. But shift cultivation is not of a homogeneous variety and some areas may be suitable for shift cultivation as well. At the micro level, suitable packages of alternative cultivation/plantation have to be developed for different areas. As pointed out by the Working Group for the Eighth Plan, these efforts are still in the early stages.

Moreover, the tribals found this ban quite confusing. Good forests have been cut down to make room for industries and mines. Major river valley projects have submerged large tracts of forests. Large thermal power stations and major iron ore, coal and bauxite mines have come down in the middle of the forests, causing irreparable damage to the environment.

The state refuses to recognize forests as life-saving for the tribal communities living around them. It exercises first right over this property and pursues an even more unscientific anti-people colonial forest policy, which is detrimental to both the sustainable management of the property and the tribal communities that make a living from it.

Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2005

The Bill is based on the acknowledgment that a historical injustice has been done to the tribals in snatching away their land to reserve forests for royal and commercial purposes. Thus the whole government has been following the policy of integration towards the tribes. But there are other aspects of the policy which have resulted in discontent among the tribes.

Autonomy Issues

Post-independence integration efforts have raised several issues that have led to inequality in the development of different tribes in different regions.

- Tribes in many areas have accused the state government of not paying enough attention to their problem and developing a perception of discrimination there.
- Introducing tribes to the same education system has resulted in a threat to identity.
- This unrest is compounded by non-recognition of tribal cultural/languages at the national or state level. Due to non-availability of written script the tribes are unable to preserve their cultural heritage.
- In some areas, geographically bordering tribes do not conform to state boundaries, leading to dissatisfaction due to different treatment of members of the same tribe. All of these have expressed their distribution to the generation of social movement among the tribes, generally through demands for autonomy.

On a positive note, it is a matter of some consolation that Indian states have also responded to tribal issues and have come up with plans and policies from time to time. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 is a recent major step to pacify their situation and fulfill the long standing demand of forest rights and occupation of forest land for tribes.

It is important that the constitutional rights given to tribes are protected and given special emphasis in the planning process. In order to protect these rights, the framers of the Constitution created the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST), which is a constitutional body established under Article 338A of the Constitution of India. The issues of tribal communities in India are unique in different regions because of their distinct cultural patterns and value systems. Wherever they live, they are following a developmental approach to ensure ecological balance along with economic growth which is called sustainable development in the modern world. Keeping this perspective in mind, specific needs were identified and a special constitutional status was given to the NCST. National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) is an apex organisation specially set up for the economic development of Scheduled Tribes. Other initiatives include Tribal Sub Plan since 1974, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, TRIFED for marketing of tribal goods, reservation of seats for STs in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies, Articles 164, 330 and 332 in the Constitution, appointment of Minister in charge of Tribals. The Welfare and Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 popularly known as PESA. These are some of the steps aimed at addressing the problems of integration, development and autonomy in a multi-pronged manner.

Various All India Tribal Conferences organised or actively supported by the government indirectly created solidarity in tribal India. But in this they only got additional impetus to the demands for autonomy in some parts of the country. They take the form of movements for autonomy, for the creation of sub-regional autonomy, for separate states, demands for secession. The demand for autonomy is also expressed in terms of the freedom to pursue one's own culture. Movements for recognition of tribal languages to protect the culture have been seen in different parts of the country. Autonomy has also been understood in the context of the economy of the "sons of the land" from external exploiters, tribal movements finding their expression in all forms of rebellion. Caste conflicts, demands from the state, political mobilisation etc

The complexity of the Indian tribal population made the task of integration and autonomy even more difficult. Ethno-tribal sub-nationalism was another issue. Autonomy is desired so that development policies are systematically developed in line with the tribal culture and way of life. On the other hand, proactive measures should be taken to integrate them so that they can come out of backwardness and isolation. Too much focus on autonomy can lead to isolationist tendencies. But, integration can pose a threat to the cultural identity of the tribals.

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