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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Author	Title of the Paper	Page No.
1	Chiya Parvizpur &	The Unconscious Criticality of	
	Fazel Asadi Amjad	Wright's Native Son to Capitalism	
2	B.A. Tina Zahel &	Ageing Workers in SMEs and the	12
	Prof. Dr. Franz Josef Gellert	Influence on Corporate's	
		Internationalization	
3	Mimita Sachdeva	Life Skills and the Autistic Child	26
4	Talluri Mathew Bhaskar	The Fire and the Rain: A Myth	29
		Retold	
5	Dr. Ankita Khanna	Assessments beyond Writing: An	44
		Attempt to Provide a Fair Chance	
	\bigcirc	to the Learners	
6	Dr. Meetakshi Pant	Total Factor Productivity and	49
		Financial Structure of Steel	
		Industry	
7	Ashish Kumar	Carelessness of Man's Mind: a	62
		Study of Albert Camus's the	
		Stranger	
8	Dr. Manju Lalwani Pathak	Debunking the image of Sindhis as	68
		Refugees	
9	Rita Malache	Approaches of tribal development:	72
		A critical Perspective	
10	Prof. Dr. Patil Vijaykumar	Wendy Wasserstein's An American	82
	Ambadasrao	Daughter: An Analysis	

11	Dr. Khandekar Surendra Sakhar	Portrayal of Relations and	89
		Globalization in Kiran Desai's	
		Novel 'The Inheritance of Loss'	
12	Dr. Rakseh Rai	A Study of Social Intelligence	95
		among College Students of Tura	
		(West Garo Hills) in Meghalaya	
13	Prof. Vijay D. Songire	Male Sufferers in Toni Morrison's	109
		The Bluest Eye, Sula and Arundhati	
		Roy's The God of Small Things	
14	Prof. R.Y. Shinde &	Vijay Tendulkar's His Fifth	116
	Dr. Archana Durgesh	Woman: A Brief Introduction	
15	Prof. (Dr) Mala Tandon	Alternate Schooling and Teacher	122
		Education: Issues, Challenges and	
	A	Priorities	
16	Dr. J. Thirumaran	A study on three leading stochastic	130
		Optimization methods in simulation	
17	Dr Tanu Tandon	Media and Education: Pathways to	135
	Mr. Durgesh Pathak	End Women Violence	
18	K. Ravi Sankar &	The Inner Awareness of the Human	139
	Dr. V. B. Chithra	Soul: A Study of the Apprentice	
19	Dr. Vitthal V. Parab	A Socio-Literary Perspective in the	147
		Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri & Bharati	
		Mukherjee	

Approaches of tribal development: A critical Perspective

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Abstract

The tribal communities represent an important social category of Indian social structure. The tribal population in India according to the 2011 census is 8.2 percent. However, distinct vulnerability arises from their inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of their integration with the mainstream economy, society, cultural and political India because they are poor, asset-less and illiterate compared to the general population. Tribal communities continue to be vulnerable even today after five decades of planned economic development. With these came processes of displacement followed by a conflict between development and protection of tribal rights and interests. Here an attempt is made to study the approaches of development for tribal community in Indian context and review the protective mechanism for tribals. The researcher has employed historical and field methods for the study. are employed

Key Words: Tribal community, development, mainstream society, displacement

Introduction

The tribal communities represent an important social category of Indian social structure. According to 2011 census they constitute 8.2 percent of total population. The Anthropological Survey of India under the 'People of Indian Project' identifies 573 tribal and sub tribal communities in India However they have historically been among the poorest and most excluded and disadvantaged social sectors in the world. In this regards the present paper tries to attempt the grass root problems of the tribal community and therefore some approaches arise to solve this problems which are critically examined in the present paper. The definition of development is given by international organization labor as "Development is defined as a process which involves improvement in the quality of life of the weaker sections and a greater participation and involvement of the masses in the process of decision making in the economic, social, political and

culture life of the society." The purpose of development is, thus, to provide increasing opportunities to all people for a better life.

However, in the context of tribal community there are different approaches and perspectives to view the tribal community development in India. And it is also seen that there are different measures adopted to solve the tribal problems but unfortunately their problems can't get solved because of various reasons. There are two kinds of tribal problems. Those mundane problems which arise from their traditional way of living in the present surrounding, and other problems emerge from the government's tribal development or programmes which projects are launched for tribal mobility and development because they appear to be non-implementable.

Taking into account the above situation, we have to consider three main approaches developed and adopted by scholars, administrators and advisors to make upliftment of the tribal communities, and also show limitation of these approaches in fulfilling and accomplishing holistic tribal development.

B) Aapproaches: Its Critic and Impact on Tribal Development

The tribes are the original inhabitants of India. India has the second largest tribal population in the world next only to Africa. And therefore it is important to consider different approaches to the development of tribes which are being followed. Isolation, Assimilation, Integration are major approaches which can be briefly introduced as follows:

i) Isolation /Segregation Approach

Isolation, also called as segregation, is an approach inherited by British regime which is described as 'leave them untouched'. The policy or idea was to isolate the tribal population from the masses, from the rest of the Indian society and allow them to develop according to their own pace and wishes. The British took deliberate efforts not to develop communication in the tribal areas. Tribals were kept away from the rest of the population. Verrier Elwin (1934) supported the establishment of a sort of 'national park' or 'specimens in a human zoo' of the tribals and advised that their contact with the outside should be reduced to minimum. But this approach was not followed for long because the earlier British interest to extract surplus from the tribal areas disrobed the tribal from their land and common property resources. And so many a times they were uprooted from their natural habitat. In addition, British avoided taking measures that might disturb socio- cultural life of the tribals. Some British administrators extolled tribal culture and pleaded for its protection.

Sympathy of British rulers for tribal culture was limited so long as it did not conflict with the state policy of extracting resources from tribal areas.

Some scholars hold that this approach is neither practical, nor desirable nor possible because of the fact that most of the tribals have come into contact with other tribal and non-tribal communities. On the other hand, few believe that in the course of time, the tribes must gradually be assimilated and integrated within the rest of the society in order to develop. Such development implies that they are developed only if they become like other non- tribal communities and acquire the culture, tradition, language of nontribal communities in their vicinity. This view opposes the idea of having any separate 'areas' like the scheduled areas for them, as these are supposed to keep them away from being part of the main society, and to maintain a kind of 'divide' which is detrimental to the spirit of national integration. They also view these as adopted methods by British, who developed; and partially excluded; areas to check uprising and rebellions, as also to create a divide between the various groups.

In this connection, Govind Gare opines "Even if regional and cultural isolation of tribal is mandatory and essential for securing tribal rights and security of their living; it is not right and favourable to keep them isolated from mainstream society as well. He puts that they must be integrated into mainstream society for national unity and their cultural and social development. Hence he suggested that tribal relation with the outside world is vital to eradicate all kinds of their problems. And thus it also helps in maintaining national integrity and unity.

ii) Assimilation Approach

Assimilation is a gradual process by which a person or group belonging to one culture adopts the practices of another. Thus the person becomes a member of other culture. In other words, the assimilation of an individual blends entirely into the new society and loses most or all aspects of his or her previous cultural identity. Assimilation approach paves way for the tribal people to mingle with the neighbouring non-tribals. In India, the tribals have accepted the Hindu culture gradually through the process of assimilation. This approach is criticised for it tried to change the tribals by imposing the non – tribal customs and traditions. On the other hand, the advocates of this approach supported a direct assimilation without waiting for a slow and long-drawn change over. Yet this approach is also considered to be a failure.

Assimilation of tribes within mainstream has been studied by the scholars like Risley, Russell and Hiralal, Bose, Srinivas, Sinha and Sarkar. It is generally observed that there are two important ways which have gradually transformed the tribes. Firstly, they accepted other religious faiths with or without losing their tribal identity, and secondly, they came into close interaction with non-tribal institutions. Srinivas (1962) puts that societies that were kept outside the caste based social hierarchy, in the course of time, also were included in the Varna- jati system. But they found their place in the hierarchy with other societies which were in lower position in a hierarchy.

In the tribal assimilation discourse, the views of scholars like Ghurye, Bose, Kosambi, Chatterji and Srinivas are important. Ghurye called them 'Backward

Bose explained the tribal's Hindu.' process of economic assimilation through the 'Hindu mode of absorption.' Kosambi puts that the tribals had to adopt 'the Brahmanical model of cultivation'. Chatterji explained that tribals have adopted process of 'sankritisation' in cultural terms. And according to Srinivas, tribals adopted the process the of 'sankritization' in structural sense. In a nutshell, the process of Hinduisation has not fully assimilated the tribals into the Hindu. An upward social mobility is not seen even among the tribals who have embraced and observed Hinduism because they are not considered equals with vaishyas, kshatriyas or Brahmins. The tribals are counted among the 'sudras' in the Hindu 'varna system' or at worst as outcastes, equated with the untouchables.

Various anthropological studies, regarding tribes in India along with the concepts of caste, peasant and social differentiation have led various scholars to conclude that tribes are becoming castes, or peasants or socially differentiated groups and they have lost the traits and features that which made them 'tribes'. The main reason behind it is that, tribes have not been studied in itself or in their own right, but only in relation to general Indian society which was marked by the features of caste, social differentiation. peasant and Therefore, through this processes, tribes could not constitute and maintain a separate society and identity. Assimilation approach is criticised for it tends to be hegemonistic and deprives the tribals of their cultural identity and it also places them in the lower rungs of the caste system of the Hindu society.

On losing distinct tribal identity, Virgineous Xaxa opines that in the

understanding of the Indian society and its social transformation, tribes as entities with their distinct language, culture, custom, tradition, territory, etc., are at least recognized. Indeed, the difference acts as the point of departure for the analysis and understanding of the transformation of the tribal societies. It points to how tribes, as they come in contact with the larger Indian society, tend to lose their distinct identity and get absorbed into the larger Indian society. In this line of thinking, tribes are thus left with no distinct identity and space of their own due to the process of social transformation among them. If at all they have identity, it is only as a caste within the overall organizational and hierarchical structure of the caste system. Such has dominant pattern of been the the understanding of tribes in India. In a way, these have been the modes of the historical process that have helped to work out an inclusive society. (Xaxa, 2010)ⁱ

In short, this approach is not application to the tribals because schedule tribes are divided into a number of social groups. Many of the groups, with common real or imaginary origins, are further divided into distinct groups in terms of their locations, dialects and social customs. In their life styles, belief systems, religious practices and social customs, some tribes are closer to caste Hindus in whose proximity they live. However, a great deal of variations exists in their economic activities. Many are settled agriculturists, a few practice shifting cultivation and fewer still depend on hunting and primitive ways of food gathering. In terms of land ownership, they are stratified— some are rich and others are poor. Notwithstanding these social and economic differentiations among them are distinct social groups, whose

differentiations are not as marked as observed among urban or semi-urbanised caste Hindu peasants. Their interaction with the 'mainstream' society, dominated by upper caste-Hindus, is limited particularly to social sphere. Among those are settled agriculturist, who legal ownership of land is still an alien concept. Exchange of labour and agricultural widespread implements is which independence. reinforces their Their dependency on forest resources is high.

iii) Integration Approach

The inadequacies of the policies of isolation and assimilation forced the planners and policymakers to take the middle way between the two approaches gave birth to an approach called the integration approach. It is mainly a brain child of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and advocate of mixed economy. The policy of integration consists of two types of measures for tribal development namely protective and promotional measures. Protective measure consists of land polices, forest policies and the policies to protect tribal culture and traditions, whereas promotional measures is development and welfare programmes which are undertaken by the government through plans and other voluntary agencies to make the tribal life better through the integrationist approach.

P.D Kulkarni states that the policy of protection and development is undoubtedly same in itself, but it remains to be seen whether development is possible without upsetting the harmony that exists in the placid tribal life.ⁱⁱ The constitution of India initiated the tribal welfare programmes by incorporating important provisions which not only put an end to the pre-independence policies of indifference, but also gave testimony to tribal welfare programmes. Thus these provisions were made a constitutional obligation for the future governments of the country.

This approach, also known as Panchsheel, was propounded by Nehru who said, "We cannot allow matters to drift in the tribal areas, the avenues for development should be pursued within the tribal framework of the following five fundamental principles:

- 1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius,
- 2. Tribals rights in land and forests should be respected,
- 3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people
- 4. We should not over administrative their areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions
- 5. We should judge results, not by the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human characteristics evolved.

Again, the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission which was set up under the chairmanship of Sri. U.N. Dhebar in 1961 referred to this policy approval and observed, "The problem is not to disturb the harmony of tribal life but simultaneously work for their advance, not to impose any thing upon the tribals but work for their integration as members and part of the Indian family". According to this commission, "problem of economic development for the bulk of the tribals cannot be solved unless that resource of land, forests, cattle wealth, cottage and village industries are all mobilized in an integrated basis."iii

Evaluating Nehru's approach to tribal integration, Doshi S.L. in his book on 'Emerging Tribal Image', appreciates Nehru for his understanding of tribes through his ardent spirit and keen mind, humanist and radical rationalist approach. He further says that Nehru's contact with the tribals dated back to the times of the struggle for freedom. And so Nehru understood that the tribal problems in the country varied from region to region; and the problems of frontier were different from the heartland tribes. The solution of the problems thus has also to be different. However he holds that they suffered from problems like exploitation, common poverty and general illiteracy, backwardness. He opines that the solution of tribals' backwardness was to develop them economically and politically. Nehru's vision of India was a modern, technologically developed India. The objective of tribal development programmes is, thus to ultimately raise the quality of tribal life on part with the advanced groups of the country.^{iv}

Some scholars have criticised this approach for being ideal and not practical implementation. For in example Meenakshi Hooja observes that though ideal in theory, many of these principals have not been carried out in practice, as our analysis of the various schemes and strategies has shown, in particular, the problems of land alienation, loss of rights in forest areas and shortage of forest areas, large numbers of schemes which have not benefitted the tribals much and displaced on account of 'development' projects have continued to be major challenges.^v

Sah pointed out another gaps in the development projects and programmes. To him, alienation, deprivation and inequality

are, it is argued, inherent in the strategy of Indian development (Sah, 2001)^{vi}. The new agricultural strategy created islands of prosperity amidst mass poverty. Inequality across groups of people and across locations intensified. In contemporary India, the tribals continue to be so pushed in order to acquire land- their land- for large development projects. Of late, their displacement is supposed to be integrating them with mainstream. This process of integration is by no means free from insensitivity and socio- cultural disruption (Sah, 1999; Planning Commissions, 1992).^{vii}

The existing paradigm of development resulted in seriously disturbing the tribal rights over their common property resources. This was possible because tribals across the country are the least powerful interest groups. The demand for their land, forest and water resources is still forcing them out of their habitat. Of late, through the eroding resource base and socio- cultural heritage of theirs is being recognised lack of effective legal protection to them and unimaginative incentive are unable to compensate their loss. The development process even today is unmindful of tribal plight (Planning Commission, 1990)^{viii}.

Gouranga Chattopadhyay Barun De (1969), 'Problem of Tribal Integration to Urban Industrial Society: A Theoretical Approach' examines tribal integration in urban setting from different method. By integrating the Indian state removes the distinctiveness of the group and they do lose their identity. For instance, their hereditary titles were stopped from being passed down, then their lands and rights over people were taken away, and now it is proposed to take away their extra money (Privy Purse) so that they will finally have to give up their distinctive style of life. He suggested that one should involve an implication of the term 'integration' which is opposing to the definition given above. Further he suggested that one should remove their conflict, and understand their values and behavioural norms which are more in conforming to the values and norms of industrial organisation than those of non-tribal Indians. Therefore he gave the following recommendations:

- The tribals integration with urban industrial system one should minimise the conflict;
- Anthropologists and the policy-makers should study the tribals, to actually taking decisions about the tribals;
- One should get the support of the tribal leaders because they will lose their leadership in a new situation.
- The roles of anthropologists and policy- makers at the centre is, along with surveys to find out what the tribals themselves want - to be integrated or to be detribalised citizens of the Republic of India;
- Research is also needed to test the tentative hypothesis that the values and behavioural norms of the tribals may be more in conformity than those of the non-tribal Indians with the values and norms of industrial organisation.

In conclusion, the tribal communities continue to be vulnerable even after six decades of planned economic development, it is not because they are poor; they are asset-less; and they illiterate as compared to the general population. But their vulnerability arises from their inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of their integration with the mainstream economy, society, cultural and

political systems. So far they were historically protected from mainstream economy, society, cultural and political systems by keeping them in isolation. The requirement of planned development brought with them the dams, mines, industries and roads, all located on tribal lands. With these came the affiliated processes of displacement followed by a conflict between development and protection of tribal rights and interests.

Problems and Suggestions for Tribal Development

From the beginning of the planning era (1951) efforts were made through various developmental plans. Policies, special strategies and programmes have registered a definite quantifiable improvement in the socio- economic status of the tribals. However, the progress made by them could not bring them anywhere nearer to the mainstream of society since the gap in their socio-economic status continued to prevail. The incidence of poverty amongst scheduled tribes still continues to be very high with about 42 and 32 percent living below the poverty line in rural and urban areas respectively. This is primarily due to a large number of scheduled tribes are landless with no productive assets and with no access to sustainable employment and minimum wages.

The prime reason of this problem is the marginalisation of tribals and their accessfailure to natural resources such as land, forest and water. Low productivity, dispersed habitation, shifting cultivation, weak co-operative and marketing infrastructure, continued tribal land alienation leading to their dispossession and exploitation, remoteness to state, etc., are some of the striking features which characterise the tribal areas. All these and many other issues, which have been deeply rooted in the tribal areas, attracted the attention of the government and various strategies have been adopted for tribal development since independence. The tribal development approach attempted to remove disparities between tribal and other developed areas and also to improve the quality of their life. The twin-approach aims at forcing area development and problems solving with greater emphasis on increase in productivity and income, recourses. development of human elimination of exploitation. and infrastructure development. The homogeneous image of the tribes resulted a planning process where in their variability was neglected. Since tribal development ignored tribal world -view, non-tribal institutions, technology and skilled were forced on them. Dube (1998) argues that any "development strategy that skirts around poverty, speaks of social justice in low whisper and underplays an endogenous creativity cannot be sustained... the worst sufferers in the process will be the tribes, whose problems need sensitive handling, for, then we need economically effective and culturally sensitive plans participatory of development. It would be suicidal to ride roughshod over tribal interest and ways of life in name of national the development"ix.

Despite of planned efforts tribal condition after independence did not improve. In the process, they further lost the control over their resources. It can be argued that through the approach may have been different, its implementation still remained technology- centred and had no congruence with their community oriented approach. In fact, the area development approach has worked counterproductive because problems like land alienation, indebtedness and poor skills call for a different approach. Thus, the policy of market dominated development and tribal socio-cultural world-view have coexisted, albeit in contradiction.

In her paper on the 'Tribal Rights in the Global Development Paradigm", Neeta Tapan argues that in the process the ambitious development projects most often marginalise and alienate the tribal people. The first characteristic of the tribal economy is the close relationship between their economic life and their natural habitat or environment. But with changing laws the alienation of tribals, the marking off of their traditional resource bases as off-limits, the destruction or submergence of their areas for large development exploitation projects and their bv commercial interest is critical. she argues that having accepted the new concept of development to providing opportunities to all people for a better life, the state has tried to match it with constitution's spirits. Notwithstanding a number of provisions, tribal interest has remained secondary to development interventions since independence. The process may further deteriorate tribal interest, argues Neeta, owing to liberalisation, privatisation and globalization. This may be seen especially in the form of pressures from multinationals to acquire illegally their traditional knowledge, their resource base, and their traditional medicine, Neeta concludes that a safety net requires multidimensional approach in the vulnerable atmosphere.^x

Whatever may be the history or origin of various tribes in India the fact is that at the time of independence, there was a great concern to provide for special measures for their development. Over the years the tribes, some of whom had at one point of time even been rulers of their domain, had been pushed back, marginalised and deprived of their resources (Rima Hooja, 1988). The gap between the status of tribal communities and other communities was wide enough to warrant a special concern for their development. This thread runs through the discussions and debates of the Constituent Assembly which had the responsibility of drafting the Constitution.

It is this contradiction that needs sensitivity in handling plans, processes as well as institution that identify and address imbalances created by development. With the passage of time, it has widely been experienced that all the programmes and activities relating to the tribals development do not percolate to the grassroots level in a sensitive manner.

Suggestions for Tribal Development

The followings are some of the suggestions given by the scholars for the tribal development which need to be revaluated.

- 1. Displacement or forced/ voluntary eviction of tribals from their land and their natural habitats and subsequent re-habitation has been a serious problem that remains to be addressed by the government.
- 2. Tribal communities have tended to get eroded not only through acquisition of their land for public purpose but also through fraudulent transfers, forcible eviction, mortgages, leases and encroachments.
- 3. The problems of indebtedness is not only an indication of their poverty but also reflected the wider economic malaise, i.e., lack of education, low

purchasing/ bargaining power and lack of resources for engaging in gainful activity and meeting emergent expenditure.

4. Tribals continue to struggle for mere survival as they face formidable problems and displacement due to development of national parks and wild-life sanctuaries and other environmental restoration projects, lack of development in forest villages etc. the protection of rights of tribals in forests is key to the amelioration of their conditions.

While the unresolved issues need to be attended to on priority basis, the on-going efforts along with new initiative for empowering the tribals will continue simultaneously with added thrust so as to mitigate the persisting problems in the critical areas of education, health, livelihood. poverty, vulnerability. violence, unrest etc., so as to accelerate the process of empowering scheduled tribes towards accomplishing the task of raising their status on par with the rest of the society.

Conclusion:

Each tribe has typical problems of its own due to its own socio-economic political historical cultural and environmental condition. Depending on these factors the tribes remain at different stages of socio psychological orientation and politicoeconomic development. However, most of them are quite away from the national mainstream. Even, we can find striking difference between tribes living in deep and deep forest and those living in plains in their living standards including size of techniques of production, holding, employment, income levels, customs, social and cultural manifestations. In a democratic state, one group of people should not remain outside the mainstream society. Tribals have to be involved in all the matters concerning their country. The conditions of the scheduled tribes at national level remains pathetic due to lack of development of proper infrastructural facilities including transport, housing, safe drinking water, education, primary health care etc.. The resettlement of the tribals is needed at present in the conducive environment in order to improve their socio economic and political situations. The empowerment from the points of view of social, economic and social justice is needed, for which the government and voluntary organization have to initiate necessary measures. Then only we can see the overall development of the scheduled tribes at the national as well as state levels.

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