

THE TRIBAL POLICY OF GOVERNMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NILGIRIS DISTRICT

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Abstract

The Tribals have been given numerous rights and concessions under various statutes of the Central as well as State Governments, but they remain deprived of the benefits arriving out of such statutory provisions due to the ignorance and apathy of the enforcing agencies. The Government of India's Five Year Plans and the proper implementation of various developmental schemes through the Tribal Welfare Department and its wings have had a considerable effect on the upliftment of the tribals. Some voluntary organisations, too, are working towards the welfare of the tribes in the Nilgiris District. They have initiated the establishment of a Panchayat level Tribal Welfare Community that is accessible to all villages and is headed by tribal members.

Keywords: *tribal population marginalised, exploitation, upliftment, human rights, development and welfare and voluntary organisations.*

Introduction

India has the largest concentration of tribal people in the world except Africa. The tribals are said to be the children of nature and their lifestyle is conditioned by the Ecosystem. India with variety of ecosystem, presents a varied tribal population throughout its length and breadth. The areas inhabited by the tribal constitute a significant part of the under developed areas of the country. The tribal lives mostly in isolated villages or hamlets. Some tribal groups are still in almost primitive stage. They continue to live in an isolated villages and practice both primitive agriculture and most of them are still in food gathering stage. The majority of tribals constitute the work force though the participation in work is declining. More than half of the rural tribal population is found to be below poverty line as per latest survey available with Ministry of Rural Development (1993-94).

¹ The per capita income of Tribal continues to be one of the lowest in country.

The census report of India 2001 indicates that there are 84,32,240 scheduled tribal populations. The state of Mizoram has 94.5 per cent scheduled tribes of its total population and more than half of the tribal population in India were founded to be concentrated in the northern states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Jharkhand and Gujarat. Some tribal groups have associated themselves with the development taken around them while others could not cope up with it and got still behind. Government has identified 75 of such groups on the basis of their pre-agricultural technology, stagnant or decline in birth rate, low literacy and subsistence level of economy and declared them as the primitive Tribal groups. Tamil Nadu government with the approval of the Central Government had

listed 3 primitive groups as Scheduled Tribes. All the primitive tribes are having their main concentration on the Nilgiris district. The tribals have been given numerous rights and concessions under various statues of central as well as State Government but they remain deprived of the benefits arriving out of such statutory provisions due to the ignorance and apathy of enforcing agencies.

Policy of the Government

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the First Prime minister of the Independent India (1947 – 1964), brought the so-called Tribal under Panchasheel to protect the tribal heritage and to allow them to develop according to their indigenous ways. The principles of Tribal Panchasheel are:²

- 1) Encouragement of the development of tribals on indigenous lines.
- 2) Respect for tribal rights in land and forests.
- 3) Administration and development through local people with the exception of technical personnel and avoidance of introducing many outsiders into the territory.
- 4) Not overwhelming with a multiplicity of schemes and not in rivalry, with their own social and cultural institutions and
- 5) Judging results not by statistics or the money spent, but by the quality of human character evolved.

In order to protect the economic interests of the Tribals, to safe-guard their way of life and to ensure their development so that they might take their legitimate place in their general life of the country. Article 242 of the Indian Constitution empowers the Indian union to notify the Scheduled tribe area and article forty-six ensures that the State is responsible for the promotion of the social injustice and exploitation.

In spite of the protective measures outlined in the Constitution of India, the Adivasis are caught up

in a deep and horrendous crisis of survival. The land and natural resources which were for them life-supporting from centuries have been grabbed from their hands and these resources are today being controlled by the internal and external oppressive forces. They are deprived of the necessary power, economic and political, to decide their own destinies.³ Their identity as Tribal is in grave danger. The fifth and the sixth Schedules of the constitution were not used effectively for the benefit of the tribal properly. They have been marginalized, their lands were invaded and plundered and they have been made foreigners in their own land.

The government of India through the Five-Year Plans and proper implementation of developmental schemes through newly created Tribal Welfare Department and its wings had salient effects in the upliftment of the tribals. Welfare schemes like the enactment and implementation of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act 1976, 20 point programme, food for work, housing programmes, provision of basic amenities, electrification of the tribal settlements, provision of foot paths to tribal settlements, allocation of burial grounds and approach roads, building community centres, radio listening centres to the tribal colonies, TV rooms and supply of free TV sets to the Tribal people, constructions of school building and tribal residential schools and implementing the programmes of supply of free uniforms and books to the school going children, economical package of sanctioning of bank loans to purchase milking cows, restoring agricultural land and the issue of free seedlings and agricultural expertise are some of the Government development schemes designed for the upliftment and empowerment of the tribal society.⁴

Developmental Inflows

Programmes and their schedules are at the hands of the government department as well as with the non-governmental organization, numerous aiming at the

upliftment and development of the tribals. Nilgiris district is picturesquely described as the queen of hill station in Tamil Nadu and has been the adobe of primitive groups: Kothas, Todas, Irulas,¹ Kurumbas, Kattunaikans and Paniyans and they were notified as the approved primitive tribal groups in the state of Tamil Nadu through the publication released in the Annual report 2002-2003, of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, New Delhi. Out of the six tribes the last 4 sets are having their settlement in Gudalur, and Pandalur taluks of the Gudalore Revenue Division of the Nilgiris district, which is situated in the meeting point of three states, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.⁵

Tribal schools were also run by the Forest department in Tamil Nadu particularly in Javadis, Jamanamarathur and Indira Gandhi Wild Life Sanctuary has been very successful and has been able to attract tribal children towards the facilities offered in the school. Primary education to tribals in Javadis were started by the forest Department as early as 1951 at Jamanamarathur and extended to other villages. In Thiruvannamalai division there are 9 schools which include three elementary schools, five middle schools, one higher secondary school, devoted for the tribal society. In the history of legislation in India, it is worthwhile to quote the preamble of the scheduled tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers.⁶ The preamble implies the Parliament recognizes a fundamental fact, viz., that rights forest dwelling ST people in India were in forests had been for long denied by not even being recognized. For these people, pre-history ends and history begins with this Act. Government has the order GO Ms No. 1, 'Environment and forests department'; dated 31st May 2007 has accorded administrative sanction of Rs. 507.05 lakhs for the project of providing infrastructure facilities to the above tribal schools. Out of which Rs. 431 lakhs will be in the farm loan assistance from NABARD under

RIDF XII and the State Government contribution is Rs. 7.05 lakhs. As regard to the primitive tribal population of Gudalore and Pandalur taluks forest department had absorbed affair percentage if the youths of the tribals to work as Forest watcher, Casual labourers and Elephant Mahouts and Mavuthans. Some of them are serving as valuable forest guides for visitors and helps forest officials as a usual trait.⁷

Government Agency's Angle

Government had viewed that caste stigma and the untouchability were the acute problems in the society and they were still prevailing. Scheduled castes and tribes are not getting their due share of benefit in occupational opportunities as compared to other members of the society. After independence a provision of the Government of India Act adopted protection Civil Rights Act, 1955. The primitive tribals of Gudalore and Pandalur taluks had met their renaissance and renovated relief with the promulgation and implantation of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act 17. It recognizes the evil system as a gross infringement of the Fundamental Human Rights of the affected citizens and is implacably committed to its total eradication in the shortest possible time.⁸

The Central Government had formulated the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy for all round development of tribal areas throughout the country since Fifth five-year plan. Under the TSP approach almost entire tribal inhabited areas were covered under anyone of the following, depend upon their population percentile:⁹

1. Integrated Area Development Project (IDP)
2. Modified Area Development Approach (MADA)
3. Clusters
4. Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)

The ministry provides Grants-in-Aid to TSP and tribal majority states under Article 275(1) of the

constitution to meet the cost of such projects for tribal development as maybe undertaken by the State Government for raising the level of administration of Scheduled areas therein to the level of the rest of the state. In the Ninth plan, besides other project, from the funds allocated by the scheme with 100 per cent grant, available at the State Tribal Development Cooperative Cooperation (STDCC) and other similar corporations of State engaged in collection and trading of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through tribals.¹⁰

Government had envisaged the Village Grain Bank Scheme and this scheme provides grants for establishment for village grain bank to prevent 'deaths of statistics' especially children in remote and backward tribal villages due to lack of building storage facility, procurement of weight and for the purchase of initial stock of one quintal of food grain of local variety for each family.¹¹

Government has taken interest in the rate of tribal literacy and announced a scheme "Strengthening Education among Scheduled Girls in Low Literacy District". It is a gender scheme of the tribal affair ministry. The scheme aims to bridge the gap between literacy levels in general female population and tribal women.¹²

A scheme grant-in-aid to voluntary organizations working for welfare of scheduled tribes, is adopted by the government with the prime objective to enhance the reach of the welfare schemes of Government, to fill the gaps in service rendered to tribal areas, in sectors such as education, health, drinking water, agro-horticulture productivity, social security etc. through the efforts of Voluntary Organizations and NGOs and to provide an environment for socio-economic upliftment and overall development of the scheduled tribes.¹³

In the Pandalur taluk of the Nilgiris district, the Government of Tamil Nadu formed the land

colonization project and a PHC at Kappala of the Erummad revenue village for the welfare of the free bonded labourers of the primitive tribals. The Adi-Dravidar and TWD of Tamil Nadu is running the Five Tribal Residential Schools and one middle school in the Pandalur taluk area for the tribals.¹⁴ In Gudalore taluk that there are three Tribal residential schools and tribal hostel are functioning. In 2008, the Tamil Nadu government had supplied to almost all the tribal household with a colour television set and electric power connection and fire cooking gas connection with gas stove and gas cylinders.

The Impact of Development

Almost all the colonies in the Nilgiris district and Gudalore division were taken up for the provision of concrete roofed housing projects. The tribal population had learned to live under the concrete roofed house from the old grass roofed huts. They learned to live on the cement floored houses from their strong eastern floor. A percentage of tribals came out for their traditional shyness to meet the common people and learned to dress their children to attend schools and converse with other.¹⁵ Dr.Ramu reports that the Alu Kurumba tribe of Gudalore and Pandalur taluks from their traditional method of primary shifting cultivation and secondary livestock rearing, hunting and gathering and collection of minor forest products had shifted to the second transition period of the wage economy where most of the tribal families adopted agricultural labour for their daily livelihood. They have shifted to plantation sector as the third phase and established settled plantations and learned to grow the cash crops like tea, coffee and pepper. Plantations had raised their status to community land owners, individual land holders and land lease right holders of government lands. It is reported that two of the hundred of the Alu Kurumbas were placed in Kurumbas who are in government

services are said to under the fear of tribal alienation.¹⁶

Mullu Kurumba tribes were reported to be the hunters and gathers in the 1970. They were shifted to hunting as primary occupation and supplementary income through fishing, animal husbandry together with their women folk undertake hand pounding work. Most of the Mullu Kurumba Tribes are found to be landholders and having cultivation like tea, coffee, pepper etc. a few percentages of them were also in government services. Betta Kurumba Tribals are expert in tapping, tramming wild elephants and also best collectors of cliff honey. Nowadays most of the youths of this community is working in the forest department and many of them are working in Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary as daily wage earners.¹⁷

A government report on the development of Paniyas indicates that during 1975 in the Gudalore division, Tamil Nadu Government had allotted five hundred and sixty-three paniya household. They are cultivating pepper, ginger, tea paddy etc.¹⁸

Kattu Nayakan Tribes were said to be hunters and gatherers and used to rear dogs for their use in hunting. In recent years they converted their working to agriculture. They are cultivating ginger, pepper, tea, coffee etc and in the lean seasons they used to go on collection of roots, benu kekku etc.¹⁹

The inter caste marriage between the non-tribal communities and religious conversions among the tribal population of Christianity and Islam, acquiring membership in political parties are found to be the order of the day. Anthropologists explain it as a mark of development in the society.²⁰

The Nilgiris district, the home to all six of the Primitive Tribal Groups of the thirty six scheduled tribes of Tamil Nadu and the context of over 50 per cent of this tribal population live in the Gudalur and Panfdalur taluk, the Adivasi Munneda Sangam, an

organization of 3000 families of the Paniya, Kattu Nayakan, Beeta, Kurumba, Mullu Kurumba and the Irula tribes in this region with the Action for Community Organization, Rehabilitation and Development held a consultation at the Gudalore Adivasi hospital in August 2006.²¹

They started to establish a Panchayat level Tribal Welfare Community that is accessible to all villages and that should be headed by tribal members. For increased accessibility, the district welfare Office should be located in an area where maximum tribal population are found rather at the district headquarters.²²

At state and Panchayat levels, funds earmarked for scheduled tribes must be separated from the scheduled tribes and dispersed independently. Their accounts must be maintained and recorded separately. These accounts should be on the web available for scrutiny to avoid fund going into the pockets of corrupt officials and politicians.²³

Conclusion

With a lot of programmes and measures taken by the government made the fact that the tribal population is shedding its shyness and exhibiting its crusade of awareness against the virtual realities and it served the marked symptom of the developing attitude among the tribals. But at the same time, there are innumerable constraints which is responsible for lower pace of tribal development process than desired. The lack of awareness among tribal population about the programmes which are launched by the Government of India results in their exploitation. It is felt that wherever educational facilities are provided they are not accessible in the real sense of the term to the targeted group and for scheduled tribal girls and residential facilities in educational institution is lacking. Considering the important role of women in shaping the size of the family and outlook of its members and also an active

agent of economic and social development, investment in providing education to the women of these communities will not improve only their social and economic status, but will also help in accelerating the development of these communities and the nation as a whole.

Endnotes

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