

Tribal Development in Post-independent India: Need for Automatic Integration

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The tribal problem in India is characterized by the process of institutionalized exploitation and socio-political marginalization, produced by the twin historical processes of unequal incorporation and exclusion. The tribal problem results from a tendency of the economically and politically dominant populations to impose their own codes of behaviour on the tribal people. The tribes have been transformed from tribe to a *jati* and from a *jati* to a class. Earlier, when the tribes came into contact with the Hindu cult, they had to assume the caste rank, willingly or unwillingly. Presently, the tribes are directly interacting with the market system and are influenced by commercial capitalist system without caste mediation. Now, they are stratified in terms of control over resources.

The identification of tribe is important in the context of isolation or assimilation and integration of their life processes with the larger society. Tribals are not alien, their isolation is not possible, or partial and relative, they are part of the civilization. Today, tribal societies have been internally differentiated and their articulation with national- regional economy has been increasing rapidly.

In India we do not find the nature of primitive tribalism. What we find is the transition from tribe to *jati* and from *jati* to class. Most of the tribes have lost their primitive tribal identity or 'pristine tribal characters' after prolonged contact with the Hindus (Bose, 1972; Beteille, 1977).

The overall transition can be found in four phases: incorporation and encirclement phase through the policy of assimilation, invasion and appropriation phase through the policy of isolation, development and disintegration phase through the policy of integration, and resistance and response phase through the policy of accommodation. On the basis of this transition tribes are classified into four: tribes confined to the forest habitats and habituated to the primitive way of life, *i.e.* primitive tribes; settled agricul-

tural tribes associated with fishing, hunting and food gathering and living in the rural areas; urban-based migrated tribal communities engaged in industrial activities and other service sectors and adapted with modern cultural traits; and tribes assimilated with the non-tribal societies but retain their religious and clan traits (Mamoria, 1958).

Hinduism and its assimilative process have broken up and are breaking up various tribes, sections of which seek and acquire some nook or corner in the Hindu social world.... But a more disruptive inroad on tribal solidarity was made by the introduction of the British rule.' (Ghurye, 1963 : 191). In fact, elite institutions gradually extended their spheres of operation in the tribal areas. The Hindu elite even during the British rule dominated over the tribals by and through modern technologies of repression, institution like parliamentary democracy and system of universal adult franchise. With its dominance in the parliament, judiciary, bureaucracy and police, and with its legitimization of actions, the elites did not want to integrate the tribal leaders in their own ranks, except the token approach to integration of the tribals in the broader pan-Indian society only in terms of marginality. Though Hindu ideology of social organization was dominant in the organization of the production process, it was then mediated by the ideology of mercantile capitalism characterized by the onslaughts of feudalism and commodity production. In this condition, it was not possible for the tribals to get an upward mobility by securing their ritual status in the Hindu hierarchy.

The 'leave them alone' policy of the colonial rule was possible during that period, but today it is not possible as the tribals have a strong sense of separate identity and ethnicity and they were likely to be strongly resistant to the unequal incorporation into the Hindu hierarchy, to the inequality and appropriation of surplus labour, and to the land alienation process. The

conditions have changed in the post-colonial period. Modern industry has transformed the whole world, humanitarian ideals have replaced the old policy of isolation. Tribal leaders now demand greater opportunities. Post-colonial elites now include substantial elements from these communities in order to get a level of mass acceptability and political legitimacy and in order to legitimize repression with consent. Tribals are integrated into the larger political society in a dependent and marginal incorporation process. 'The Hindu elite would no doubt continuously use the rhetoric of national integration to break down or dilute the sense of separate ethnic identity and pride of the tribals, but in the present state of India's political economy, this separateness is their most effective, and may be the only bulwark against total marginalisation.' (Saha, 1986). The measures like the integration of the tribals in the larger society, de-tribalization, industrialization and developmental programmes are like the mere eye-wash, not intended to make a rapid progress or to change *status quo* too much and too soon. Doshi finds that there is inequality and crisis. If the tribals cast off their ethnic identity, then they may be drowned in the multiple ethnic identities without having its own ethnic identity. And if they continue a social stratification based on primordial traits, they become weakest in the incorporation process. In the process of integration and development both identity and integration are to be achieved in simultaneity (Doshi, 1990). Tribal development must take place within the broader spectrum of national integration without having a special treatment for them. They must be involved in the market economy of the country through 'a satisfactory progress in the religious sphere from animism to Hinduism' (Doshi, 1972) so that they can ultimately be absorbed into the national economy and broader Hindu society closing the gap between integration and identity. To Ghurye, the process of integration should be automatic and there is no need for special treatment as a special group, 'the tribesmen first, the tribesmen last, the tribesmen all the time'. 'The Scheduled Areas and the Scheduled Tribes Commission's recommendations will, sooner or later, create fifty to sixty tiny ulsters and half-a-dozen fairly big ones....' (Ghurye, 1963: 383). I do think that

they should not be treated as tribesmen, but as Indian citizens in the process of integration and development. The paths of development should be pursued within the broader framework of five-principle formulations: (1) 'People should develop along the lines of their own genius.' (2) 'Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.' (3) 'We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development.' (4) 'We should not over-administer these areas.' (5) 'We should judge results, ... by the quality of human character....' (Mathur, 1989: 127). There should be no special facilities. They should only be mobilized with the general community. They should be integrated by the spirit of service. In the integration and planning process identification of tribal problems and analysis of tribal movements, *i.e.* 'genesis, history, ideology, operational strategy, ... mobilization mechanisms, styles of leadership' (Dube, 1977: 6) are necessary to a great extent. To bridge the gap between identity and integration the process of integration should be automatic, tribals should not think that they are being deprived. Assimilation is a social process, having no measuring instrument. It cannot be controlled from a remote pressing a button. The process is and should be automatic, cannot be controlled outwardly. What we can do is the overall development of the whole country or region or area through which the tribal community can do their best in integrating themselves with the larger community. Therefore, I do not agree with the view: 'The tribal folk have a distinct culture and complete assimilation may not be possible without doing injury to them.... The best policy would be one of controlled and limited assimilation.' (Majumdar and Madan, 1967: 280-81). If we can bridge the gap between integration and identity in our plural society, then the tribals should not get deprivation and lose their self-identity. This process of integration may range from low to high in which two or more elements interact without losing their cultural identity (Cohen, 1965). 'The more each group changes toward reduction of boundary maintenance with respect to the other, the greater is the degree of incorporation.' (Cohen, 1970: 9). Boundary here means the socio-cultural, political and economic characteristics of the

constituent groups in a plural society like India. The degree of incorporation is the result of the combined function of the number of social and cultural boundaries in a plural society. In a plural society each group or community has a identity of its own. Therefore, total incorporation is not possible in a plural society. What I want to say about incorporation is automatic integration with overall development, where the 'entire system of parts is in process such that each part and the whole are constantly adjusting and changing their cohesiveness and degree of importance with respect to one another as groups, and for the individual actors who must live out their lives in this complex situation.' (Cohen and Middleton, 1970: 9-10).

The increasing tempo of industrialization and urbanization, occupational diversity and geographical mobility etc. have facilitated the incorporation process. Despite that, modernization has produced a feeling of deprivation among the tribals in post-independent days. They still continue as a class of primary producers, rural peasantry and are becoming increasingly proletarianized by and through economic exploitation, legal-political manipulations and administrative onslaughts. The sources of exploitation are essentially economic, therefore, bridging the gap between integration and identity would necessarily be on economic plane. The sources like alienation of the tribals from lands and forests, money-lending leading to surplus appropriation by way of usurious interests, dominance of the non-tribals in all trading activities and exclusion of the tribals in the productive assets, employment and income created through the twin processes of industrialization and urbanization would essentially be combated and transformed into a more equitable relations of production. The overall development and bridging the integration-identity gap would be done within this wider perspective.

The post-Independence Indian state, with its agenda outlining "secular, democratic goals", could not afford to adopt an overtly exploitative remit. It can ill afford to create the impression that its policies merely represented the class of interests of landlords and big industrialists. Thus, policies of integration were justified as representing 'progress' and encouraging the inevitable

development of the productive forces. In reality, however, these policies benefited only the large-scale private sector industry, and did not involve any radical restructuring of the relations of production into a more democratic or egalitarian system committed to improving the Adivasis' position. Hence, the gap between the proclaimed postures of the exploiting class and its real interest of accumulation and monopolization of Adivasi resources is obvious. By legally obliging these interests, the 'state' has clearly tilted towards the dominant class interests, whilst ignoring the Adivasis' rightful claims. It is this process of instrumentality of the state in promoting the dominant exploiting classes' interest in accumulation which makes the claims of the state to be 'socialist' unrealistic and helps to explain its true bias.' (Rao, 1998). All the development projects and planning processes are not in due concern to the historico-cultural and cultural-ecological complexities of the tribals. Imposition of individualism, statist ideology and reductionism have wrecked the survival of the tribals. The present-day development practices are nothing but the outgrowth of capitalist and neo-colonialist development. The increasing economic destitution, state violence and institutionalized form of exploitation have made a positional decline of the tribals. The governmental policies of understanding, accommodation and reconciliation have shown flexibility of approach in meeting legitimate ethnic aspirations. Deforestation, drought, mutilation of natural and environmental resources, alienation of lands and diversification of fertile lands into industries, tribals' displacement – all have forced the tribals to live in an unknown milieu, as development and planning processes are not conducive to the proportional developments in all spheres of economy, society and culture. This forced migration from forests and hills to the plains has led them into an unequal exploitative condition making them forcefully subjugated agricultural labourers subservient to the local landed gentry and trader-money-lenders and producing an army of cheap labour subservient to the needs of market-oriented entrepreneurs and urban-based trader-industrialists. The forest and irrigation policies, and industrialization have produced no good to the tribals, added only

deforestation, diversification and submergence of tribal lands, displacement of the tribals without no compensation, over-exploitation of forest resources in the processes of plunder, unequal investment-profit ratio and retarded eco-system (Sharma, 1977; Sinha, 1976 and Bandyopadhyaya, 1987). Fernandes comments that the post-colonial Government was expected to take a pro-tribal policy, but has done the opposite. The first National Forest Policy of the post-colonial period in 1952 changed certain rights and privileges into certain rights and concessions. Because of industrial growth, the pace of deforestation got intensified. At the time of British rule the country had 40 per cent tree cover, which came down to 22 per cent by 1952. In fact, '18 per cent of the tree cover had vanished in a century or at the rate of 0.14 per cent per year. About 12 per cent of the tree cover further disappeared in the three decades at the rate of 0.4 per cent per year thanks to the industrial expansion. It is estimated that the country is suffering a loss of 1.5 million hectares of forest every year.' (Fernandes, 1989). In essence, the net result is that the tribals have been dislodged from their traditional sources of livelihood and places of habitation without any actual development. They accepted whatever cash compensation was given to them not conversant with the details of acquisition proceedings and became emigrants. With money in hand and many attractions in nearby industrial townships, their funds were rapidly depleted and they became without cash-in-hand and land-in-possession in course of time. Naturally, they have joined the ranks of the landless labourers without any training, equipment or aptitude for any skilled and semi-skilled jobs (Government of India, 1963).

Apart from this, a new situation has emerged. Money has been poured for the upliftment of the tribals more rather than establishing schools, *ashrams* and providing medical and agricultural facilities in the pre-dominantly tribal-inhabited area. As a result, few tribes have become affluent taking greater benefits than the other. That is why Anna Hazare tried to establish a 'civil society', which would be responsible to itself and to its environment, and responsive to its all members by and through the three-stage functional formulation: generating self-awareness

among its members, closing down all liquor brewing and alcohol and narcotics, and creating systems to improve the economy of the village based on self-reliance (Kashyap, 1998 and Rajivlochan, 1994). And with the introduction of adult franchise, power tends to concentrate into few pockets among the tribal communities. There has emerged a 'dominant middle class' from among the tribes 'in place of the old one based on caste'. 'And under the exigencies of modern economic development, this comparatively recent and almost purely economic middle class is being shifted once more so that some sections might rise to the rank of the propertied rulers and others be merged with the proletariat.' (Bose, 1977).

The tribals remain at the back of the queue. The establishment of industries 'lends urgency to the extension of protective measures' so that they cannot be exploited anymore. There is no need of directed integration. 'The manner of the integration of the tribals into the wider Indian society will ultimately be determined by political decisions, and these will be not the basis of moral evaluations.' (Haimendorf, 1994: 322). There is the need for cultural tolerance and appreciation of cultural values. Tribals should not be separated, but assimilated within the broader Indian society in an automatic way. There is the need for protection so that they cannot be exploited by the non-tribals and neo-elites among the tribals in an undue manner, but no special privilege. They can develop along their own lines. The pattern of integration can be shown in the figurative dimension (Figs. 1 & 2).

The tribals are now in an unequal national and global market instead of being free players in the market economy. The tribal resistance and struggle essentially centered round land, forest, resources, labour and wages, feudal cultural hegemony and control of the economy through a subtle means of surplus accumulation within the matrix of colonial and neo-colonial oppression. 'The resistance offered by the various revolutionary and other Adivasi forces made an impact on the state and the dominant classes. This has resulted in certain modifications of the position of the former. The transfer and conversion of accumulated property to "safe arenas" became the alternative for the exploiting class,

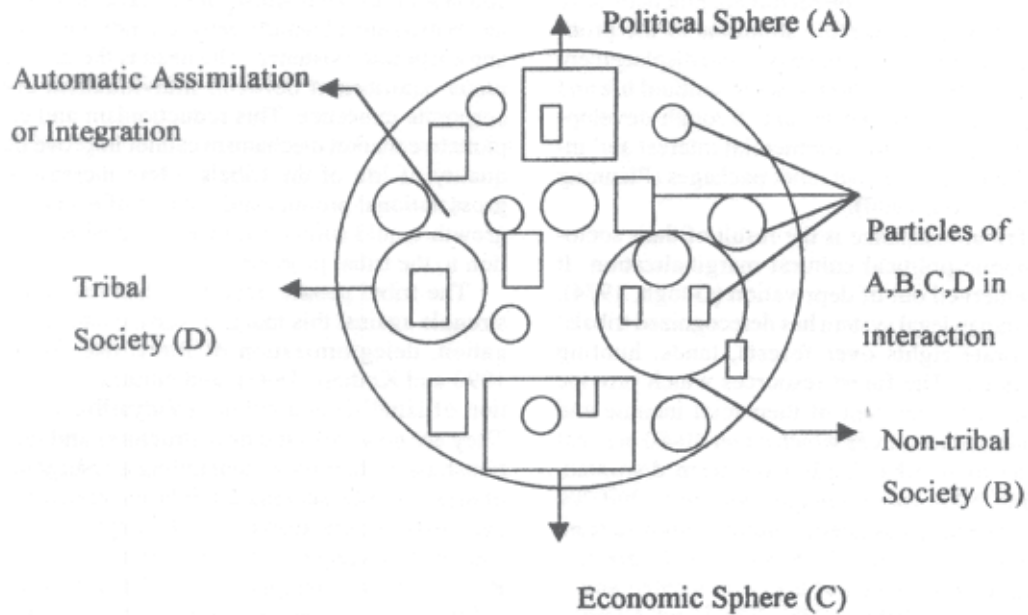


Fig. 1. What should be

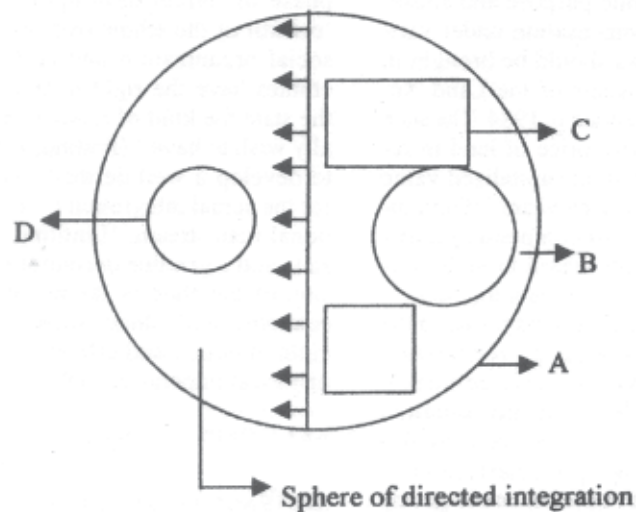


Fig. 2. What is

while the state with all its repressive machinery was compelled to adopt "transitory liberal strategies of falsification".⁹ (Rao, 1998).

The government has been trying to adopt

development policies with a view that more resources if allocated, the faster production capacity would grow (Mellor, 1976). And with a faster growth in production, benefits will trickle down

to the lowest level. But growth remains too small to trickle down. The development practices have not yet made a sizeable solutions to the problems of eroding resource bases and displacement of the tribals, disruption of socio-cultural life and environment created by and through development interventions, commercial interest and insensitive legalism and relief packages (Planning Commission, 1990).

Tribal resistance is the result of their socio-economic-political-cultural marginalization. It has emerged out of deprivation (Gough, 1974). The Indian legal system has derecognized tribals' corporate rights over forests, lands, hunting places etc. The forest resources which provide them 30-50 per cent of their total income and land-based resources which cover 40-80 per cent of the total tribal lands have been disrupted. About '5000 forest villages with over 200,000 tribal families have been forcibly removed from remote forests,' and 'between 25 to 40 per cent of agricultural lands of tribals is located above 10° slope.' (Pathy, 1998). The Land Acquisition Act, 1984 in the name of public purposes has alienated the tribals from their lands. 'Acquisition of land for public purpose and consequential payment of compensation under various state and central laws should be brought in harmony with the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act 1981 as amended in 1984. The state should fix a category-wise price of land in respect of tribal lands based on capitalized value of productivity of previous ten years.' (Government of India : 10). But this compensation pattern based on quality with regard to yield productivity would provide the tribals the meagre compensation as most of the tribals reside in the undulating areas with low yield productivity. Therefore, a few tribes will get the large amount of compensation, who have already acquired fertile lands. These are neo-elites. And by this Act the state is encouraging regularized class distinctions and subjective preference in giving compensation to the acquired lands. Therefore, the development paradigm has reduced the ecological balance, destroyed an equilibrium between nature and culture, and overall a tribal matrix of harmonious equilibrium. State-controlled capitalist development has imposed on the tribals the ideology of individualism and

consumerism in order to appropriate resources and labour for the interests of the haves and neo-haves eroding a balance between individualism and corporate existence. The need is the harmonious equilibrium between individualism and corporate existence. This reductionism and exploitative market mechanism cannot improve the quality of life of the tribals. Mere increase in gross national product and the rate of economic growth would surely not make a sizeable solution to the tribal problem.

The tribal people, therefore, has rose up to struggle against this marginalization and subjugation, delegitimization of forest use (Haial, 1990 and Kothari, 1993), and cultural domination of Hindi-Hindu culture (Vidyarthi, 1972). They are now evolving new structures and relationships of their own, demanding a resurgence of their identity, seeking a solidarity, expanding their socio-political spaces and control over resources (Dhanagre, 1988; Roy Burman, 1979; Rao, 1979 and Sengupta, 1982). The Hindi-Hindu culture is '... a positive suppression of human talent. It deplores individual and society of free choice' (Pattanayak and Heredia, 1994). In the phase of 'ethno development', which means 'control of the ethnics over its lands, resources, social organization and culture, ... the tribal ethnics have the right to freely negotiate with the state the kind of relationship they individually wish to have.' (Prabhu, 1998), the state has to develop a well-defined development policy for the actual integration of the tribals in the national mainstream. 'Limiting the power of the state and a genuine decentralisation and dispersion of the state in favour of the basic socio-economic and ethnic collectivities on the principle of equity and efficiency is, of course, the historical imperative.' (Pathy, 1998).

KEY WORDS Primitive Tribes. Development. Socio-economic. Politics.

ABSTRACT In India we do not find the nature of primitive tribalism. Most of the tribes have lost their primitive tribal identity. We find in India to-day settled agricultural tribes, urban-based migrated tribes and tribes assimilated with non-tribal societies. The overall transition can be found in four phases: incorporation and encirclement phase, invasion and appropriation phase, development and disintegration phase, and resistance and response phase. The first phase basically started with the establishment of various kingdoms and their penetration into the tribal life. In the

second phase metropolitan capitalism or colonial capitalism created the demand for money economy in the non-money tribal economy. In the third phase tribals are now integrated into the larger political society in a dependent and marginal incorporation process. In the fourth phase of resistance and response tribals are against the unequal national and global market, and surplus accumulation within the matrix of colonial and neo-colonial oppression.

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