
EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBALS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest problems facing the world today is the growing number of persons who are excluded from the meaningful participation in economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities. Such societies are neither efficient nor desirable. So, the current national and international concern with social inclusion has emerged in response to the challenges posed by persistent and increasing marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion of vulnerable groups in all societies. Consequently, any discussion of social inclusion cannot be separated from a serious consideration of social exclusion. As interrelated and multidimensional processes, inclusion and exclusion 'describe how people's opportunities for full and meaningful participation in the main spheres of social life may be differentially facilitated or blocked. These processes, in turn, contribute to unequal prospects that people have to achieve socially and economically valued resources, capacities, and credentials.' Thus, Simone Well rightly states: 'Someone who does not see a pan of glass does not know that he does not see it. Someone who, being placed differently does see it does not know the other does not see it' (quoted in Young, 1990: 39). The political institution (the state) has put much emphasis on participation and empowerment of the disadvantaged groups. The state realized the necessity of empowering these groups by undertaking political reforms — new policies, institutions and strategies that are intended to promote the empowerment and inclusion of disadvantaged groups, especially the tribals, and their capacity to take collective action. Guided by this understanding, towards the fulfillment of the commitments, the Ninth Plan adopted a three pronged strategies: i) social empowerment; ii) economic empowerment; and iii) social justice to ensure removal of disparities, elimination of exploitation and suppression and to provide protection to STs along with SCs, OBCs and Minorities.

KEYWORDS: Marginalization, Discrimination, Empowerment, Disparities, Exploitation and suppression.

UNDERSTANDING EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a concept of great significance in the contemporary world, especially keeping in mind the troika of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG). The era of LPG is based on the skill and capability of individuals and this process also leads to the marginalization, discrimination, subjugation and exclusion of disadvantaged groups, especially the tribals, because some people mistakenly believe that group identification makes a difference to the capacities, temperament or virtue of group members. This individualist conception of persons and their relation to one another tends to identify discrimination with group identification. This understanding underlines the importance of 'empowerment' in the Indian context.

The general understanding of the concept of 'empowerment' is giving power to certain disadvantaged sections of the society such as workers, peasants, women, Dalits, tribes etc. It is not possible to deal with all these groups in a given space. It has different meanings in different socio-cultural and political contexts. Empowerment can be defined as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important. It is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals and groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. It is the expansion of assents and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Thus, it requires the full participation of people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions determining and well being of their societies. The participation of citizens in the definition of their role in society and in the choices affecting the future of their society is an important objective in itself (Bernard et al. 1998: 7). Participation addresses the question of how they are empowered and included and the role they play once included. To put differently, it links with the issue of equality, liberty and fraternity and at the core of the concept is the idea of power and the idea of power, according to Max Weber, is often related to our ability to make others do what we want regardless of their own interests and wishes.

Empowerment provides enabling environment in the economic, political and cultural spheres. For instance, the Indian government's country paper for the Copenhagen Summit (March, 1995) talks about empowering the poor to enable them to help themselves and removing

social, economic, cultural and psychological barriers to transform them from being passive recipients of governments programme' to 'active participants and managers of their own affairs' (quoted in Mohanty, 2001: 27). By highlighting the role of non-governmental/voluntary organizations to provide the support structures need, the paper also points out the necessity of organizing the disadvantaged sections into informal groups, formal associations, trade unions, cooperatives etc. for exerting collective pressure, articulating demand and effectively participating in the decision making process with the ultimate objective of building foundations of individual and collective self-reliance.

The concept of empowerment is a multi-contextual and multi-dimensional social process. This is due to the recognition that group/community differences cut across individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different contexts. For instance, in the tribal societies, the educated middle class is a group that is privileged in relation to that tribal group. On the contrary, when we compare their position with other groups/communities, especially higher caste, they suffer different kinds of discrimination, marginalization and subjugation.

Empowerment can be viewed both as a process and product (Xaxa, 2001: 204). It is a process because it enables the tribes to control and enjoy some powers by creating conducive environment in economic, political, social and cultural spheres. It can also be termed as a product because tribes are theoretically empowered to participate and it depends much on formal institutional arrangements, which may be inadequate for them. To put it differently, these two aspects of empowerment are counted to procedural and formal empowerment of tribes in India. The formal empowerment of tribal societies shifts attention away from challenging the existing hierarchical power structure and then it will be dominated by upper classes and higher castes. Exploring the relationship between empowerment and the marginalized groups, SinghaRoy identified two different contexts (SinghaRoy, 2001: 12). First, The traditional distribution, redistribution and sharing of power is based on hierarchy. This hierarchical nature of power distribution leads to the emergence of the system which arranges people with a powerful 'few' at the social and economic command deciding the mainstream of the society, polity and the economy. On the contrary, within the same structure, the vast majority have remained powerless occupying the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy and surviving at the periphery of the margin of the social order. Second, the existing unequal distribution of power is legitimized by the economic, normative, institutional and ideological foundations. To put it differently, this dynamics of discriminatory power distribution legitimizes the subordination of the marginalized groups.

In short, the existing power relations help the state to legitimize its control over resources of the tribal society in India (Xaxa, 2001: 119-135; Ambagudia, 2006).

This dimension of the concept can be understood in the context of the definition of social work. Underlining the importance of empowerment, the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers, adopted the definition of social work in July 2001, where it has been stated that the social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. The role of the social worker is not to help individuals to adjust or accepts problems, but to help them to develop the ability to change the situation and prevents its reoccurrence (Rao, 2007: 29-30). To put it differently, the goal of social work has always been to give more power to the disadvantaged, the poor and the rejected. It helps the marginalized groups to develop their skills and ability to deal with the future discrepancies. It always aims to achieve equitable distribution of scarce resources and the establishment of non-exploitative relationship between people. Thus, based on the above analysis, the key features of empowerment can be summarized in the following way:

Empowerment is a dynamic, multidimensional and democratic process of awareness and capacity building.

It intends to transfer of delegation of power and authority.

It is not an end but a means by which people, communities and organizations control over their affairs by realizing full identity and power in all spheres of life.

It helps to improve and maximize the quality of life of one of the most vulnerable sections of the society, i.e., the tribals.

It implies a fundamental redistribution of power between different groups.

Empowerment believes in people's participation especially of deprived sections in decision making process and they should have greater control over the circumstances of that influence their lives.

TRIBALS AND EMPOWERMENT

Looking at the synergy between tribals and empowerment, there are overwhelming factors which directly or indirectly contribute to the empowerment of the vulnerable tribal communities and they can be discussed under the following heads. The empowerment of

tribals have been the major area of exploration and the Indian state has adopted special provisions and underlined different provisions in various Five Year Plans directing towards such objectives.

Empowerment Process

Towards fulfilling the commitments of the Indian state to empower the tribals, it has adopted a three pronged strategy-social empowerment, economic empowerment, and social justice to ensure removal of disparities, elimination of exploitation and suppression and to provide protection to these disadvantaged groups that have been reflected in various legal and statutory provisions of the Indian constitution.

Pre-Independence Period

The different efforts of the Indian state to empower the tribal communities through different legislations had its foundations in pre-independence period. More or less in pre-independence period, the tribal communities were self-governed by their own political structure. The debut of British in India and bringing tribal dominated areas under their hegemony resulted in strong reaction in different parts of the country. Thus, they adopted policies, which were designed to isolate tribals from other general masses as part of their deliberate policy of not developing communication in tribal areas. But they were unable to protect the tribals from the clutches of money lenders and contractors and from the influence of the missionaries. This provided the platform for the British to revise their policy of isolation and decided to intervene in tribal areas only to maintain law and order and minimise exploitation by taking legal, protective and executive measures. Guided by this understanding, British formulated special administrative arrangements and special programmes for the tribal people and for the development of tribal dominated regions. With these objectives, the British Parliament enacted a number of Acts and Regulations until the commencement of the constitution of India and the special provisions are made therein for the administration and development of tribal areas of all parts in India. The important legislation was the Regulation XIII of 1833, which declared Chota Nagpur a 'non-regulated' area followed by other special laws for the governance of other tribal areas. The common feature of all these laws was a simple and elastic form of judicial and administrative procedure. The Government of India Act, 1835, allowed for the formulation of laws for tribal areas under Government of East India Company.

The enactment of the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874, was the first significant measure to deal with all tribal areas in the country which declared all tribal areas as Scheduled Districts. The main objective of the Act is to protect the tribals from the twin dangers of land alienation and indebtedness (Xaxa, 2001: 210) with special civil and judicial administration. The Scheduled Districts Act, 1874, was repealed when the sections 52A and 52B of the Government of India Act, 1919, came into force. The Act designed the tribal areas as Backward Tract. Section 52A (2) of the Act empowered the Governor General in Council to declare any territory in British India as 'backward area'. This Act also empowered the Governor General with more powers to modify the acts applicable to the backward tracts according to his discretion. Similarly, he was also authorised to issue directions in relation to the acts of the provincial legislatures were concerned. Behura and Panigrahi (2006) explore the different positive measures of the British India primarily designed to empower the tribal communities. Realising the backwardness of these areas, the Indian Education Commission of 1882 had made few suggestions in the form of preferential treatment to tribal children through non-payment of school fees and provision of additional grants for schools located in tribal areas. The Government of India Act, 1935, went a step further and classified the backward tract as Excluded Areas and Partial Excluded Areas for smooth administration. The line of distinction between Excluded Areas and Partial Excluded Areas is that though both areas were excluded from the competence of the Provincial and Federal Legislature, the administration of the Excluded areas was vested in the Governor acting in his discretion, while the administration of the Partially Excluded Areas was vested in the Council of Ministers, however, to the Governor exercising his individual judgment. In other words, the Government of India Act, 1935, delegated more power to the Governor General in the sense that without his prior approval through public notification, none of Dominion Legislatures would be applicable to these both categories of areas. The Governor General was vested with powers of amending or repealing any existing law that were in operation in those areas if he considers it essential for the sake of administration. In short, the British India had also enacted number of legislative measures for the empowerment of backward communities such as STs during the pre-independence period.

Post-Independence Period

The founding father of the Indian constitution aimed to establish just society by developing and empowering all the communities, including STs. This is dawn to the fact that certain communities are suffering from different disabilities and they require certain positive

assistance for their empowerment. To put it differently, they desired to secure justice: social, economic and political for all citizens. Guided by this understanding, Indian constitution enshrines a number of important provisions for the empowerment of STs. The preamble of the Indian constitution states: "...Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity, and to promote fraternity among them all assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation". So, the objective of delivering justice in social, economic and political spheres, and equality of opportunity' are particularly relevant to the tribals and these provisions correspond to the adoption of different executive and legislative measures for their empowerment. In other words, it is designed not only for political empowerment but also for economic and social empowerment. On the same note, article 46 directs the state 'to take special care of the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people; and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation'. As this can be seen, this article of the constitution makes it obligatory for the state to make action to ameliorate the conditions of the weaker sections including the backward classes. They are twofold: (a) to promote with special care the educational and economic interests by taking 'positive measures', and (b) to prevent social injustices and all forms of exploitation by taking 'preventive measures'. Central to this directive and other related provision is reservation, which is a package of constitutional provisions and their intended follow-up programmes for the social advancement of weaker sections. Thus, the present policy with regard to the tribal population has two dimensions: to bring them into the mainstream of national life; and at the same time to maintain their distinctive characteristics of their tribal identity.

These provisions have apparently empowered the tribals to protect their legitimate rights and accelerated their socio-economic development. In India, the provisions in the constitution have a three fold purpose-remedial, i.e., to remove social and religious disabilities of certain specified groups suffering disabilities on account of their segregation and spatial and cultural isolation; promotive, i.e., to facilitate and promote equal participation with others, of all socially disabled and disadvantaged groups in organised sectors of the country's economic and social life; and protective, i.e., to protect, if necessary through legislative actions and executive orders, this group from all forms of social injustice and exploitation. In other words, the main provisions of the Indian constitution to empower the STs can be understood under three heads: (i) protective measures; (ii) positive discrimination measures; and (iii) developmental measures.

Protective Measures

The policy in which various welfare measures and provisions pertaining to protect the interests of historically disadvantaged sections have been incorporated is known as 'protective discrimination'. Protective measures have been taken for welfare of STs like rights over forest produce, shifting cultivation, discouraging bonded labour, rehabilitation of displaced families, land alienation etc. The main thrust of the constitutional safeguards is on protective legislation, preparing the tribals of availing of opportunities of development and formulation and execution of appropriate development schemes.

The Indian state has set up different institutional bodies to empower the STs. Their interests have been protected by different legal measures, such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, which came into force in January 1990. The reason behind the emergence of the act is: 'despite various measures to improve the socio-economic conditions of SCs and STs, they remain vulnerable. They are denied of civil rights. They are subjected to various offences, indignities, humiliation and harassment. They have, in several brutal incidents, been deprived of their life and property. Serious crimes are committed against them for various historical, social and economic reasons' (Louis, 2008: 7). In 1990, Government of India constituted the Commission for SCs and STs with wide ranging powers and functions to address and protect the specific rights of SCs and STs. To give specific orientation and emphasis to both SCs and STs separately, the commission was split into National Commission for SCs and the National Commission for STs. In addition, the different states have set up the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) to look at different dimensions of tribal societies in India. The SCSTRTI, an organization of the Welfare Department, functions with the primary objective of conducting research and surveys as well as imparting training besides undertaking preparation of action plan on specific tribal communities and SCs. These legal measures aim to safeguard different rights of STs, which also contribute to the empowerment of this community.

Positive Discrimination Measures

Positive discrimination measures are known as reservation policy in India. Reservations are the Indian version of quota system: a legal provision that guarantees a minimum presence in various institutions to STs. Different expressions are used to signify the policy of reservation, for instance, protective discrimination, reverse discrimination, positive/affirmative action,

preferential treatment etc. The rationale of reservation policy for STs is based on the upliftment and empowerment principle.

There are three types of provisions in Indian constitution under positive discrimination policy: (i) reservation in educational institutions; (ii) reservation of services and posts in the government services; and (iii) Political reservation.

Reservation in Education

Education is the most effective instrument of social and economic empowerment of the tribals in India. The Indian state, thus, made an attempt to bring the educational development of the tribals through the policy of reservation. Under the original constitution, preferential treatments were in the field of government employment and legislative representation. A new clause 15 (4) to the effect that “nothing in this Article or clause (2) of the Article 29 shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the SCs and the STs” was added in 1951 by the 1st Amendment. The object of this clause is to bring Articles 15 and 29 in line with Articles 16 (4), 46 and 340 and to make it constitutional for the state to reserve seats for STs in the public educational institutions as well as to make special provisions as may be necessary for their advancement. Articles 15, 16 and 19 make it possible, while legislating on any matter, to take into consideration the special conditions of tribals in the matter of enforcing the provisions relating to the equality of all citizens. In short, pursuing the ideal of non-discrimination in a democracy necessitated their inclusion in public services. So, there is a reservation of 7.5 per cent for STs, which is believed to be based on the proportion to their numbers. The same percentage of seats is applicable to all these three spheres, such as education, politics and employment. The collective and uninterrupted impact of positive measures explores the considerable progress in the field of education. When we examine different census reports such as 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001, it provides a pleasing statistics because the general literacy rate has increased little more than thrice from 1961 to 2001, while the tribal literacy rate has increased more than five times from 1961 to 2001. Reservation in educational institutions empowers the individuals/tribals by expanding the choices of their living.

Reservation in Services

The state has been empowered to reserve posts for STs along with SCs, as are not adequately represented in services of the State under Article 16(4) of the constitution. Marc Galanter has

described this provision of Indian Constitution as “a matter not only of private ambition but of group advancement” (Galanter, 1984: 85) for STs. This is because the employment in the private sector has been severely limited; STs depend upon the government for employment in the upper reaches of government services is often used as a measure of advancement and security. Due to the preferences in the services, the tribals have been represented to the public sector periodically, though the statistics do not show the desired result, otherwise that would have been lacking.

Political Reservation

There are number of provisions in the Indian constitution, which are primarily designed for the political empowerment of tribals. Under Article 330 of the Indian constitution, there is the provision of reservation for STs along with the SCs in the House of the People. Article 332 specifies the reservation of seats for both these categories in the Legislative Assemblies of the states. In the same vein, these preferences have been extended to the lower level of governance, i.e., panchayats under Article 243D. The effect of reservation of seats is to guarantee a minimum number of seats to the members of the STs in proportion to their numerical strength. In other words, all these positive provisions aim to make the tribals present in the public sphere which they were lacking during the pre-colonial period. Accordingly, total of 38 and 282 seats are reserved for the STs in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies respectively. The provision of reservation really empowers the tribals politically and gives a political voice to them that traditionally had little say in the political process. Affirmative discrimination through reservation for STs in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and in the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) has established the growing strength of STs not only in terms of their participation in the democratic processes of the country since independence, but also increased their representation in the political decision-making institutions i.e. Parliament, Legislative Assemblies and in the grass-root democratic institutions viz., Panchayats and local bodies. Consequently, there are The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, and PESA are examples of laws that have been enacted because of the political presence of the tribals. These provisions are of paramount importance so far as empowerment of the tribals is concerned.

Developmental Measures

The GOI has also adopted number of developmental measures for the development of the vulnerable tribal communities of India. The various developmental initiatives taken for all round development of the tribals include adaptation of Tribal SubPlan (TSP), Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs), Cooperative and LAMPS societies, Small Farmers' Development Projects, Modified Area Development Approach (MADA), Dispersed Tribal Development Programme (DTDP), Micro-projects for the development of Primitive Tribal Groups etc.

Besides these, there are provisions in the constitution that empower the state to bring the area inhabited by the tribals under the fifth and sixth schedules of the constitution for the purpose of special treatment with respect to the administration of the tribal people. The objective of these schedules is to empower the tribals by declaring schedule areas on the basis of tribal concentration and thus creating the Autonomous District Councils respectively. These schedules aim to safeguard, protect and promote the interests of the tribal communities in India.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and STs

Exploring the evidence of lack of adequate representation of tribals in the local decision making process owing to the dominance of the privileged groups, the Indian state adopted the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1993. The process of tribal empowerment was initiated in India through the landmark provision of reserving one-third of seats for tribals at the local self-government. The commitment towards popular participation in governance at the local level has been reinforced through recent policies of affirmative action, which have given an opportunity to hitherto marginalized and discriminated tribal groups to express their voice and have a say in the making of policies that affect them. Measures of affirmative action following the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993, opened a new chapter in the history of democratic decentralization in India by devolving power to the people. The increased importance of participation in the panchayats through policies of affirmative action has necessarily increased the number of STs in rural political institution of India.

The provision of affirmative action under Article 243D of the Indian constitution has provided the much needed opportunity for the vulnerable tribals in India to actively participate in the decision making process of their locality through political rights. The tribal communities of India participate in the PRIs in the following ways:

As voters.

As candidates.

As members of political parties.

As elected members of PRIs, taking part in decision making, planning implementation and evaluation.

The major promise of democratic decentralization is that it brings popular participation and accountability to local governance, and therefore makes local governance more responsive to citizen's desire and more effective in delivering services. Thus, the local self-government is essentially the empowerment of tribal's by giving them not only the voice but the power of choice as well as in order to shape the development, which they feel as appropriate to their situation.

Panchayat (Extension to the Schedule Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA)

Rights of tribal's over local resources were considered sacrosanct and nonnegotiable and there was a growing need from all corners of the country to secure constitutional recognition to these rights. This aspect was grossly neglected under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (as this Act does not apply to Schedule V and VI Areas of Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram, State of Nagaland, hill areas of the State of Manipur for which District Councils exist) and the recognition process started with the constitution of Bhuria Committee. Bhuria committee looked at the issue of tribal rights over resources in the Fifth Schedule Areas. Based on the recommendations of the committee, the Indian Parliament passed a separate legislation in 1996 as an annexure to the 73rd Amendment specifying special provision for Panchayats in the Fifth Schedule Areas. With the objective of safeguarding and preserving the traditions and customs of the people living in the Fifth Schedule Areas, their social, religious and cultural identities and traditional management practices of community resources, therefore, the Government of India enacted the Panchayat (Extension to the Schedule Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) which came into force on December 24, 1996. It recognized the traditional rights of tribals over community resources such as, land, water and forest. This Act is applicable to Fifth Schedule Areas of eight states such as, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar (now divided into Jharkhand and Bihar) Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh (now divided into Chhattisgarh and M.P) Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan. The distinguishing feature of this Act is to recognize the traditional structures of self-governance in the tribal areas and to transform them into units of local self-government, particularly through the Gramsabha.

The salient features of this Act are: (i) the state legislation on the panchayats has to be in consonance with the customary laws, social and religious practices and the traditional management practices of community resources and dispute resolution; (ii) the community is the centre of Gram Sabha; (iii) the Gram Sabha has been conferred with the power of approval of the plans, programmes and projects for social and economic development; selection of beneficiaries for poverty alleviation; and (iv) being consulted for land acquisition for projects, control over minor water bodies, minerals and forest produce; enforcing prohibition, management of local markets, check on money lenders etc. (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, The National Tribal Policy, Draft). This Act intends to enable tribal society to assume control over their own destiny to preserve and conserve their traditional rights over natural resources. With PESA, an effort was made to vest legislative powers in the Gram Sabha, to manage community resources, and to resolve disputes according to the customs and traditions of the people. This significant legislation was expected to have far reaching consequences in the social, economic, and cultural life of tribal people in Scheduled Areas. All the scheduled states were given one year to amend their respective Panchayat Acts to conform to the letter and spirit of PESA. Therefore, it acts as a catalyst of empowering STs of Scheduled Areas to preserve and conserve their traditional resources which are an integral part of their livelihood.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006

The current regulatory and legislative framework on forests and tribals are criticized as inadequate. Local people have less access to benefit sharing for conservation, although they are to a large extent dependant on the resources in conservation areas. On 13 December 2005, the Minister for Tribal Affairs introduced the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill 2005 into Parliament, “to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land in forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes who have been residing in such forests for generations but whose rights could not be recorded and to provide for a framework for recording the forest rights so vested and the nature of evidence required for such recognition and vesting in respect of forest land.” The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 adopted by the Lok Sabha is a landmark legislation that seeks to empower traditional forest dwelling communities by giving them security of tenure, access to minor forest produce, and a big stake in the preservation of natural spaces.

Disempowerment Process

The tribals are closely affected by different forces in their daily life, which correspondently contribute to their disempowerment. Disempowerment can be understood in the context of appropriation and seizure of power. According to Xaxa (2001), the disempowerment process of the tribes began with the incorporation of tribes with the larger social structure, especially the state. The attempt of the modern state to integrate the tribals into the so-called mainstream society led to the different form of exploitation and marginalization of tribals, correspondingly accentuated the disempowerment process in India. This nature of the Indian state offered the scope to the colonial anthropologist, Verrier Elwin, to advocate for complete isolation for tribals, which, according to him, is the only mechanism to check the disempowerment of tribals by safeguarding and protecting their interests in different spheres. After independence, the so-called development projects of the state have turned out to be major factor for the disempowerment of tribals in India. The opening up of the large developmental projects has displaced thousands of tribals in different corners of the country. Consequent, the marginalized groups have forced to bear the price of the national development. To put it differently, the vulnerable tribal communities have to sacrifice their interests for the sake of the nation's development. These developmental efforts of the state have altered the historic relationship of tribals with their source of livelihood, such as land, water and forest. The modern nation-state is consistently involved in the gradual erosion of tribal culture and tradition by imposing the outside culture on them. The discriminatory policies adopted by the state in relation to land and forest dilute the traditional management of community resources by the tribals in India, which leads to the disempowerment process. The state also changes its role in relation to tribal people over the period and fails to deal with the tribal issues more sensibly.

The changing role of the state can be more visible by citing couple of examples. The Indian state does not look at the tribal issues more sensibly. Sometimes, it deschedules some of the categories from the ST list and in this context, the case of Jhodia tribe (who have been availing the benefits of preferences at the state level but not at the central level) can be demonstrated. Again, it has failed to come out with any white paper regarding the criteria to be included in ST list in India. The Government of India has not recognized the tribal people of Puducherry as STs, though they have been supported by the strong ethnographic study. They have all the five characteristics required to be notified as a ST under Article 342 of the Constitution-primitive traits, a distinct culture, shyness of contact with the public at large,

geographical isolation and social and economic backwardness. The tribal people of Puducherry continue to wait for recognition as STs.

In addition, there are other factors which are playing an active role in the process of disempowerment of tribals in India. Recently, some of the militant organizations, such as the Maoists, have played an active role in diluting the idea of empowerment of the tribals. For instance, in the recent general election in Orissa, the naxals had issued warning to boycott the general election-2009. When the Maoists spread terror on Election Day, they disempowered the very people they claim to fight for. These aspects greatly undermine the political empowerment of the tribals in India. So, these factors are playing an important role in the disempowerment process in India.

SUM UP

For comprehensive empowerment of STs, the constitution of India has adopted number of legal as well as statutory provisions, which are primarily designed to empower the marginalized groups such as the tribal's. These commendable provisions along with other developmental plans and projects have no doubt been able to empower the tribal's but not have been able to bring about the required qualitative change in the life of the tribal's in India. In other words, the different provisions of the Indian constitution, which are primarily designed for the development and empowerment of the tribals, have failed to achieve their objectives. After more than five decades of the working of the Indian constitution, the tribals are still struggling for their empowerment in the context of their rights. The tribals of the different parts are consistently protesting against their land alienation in order to live with dignity. The contemporary struggle of the tribals in India is basically one for empowerment. The modern welfare state has failed to empower them in terms of their relationship with the natural resources. So, the biggest challenge for the welfare state is to translate the different constitutional provisions and developmental plans and projects in to reality, which will accentuate the empowerment process of the tribal's in India.

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