

A Study of Some Basic Problems Faced By Tribal Communities in India

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ABSTRACT

In the ancient period, the backward castes had been denied all kinds of social and economic developments in India. Thus backwards classes had been lagging far behind in the process of development. The social and economic deprivation among Scheduled tribes had been most common during pre and post-Independence. Till today scheduled tribes are facing manifold problems and struggling for basic needs of life. Although, government and non-government agencies are making efforts for upliftment of schedule tribes, but a lot is to be done yet.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tribal groups in India have been selected as “Scheduled Tribes” under the Constitution. Many tribes and specified in this schedule and there is a certain procedure by which new tribal groups can be added to Scheduled list. Primitive traits, geographically isolated, distinct culture, and shyness of contact with community at large, and economically backwardness are some basic characteristics of scheduled tribes. Scheduled tribes are notified as Scheduled Tribes under Article 342 of the Constitution

India is among few nations in the world having a sizeable tribal population which is widespread in different parts of the country. Presently, there are 573 different tribal communities spread all over India but only 258 tribal communities speaking about 106 different languages are notified as “Scheduled Tribes”. About 80 percent of tribal populations are to be found along the Central India belt and the rest 20 percent are in the North-Eastern States, Southern States and Island groups.

Tribal communities living in far remote areas are still struggling to fulfill their basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. Besides these basic needs, today tribes require better opportunities to live in dignity and self-respect. Scheduled tribes who are treated “Untouchables” have been suffering from various social, religious, legal, political, economic, educational and other disabilities.

PROBLEMS OF TRIBES IN INDIA

According to census 2011, the number of Scheduled Tribes in the country is 10,42,81,034 which is 8.6 of the total population of India . Of these, about 1.37 million (1.67 per cent) belong to Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG). The Human Development Indices (HDIs) of the ST population are much lower than the rest of the population in terms of all parameters such as education, health, income, etc. Further, the gap in the infrastructure in the tribal areas vis-à-vis the rest of the areas is widening at a much faster rate. Social inequalities of the tribal population are manifested in various forms of exploitation such as bondage, forced labour and indebtedness. They are also exploited by merchants, money lenders and forest contractors.

Tribes in India were denied political representation, legal rights, civic facilities, educational privileges and economic opportunities since centuries. Scheduled tribes are not free from problems and they are facing many-facet problems on social, economic, religious and political fronts. Although after independence many provisions were made in the constitution to protect the interests of the scheduled tribes and for their development also. Scheduled tribes are till date facing many problems which can be categorized under following headings :

(A) Social

The Scheduled tribes were suffered for centuries from a number of social disabilities such as:

(a) Social Status

Scheduled tribes have been suffering from the stigma of 'untouchability' and in the Caste hierarchy the Scheduled tribes are ascribed the lowest social status. They are considered to be 'unholy', 'inferior' and 'low' and are looked down upon by the other castes. Their very touch is considered to be polluting for the higher caste people. Still they are treated as the servants of the upper caste people. They were kept at a distance from other caste people.

(b) Education Disabilities:

During early days in India Scheduled tribes were not allowed taking up to education. Especially, Sanskrit education was denied for them. The doors of public schools and other educational institutions were closed for them. As a result of which till today a majority of them are illiterate and ignorant.

Illiteracy proved to be curse for the scheduled tribes. This is the only reason that they are still far behind in the race of development. Due to lack of education they could not understand the welfare schemes run by government and so they cannot avail the benefits of such schemes.

(c) Civic Disabilities:

In India, scheduled tribes were prevented from the use of Public Places for a long period of time and still they are facing this problem but not to that extent. For a long time the scheduled tribes who were treated as untouchable, were not allowed to use public places and avail of civic facilities such as village wells, ponds, temples, hostels, hotels, schools, hospitals, lecture halls, dharamashalas, choultries, etc.

They were forced to live on the outskirts of the towns and villages during the early days. Even today they are segregated from others spatially. In South India, restrictions were imposed on the mode of construction of their houses, types of dresses and patterns of their ornamentation.

Some lower caste people were not allowed to carry umbrellas, to wear shoes or golden ornaments and to milk cows. They were prohibited from covering the upper part of their body. The services of barbers, washermen and tailors were refused to them.

(B) Religious Disabilities:

The scheduled tribes also suffer from religious disabilities even today. They are not allowed to enter temples in many places. The brahmins who offer their priestly services to some lower castes, are not prepared to officiate in the ceremonies of the 'untouchable' castes. They do not even bow down to the duties of these 'untouchable' castes.

The Vedic mantras which are considered to be more pure could not be listened to and chanted by the tribes because of the taboos. They were only permitted to make use of the upanishadic mantras which are considered to be less pure. Burial grounds were also denied for them in many places.

(C) Economic Disabilities:

Since long time scheduled tribes were economically backward and thus they have been suffering from various economic disabilities also.

1. No Right of Property Ownership:

Land as a prime resource has been a source of problem in tribal life because of two related reasons, first, Dependency, i.e. tribal dependency on land and second, improper planning from government agencies. Land rights and changes in rules go unnoticed. Tribal are unaware or are made unaware about the rules which governs India's land rights.

The Tribals do not have access to land records, not even the Record of Rights. This lends them to a higher probability of getting exploited, by the non-tribals and in some cases by the local officials. Wherever lands are given yet the pattas are not given, or pattas handed over yet the land is not shown.

For centuries the tribes were not allowed to have land and business of their own. It is only recently their ownership to the property has become recognised. The propertied people are comparatively less in them. Majority of them depend upon agriculture but only a few of them own land.

Though many measures like scheduling of tribal areas, ceasing land transfer and recognition of the rights over resources is encouraged by the Government of India. Yet, tribal are facing problems of land alienation, displacement, indebtedness and bonded labour. Many of the problems are rooted from their increasing attachment with dominant culture and lack of basic competence in education.

2. Limited Occupations:

The ancient caste system in India imposes restrictions on the occupational choice of the members. The occupational choice was very much limited for the scheduled tribes. They were not allowed to take up to occupations which were reserved for the upper caste people.

They were forced to stick on to the traditional inferior occupations such as curing hides, removing the human wastes, sweeping, scavenging, oil grinding, tanning, shoemaking, leather works, carrying the dead animals, etc. These occupations were regarded as 'degraded' and 'inferior'.

3. Landless Labourers:

Majority of the scheduled tribes are today working as landless labourers. More than 90.1 of the agricultural labourers in India belong to the depressed classes which include the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. More than 77.1% of the Scheduled Caste workers in rural areas are agricultural labourers.

A large number of scheduled tribe families are in debts. Their indebtedness is increasing day by day. The scheduled tribes are economically exploited by the upper caste people. Even today they are the lowest paid workers; some of them continue to suffer as bonded labourers at the hands of the higher caste people.

Landlessness has been arguably the major cause of indebtedness among the agriculturist tribals in India. In India 58% of the tribal people Below Poverty Line with a high concentration in states like Andhra, Rajasthan, UP, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. The land alienation with its long history has natural consequence of indebtedness, which further lead to dispossession of tribal land. The poverty, land alienation indebtedness and landlessness is working a cyclical way.

(D) Political Disabilities:

Due to backwardness, scheduled tribes are still lacking political empowerment. Political rights and representation were denied for them. Now efforts are being made by the government to give them political empowerment and reservation of seats in election is allowed. Political reservation enables scheduled tribes to raise their voice on political platform.

II. CONCLUSION

The scheduled tribes in India are facing problems not only on socio-economic front but they are still facing religious problems. They also not political empowered and lack strong political leadership. Due to lack of education they could not understand properly the welfare schemes of government and on the other hand money lenders and other peoples take advantage of it.

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