
TRIBAL ISSUE AND POLICY CONSOLIDATION

Introduction

A tribe is a group of distinct people, dependent on their land for their livelihood, who are largely self-sufficient, and not integrated into the national society.

Tribes of India are varied in terms of their socio-economic and political development. Some tribal people are in the transitional phase, while others are adhering to their old lifestyles. This shows an uneven process of change and development among the tribal people in India.

Issues

Government has put efforts to integrate them into the mainstream for inclusive growth but still there are many issues faced by the tribal people which needs to be resolved -

- **Cultural Issues**

The institutions of untouchability, pollution-purity and high and low status have also made inroads into tribal life. The tribals have become to a large extent a 'caste' or 'pseudo-caste' by this process of cultural contact. Ignorance, illiteracy, superstition and poverty are the major problems of the tribal people in the Indian sub-continent.

- **Separatism**

The demand for separate states for tribals took the shape of insurgency in Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Bihar, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura. Neighbouring countries, unfriendly to India, were active in exploiting these anti-Indian sentiments. Infiltration of foreign nationals, gun-running, trafficking in narcotics and smuggling even today are very serious problems in these states surrounded by tribal belts.

- **Social Issues:**

- a) **Displacement of Tribals**

Tribals have been displaced in large numbers on account of various large development projects like irrigation dams, hydro-electric and thermal power plants, coal mines and mineral-based industries.

- b) **Illiteracy**

The literacy rate as per Census 2011 is 73% but for STs is 59% only. Since most of the tribals are poor, education appears to be a luxury for them. In the case of those people who are engaged in agriculture, their minor children are also engaged in it.

- c) **Health and Sanitation**

Due to illiteracy and ignorance the tribals are not able to appreciate modern concept of health and sanitation. They do not take much care pertaining to their own health.

- **Economic Issues**

The tribal people are economically the poorest people of India. Majority of them live below the poverty line. The tribal economy is based on agriculture of the crudest type.

- a) **Exploitation**

The innocence, illiteracy and helplessness of the tribals are exploited by the outsiders.

b) Unprofitable Agriculture

About 90% of the tribals are engaged in cultivation and most of them are landless and practice shifting cultivation. Some tribals even today are engaged in jhum (shifting) cultivation, which is not only uneconomical but also causes deforestation and soil erosion. Since the tribals have no alternative source of livelihood, they continue to use shifting cultivation and cutting of forests for their livelihood.

c) Land ownership

A good portion of the land in the tribal areas has been legally transferred to non-tribals. Tribals demand that this land should be returned to them. In fact the tribals had earlier enjoyed much freedom to use the forest and hunt their animals. The tribals who are deprived of their rights to the land and forest have reacted sharply to the restrictions imposed by the government on their traditional rights.

d) Unemployment and Underemployment

A large number of tribal young men and women are either unemployed or underemployed. They are unhappy for they are not able to get jobs that can keep them occupied throughout the year.

e) Per capita landholding has decreased

Alienation of land due to indebtedness and socio-economic backwardness, Increase in tribal population and Takeover of tribal lands by the government for establishing industries.

Policy Consolidation

After Independence, provisions were made in the Constitution to safeguard tribal interests and promote their developmental and welfare activities.

Government enunciated the policy of Panchsheel for tribal transformation, which rested on following five principles:

1. Avoiding imposing the culture of the majority people on them and encouraging in every way their (tribal) own traditional arts and culture.
2. Respecting tribal rights on land and forest.
3. Training tribal leaders for administrative and developmental activities with the help of some technical personnel from outside.
4. Avoiding over-administering of the tribal areas.
5. Judging results not on the basis of money spent but the quality of human character evolved.

In 1960, the Scheduled Tribe Commission was set up under the chairmanship of U.N. Dhebar to work for the advancement of the tribals.

After the Fifth Five Year Plan, the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy was designed in 1980 which consisted of two things:

1. Socio-economic development of the STs.
2. Protection of tribals against exploitation. The funds for TSPs are provided by state governments and the central ministries.

In the Five Year Plans, the programmes for the welfare of the STs aim at:

1. Raising the productivity levels in agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, cottage and small-scale industries, etc., to improve the economic conditions
2. Rehabilitation of the bonded labor.
3. Education and training programmes.

4. Special development programmes for women and children.

With the prime objective of providing marketing assistance and remunerative prices to tribals for their minor forest produce and surplus agricultural produce and to save them from exploitative middlemen, the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) was set up by the Government in the year 1987.

The Government has enacted the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 which recognizes and vests the forest rights and occupation in forest land in forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who have been residing in such forests, for generations.

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