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Tribal Development Approaches in India

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Abstract

Tribal studies in India have been experiencing ideological and socio-political upheavals vis-à-vis taken serious turns. Comparative studies are done reflecting the complex aspects like tribe-caste interaction, habitation, ecological setting and other aspects of their life. Theories and methods developed continuously reflect that tribal studies do not remain confined within the stipulated boundaries and approaches of social anthropologists and sociologists only, rather scholars from other disciplines too show tremendous interests to re-look into the issues and problems of the tribes. The 'Isolationist approach' of Verrier Elwin, the 'Assimilationist approach' of G.S. Ghurye and the 'Integrationist approach' propounded by Jawaharlal Nehru by now is seriously reviewed and re-written. This paper highlights these major Approaches as how far relevant in Contemporary period.

Keywords: Isolation Approach, Assimilation Approach, Integration Approach

Introduction

Tribal studies attract scholars across disciplines. European anthropologists and sociologists lay foundation of tribal studies. Australian aborigines, African and Indian tribes become subject of intensive study for these scholars. Colonial administrators cum anthropologists too put immense interest to study tribes. European model of tribal study becomes dominant which is subsequently corroborated by contextualized theories and methods. Indian tribes are unique in terms of distinctive socio-historical features. Tribal studies in India or studies relating to the multi-dimensionality of the tribes in India started during the late British period. The domination of British anthropology upon Indian anthropology and sociology continued. At least concepts, methods and approaches developed by them were followed by most of the scholars in India. Subsequently the studies of American anthropologists and other scholars from Africa and other regions also influenced/motivated the Indian scholars. However till the early 1970 Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's methods remained to be the most popular methods for the Indian scholars. Therefore, Tribal studies in India become a matter of immense debate and discussion among scholars across disciplines throughout the world. Indian sociologists, colonial administrators and policy makers could not put similar view on problems and prospects of Indian tribes. There are three major approaches 'Isolation approach', 'Assimilation approach' and 'Integration approach' emerge on Indian tribes.

Isolation Approach

Verrier Elwin in his book, *The Baiga* (1939), advocates establishment of a sort of 'National Park' in a wild and largely inaccessible part of country under direct control of a tribal commissioner. Inside this area, administration should allow tribesmen to live their lives with utmost possible happiness and freedom. Wide powers would be given to old tribal council and authority of village headman would be established. Non-tribal settlements in this area would be required to take out license. No missionaries of any religion would be permitted to break up tribal life. Everything possible would be done for the progress of tribals within this area, provided the quality of tribal life would not be impaired. Tribal culture would not be destroyed and tribal freedom would be restored and maintained. Tribes' contact with outsiders should be minimised. Economic development would be given high priority. Simple and need oriented education would be given to tribal people. Fishing and hunting would be freely permitted and dictatorship of subordinate officials within the area should be eradicated.

Tribal population in India belongs to various stages of cultural development. Verrier Elwin in his book *'The Aborigines'* (1943) divides Indian tribes into four classes according to their stage of cultural development. Class I is the purest of pure tribal groups comprising about two or three million persons. Elwin and a large section of missionary reformers and anthropologists grow lyrical over the robust, vibrant and healthy life of this tribal group. According to Elwin, these

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Highlanders do not merely exist like so many villagers, they really live. Their religion is characteristic and alive, their tribal organisation is un-impaired, their artistic and choreographic traditions are unbroken, and their mythology still vitalises healthy organisation of tribal life. Geographical conditions have largely protected them from debasing contacts of the plains. It is said that the hoot of the motor-horn would sound the knell of the aboriginal tribes. A section of this category of tribes has been experiencing contact with plain and consequently undergoing change. This group is coming under class II of Elwin's classification. Though such group retain its tribal mode of living it may exhibit many contrasting characteristics with the first group. Instead of communal life this group lives a village life which has become individualistic. Their communal life and traditions are only preserved through their village dormitories. They do not share things with one another. Axe cultivation has ceased to be a way of life for them. Members of these tribes are more contaminated by life outside. They come in contact with groups living on periphery who live a more complex i.e. civilised life. Members of these tribes are less simple and less honest than members of tribes belonging to class I. Tribe belonging to class III constitutes the largest section of total tribal population, about four-fifth of it, i.e. nearly twenty millions. Members of this class of tribal groups are in a peculiar state of transition. They bare tribal in name but have become as like as Hindus who belong to lower rung of Hindu society. One section of this class has got converted into Christianity. This group of tribes has been appreciably affected by external contacts. They have been exposed to influence of economic and socio-cultural forces of Hindu society. They have also subjected to missionary influences. But above all, they have been most adversely affected by the economic and political policies of the British which resulted in their being dragged into orbit of colonial- capitalist system in India. Members belonging to this category of tribal groups were uprooted from their mode of production in same way as were millions of cultivators and artisans living in the multitude of autarchic of villages of pre-British India from their self-sufficient, self-contained village community setting. During British period under impact of new economic and politico-administrative measures these tribesmen lost their moorings from their economy, social organization and cultural life. A large section of this population was reduced to status of bond slaves or agrestic serfs of money- lender, zamindar and contractor who emerged due to political and economic policy pursued by British. Another section was reduced to category of near to slave labourer working on plantation, mine, railway or road construction or other enterprise. They were uprooted from their habitat and condemned to a wretched existence. A number of these tribes were branded as criminal tribes as their members could survive only by criminal means. They lost their land and occupation and had no alternative means to subsistence because of economic and political exploitation of British. Class IV tribals consists of old aristocracy of country, represented today by great Bhil and Naga Chieftains, Gond Rajas, a few Binshevar and Bhuyia landlords, korku noblemen, wealthy Santal and Uraon leaders and some highly cultured Mundas. They retain their own tribal names, clan and totem rules. They observe elements of tribal religion despite of adopting full Hindu faith and live in modern or even European style. According to Elwin, tribals of this class have won the battle of cultural contacts. It seems that they have acquired aristocratic traditions, economic stability, affluence, outside encouragement, a certain arrogance and self-

confidence characteristic alike ancient families and modern enterprise. This class of tribals has secured benefit of civilisation without injury to themselves. Elwin observes, whole aboriginal problem is to how to enable tribesmen of the first and second classes to advance direct into the fourth class without having to suffer the despair and degradation of the third. For this purpose Elwin advocates policy of isolation. He feels it is important to give some protection to tribal people in transition period during which they must learn to stand on their own feet and become strong enough to resist those who exploit them. In his book '*A Philosophy of NEFA*' he advocates for development of tribes residing in remote areas of North-East Frontier and suggests for spending a great deal of money to eradicate their poverty, degradation and unhappiness.

This approach is not followed for long term. Looking into perspective of third world, Indian strategy of tribal development, in spite of its limitations, is described as a unique experiment. Assimilation approach paved way for tribal people to mingle with neighbouring non-tribals. In India, process of assimilation takes place in different parts of the country resulting in gradual acceptance of Hindu culture by tribals. Advocates of this approach support a direct assimilation without waiting for a slow and long-drawn change.

Assimilation Approach

Govind Sadashiv Ghurye in book '*The Scheduled Tribes*' 1959 describe nature of assimilation of tribes in wider Hindu society. Like Elwin, Ghurye also divides tribes into three sections. First section is constituted of Rajgonds and others who have successfully fought the battle and are organised as members of fairly high status within Hindu society. Second category is large mass that has been partially Hinduised and has come to closer contact with Hindus and third, the hill sections, which has exhibited the greater power of resistance to the alien cultures that have passed upon their border.

A large number of tribes in India, according to Ghurye, Santal, Munda, Oraon, Kond, Gond and Korku speak languages which either belong to Kherwari or Mundari group of languages or to Dravidian family. These languages are, more often than not, different from languages of plains people among whom tribals have larger social intercourse. Languages of latter in most cases belong to Indo-Aryan family. Many of these tribes, though they have preserved their tribal languages, can and do employ Indo-Aryan languages of surrounding people in their routine intercourse. Many of them thus are bi-lingual, having their own mother-tongue and having more or less acquired languages of neighbouring people. There are others, like Baigas, who have taken up Indo-Aryan tongue of the locality in place of their own language. Others like Bhils speak languages which are dialect of local languages. In all case language spoken by so-called aborigine were till recently not spoken tongue and no script of their own. Tribal solidarity, according to Ghurye, has been broken by two distinct agencies. One is Hinduism and its assimilative process and other is British policy. Hindu assimilation makes tribes not so absorbed rather weak and benumbed under feeling of brokenness. If section of tribes gets assimilated in Hindu fold they are ushered into an altogether strange social world. Hindu castes, at least many of them, have characteristics of tribal society as regards to management of internal affairs. Tribal sections on joining Hindu society develop an internal organisation of caste pattern, and thus have been regulating and controlling power within them. Many of tribes get smugly

settled into Hindu fold. Moreover, Ghurye is of view that British rule particularly its revenue collection pattern; its central police system and judicial system have broken solidarity of tribal society in India.

According to G.S Ghurye tribal people in India are backward Hindu differing only in degree from the other segment of Hindu society. Their backwardness is due to their imperfect assimilation into Hindu society. Tribes of India have slowly absorbed certain Hindu values and life style through contact with Hindus. Under Hindu influence tribes have given up liquor drinking, they received education and have changed their practices and habits and adopted Hinduism as their religion.

Integration Approach

This approach is propounded by Jawaharlal Nehru in his manuscript discovery of India. Though his concept is mainly influenced and drawn from his *panchsheel* principle, Neheru categorically rejected both isolation and assimilation approach of tribe. According to him isolation approach to treat tribal as '*museum specimen to be observed and written about*' signifies insult to them. Tribe cannot be left cut off from world as they are. Isolation is in any case is impossible at this stage of underdevelopment due to outsiders' penetration. To him, assimilation approach of allowing tribes '*to be engulfed by masses of Indian humanity*' is also wrong. This would lead to loss of their virtuous social and cultural identity as well as there is possibility of capturing tribal land and forest by unscrupulous outsiders. Life of tribal will be in threat in such a position. Instead of these two approaches, Neheru favours policy of integrating tribal people in Indian society and to make them an integral part of Indian nation without hampering their distinct identity and culture. Policy of integration consists of two types of measures for tribal development. These are Protective measure and Promotional measure. After independence Prime Minister Jawarharlal Neheru lays down a Panchsheel principle for tribal development in India. *Panchsheel* is five fundamental principles for tribal development in India. For ensuring overall development there should be proper communication, medical facility, education and better agriculture. These avenues of development should, however, be pursued within broad framework of following five fundamental principles.

1. People should develop a long line of their own genius and nothing should be imposed on them. Rather we should try to encourage in every way their own traditional art and culture.
2. Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
3. We should try to train and built up a team of their own people to do work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will be needed in beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through their own social and cultural institution.
5. We should judge result, not by statistics of amount of money spent, but by quality of human character that is evolved.

Jawaharlal Neheru being Prime Minister notes and elaborates these points on a number of occasions and speaks on caution needed in developing tribal areas. He points out disastrous effect of '*so-called European civilisation*' on tribal people of

other parts of the world which has put to an end of their arts and crafts and simple way of living. Neheru declares that so-called Indian civilization may have a dangerous impact on life of tribals if it is not checked in proper way. In beginning of shaping government's policy for tribal development Constitution of India under Article 46 directs states to promote special care on educational and economic interest of tribal people. Tribals should be provided social justice and should be protected from exploitation through special legislation. Governors of states in which tribal areas are situated are given special responsibility to protect tribal interests. Governor has power to modify central and state laws in their application to tribal areas, and to frame regulations for protection of tribals' right to land and also to save them from exploitation of moneylenders. Applications of fundamental rights are amended for this purpose. Constitution also extends full political right to tribal people. In addition, it provides provision for reservation of seats in legislature and administrative services for Scheduled Tribes as in the case of Scheduled Castes. Constitution also provides for setting up of Tribal Advisory Councils in all states containing tribal areas to advice on matters concerning welfare of tribals. A commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is appointed by President to investigate whether safeguard provided to them are being observed. Legislative as well as executive action is taken by state governments to prevent loss of tribal land to non-tribal people and to prevent exploitation of tribals by moneylenders. Central and state governments create special facilities and organize special programmes for welfare and development of tribal areas and tribal people including promotion of cottage and village industries and generation of employment among them. Large expenditures are undertaken and large sums set apart in plan for this purpose. Funding for tribal welfare significantly increased after 1971. Tribal policy of the Government of India, inspired by Jawaharlal Neheru is therefore more relevant to tribal people of North East India. Neheru says in October 1952 that all this North-East border area deserve special attention not only of government but of people of India.

A reflection of this policy is in Sixth Schedule of constitution which applies only to tribal areas of Assam. Sixth Schedule offers a fair degree of self- government for tribal people by providing for autonomous districts and creation of district and regional councils which will exercise some of legislative and judicial functions within overall jurisdiction of Assam legislature and parliament. Objective of Sixth Schedule is to enable tribals to live according to their own way. Government of India also expresses its willingness to further amend constitutional provisions relating to tribal people if it is found necessary to do so with a view to promote further autonomy. Neheru's and Elwin's policies are implemented best of all in North-Eastern Frontier Agency or NEFA. It is created in 1948 out of border areas of Assam. NEFA is established as a Union Territory outside jurisdiction of Assam and placed under a special administration.

Former approach consists of land policy, forest policy and policy to protect tribal culture and tradition, while the latter is development and welfare programmes would be undertaken by government to make better tribal life. P.D Kulkarni states that policy of protection and development is undoubtedly same in itself, but it remains to be seen whether development is possible without upsetting harmony that exists in placid tribal life.

G.S Ghurye's makes well-known analysis of Scheduled Tribe problem. His anthropological inclinations naturally brought

tribes close to his heart. Inspired by the work of his students, Ghurye writes on grand theme of '*Integration of Tribals*' in 1943 and it is essentially in reply to 'isolationist' approach of Verrier Elwin, which forms basis of British colonial policy. G.S Ghurye views that only solution to the problem is their progressive assimilation with the farmers and peasants of the adjoining districts. He has vision to conclude that the major problems of the tribals are never different from the problems of poor rural people in general.

In subsequent editions of the book '*The Scheduled Tribes*', G.S Ghurye becomes critical of independent India's government policy which sows seeds of disintegration by its internally contradicting step of laying down integrationist approach in constitution and on other hand promoting fission by giving importance to idea of Scheduled Areas. Comprehensive study of Ghurye on problems of Indian tribes conducted 65 years ago lead to a great methodological contribution at present.

Conclusion

Indian tribes are unique in terms of distinctive socio-historical features. Therefore, Tribal studies in India become a matter of immense debate and discussion among scholars across disciplines throughout the world. Indian sociologists, colonial administrators and policy makers could not put similar view on problems and prospects of Indian tribes. There are three major approaches 'Isolation approach', 'Assimilation approach' and 'Integration approach' emerge on Indian tribes. Regarding major theories of tribe as of now only three theories are found and visible to wider extent. Though attempts are made at different levels to build up theory at every level, their significance or existence is yet to be felt. That is why probably isolation approach, assimilation approach and integration approach are now debated and contradicted.

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