

## **Tribal Welfare in India: Myth and Reality**

**Dr. Pritinanda Mohanty**

*Department of Sociology,  
University of Madras, Chennai- 600005  
Email: mohantyp99@gmail.com*

### **I**

The welfare and development of scheduled tribes is one of the major concerns of the Government of Independent India and it is treated as the integral part of Indian planning. Besides the affirmative actions envisaged in the constitution including those in the fifth and sixth schedules, systematic and concerted efforts have been made ever since planning era in conformity with the Directive Principles of State Policies for their socio-economic upliftment within the broader framework of *Panchasheel* principles enunciated by Nehru

In the first two Five Year Plans, welfare programmes were drawn up and implemented through an area development approach. The first plan aimed at inducing changes in all aspects of tribal life through community development. In the second plan Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks were created and emphasis was given to education, health, agriculture, communication and housing programmes. These blocks were renamed as Tribal Development Blocks for integrated development in the third plan. The fourth plan adopted a regional approach and special attention was directed to individual person. The fifth plan pursued the integrated area development approach and it was during this plan the Tribal Sub-Plan approach was adopted. It earmarked allocations for the socio-economic development of the tribals apart from the general programmes of economic development undertaken by the Central and State Governments. In the Sixth Plan the emphasis shifted from welfare to family and beneficiary-oriented development schemes and the target of raising 50 per cent of Scheduled Castes and Tribes above the poverty line was set. The Seventh Plan continued this thrust of socio-economic development through tribal sub-plans and by turning the blocks with a tribal majority into integrated tribal development projects. It laid stress on human resource as well as infrastructure development, strengthening protective measures and forming LAMPS and other cooperatives and integrating IRDP, DPAP and other programmes into them. Consequently, efforts were made in the Eighth Plan to bridge the gap between the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the rest of society and elimination of exploitation and oppression received high priority. A national policy on rehabilitation of displaced by large development

projects was evolved. Like all other plans the Ninth Plan Draft paper also shows a commitment for the all-round and speedy development of the scheduled tribes along with other weaker sections through a process of empowerment. Apart from this, in the post-independence period, a number of commissions, committees and working groups were formed time to time to evaluate the conditions of scheduled tribes and to provide appropriate feedback for the proper formulation and implementation of developmental measures.

The collective impact of these sustained and uninterrupted efforts are expected to bring appreciable changes in the socio-economic conditions of the tribals. But it is reported by a large number of studies conducted in different parts of tribal India that plans and programmes implemented so far, have failed to bring desired changes (D'Souza 1990; Tripathy 1997; Chakrabarty 1998). Moreover, it is argued that instead of improving the conditions of the tribals these plans and policies have adversely affected them (Pathy 1984; Rao 1987; Fernandes 1991; 1997; Mohanty 1997). However, most of these studies have been undertaken at the micro level or confined to specific regions. Some of them were carried out at an early stage of planning and development. In this context, the present paper attempts to provide a comprehensive picture of the overall impact of the developmental measures on the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled tribes at the macro level.

## II

Since independence development projects of the Five Year Plan have displaced largely the tribals. Most of the heavy industries, mega dams, mines, wild life sanctuaries are set up in the midst of tribal concentrated areas. Two out of four major steel plants opened after independence (Rourkela and Bokaro) flourished in the tribal land and the other two plants (Bhilai and Durgapur) also developed at a closer vicinity of tribal areas. The four steel plants have displaced 135, 200 persons, 2145 of them tribals (Commissioner of SC and ST 1961: 115). The Rourkela Steel Plant alone displaced 2, 444 families (13, 500 persons) of which 50.37 per cent were tribals (Mahapatra 1991: 275). The construction of Bokaro Steel Plant displaced 12, 990 families, 20.84 per cent of them tribals (Areparampil 1996: 1427). The establishment of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. in Koraput affected 1101 families (of 21 villages), 69 per cent of them tribals belonging to Paraja and Gadaba communities (Report of the Study Team on Tribal Development Programme, Odisha 1966: 111-13). Similarly the National Aluminum Company at Koraput displaced 597 families, 43 per cent of them tribals (Stanley 1996: 534). The other industrial establishment located in Bihar and Madhy Pradesh have also considerably displaced the tribals. The Heavy Engineering Corporation established at Hatia near Ranchi displaced 12, 990 persons mostly belonging to Munda and Oraon tribes. (Areparampil 1996: 1522). In the country as a whole, 2.6 lakhs of tribals constituting 20 per cent of all displaced persons and 87 per cent of the concerned region were displaced by the development projects undertaken between 1951-1990 (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Displacement and Rehabilitation of Tribals (1951-1990)

Sr. No.	Project	No. of displaced Tribals (in lakhs)	Percentage to all displaced persons	Percentage of the region	Percentage of displaced tribals rehabilitated
1.	Mines	12.0	57.14	84.81	25.00
2.	Dams	53.00	37.57	75.71	24.81
3.	Industries	02.60	20.00	86.67	25.00
4.	Sanctuaries	05.00	83.33	83.33	25.00
5.	Others	01.50	30.00	75.00	26.27
Total		74.10	40.05	77.81	24.97

Source: Fernandes (1991: 256).

The dams and canals also constructed in the densely populated tribal areas. Around 53 lakhs of tribals constituting of 37.51 per cent to total displaced persons and 75.71 per cent of the respective regions were affected (Table 1). The Koel Karo in Bihar, Hirakud and Rengali in Orissa, Ukai in Gujarat, Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, Bhopapatnam in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, Pochampad in Andhra Pradesh, Bhakra in Himachal Pradesh have caused displacement of the tribals on a massive scale. However, the Hirakud Dam of the 1950<sup>s</sup> though displaced more than one lakh persons, only 11.4 per cent of them tribals (Mahapatra 1991: 275). The power projects located in Orissa displaced quite a large number of tribals. For examples, the hydro-electric project at Machhkund displaced around 2, 938 families of which 51 per cent were tribals (Mahapatra 1990: 86). The major hydro-electric projects taken up jointly by Odisha and Andhra Pradesh at Balimela affected 1611 families in which 69 per cent were tribals belonging to Kondh, Gadaba, Didyei and Bonda communities (Report of the Study Team on Tribal Development Programme, Odisha 1966: 111-113) and the Upper Kolab Multipurpose Project affected 13095 families, 54 per cent of them tribals (Stanley 1996: 534).

A large number of mines are located in tribal areas. Around 98 per cent of coal mines of the country are in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, U.P., Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal and most of these mines are in the tribal lands (Fernandes 1991: 251). Besides, considerable number of bauxite mines, Chromite mines, Copper mines, Iron ore mines and Manganese ore mines of Odisha, Madhya Pradesh. and Bihar are in the predominantly tribal areas. Between 1951 to 1990, all these mining operations have displaced around 12 lakh tribals, 57.14 per cent of all displaced persons (Table 1). In addition, the wildlife sanctuaries in Bihar, Madhy Pradesh, Odisha and other States displaced around 6 lakhs persons of which 83 per cent were tribals.

All these displaced tribals have hardly been rehabilitated. Only one fourth of the displaced have not been resettled. In almost all the cases, the amount of compensation paid to the tribals for the loss of their land and other resources is nominal and rarely paid properly (Fernandes and Raj 1971; Mishra 1996; Kothari 1996).

Education is conceived as the key mechanism for the empowerment of the weaker sections specifically the scheduled tribes and castes. Universalisation of Elementary Education has been accepted as a national goal since 1950. Keeping in view the low level of literacy among the scheduled tribes and castes, strategies have been evolved by the State and Union Governments for the attainment of Universal Elementary Education envisaged in the National Policy on Education (1986), as well as, the Programme of Action of (1992) formulated in tune with the World Declaration on "Education for All by 2000 A.D.". In spite of enshrining free and compulsory education, the educational backwardness among the tribals of the country is quite glaring. The literacy rate among the tribals continue to be low and it shows a slow rate of improvement (Table 2). Only 30 per cent of the tribals could become literate after more than four decades of development. Further, the female literacy has reached only 18 per cent. Moreover, the gap between general population and the Scheduled Tribes is gradually increasing decade after decade.

**Table 2:** Literacy Rates of Scheduled Tribes (%)

Year	General literacy	Female literacy	Gap between scheduled tribes and general population (including SC/ST)	
			General literacy	Female literacy
1971	11.30	04.85	18.15	17.12
1981	16.35	08.04	19.18	21.81
1991	29.60	18.19	22.61	21.10
2001	47.10	34.74	18.28	19.40

Source: Twelfth Five Year Plan (Draft), 2012-2017.

The dropout rate among the tribals also continues to be higher (Table 3). The decline rate is insignificant. The gap between the scheduled tribes and general population is gradually showing an increasing trend. The rate is 80 per cent and 86 per cent at the class 1-VIII and 1-X levels. Though among the general population the dropout rate is also more, it is much less than the tribals at all levels. Besides, the members of scheduled tribes have not been able to take the benefit of employment opportunities earmarked for them through the reservation policies of the State and Union Government. Their total representation in all categories of services comes to only 5.48 per cent though it has increased from 4.52 per cent as on 1.1.1984 and 2.81 per cent as on 1.1.1974 (Ninth Five Year Plan Draft 1997-2002, Vol. II, p.362). Moreover, in the services of A and B Groups at which level decision making takes place, their representation is negligible (around 3 per cent) as on 1.1.1994 (ibid). It seems that the people of hegemonic structure find it intolerable to see the tribals at par with their higher position in the society.

**Table 3:** Drop-out Rates Among Scheduled Tribe Students (%)

Category	(Classes I-V)			(Classes I-VIII)			(Classes I-X)		
	1980-81	1989-90	2004-05	1980-81	1990-91	2009-10	1980-81	1990-91	2004-05
General population	58.70	48.08	29.0	72.70	63.40	50.8	82.46	71.34	N.A
Scheduled tribes	75.66	63.81	42.3	86.71	80.10	65.9	91.18	86.00	N.A

Sources: (a) Ninth Five Year Plan (Draft) 1997-2002, (b) Eleventh Five Year Plan (Draft) 2007-12.

Keeping in view the poor land ownership position of scheduled tribes that accounts for their perpetual poverty and exploitation, the Government of India has made systematic endeavour to protect and promote their landholding position through land reforms and allied measures. Land reforms has also been included in the Ninth Schedule to ensure speedy and unhindered implementation of various legislative measures. Each State Government without exception have formulated legislative, as well as, executive measures for the allotment and protection of tribal land. But the net result of these efforts have not considerably improved the landholding status of the tribals. The area operated by the scheduled tribes which was 10.20 per cent in 1980-81 increased to only 10.80 per cent in 1990-91 (Agricultural Census for the relevant years). Rather, in some States like Bihar and Odisha it has declined further. While the operated area in Bihar has decreased to 16.10 per cent in 1990-91 as against 16.25 per cent in 1980-81, in Odisha it was 28.70 per cent in 1990-91 as compared to 29.90 per cent in 1980-81. Around 65 per cent of the landholder of scheduled tribes in the country belong to small and marginal farmers category (Agricultural Census 1990-91). Under the fifth Schedule of the Constitution, regulations to control land alienation of tribal lands have been promulgated in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha. But the cases of land alienation in the States like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat are widespread. It is reported that more than 40 thousand cases of land alienation in Andhra Pradesh, 13 thousand in Bihar and 5 thousand in Odisha have been registered as on 1986-87 (Report of the Commissioner for SC and ST, 1986-87, 28<sup>th</sup> Report). Though many of these cases are disposed by the concerned governments in States like Odisha it is not restored (only 21 per cent of the cases). Moreover, many of the land alienation cases are also unreported and unregistered. Alienation of tribal is reported by many studies from different parts of the country (Patel, 1974; Murdia, 1975; Rao, 1987; Mohanty, 1997, 2000). Besides the alienation of tribal land by the non-tribals, the acquisitions of land by the various development projects in the tribal areas has increased the landlessness of the tribals. More than 90 per cent of the scheduled tribes in the country are landless with no productive assets and are devoid of sustainable employment and minimum wages (Ninth Five Year Plan Draft 1997-2002, p. 361).

Thus, the plans and programmes formulated for the development of tribals have failed to improve their socio-economic conditions and they continue to be backward

in almost all fronts of life. Poorest among poor in India society are largely from these groups. As per the estimate of the planning Commission (Ninth-Five Year Plan Draft, 1997-2002) more than 51 per cent of scheduled tribe population are below the poverty line as against 36 per cent of general population. After five decades of planned initiatives and policy measures, displacement, landlessness, illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and exploitation persist in a large scale. Even a slow process of improvement makes the rich dominant non-tribals intolerable and non-acceptable. They commit various types of atrocities on the tribal population. Majority of atrocities on them are due to implementation of land reform laws, various welfare programmes, resentment against the manifestation of awareness about their rights and privileges, non-payment or under payment of minimum wages and opposition to dishonest money lending practices. The successive Reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have documented many such cases that have come for legal rescue (See for example, 28<sup>th</sup> Report, 1986-87).

Across social groups, the incidence of poverty has been most pronounced among the STs (Table 4). Even though the incidence of poverty has declined over the years, the headcount ratio (HCR) for STs remains higher than the national average. However, that poverty has declined at an accelerated rate between 2004–05 and 2009–10. The annual rate of decline of HCR for STs in the period between 2004–05 and 2009–10 has been higher than the overall annual rate of decline of HCR. The annual pace of poverty reduction amongst STs was disappointingly low in the period between 1993–94 and 2004–05 (0.34 percentage points per annum). However, in the period between 2004–05 and 2009–10, the annual rate of decline increased steeply to 2.98 percentage points per annum, exceeding the pace of overall poverty reduction. 24.3. Though over the years several steps have been taken to bridge the gap tribal groups and the rest of the population the gaps still persist.

**Table 4: Incidence of Poverty**

Social Groups	Rural					Urban				
	Headcount Ratio			Annual Rate of Decline		Headcount Ratio			Annual Rate of Decline	
	1993-94	2004-05	2009-10	1993-94 to 2004-05	2004-05 to 2009-10	1993-94	2004-05	2009-10	1993-94 to 2004-05	2004-05 to 2009-10
Scheduled tribes	66.02	62.28	47.37	0.34	2.98	39.46	35.52	30.38	0.36	1.03
General	50.19	41.79	33.80	0.76	1.60	31.45	25.68	20.90	0.52	50.19

Source: Twelfth Five Year Plan (Draft), 2012-2017, Planning Commission, New Delhi, Vol. 3, P. 221.

## III

To sum up, though several plans and programmes have been afoot the misery of the tribals persists which questions the idea of tribal welfare incorporated in Indian planning. The failure of the planning in providing the benefits of developmental measures to the tribals 'specially, worked out for them can not be simply attributed to their ignorance, simplicity and backwardness. The widespread poverty, illiteracy marginalisation among the tribals even after almost five decades of planned efforts exposes the latent principles guiding the trend of tribal development. The large scale displacement of the tribals through the periodic establishment of macro development projects at the socio- cultural and environmental costs clearly indicates the exploitative approach of the Government towards the tribals. The welfare policies are carefully designed to impress the tribal mass and to safeguard and promote the interest of the non- tribal propertied class. The 'development model' imposes on the tribals the views and the ideology of the dominant non-tribals. It treats the tribals as the objects rather than subjects of development. The rhetoric of welfare masks the objective conditions of the tribals. In fact, the loudly proclaimed objective of tribal welfare is a myth which forms the part of the ideology and mind-set intended to pursue the paradigm of development based on inequality, deprivation and domination.

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