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## Tribal's Issues And Challenges



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## Tribal Issue And Challenges In Maharashtra

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### PROBLEMS OF TRIBES IN MAHARASHTRA

Tribal communities are scattered all the states of India. All tribal are having same characteristics and problems. They have their own culture and lifestyle. After independence some changes and development have been taking place but still expected success could not cover by them. Through this article special focus given on the various problems.

Development of Tribal Population is a key issue in our country for up-lift of socio-economically backward classes in India. Major problems of tribal community are illiteracy, low level of education, poor health conditions, poverty and unemployment, lack of development opportunities and above all, insensitivity towards development. Maharashtra is one of the 17 states in the country with tribal population. Union and State Governments are implementing plans for development of Tribal community but the efforts are lacking political willingness or there is administrative apathy in implementing the plans. This paper attempts to find reasons behind slow path of development of Tribal people in the State of Maharashtra.

It is observed in this paper that the Tribal Development in Maharashtra is inadequate to fulfill the requirements of the society and further, whatever provisions are made those are not fully utilized.

### PROBLEMS

- I. They possess small and uneconomical landholdings because of which their crop yield is less and hence they remain chronically indebted.
- II. Only a small percentage of the population participates in occupational activities in the secondary and tertiary sectors.
- III. Literacy rate among tribals is very low. While in 1961, it was 18.53 per cent, in 1991 it increased to 29.60 per cent which compared to general literacy rate of 52.21 per cent in the country is very low, because while the growth of literacy rate in the past three decades in the country was 28.21 per cent, among the STs it was only 11.7 per cent (The Hindustan Times, July 11, 1995). Though tribal literacy rate in Mizoram is 82.71 per cent and in Nagaland, Sikkim and Kerala it is between 57 per cent and 61 per cent, lack of literacy among tribal people has been identified as a major development problem.

### Loss of Control over Natural Resources:

Before the coming of the British, the tribal enjoyed unhindered rights of ownership and management over natural resources like land, forests, wildlife, water, soil, fish, etc. With the advent of industrialization in India and the discovery of mineral

and other resources in tribal inhabited areas, these pockets were thrown open to outsiders and state control replaced tribal control.

Thus began the story of unending miseries for the tribals. With the impetus to the development process after independence, pressure on land and forests increased.

This resulted in loss of ownership rights over land, owing to chronic indebtedness, unscrupulous landlords, money-lenders, contractors and officials. With the concepts of protected forests and national forests gaining currency, the tribals felt themselves uprooted from their cultural moorings and with no secure means of livelihood.

## **2. Lack of Education:**

According to the 1991 Census, nearly 70 per cent of the tribals are illiterates. Although it cannot be denied that education can act as the instrument for betterment of the tribals ensuring greater participation for them in the development process, still there are certain factors which inhibit the tribals from taking to education.

Ranging from problems of finding nutritious food, proper clothing and a roof above their heads to problems of receiving no formal education and thus having no sustainable source of income. Apart from this, they are sometimes exploited by greedy and pathetic gov't officials on their area like police officers, civil servants, and others.

One of the notable examples of such tribals are the primitive Madia Gond people living in the dense forests at the eastern border of Maharashtra. These people are nomadic hunter-gatherers who are completely primitive in every aspect. They live their lives in tiny settlements hidden in remote jungle areas that are difficult to reach from towns or cities.

These people lead a unique lifestyle. They gather roots and fruits of trees and hunt animals in the forest to eat. They wear clothes which they themselves make since there is no one to "sell" products to them in that area. And even if there was, it would be of no use. They are extremely poor and have no education or understanding of society. They just live like a close-knit extended family with no knowledge or contact of our world. While living in the forests, they are exposed to the various natural elements and forces of nature. They are unaware of medicine and hold superstitious beliefs in "healing powers" of witch doctors and shamans who take advantage of their gullible nature and try to cheat them of their belongings by preaching arcane remedies that have no basis in science but are like black magic.

As if all this was not enough, the area in which they live is a hotspot for Naxalite activity. As you may be aware, the Government considers Naxalites as terrorists and hunts them down and kills them. Even though these areas are remote, the Government has deployed law enforcement officers in these areas to keep them under control.

Sometimes, these police officials conduct raids in the villages of these simple, innocent people and accuse them of providing shelter to the Naxalites. Despite pleadings of innocence and mercy, sometimes the officers will round up people for questioning and torture them even to death. The fate of women and children is even worse without going in details.

As you can see, it is a very grim picture for these simple forest-dwellers and their plight would have gone unnoticed if it were not for one person. This person, who is today no more, was a young lawyer in the 1970s who was happy with his life and profession until one day, he saw the suffering of these people and was moved by it. He decided to do something about it and summoned his sons, both young medical students, to his side.

He told them of his desire to help these tribals and integrate them into mainstream society. It was a monumental task with countless obstacles. But his sons, especially the one whose name means 'Light' in Marathi, readily agreed to spearhead the effort by going and setting up camp right in their heartland.

From day one they faced countless obstacles, but remained firm on their path, forsaking the assured security and comforts of a doctors life in the city. Along with his wife and some friends and colleagues, the son set up their base of operations in the forest areas with the goals of providing the basic amenities of a civilized existence to these tribals who were so cutoff from society. Day and night they labored, over blood, sweat and tears, facing rejection and hostility from the very people they were trying to help. Despite this, they did not give up and continued on this Herculean mission with a smiling face and a hand extended in support.

Today, over 30 years have passed, and yet their mission is not completed. But over all these years, they have managed to make a monumental difference in the lives of the Madia Gond. I would not like to withhold their names any longer.

#### **Solutions:**

Various solutions have been presented for dealing effectively with the tribal problems. The tribal problems have been approached from three viewpoints. They are as follows:

#### **Assimilation-**

Assimilation is one of the ways of dealing with the tribal problems. Thus, according to this approach, we cannot deal with tribal problems on the basis of tribal culture and life but by changing them into the frame of new community. According to this solution advocated by the social reformers and voluntary organizations, assisting and encouraging the tribals to assimilate them with the mainstream of national life, can alone permanently solve the tribal problems. This approach has its own limitations. Complete assimilation is a difficult task. The tribals are not prepared to give up all of their traditional tribal beliefs, practices and ideas. Any attempt to impose the external cultural practices on them, creates in them guilt feelings, confusions and mental conflicts. This solution may even create economic, religious and moral degradation among them.

#### **Isolation –**

Elwin have suggested that tribals must be kept at a distance from the rest of the society. Keeping them in isolation in some "National Parks" or "reserved areas" would solve two problems a) the tribals would be in a position to maintain their independent

identity; b) they would be free from the exploitation of outsiders. The champions of this approach are of the view that sufficient time must be given to the tribals to assimilate themselves with the rest of the community. The limitation of this approach is that when once the tribals are kept in isolation they are likely to develop vested interests and keep themselves permanently away from others.

### **Integration-**

The third view, which is actively followed in the recent years, is that of integration. The policy of isolation is neither possible nor desirable, and that of assimilation would mean imposition. Hence integration alone can make available to the tribes the benefits of modern society and yet retain their separate identity. This view recommends the rehabilitation of the tribals on the plains along with the civilized people, but away from their native places such as hills, mountains, forests, etc. This suggestion has also been criticized. It is said that this suggestion has been advocated to further the interests of industrialists and capitalists.

The solution is not appreciated from their beloved land to plains. Still, the policy of integration which aims at developing a creative adjustment between tribes and non-tribes has been supported by thinkers and writers like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Pandit Jawaharlal in 1957 in his foreword to Verrier Elwin's "The Philosophy for NEFA" has laid down in five principles, that is, "Panchasheela", the policy of integration. The tribal "Panchasheela", as has been enunciated by him are as follows:

- i) Nothing should be imposed on the tribal people. They must be allowed to develop along the lines of their own genius. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
- ii) Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
- iii) Attempt must be made to train and build up a team of their own people to the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will be of great help for them in the beginning. But too many outsiders must not be sent to the tribal territory.
- iv) Over-administering the tribal areas or overwhelming them with too many schemes must be avoided. We should not work in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions.
- v) The results of the work must be adjudged by the quality of the human character that is evolved and not by statistics or the amount of money spent.

The policy of isolation is neither possible nor desirable, and that of assimilation would mean imposition. Hence integration alone can make available to the tribes the benefits of modern society and yet retain their separate identity. The policy of integration which aims at developing a creative adjustment between tribes and non-tribes has been supported by thinkers and writers.

**In conclusion** it is very important to note that it is very difficult to educate and solve the problems of tribals unless people come forward to guide and try to help people

like the legendary Amte family: Baba Amte (who was the founder of Anandvan for leprosy victims) and his sons, the true noble genius, Dr. Prakash Amte along with his family and friends have established the "Lok Biradari Prakalp" (People's Brotherhood Project) to provide for and support the Madia Gond tribals. They operate hospitals, clinics, schools, and other community projects in this area, all of them providing some kind of support to the tribals. Such is the nature of this undertaking, and so successful it has been in such a noble gesture, that Baba Amte and Prakash Amte have both been awarded multiple awards of national and international recognition.

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