

The Scheduled Tribes

✿ THE TRIBES of India are varied in terms of their socio-economic and political development. Some of them have changed through Hinduisation, through conversion to Christianity or through some other route. Some tribal people are in the transitional phase, while others are adhering to their old life styles to a large extent. This shows an uneven process of change and development among the tribal people in India. Only a small number of tribal people have been benefited by the policies and programmes meant for their development. According to the 1971 census, the tribal population is 38,015,162 that is about 7 per cent of the total population of India. Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar have 8,387,403, 5,071,937 and 4,932,767 respectively. Gujarat and Rajasthan have over 3 million each. Maharashtra has 8 per cent, Assam 6.84, West Bengal 6.81 and Andhra Pradesh 4.39 per cent tribal population. Lakshadweep

islands have 97.03 per cent, Nagaland 93.09, Arunachal Pradesh 88.59, and Darda and Nagar Haveli 88.43 per cent. Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh have a negligible number of tribals. According to 1981 census, the percentage of the Scheduled Tribe population ranging from 22.97 per cent in Madhya Pradesh to 8.31 per cent in Bihar. In the smaller states like Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Meghalaya more than 80 per cent of their population is tribal.

✿ L.P. Vidyarthi classifies the tribal people into (1) Himalayan, (2) middle India, (3) Western India, and (4) Southern India regions. These tribes, numbering about 450, belong to various racial, linguistic, economic social and religious categories. There are numerous differences between these tribals because they are at different levels of development and participation in national life. However, in general terms, the tribes are economically, educationally and politically backward, compared to the non-

tribal groups. There is "tribal identity", despite the tribals proximity to caste groups. According to the 1981 census, the Scheduled Tribes form 7.76 per cent of total population, whereas they were 6.82 per cent at the time 1971 census. There are very small tribes as well as very large ones. Variations are also quite prominent in regard to the economic pursuits they follow. There are nomadic tribes as well as the ones which have settled down at one place and have been

- ✿ engaged in agriculture and other occupations like the caste Hindus.

Towards a Definition of Tribes

- ✿ G.S. Ghurye, in the revised edition of his book *The Scheduled Tribes* (1959) writes : "The Scheduled Tribes are neither called the Aborigines, nor the 'Adivasis' , nor are they treated as a category by themselves. By and large they are treated together with the Scheduled Castes and further envisaged as one group of the

Backward classes." This is the quintessence of the constitutional viewpoint about the Scheduled Tribes. Obviously, Ghurye would like the tribes of India to be treated as distinct social and cultural entities. To club them with the Scheduled Castes or other backward classes or to change them so that they become part of the wider Hindu or Indian society would do a lot of harm; as this precludes their point of view or their need for assimilation.

- ✿ The Constitution of India, under Article 342, states that the President may "by public notification specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities. which shall for the purposes of this constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes..." The tribes of India prior to independence were considered animistic by the census authorities. Distinction was made between those who were Hinduised and those who followed their own religion. However, some scholars have opined that no sharp line of demarcation can be drawn

between Hinduism and animism. There is no uniform pattern of religion among the tribal people of India. The word 'animism' was wrongly given a communal connotations while distinguishing it from Hinduism. One view is that Hinduism itself is an amalgam of the pre-Aryan beliefs and the religion of the Rig-Veda.

❁ Variations among the tribes can be seen in terms of the areas they live in, such as the Aravali Hills, the Vindhya, the Satpura, the Mahadev hills, the Chhotanagpur plateau and several other areas. Numerically, the most preponderate tribes are: Gond, Santhal, bhil, Oraon, kond Munda, Bhuiya, Ho, Savara, Kol, Korku, Maler, Baiga and Meena. Some of these tribal people share Hinduism along with Hindus, and speak the languages spoken by Hindus. They are not exclusive groups in spatial terms. Some scholars consider the tribals as autochthons, the earliest and the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, who were pushed to forests and hills by the invaders. Whatever may be the

fact regarding tribal exclusivity, it is accepted that the tribes such as Baiga, Bhil, Gond, Kol, Korku, Meena, Santhal, Bhumia, Binjhar, Mahato, Korwa, Maria, Kamar, Bhatia and Maler have not only adopted Hindu pantheon and rituals, but have taken up various version of Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and other languages. Some of these tribes do not accept meals from lower and "untouchable" Hindu caste.

❁ Thus, a Large number of tribes have a Hinduised section, which is evidence of their contact with the Hindus, at least in regard to religion, language and occupation. These Hinduised tribal people look upon themselves as Hindus. V.Elwin is of the view that, with the exception of the North-East, all the aboriginal tribes should be classed as Hindus by religion, but be separated in terms of race. Several ethnographers have distinguished tribes from castes in terms of physical traits. These include Sir Herbert Risley, G.S. Ghurye, J.H. Hutton and B.S Guha. Ghurye is however, of the view that the

proper description of tribal people must refer itself to their place in or near Hindu society and not to their supposed autochthonism. Some are properly integrated into the Hindu society: Some are loosely integrated: While some tribes are living isolated in hills and forest. Ghurye prefers to call the Scheduled Tribes as "Backward Hindus" Those who refer to a "tribe-caste continuum" hold the view that a sharp line between tribes and castes cannot be drawn. To call a group a tribe is, therefore, only a legal status granted under the law.

The Problem of the Tribal People

- ✿ The tribes were alienated from their own lands. The landlords or moneylenders of the plains gradually replaced the tribal landlords. There were a number of movement against the British Raj and the Hindu moneylenders and landlords. The tribes were given protection, in view of such an oppressive situation. Ghurye lists a number of socio-Cultural and economic problems of the

tribes of India in view of their distinctions. Some tribes represent aristocracy, landlords and noblemen: others consist of the Hinduised sections of tribesmen; and, thirdly, there are tribes and some section from among them who are still largely isolated from the non-tribal population.

- ✿ Ghurye mentions three views on the solution of the problems of tribal people: (1) no change and revivalism, (2) isolationism and preservation, and (3) assimilation. No change and revivalism has been supported by Elwin, whereas isolationism has been advocated by Hutton. The famous anthropologist, S.C. Roy, was an assimilation. One finds a sort of problem in the present-day situation. Protective discrimination isolates the tribal people from the non-tribesmen, but in course of time this very policy would bring the tribals at par with the non-tribals. The dominant thinking today is in favour of assimilation of the tribal people into the national mainstream without any disruption.

✿ Since tribal people are at different social, political, economic and ecological levels, their problems also differ in degree from each other. These differences can be seen in terms of hills tribes and plainsmen; and those engaged in forest-based economic pursuits and the ones who are employed as settled agriculturists; or those who are Hinduised or converted to Christianity and those who are adhering to an unadulterated tribal way of life. Despite these distinctions, some common problems of the tribal people are: (1) poverty and exploitation, (2) economic and technological backwardness, (3) socio-cultural handicaps, and (4) problem related to their assimilation with the non-tribal population.

✿ S.C. Dube's five fold classification of the Indian tribes provides a clear picture of the problem of tribes in India: (1) aboriginals living in seclusion; (2) tribal groups having an association with the neighbouring non-tribal society and also maintaining their distinctiveness; (3) tribals living in villages along with

caste groups, sects and religious groups and maintaining their identity; (4) tribals who have been degraded to the status of untouchables, and (5) tribals who enjoy high social, economic and political status. Such a classification is basically based on the nature of cultural contact of the tribals with non-tribals. The U.N. Dhebar Commission recommended that an area be declared 'tribal' where more than 50 per cent of the people were tribals. Economic criteria have been suggested, such as dependence upon forests for food, primitive agriculture, agriculture and forests both as sources of livelihood, and modern occupations, particularly employment in industries.

✿ The tribal people had a strong sense of community life before the British rulers and Hindu zamindars and moneylenders intruded into their lives. Exchange of goods and transactions at weekly markets and fairs were the basic mode of economic relations. However, the British took over the forests on which they

depended for their livelihood. The moneylenders brought them under their control by extending loans, at exorbitant interest rates and then by mortgaging their lands, alienating them from land they cultivated. Indebtedness led to exploitation and pauperisation of the tribal people. Hinduisation has also contributed to indebtedness and exploitation; as the tribals adopted Hindu ways of life and rituals which forced them to spend as the Hindus did. Tribals occupied a very low rank in Hindu society after they copied Hinduism.

- ✿ At some places the tribals have been made to serve as bonded labourers. The Doms and Koltas in Uttar Pradesh, serve the upper caste families even today. In Rajasthan, the Sagri system, in Andhra, the vetti system, in Orissa the Gothi, in Karnataka the jetha and in Madhya Pradesh the Naukrinama are the examples of the bondedness of the tribals. They have borrowed money from the moneylenders, but have not been able to pay it back and are bound to work till

they return the loan. A situation of emancipation does not arise, as a tribal is not able to repay the loan completely and quickly.

- ✿ K.S. Singh points out that agrarian issues are basic to tribal development in India. The tribal agrarian problem cannot be treated in isolation. Tribal people have to be treated along with other weaker sections of Indian society. Keeping the situation of Bihar in view Singh observes that the concept of aliens (dikku) is crucial to the understanding of an agrarian situation where non-tribals outnumber tribals. The class of moneylenders has arisen due to several factors including the agrarian legislation. Alienation of land has resulted from tribal backwardness and indebtedness. Integrated Tribal Development Blocks have not produced the desired results in the tribal areas. Famine and drought have become a recurrent feature. The tribal sub-plan has been introduced to combat problems of famine, drought, illiteracy, indebtedness, exploitation, etc.,

by taking up special schemes for the development of the tribal areas.

❖ A study of the impact of the decentralisation of Minor Forest Produce trade on the tribals of Bihar shows that the dominant causality is economic (MFP trade takeover) rather than political and ideological. The study refers to the control of forest produce like bamboo, Kendu leaves, Mahua, Kusum, Karanj and Sal seeds, being taken over by the government of Bihar. The MFP contributes about 35 per cent of the state's revenue from forests. The takeover has adversely affected the institution of haat (weekly market), where the tribals carried out economic transactions and also performed several social and cultural activities. Forests provided a collective life to the tribals, and this was being denied to them as a result of the MFP trade takeover. The tribals have been agitated over this step taken by the government of Bihar.

❖ Per capita landholdings has decreased among the tribals due to three reasons;(1) alienation of land due to indebtedness and

socio-economic

backwardness;(2) increase in tribal population;(3) takeover of tribal lands by the government for establishing industries. Land was alienated much before legislations were passed by the state government. Today even after passing such legislations, the tribal elite are alienating the tribals from their lands. The tribals have been displaced in parts of Bihar, Orissa and some other states by the taking lands for establishing industries. However, the tribals have not been provided with alternative avenues of employment. The compensation paid to them for their land was quickly spent by them without making any investment in productive and remunerative enterprises.

❖ Some tribals even today are engaged in jhum cultivation which is not only uneconomical, but also caused reforestation 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. In

protest against the government's policy of MFP takeover in Bihar, the tribals cut forests on a large scale in the Singhbhum and other districts. Forest cooperatives can be a lot to ameliorate the pitiable plight of the tribals; but unfortunately the benefits from these societies have reached largely the well off sections of the Bhils, Meenas, Oraons, etc.

- ✿ The dilemma for the tribal people in India is the choice between isolation and contact. Isolation keeps the tribals away from forces of change and development; and contact with the wider society creates problems of adjustment, cultural shock and disintegration of tribal social organisation and community living. The intrusion of outsiders into tribal life, for example, has adversely affected the institution of weekly markets, dormitory and reciprocal relationships. The institutions of untouchability - pollution-purity and high and low status have made in roads into tribal life. The tribals to a large extent become 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 subcontinent.

Tribal Social Movements

- ✿ Social movements among tribes aim at collective action to alter, reconstitute, reinterpret, restore and protect social structure, with a view to improve their social, cultural, economic and political conditions. Hinduism, Christianity, British rule, modern education and post-Independence legislation have generated a level of consciousness among the tribals, which has in turn encouraged several movements. There have been movement to assert their tribal identity and political solidarity. Ecological-cultural isolation, economic backwardness and a feeling of frustration have been responsible for these movements. Those tribals who are either too isolated or too Integrated with Hindu society are not involved in these socio-cultural movement. The Unnati Samaj, an organisation established in 1912 for socio-

cultural reforms, and the Adivasi Mahasabha established in 1938, aimed at revivalism in Bihar. The Jharkhand movement in 1950 was, however, started to fight land alienation, exploitation and for political solidarity among the tribes of Bihar and the adjoining states of Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. This movement ultimately made a demand for the formation of a separate state for the adivasis of these four states.

- ✿ Tribal movements encompass a very wide arena. The unique geopolitical situation and historical background need to be taken into consideration while analysing movements in the Northeast, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. Movements in these areas generally refer to cultural and political revivalism. Political autonomy, control over the forests, socio-religious, cultural and linguistic considerations have been the key factors in other tribal movements. For example, in case of the Jharkhand movement in Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and M.P., the main points are related to

historicity, ideology, structure, leadership and sub-regional identity.

Socio-cultural movements have given primacy to status-elevation through Sanskritisation. The various modes of status-elevation include emphasis on a specific script, language, religion and ethnic identity for various tribal communities.

- ✿ A given region may have a particular type of movement because of its specific geographical and political situation in the wider context. S.M. Dubey provides a classification of tribal movement in North-East India.
- ✿ religious and social reform movements,
- ✿ State formation movements,
- ✿ insurgent movements; and
- ✿ culturological movements.
- ✿ An all-India tribal movements has not emerged because of the diversity and unevenness among the tribes of India. K.S. Singh has given detailed accounts of 36 tribal movements in India; of which 14 were in the northeast region alone. Singh classifies the various movements into; (1) movements for political

autonomy; (2) agrarian and forest based movements; (3) Sanskritisation process and (4) Cultural movements.

- ❖ The questions which still remain inadequately answered are: (1) why have the tribals been pressing for cultural revivalism, autonomy and restoration of aboriginality?(2) why have some tribes been making efforts for cultural, ethnic and linguistic revivalism? (3) why have some others been raising their voice for the formation of a separate state, and for a greater share in educational institutions, jobs and other opportunities? Exploitation of the adivasis by outsiders, non- adivasis and dominant elements from among the tribals has now become a fact of life.

The Integration of the Tribals with the Non-Tribals

- ❖ In their own interest the British pursued policy of isolation of the tribals. The British retained under their control the tribal chiefs with curtailed powers. Today, integration of the tribals with the non-tribals is the cornerstone of the policy of the

Government of India. The constitutional provisions are as follows:(1) Article 46: "The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation." (2) Article 244," Empowers the President to declare any areas, where there is a substantial population of tribal people, as Scheduled area under the 5th schedule or in Assam as a tribal area under the 6th schedule." (3) Article 275 "There shall be paid out of the Consolidated Fund of India as grants-in-aid of the revenues of a state such capital and recurring sums as may be necessary to enable that state to meet the costs of such schemes of development as may be undertaken by the state with the approval of the Government of India for the purpose of promoting the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in that state or raising the level of administration of the Scheduled

areas therein to that of the administration of the rest of that state."

❖ The Government of state have been given powers to reserve seats in educational institutions and jobs in government departments and public sector undertakings. A sum of Rs. 19.83 cores was spent in the First Five Year Plan for the welfare of the Scheduled tribes. This was raised to Rs. 43.00 crores and 60.43 crores in the second and the third plans, respectively. This was really meagre allocation in the plans for welfare of the tribal people. The Fifth Five Year Plan made a separate sub-plan for the tribals to promote integrated Tribal Development. Tribal Development Blocks have been entrusted the responsibility of tribal welfare in Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and in other states. These provisions have certainly created social and political consciousness among the tribals population. A tribal consciousness has emerged; hence a number of tribal movements all over the country.

❖ The tribals have come under the impact of the dominant cultural stream of India. New division have been created among the tribals due to cultural change in their ranks. Tana Bhagats in Bihar are the Hinduised tribals, Whereas there are others who claim to remain custodians of their aboriginality. The latter have made efforts to rectify the distortions of their culture by launching restoration movements. The Bhils in Rajasthan are divided into Bhagats and non-Bhagats. The Bhagats are further divided into the Kabirpanthis and the Shambu Dal. The non-Bhagats strive to maintain their traditional way of life. The Bhagats have adopted a Brahmanical way of life, such as vegetarianism and teetotalism. The Bhagats consider themselves superior to the non-Bhagats and the kabirpanthis consider themselves superior to the Shambu Dal. The notions of untouchability, pollution-purity and the rules of marriage such as caste endogamy, clan exogamy, hypergamy, etc. have been adopted by the Bhagats. The

tribals who have converted to Christianity are generally ahead of the non-converts in regard to education, white-collar employment and economic status.

✿ Thus, stratification in tribal society in India has its roots in British policy, unevenness due to the impact of economic development, and differential cultural contact with wider society. In fact, there are levels of integration as there are layers of tribal areas of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh has apparently reduced the gap between the tribals and the non-tribals: But it has also created new problems. The tribals who have been uprooted from their lands have not been absorbed in the new system. Hence, they are facing a new form of pauperisation without a traditional support base.

✿ **Conclusion**

✿ Tribes in India are not monolithic lot of people. They have differences in terms of their historical backgrounds, socio-economic and cultural problems and levels of advancement. Some tribes live in forests and on hill tops,

whereas others live in the plains. Some are settled agriculturists whereas others depend upon forest produce. Some have been in close contact with wider society and have adopted the life styles of Hindus, Christians and other communities. As a result of these variations, they are not all found at the same level of socio-political awakening and economic standing. In general, all tribes are still a weaker section of the society (with the exception of their power elite and economic dominant).

✿ The Constitution of India has scheduled tribes as a weaker section of society. Several provisions have been made for their overall upliftment. Efforts have been made to bring about socio-economic change to make them a part of the national mainstream by putting checks on land alienation, exploitation, indebtedness and by ensuring their increased participation in the socio-economic and political life of India. A tribal sub-plan was introduced in the Fifth Five Year Plan with a view to develop tribal areas and to

bring them at par with non-tribal areas.

- ✿ Tribals themselves have started a number of social movements to bring about socio-cultural, economic and political changes. Tribal identity has been asserted by making efforts for revival of tribal cultures, scripts and languages. Demands for control on forests and forest produce, for the formation of states for tribal people, and for the exclusion of non-tribals from tribal areas are some of the issues taken up by leaders of various tribal movements. These movements have certainly resulted in an increased level of cultural and political consciousness among the tribes in various parts of India. However, to make these movements more effective it is necessary to reduce intra-tribal economic distinctions. The constitutional provisions are not equality shared. Distributive justice has not been the end result of these provisions and other efforts.

JOB ALERT

सर्वोच्च न्यायालय का जवाब!

Empowering Nation