

Full Length Research Paper

A study of tribal vs non-tribals – Culture and life of tribal population

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The Scheduled Tribes communities in India as well as in Orissa are characterized by economic and social marginalization, primitive existence, geographical isolation and educational backwardness. Tribal population is the aboriginal inhabitants of India who have been living a life based on the natural environment and have cultural patterns congenial to their physical and social environment. They have been neglected in different sectors of the society and to protect that they started resistance movement over the years. The major tribes of Orissa, in terms of their numerical strength, are the Kondh, Gond, Santhal, Saora, Bhuiyan, Paraja, Koya, Oraon, Gadaba, Juanga and Munda. There are also several smaller tribal communities living in the state. They are the Chenchus, Mankiridia Kharia, Baiga, Birhor and Ghara. Tribal communities such as the Santhal, Gond, Munda, Ho, Birhor, Koya, Lodha, Kondha, Bhumija, Kharia and Oraons cut across state boundaries and are found in the neighbouring states of Jharkhand. As a matter of fact, acute poverty, malnutrition and starvation death have come to be associated with the life of many of the tribes living in different parts of the country. Though each of the tribal groups are culturally different and have their own identities, the problems faced by them are more or less same. It makes us believe that probably at the level of understanding the tribal culture, their social structure and also at the level of making intervention while implementing the development programmes for the tribals, some gaps have so remained that they have rather frustrated our objectives and approach to a large extent.

Key words: Tribal population, Adivasi, untouchability, discrimination, tribal rights.

INTRODUCTION

The Adivasis have been tormented and subjected to all sorts of discrimination by the same people whom they have welcomed openly into their sacred places. The discrimination against the tribals has been more in the places where the outsiders who have come from the coastal Orissa, Sarikela etc normally called Oriyas. They are quite alien to the cultures of tribals and even a blind

can feel a quite difference in status, culture, language, eating habits etc. The first of the racial discrimination is in many homes of Oriyas even today the Adivasis are subjected to untouchability and they are discouraged to visit their houses. They are looked down and treated as outcaste. Even till date, the non Christian tribals who do not practice sarna dharam are subjected to the

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discrimination and they are prevented from visiting the temples of Oriyas. There is a total negligence of government machinery; the government is only interested in milking; whatever revenue is collected from Sundergarh is spent in Cuttack, Bhubaneswar etc. There is only eye wash work done; one can see the percentage of developments in the whole district.

The tribal land cannot be bought by the non-tribals except the land should be more than 5 acres. Still many non-tribals specially Oriyas have twisted the rule and have grabbed the lands of the tribals. Now, the Oriyas have started a trend of capturing the government land called Anabadi Zamin, and then getting them registered in the tahsil office. Even today many tribals who have encroached the government land have not got the patta (registered) even they have encroached for more than 30 years. The Oriyas have refused to recognize the tribal languages as the official language of Orissa except the language, Santali (olchicki), even though most of the tribal languages are written in Devangiri script; instead they have preferred Oriya language. Some tough organizations like the Nila Chakra are quite offensive to the tribal language and are pressing hard the Oriya language.

One can clearly see the difference in ratios of tribals versus non-tribals in industries, which are in Rourkela as well as near it. Take the case of Rourkela steel plant, the majority of Oriyas have got jobs that nobody knows how. Majority of tribals here work as contract labours. Nobody cares what may happen if any accident happens, no trade union of whatever affiliation; they do not bother as majority have been dominated by the Oriyas. This trade union opposes any sort of tribal recruitment in the executive /non executive posts. Permanent employees also face discrimination during promotion, with the majority of Oriyas getting preferences. This is the case in all sectors. Tribals are discriminated in the times of job recruitments; there are many cases that the Oriyas have torn off the list of employments where the tribals get recruitment. They fiercely oppose the tribals who are getting /or about to join their jobs. They even destroy their letter of appointment.

There is also discrimination going on in schools which are dominated by the Oriya teachers. The students have faced daring statements of "you quota people" or "Adivasi students" which is clearly a violation of SC/ST Atrocity Act, but unfortunately the young students do not understand. The internal marks given to students are enjoyed by certain section of students only; after matric (SSC) many students have opted out of C.H.S.E (Board of Orissa 10+2) due to discriminatory marks given to students.

Atrocity cases filed against non-tribals are minimum. One has to check the police records to see the truth. Many cases have come that there was refusal of lodging an F.I.R by the police; no doubt that at least 85% of inmates in the jail are tribals. They stand and hope to get

out miraculously as they have no means to fight the cases with no money. The judges, the police mechanisms, administrative officers all are handpicked and brought here to carry out their goals. There is planned displacement of Adivasis by Oriyas and Rourkela's development plan to settle Oriyas, plan to reschedule Rourkela and to make it a district so that the rights of tribals can be suppressed.

The tribal lands have been taken by the government to make and set up industries. How many people (tribals) have got jobs in this private industries? Not even 5%; instead the tribals who protest against the pollutions are severely dealt with by the police, even their children are not spared. They pre-plan cracking, which they often term as M.C.C sympathizers and putting them behind bars. The media has put a blanket ban on any news regarding the tribals and they paint a picture that everything is ok here. All the media (paper/ electronic) mainly praise the achievements of the government. These are some issues which have created a mass of disgruntled tribals who are frustrated and angry. No doubt the region is now sitting on a situation which might explode. This creates a situation where there are alternate routes to channel their anger; already many have taken this path and this must be checked and prevented before it is too late.

Importance of the study

1. This study furnishes the most important criterion and its reflection in the present day tribal discriminations.
2. It ensures suitable remedies and strategies for tribal development.
3. It demonstrates critical examination of the problems and prospects of tribal populations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A lot of books have been written on tribals. But no attempt has been made by anyone on the discrimination of tribals in Orissa by their own people. This work is a first attempt on this new emerging aspect in Orissan context. However, in the book, *The Adivasis of India-A History of Discrimination*, Bijoy (2003) stated that about 67.7% of Adivasis of India are at the lowest rung of the ladder, as well as their history, religion and culture in general.

However, Upadhaya, in his article on *Tribal People and the Law*, (2004), stated the common thread running through the tribal people of Visakhapatnam and the continuing irrelevance of law in their lives.

The book, *Tribal Rights in India*, edited by K Uma Devi provided a panoramic view of the various provisions in national legislations as well as of the Multilateral Conventions and Treaties, tracing them from their evolutionary stage. The articles also highlight the limitations

and atrocities caused to economic, social and cultural rights of tribal people, including tribal children of India. The stark and gross violation of not only human rights but also their rights to be human is demonstrated by the empirical study of the tribal people in various districts in India.

Eminent historians who have done detailed research on the epic Ramayana (200 B.C to 500 B.C) have concluded that 'Lanka', the kingdom of the demonic king Ravana and 'Kishkinda', the homeland of the Vanaras (depicted as monkeys) were places situated south of Chitrakuta hill and north of Narmada River in middle India. Accordingly, Ravana and his demons were an aboriginal tribe; most probably the Gond, and the Vanaras, like Hanuman in the epic, belonged to the Savara and Korku tribes whose descendants still inhabit the central Indian forest belt. Even till date, the Gond holds Ravana, the villain of Ramayana, in high esteem as a chief. Rama, the hero of Ramayana is also known for slaughtering the Rakshasas (demons) in the forests.

The epic of Mahabharata refers to the death of Krishna at the hands of a Bhil Jaratha. In the ancient scriptures, considered to be sacred by the upper castes, various terms are used depicting Adivasis as almost non-humans. The epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Puranas, Samhitas and other so-called 'sacred books' refer to Adivasis as Rakshasa (demons), Vanara (monkeys), Jambuvan (boar men), Naga (serpents), Bhusundi Kaka (crow), Garuda (King of Eagles) etc. In medieval India, they were derogatorily called Kolla, Villa, Kirata, Nishada, those who surrendered or were subjugated were termed Dasa (slave) and those who refused to accept the bondage of slavery were termed Dasyu (a hostile robber).

Ekalavya, one of their archers was so skillful that the hero of the Aryans, Arjuna, could not stand before him. But they assaulted him, cutting his thumb and destroying his ability to fight - and then fashioned a story in which he accepted Drona as his Guru and surrendered his thumb as an offering to the master. The renowned writer, Maheshwata Devi points out that Adivasis predated Hinduism and Aryanism, that Siva was not an Aryan god and that in the 8th century, the tribal forest goddess or harvest goddess was absorbed and adapted as Siva's wife. Goddess Kali, the goddess of hunters, has definitely had a tribal origin.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data are collected through questionnaire methods for this study can be explored from top government officials, NGOs, self help groups, resource persons and leaders of different panchayats of tribal pronged areas of Orissa. Emphasis will be laid on the original manuscript, archival sources, and records of contemporary resources from the state government. It will attempt to study tribals' changing movements and developments.

Secondary sources are based on the text books, journals and

periodicals from libraries across the reputed universities and the other centres of learning in Orissa and the country.

DISCUSSION

History of the Adivasis

Little is known about the relationship between the Adivasis and non-Adivasi communities during the Hindu and Muslim rules. There are stray references to wars and alliances between the Rajput kings and tribal chieftains in middle India and in the North-East between the Ahom Kings of Brahmaputra valley and the Nagas hill. They are considered to be ati-sudra meaning lower than the untouchable castes. Even today, the upper caste people refer to these peoples as jangli, a derogatory term meaning "those who are like wild animals" - uncivilised or sub-humans.

The Adivasis have few food taboos, rather fluid cultural practices and minimal occupational specialization; while on the other hand, the mainstream population of the plains has extensive food taboos, more rigid cultural practices and considerable caste-based occupational specialization. In the Hindu caste system, the Adivasis have no place. The so-called mainstream society of India has evolved as an agglomeration of thousands of small-scale social groups whose identities within the larger society are preserved by not allowing them to marry outside their social groups.

The subjugated groups became castes forced to perform less desirable menial jobs like sweeping, cleaning of excreta, removal of dead bodies, leather works etc - the untouchables. Some of the earliest small-scale societies dependent on hunting and gathering, and traditional agriculture seem to have remained outside this process of agglomeration. These are the Adivasis of present day. Their autonomous existence outside the mainstream led to the preservation of their socio-religious and cultural practices, most of them retaining also their distinctive languages. Widow burning, enslavement, occupational differentiation, hierarchical social ordering etc are generally not there. Though there was trade between the Adivasis and the mainstream society, any form of social intercourse was discouraged. Caste India did not consciously attempt to draw them into the orbit of caste society.

But in the process of economic, cultural and ecological change, Adivasis have attached themselves to caste groups in a peripheral manner, and the process of de-tribalisation is a continuous one. Many of the Hindu communities have absorbed the cultural practices of the Adivasis. Although Hinduism could be seen as one unifying thread running through the country as a whole, it is not homogenous but in reality a conglomeration of centuries old traditions and shaped by several religious and social traditions which are more cultural in their essence (and including elements of Adivasi socio-

religious culture).

Adivasis at the lowest rung of the ladder

Adivasis are not, as a general rule, regarded as unclean by caste Hindus in the same way as Dalits are. But they continue to face prejudice (as lesser humans); they are socially distanced and often face violence from society. They are at the lowest point in every socio-economic indicator. Today the majority of the population regard them as primitive and aim at decimating them as peoples or at best integrating them with the mainstream at the lowest rung in the ladder. This is especially so with the rise of the fascist Hindutva forces.

None of the brave Adivasi fights against the British have been treated as part of the "national" struggle for independence. From the Malpahariya uprising in 1772 to Lakshman Naik's revolt in Orissa in 1942, the Adivasis repeatedly rebelled against the British in the north-eastern, eastern and central Indian belt. In many of the rebellions, the Adivasis could not be subdued, but terminated the struggle only because the British acceded to their immediate demands, as in the case of the Bhil revolt of 1809 and the Naik revolt of 1838 in Gujarat. Heroes like Birsa Munda, Kanhu Santhal, Khazya Naik, Tantya Bhil, Lakshman Naik, Kuvar Vasava, Rupa Naik, Thamal Dora, Ambul Reddi, Thalakkal Chandu etc are remembered in the songs and stories of the Adivasis but ignored in the official text books.

The British Crown dominions in India

These consist of four arrangements: the presidency areas where the Crown was supreme, the Residency Areas where the British Crown was present through the Resident and the Ruler of the realm was subservient to the Crown, the Agency (Tribal) areas where the Agent governed in the name of the Crown but left the local self-governing institutions untouched and the Excluded Areas (north-east) where the representatives of the Crown were a figure head.

After the transfer of power, the rulers of the Residency Areas signed the "Deed of Accession" on behalf of the ruled on exchange they were offered privy purse. No deed was however signed with most of the independent Adivasi states. They were assumed to have joined the Union. The government rode rough shod on independent Adivasi nations and they were merged with the Indian Union. This happened even by means of state violence as in the case of Adivasi uprising in the Nizam's State of Hyderabad and Nagalim.

While this aspect did not enter the consciousness of the Adivasis at large in the central part of India where they were preoccupied with their own survival, the picture was different in the north-east because of the historic and

material conditions. Historically the north-east was never a part of mainland India. The colonial incorporation of north-east took place much later than the rest of the Indian subcontinent. While Assam ruled by the Ahoms came under the control of British in 1826, neighbouring Bengal was annexed in 1765. Garo Hills were annexed in 1873, Naga Hills in 1879 and Mizoram under the Chin-Lushai Expeditions in 1881-90. Consequently, the struggles for self-determination took various forms as independence to greater autonomy.

A process of marginalization today, the total forest cover in India is reported to be 765.21 thousand sq. kms. of which 71% are Adivasi areas. Of these 416.52 and 223.30 thousand sq. kms are categorized as reserved and protected forests respectively. About 23% of these are further declared as Wild Life Sanctuaries and National Parks which alone has displaced some half a million Adivasis. By the process of colonization of the forests that began formally with the Forest Act of 1864 and finally the Indian Forest Act of 1927, the rights of Adivasis were reduced to mere privileges conferred by the state.

This was in acknowledgement of their dependence on the forests for survival and it was politically forced upon the rulers by the glorious struggles that the Adivasis waged persistently against the British. The Forest Policy of 1952, the Wild Life Protection Act of 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 downgraded these privileges of the peoples to concessions of the state in the post-colonial period.

With globalization, there are now further attempts to change these paternalistic concessions to being excluded as indicated by the draft "Conservation of Forests and Natural Ecosystems Act" that is to replace the forest act and the amendments proposed to the Land Acquisition Act and Schedule V of the constitution. In 1991, 23.03% of STs were literate as against 42.83% among the general population. The Government's Eighth Plan document mentions that nearly 52% of STs live below the poverty line as against 30% of the general population.

In a study on Kerala, a state considered to be unique for having developed a more egalitarian society with a high quality of life index comparable to that of only the 'developed' countries, paradoxically shows that for STs the below poverty line population was 64.5% while for Scheduled Castes it was 47% and others 41%. About 95% of Adivasis live in rural areas; less than 10% are itinerant hunter-gatherers but more than half depend upon forest produce. Very commonly, police, forest guards and officials bully and intimidate Adivasis and large numbers are routinely arrested and jailed, often for petty offences.

Only a few Adivasi communities which are forest dwellers have not been displaced and continue to live in forests, away from the mainstream development activities, such as in parts of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh, Koraput, Phulbani and Mayurbanj in Orissa and of

Andaman Islands.

Thousands of Korku children below the age of six died in the 1990s due to malnutrition and starvation in the Melghat Tiger Reserve of Maharashtra due to the denial of access to their life sustaining resource base. Adivasis of Kalahandi-Bolangir in Orissa and of Palamu in south Bihar have reported severe food shortage. According to the Central Planning Committee of the Government of India, nearly 41 districts with significant Adivasi populations are prone to deaths due to starvation, which is not normally reported as such.

Invasion of Adivasi territories The "Land Acquisition Act" of 1894 concretized the supremacy of the sovereign to allow for total colonization of any territory in the name of 'public interest' which in most cases are not community notions of common good. This is so especially for the Adivasis. The colonial juristic concept of *res nullius* (that which has not been conferred by the sovereign belongs to the sovereign) and *terra nullius* (land that belongs to none) bulldozed traditional political and social entities beginning the wanton destruction of traditional forms of self-governance.

The invasion of Adivasi territories, which for the most part commenced during the colonial period, intensified in the post-colonial period. Most of the Adivasi territories were claimed by the state. Over 10 million Adivasis have been displaced to make way for development projects such as dams, mining, industries, roads, protected areas etc. Though most of the dams (over 3000) are located in Adivasi areas, only 19.9% (1980-81) of Adivasi land holdings are irrigated as compared to 45.9% of all holdings of the general population. India produces as many as 52 principal, 3 fuel, 11 metallic, 38 non-metallic and a number of minor minerals.

Of these 45 major minerals (coal, iron ore, magnetite, manganese, bauxite, graphite, limestone, dolomite, uranium etc) are found in Adivasi areas contributing some 56% of the national total mineral earnings in terms of value. Of the 4,175 working mines reported by the Indian Bureau of Mines in 1991-92, approximately 3500 could be assumed to be in Adivasi areas. Income to the government from forests rose from Rs.5.6 million in 1869-70 to more than Rs.13 billion in the 1970s. The bulk of the nation's productive wealth lies in the Adivasi territories. Yet the Adivasi has been driven out, marginalized and robbed of dignity by the very process of 'national development'.

The systematic opening up of Adivasi territories, the development projects and the 'tribal development projects' make them conducive for waves of immigrants. In the rich mineral belt of Jharkhand, the Adivasi population has dropped from around 60% in 1911 to 27.67% in 1991. These developments have in turn driven out vast numbers of Adivasis to eke out a living in the urban areas and in far-flung places in slums. According to a rough estimate, there are more than 40,000 tribal domestic working women in Delhi alone! In some places,

development induced migration of Adivasis to other Adivasi areas has also led to fierce conflicts as between the Santhali and the Bodo in Assam.

Internal colonialism, constitutional privileges and welfare measures benefit only a small minority of the Adivasis. These privileges and welfare measures are denied to the majority of the Adivasis and they are appropriated by more powerful groups in the caste order. The steep increase of STs in Maharashtra in real terms by 148% in the two decades since 1971 is mainly due to questionable inclusion, for political gains, of a number of economically advanced groups among the backwards in the list of STs. The increase in numbers, while it distorts the demographic picture, has more disastrous effects. The real tribes are irretrievably pushed down in the 'access or claim ladder' with these new entrants cornering the lion's share of both resources and opportunities for education, social and economic advancement.

Despite the Bonded Labour Abolition Act of 1976, Adivasis still form a substantial percentage of bonded labour in the country.

Despite positive political, institutional and financial commitment to tribal development, there is presently a large scale displacement and biological decline of Adivasi communities, a growing loss of genetic and cultural diversity and destruction of a rich resource base leading to rising trends of shrinking forests, crumbling fisheries, increasing unemployment, hunger and conflicts. The Adivasis have preserved 90% of the country's bio-cultural diversity protecting the polyvalent, pre-colonial, biodiversity friendly Indian identity from bio-cultural pathogens. Excessive and indiscriminate demands of the urban market have reduced Adivasis to raw material collectors and providers.

It is a cruel joke that people who can produce some of India's most exquisite handicrafts, who can distinguish hundreds of species of plants and animals, who can survive off the forests, the lands and the streams sustainably with no need to go to the market to buy food, are labeled as 'unskilled'. Equally critical are the paths of resistance that many Adivasi areas are displaying: Koel Karo, Bodh Ghat, Inchampalli, Bhopalpatnam, Rathong Chu ... big dams that were proposed by the enlightened planners and which were halted by the mass movements.

Such a situation has risen because of the discriminatory and predatory approach of the mainstream society on Adivasis and their territories. The moral legitimacy for the process of internal colonisation of Adivasi territories and the deliberate disregard and violations of constitutional protection of STs has its basis in the culturally ingrained hierarchical caste social order and consciousness that pervades the entire politico-administrative and judicial system. This pervasive mindset is also a historical construct that got reinforced during colonial and post-colonial India.

The term 'Criminal Tribe' was concocted by the British

rulers and entered into the public vocabulary through the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 under which a list of some 150 communities including Adivasis, were mischievously declared as (naturally) 'criminal'. Though this shameful act itself was repealed in 1952, the specter of the so-called 'criminal tribes' continues to haunt these 'denotified tribes' - the Sansi, Pardhi, Kanjar, Gujjar, Bawaria, Banjara and others. They are considered as the first natural suspects of all petty and sundry crimes except that they are now hauled up under the Habitual Offenders Act that replaced the British Act. Stereotyping of numerous communities has reinforced past discriminatory attitudes of the dominant mainstream in an institutionalized form.

There is a whole history of legislation, both during the pre-independence as well as post-independence period, which was supposed to protect the rights of the Adivasis. As early as 1879, the "Bombay Province Land Revenue Code" prohibited transfer of land from a tribal to a non-tribal without the permission of the authorities. The 1908 "Chotanagpur Tenancy Act" in Bihar, 1949 "Santhal Pargana Tenancy (Supplementary) Act", the 1969 "Bihar Scheduled Areas Regulations", the 1955 "Rajasthan Tenancy Act" as amended in 1956, the 1959 "MPLP Code of Madhya Pradesh", the 1959 "Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation" and amendment of 1970, the 1960 "Tripura Land Revenue Regulation Act", the 1970 "Assam Land and Revenue Act", the 1975 "Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act" etc. are state legislations to protect Adivasi land rights.

In Andhra for example, enquiries on land transfer violations were made in 57,150 cases involving 245,581 acres of land, but only about 28% of lands were restored despite persistent militant struggles. While in the case of Kerala, out of a total claim for 9909.4522 hectares made by 8754 applicants, only 5.5% of the claims have been restored. And this is happening in spite of favourable judicial orders - orders which the state governments are circumventing by attempting to dismantle the very protective legislation itself.

The callous and casual manner with which mainstream India approaches the fulfillment of the constitutional obligations with reference to the tribes, and the persistent attempts by the politico-administrative system to subvert the constitution by deliberate acts of omission and commission, and the enormous judicial tolerance towards this speak volumes on the discriminatory approach that permeates the society with regard to the legal rights of the Adivasis.

Race, religion and language

The absence of neat classifications of Adivasis as a homogenous social-cultural category and the intensely

fluid nature of non-Adivasis are evident in the insuperable difficulty in arriving at a clear anthropological definition of a tribal in India, be it in terms of ethnicity, race, language, social forms or modes of livelihood.

The major waves of ingress into India divide the tribal communities into Veddids, similar to the Australian aborigines, and the Paleamongoloid Austro-Asiatic from the north-east. The third were the Greco-Indians who spread across Gujarat, Rajasthan and Pakistan from Central Asia. The fourth is the Negrito group of the Andaman Islands - the Great Andamanese, the Onge, the Jarawa and the Sentinelese who flourished in these parts for some 20,000 years but who could well become extinct soon. The Great Andamanese have been wiped out as a viable community with about only 30 persons alive as are the Onges who are less than a 100.

In the mid-Indian region, the Gond who number over 5 million, are the descendants of the dark skinned Kolarian or Dravidian tribes and speak dialects of Austric language family as are the Santhal who number 4 million. The Negrito and Austroloid people belong to the Mundari family of Munda, Santhal, Ho, Ashur, Kharia, Paniya, Saora etc. The Dravidian groups include the Gond, Oraon, Khond, Malto, Bhil, Mina, Garasia, Pradhan etc. and speak Austric or Dravidian family of languages. The Gujjar and Bakarwal descend from the Greco Indians and are interrelated with the Gujjar of Gujarat and the tribes settled around Gujranwala in Pakistan.

There are some 200 indigenous peoples in the north-east. The Boro, Khasi, Jantia, Naga, Garo and Tripiri belong to the Mongoloid stock like the Naga, Mikir, Apatani, Boro, Khasi, Garo, Kuki, Karbi etc. and speak languages of the Tibeto-Burman language groups and the Mon Khmer. The Adi, Aka, Apatani, Dafla, Gallong, Khamti, Monpa, Nocte, Sherdukpen, Singpho, Tangsa, Wancho etc of Arunachal Pradesh and the Garo of Meghalaya are of Tibeto-Burman stock while the Khasi of Meghalaya belong to the Mon Khmer group. In the southern region, the Malayali, Irula, Paniya, Adiya, Sholaga, Kurumba etc belong to the proto-Australoid racial stock speaking dialects of the Dravidian family.

The Census of India, 1991 records 63 different denominations as "other" of over 5.7 million people of which most are Adivasi religions. Though the Constitution recognizes them as a distinct cultural group, when it comes to religion those who do not identify as Christians, Muslims or Buddhists are compelled to register themselves as Hindus. Hindus and Christians have interacted with Adivasis to civilize them, which has been defined as sanscritisation and westernisation. However, as reflected during the 1981 census it is significant that about 5% of the Adivasis registered their religion by the names of their respective tribes or the names adopted by them. In 1991 the corresponding figure rose to about 10%, indicating the rising consciousness and assertion of identity.

Though Article 350A of the Constitution requires

primary education to be imparted in mother tongue, in general this has not been imparted except in areas where the Adivasis have been assertive. NCERT, the state owned premier education research centre, has not shown any interest. With the neglect of Adivasi languages, the State and the dominant social order aspire to culturally and socially emasculate the Adivasis subdued by the dominant cultures. The Anthropological Survey of India reported a loss of more than two-thirds of the spoken languages, most of them tribal.

Fragmentation

Some of the ST peoples of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, W. Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram have their counterparts across the border in China (including Tibet), Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The political aspirations of these trans-border tribes who find themselves living in different countries as a result of artificial demarcation of boundaries by erstwhile colonial rulers continue to be ignored, despite the spread and proliferation of militancy, especially in the north east, making it into a conflict zone.

The Adivasi territories have been divided amongst the states formed on the basis of primarily the languages of the mainstream caste society, ignoring the validity of applying the same principle of language for the Adivasis in the formation of states. Jharkhand has been divided amongst Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa though the Bihar part of Jharkhand has now become a separate state after decades of struggle. The Gond region has been divided amongst Orissa, Andhra, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Similarly, the Bhil region has been divided amongst Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

In the north-east, for example, the Naga in addition are divided into Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Further administrative sub-divisions within the states into districts, talukas and panchayats have been organised in such a way that the tribal concentration is broken up which furthers their marginalization both physically and politically.

The 1874 "Scheduled District Act", the 1919 "Government of India Act" and later the "Government of India Act" of 1935 classified the hill areas as excluded and partially excluded areas where the provincial legislature had no jurisdiction. These formed the basis for the Article 244 under which two separate schedules viz. the V Schedule and the VI Schedule were incorporated for provision of a certain degree of self-governance in designated tribal majority areas. However, in effect, this remained a non-starter. However, the recent legislation of the Panchayat Raj (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 has raised hope of a radical redefinition of self-governance.

By not applying the same yard stick and norms for

Adivasis as for the upper caste dominated mainstream, by not genuinely recognizing the Adivasis' traditional self-governing systems and by not being serious about devolving autonomy, the Indian State and society indicate a racist and imperialist attitude. The call for a socially homogenous country, particularly in the Hindi paradigm has suppressed tribal languages, defiled cultures and destroyed civilizations. The creation of a unified albeit centralized polity and the extension of the formal system of governance have emasculated the self-governing institutions of the Adivasis and with their internal cohesiveness.

The struggle for the future, the conceptual vocabulary used to understand the place of Adivasis in the modern world has been constructed on the feudal, colonial and imperialistic notions which combine traditional and historical constructs with the modern construct based on notions of linear scientific and technological progress.

Historically the Adivasis, as explained earlier, are at best perceived as sub-humans to be kept in isolation, or as 'primitives' living in remote and backward regions who should be "civilized". None of them have a rational basis. Consequently, the official and popular perception of Adivasis is merely that of isolation in forest, tribal dialect, animism, primitive occupation, carnivorous diet, naked or semi-naked, nomadic habits, love, drink and dance. This is contrasted with the self-perception of Adivasis as casteless, classless and egalitarian in nature, community-based economic systems, symbiotic with nature, democratic according to the demands of the times, accommodative history and people-oriented art and literature.

The significance of their sustainable subsistence economy in the midst of a profit oriented economy is not recognized in the political discourse, and the negative stereotyping of the sustainable subsistence economy of Adivasi societies is based on the wrong premise that the production of surplus is more progressive than the process of social reproduction in co-existence with nature.

The source of the conflicts arises from these unresolved contradictions. With globalization, the hitherto expropriation of rights as an outcome of development has developed into expropriation of rights as a precondition for development. In response, the struggles for the rights of the Adivasis have moved towards the struggles for power and a redefinition of the contours of state, governance and progress.

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