



A STUDY OF CONTRIBUTION OF NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN TRIBAL COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The preamble captures the aspirations of the millions of the nation, something they dreamed for themselves and for the nation as a whole. In keeping with these aspirations, India chose to accelerate the monetization process through development policies and measures. Decades of independence and planned development has not answered the hope of the millions who still live a sub-human existence. Rather developmental projects have been a curse to them. Article 46 the Directive Principles of state policy says, the state shall promote, with special care, the education and the economic interest of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitations! (Hasnain 1986:151) The constitution is very much

concerned about the dignity of the individual and knowing that the justiciable rights may not be enough to guarantee the dignity of the individual, it incorporated in the Part IV of the constitution Directive Principles of state policy, which must guide the state in framing social and economic policies. Today the Supreme Court has recognized the right to dignity as a fundamental right (Basu 2004:28). In this paper I will use examples to highlight the human rights violations that take place as a matter of fact in tribal villages, and also examples to show how the NGOs help the villagers to overcome them and in the process strengthening the dignity and resolve of the tribal's. All examples are taken from villages of Balaghat District, except those specifically mentioned.

According to census 2001 there is more than 8.5 crore tribal's living in 26 states. They

are found in 187 tribal districts and they constitute 8.20 % of the country's total population. For Maharashtra, please refer Table A. 47 % of the rural wage labor forces are tribals. About 46 % of the tribal households are self-employed, out of which 44 % are in the farming sector and 2 % in other occupations. Tribals practicing occupations like hunting and food gathering are insignificant. The land the tribals occupy are generally sloppy and often of poor quality with plenty of rocks and a thin layer of soil. A large majority of them cannot afford modern technology in agriculture. Adivasi territories are rich in resources with about 90% of India's coalmines, 80% of its mineral, 72% of its forests and over 3000 hydro projects located in these areas. However, according to some estimates about 85% of them live below the poverty line. (Bijoy, C.R. 1999:211-19) More than 10 million of the adivasis are displaced in the name of development. Even though the fifth and the sixth schedules of the constitution prohibit transfer of land from a tribal to a non-tribal, yet there are a large number of cases involving transfer of tribal lands to non-tribals in the Indian Courts. Adivasis means the original inhabitants with certain distinct socio-cultural identity as compared to mainstream people. They are largely but not entirely included in the officially designated scheduled tribes

II. COLONIZATION OF TRIBAL RESOURCES

Tribals are poor and marginalized, nevertheless the land they live on are rich in natural resources. The ruling elite at the national and regional level consider tribal land the property of the state, which they could exploit without taking the tribals in whose land they are found into confidence. This internal colonization is given legal cover in the name of national interest and public purpose. The major and minor dams in tribal areas not only submerge tribal lands; but also destroy their community life, reducing a people who lived with dignity on their own terms to that of a landless wage earner in an alien environment. Land for the tribals is not just an economic need but it has social, cultural and religious significance. Rehabilitation programmes focus on the individual and not on communities. When communities are broken up into individuals and they get scattered, language is the first casualty. Language is not just a medium of communication but also a vehicle of culture. Tribal system of medicine, knowledge of fauna and flora, engineering skills required for building houses, food technology, arts, and crafts that had gone through a process of growth and maturity are lost. The elite of today are following in the footsteps of the British anthropologist who considered the Indigenous people primitive and their knowledge worthless.

III. TRIBAL CULTURE AND MODERN ECONOMICS

It is true that modern economic system has many benefits, which our indigenous people must enjoy. Never the less, the economic system also has its low points. Today modern economics has Commodified and compartmentalized relationships Tribals are known for intimate and warm relationships. Their economic systems are not independent of social ties. Anthropologists have made us aware about a tribal institution called exchange. for example, for agricultural purpose or to build a house, he would ask his fellows for help. On a day decided by the people, they would come together to the place of work with their implements and do the work requested. Once the work was over for the day, they would return home. The beneficiary was not obliged to pay cash or kind. If the beneficiary was well to do and could afford it he would give a mid-day meal. This institution was available to the poorest of the poor too.

IV. TRIBES AND FOREST

From the earliest times, the forest has been the home of the tribals, in it they found every thing they needed for life. However, the Forest Conservation Ordinance no.60 1980 enhanced the power of the government over forest. Nevertheless The National Forest Policy of 1988 adopted unanimously by the parliament recognized the rights of indigenous people living in and around the forest over forest products and

also recognized the need to involve the tribals in managing and developing forest. Together with this, the Panchayet extension to scheduled areas act 1996 recognized the Gram sabha as the authority in scheduled areas and the right of local people over water, forest, and land resources. However, these were meaningless, as the forest, officials implemented the law and in doing so sought their advantage. The fact that the tribals were ignorant of the laws and were illiterate helped the forest authorities who exploited the tribals at Act 1980 got a reprieve as 13". December 2005 was fixed as a new cut off date. products were some of the other recommendations made by the J.P.C. However when the bill was introduced changes were made in the J.P.C. reported bill. For example, the term forest dwellers meant people who reside in the forest and not in close proximity. Secondly, the bill defines one generation as 25 years, this means that nonscheduled tribes must prove that they had lived in the forest for 75 years if they are to benefit from this law.

V. LAND SACRED TO THE TRIBALS:

Since pre-independent times tribal lands have been the subject of legislations. In 1879, the Bombay Province Land Revenue Code prohibited the transfer of land from a tribal to a non-tribal without the permission of the Collector. In the course of time, various states also brought in such acts. In Maharashtra, "The

Maharashtra Restoration of Lands to S.T Act came in 1974. Through these laws the interest of the tribals were to be taken care off, however its implementation was halfhearted and manipulated thus denying the benefits that the Acts tried to confer on the tribals. Numerous examples are found where non-tribals are in possession of tribal land. Legally land may be in the name of a tribal, but in fact, a non-tribal occupies and uses it. Moreover, many non-tribals marry tribal women so that they can own land in the name of their wives. Moneylenders are another factor by which land are transferred from tribal to non-tribal ownership. The number of cases of alienated tribal land in Indian Courts is 3. 75.164 covering about 8, 55,282 acres. (Kumar 2005) Tribals Loosing ones land is like destroying a temple or a place of worship. Hence it is not proper to view tribal land from the point of a non-tribal. Tribal land must be protected from being displaced by humans and projects unless rehabilitation package is acceptable to them.

VI. POSITIVE CULTIVATION UNDER STRESS DUE TO DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES

Apart from this, a tribal suffers in other ways due to land. Tribals are community people. Normally land is not sub-divided with every passing generation, During cultivation season, the eldest male allots land to the members of the clan to cultivate. Often cultivation is done together by the clan members and then at the

harvest time the produce is divided among the members of the clan after deductions are made for the investment made for cultivation. The advantage of this method is that land fragmentation is avoided and each family gets a variety of produce. This would not be the case had land been subdivided. In addition, if the head of the family got sick, the family did not have to worry, as other members of the clan would cultivate land. This arrangement has come under stress due to the development schemes. The basic document required in securing a scheme or loan is the land record. Since the individual does not own land as it has not been sub-divided since generations they can't avail the benefits. Even the head of the clan cannot make use of the land document, as the amount of land shown in the record would be too high placing such a person above poverty line. Justice demands that the adivasis enjoy the right to development and the right to a communitarian way of life.

VII. NEGATIVE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The modal of development practiced in our country is characterized by rapid exploitation of natural resources in an unsustainable manner with a total disregard for ecology. Most of the natural resources are found in tribal regions. The ruling elite at the national and regional level considered them the property of the state, which they could exploit without taking the tribals into

confidence in whose land they are found. This is given legal cover in the name of national interest and public purpose. Many large projects have come up in tribal areas. According to the Ministry of environment and Forest since 1980, 11282 development projects have come up and the displaced tribals are 8.53 million, which is about 72 % of the total displaced. (Prasad2007:8 . Such development is not development at all. Genuine development will follow an authentic participatory modal with the capacity of the affected group to influence and modify the decisions. The fact is the people to be displaced do not have authentic modify the decisions. The fact is the people to be displaced do not have authentic information about the project, the extent of displacement and other negative impact of the project on their lives. The magnitude of tribal displacement due to projects is one aspect of it. What about the sacrifice of collective identity, the loss of historical and cultural heritage to the tribals, the sufferings caused by poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment, the debt bondage and serfdom among tribals ? This is the cost of development that the tribals are made to pay. This must be challenged.

VIII. THE ROLE OF NGO AND POSITIVE STRUCTURES

Tribals are also seen as obstacles to development and are not included in the decision making process. The price of development is

costly - degradation of tribal lands, destruction of natural resources, water, wildlife, forest, food supplies, destruction of the natural environment and tribal life. Development must be just and sustainable from the indigenous people's viewpoint. The N.G.Os involvement in implementing human rights and the right to development among the indigenous people at the grass roots strengthens hopes in the future that the marginalized become masters of their own destiny.

However, with the involvement of the N.G.Os in the various tribal villages changes in social structure became visible. Structures in the form of 'Common Tribal Panchayet', 'Mahila Mandal', 'Youth Mandals' and 'Co-Operatives are now part of these villages. Common celebrations of feast, common tribal Panchayet that included all the adult members of all the different tribal groups living in the village, Mandals which brought women together to share and discuss their problems and that of the village are part of the social structure. Importantly, these Mandals became centers of conscientization and leadership training as both women and youth got chances to exercise leadership during the programs conducted by the Mandals. These Mandals were powerful bodies too. The villages had co-operatives for forest, agricultural, milk, and fish products. The people established these structures after they became aware of the

dynamics of exploitation and what they could do about it. Such co-operatives enhanced the economic conditions of the people and developed solidarity among the villagers. Very often traditional work patterns may violate human rights. In such a situation, the presence of the NGO helps in resolving the dilemma. This is possible only because the NGO has close contact and intimate relationship with the target group. In tribal society strict division of labor is strictly followed. For example, Village Pandripathra faced water scarcity and women had to go a great distance to fetch water. These issues were discussed at the Mahila Mandal meetings and it was decided that the woman would go on a protest march to the tahsil office to register their demand.

IX. DEVELOPMENT MODAL-GO/NGO

Development particularly tribal development is a very complicated and painstaking task. The Government functionaries offer the people readymade schemes, which are inflexible and not suited to the peoples needs. This very often results in halfhearted involvement of the people who do so under pressure. Often the government agency confuses the people, as their main aim is to get beneficiaries for the records. In fact, they are not concerned about the true welfare of the people. On the other hand, the methods of the NGOs are quite different, for example, in 1993, when the

villagers of Gedori village in Balaghat District, complained about the lack of facilities in their village. The functionaries did not go about trying to solve problems, but rather they began by organizing the villagers and conscientizing them. The villagers were asked to choose the problem that most affected them and they chose the issue of Balwadi, as the one issue they would like to solve. In this process of discernment, the role of the functionaries was that of a guide. Since the Tribal Welfare Department expressed their inability to help, as the number of Balwadi sanctioned by the government was already allotted. The functionaries made the people aware that they themselves could set-up a Balwadi and run it themselves. government recognized the Balwadi and confirmed the young woman as a regular teacher providing Mid-day meals to the children. One can observe the participatory method in action. Sometimes development schemes of the government results in conflict among the villagers. At other times, they bring about class distinction among people who knew no such distinctions. Here the N.G.O. can play a very creative role. Take for example a government scheme for land development, which enabled two villagers of Garra Tola village 10 build an earthen bund over a seasonal stream. Due to the availability of water, they grew better crops and had more than one crop. This was a source of tension in the village, because the

villagers would bring their buffaloes and other animals to the pond and leave them there and these animals would destroy the crops resulting in conflict among the villagers. It was a scheme given to the individual family under the land development scheme, but the functionaries converted it into a group project. They started a pisciculture and fish co-operative involving all the members of the village .Now it was up to each member of the village to protect the fish and the Talab. At harvest time, all the members shared in the catch, which was sold at the industrial center and the money made available to the members of the co-operative. Thus, the people had money when they needed it and were free from the moneylender. The timely intervention of the NGO functionaries not only averted a conflict situation but also brought the villagers together for their own economic advantage and also created community assets.

As people begin to become confident and are exposed to new ideas they develop into more mature persons. This maturity is expressed in creative acts. For example, Implements and the things that the villagers use has remained the same over the years in spite of the government's efforts to introduce new implements. However, in villages where NGOs were involved new implements created by the villagers were observed. For thrashing the grain from the stock the villagers used a heavy log of wood, round in

shape and 6 feet long, which was harnessed to a pair of bulls and this was rolled over the harvest. This method of thrashing reduced the time and physical burden of the activity that in the past took number of days.

X. CONCLUSION

The State is the original agency charged with the responsibility to implement development of the marginalized, centralized planning by experts who had no stakes involved led to development projects causing untold sufferings to the weak indigenous people. Collusion between the bureaucracy and influential sections of society led them to corner development benefits for themselves at the cost of the weak. The inability to understand and at times deliberately ignoring cultural practices of the tribals resulted in failure of development projects and human rights violations. The N.G.Os capacity to understand the tribals and their informal style of functioning has positively benefited the tribals by bringing about positive social structures in their society . The awareness programmes and informal education that the NGO conducts makes the people aware of their rights, the method that the NGO follows namely that of participatory planning, action- reflection - action method has provided the people with a structure to analyze their situations and respond in a creative way. The Right to Information Act is another important instrument that the NGOs

have used to help the tribals realize their right to development.

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