

Tribal Development

Some Issues

Tribal Development in Andhra Pradesh: Problems, Performance and Prospects by K Mohan Rao; Booklinks Corporation, Hyderabad, 1999; Rs 250 (paperback), pp xiii+223.

T PRABHAKARA REDDY

Any development process in India should begin with the schemes/programmes meant for scheduled tribes (STs) and scheduled castes (SCs), as these are the most disadvantaged and neglected people in the society. These are the people who are economically backward and oppressed by the landlords and rural gentry over a period of time. Therefore, there is a need for sincere efforts on the part of the government to help improve the quality of life of STs and SCs. This book is a result of the author's work experience in the Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute. The book is divided into 12 chapters and can be classified into three broad divisions: (i) Significance of tribal culture, indigenous skills and knowledge; (ii) Land problems, unrest, and remedial measures; and (iii) Critical analysis of past efforts and present strategies of tribal development.

The first chapter discusses the concept of culture and Indus valley civilisation in relation to tribal culture. The author cites parallels between clan names of some of the tribes and the brahmanical gotras. He also discusses the need for national policy of culture and development for STs, scheduled areas and other tribal areas of our country. In fact, the tribal population in India accounts for 8.08 per cent and their literacy rate is about 30 per cent. Majority of the tribals are found in central India (80 per cent), the north-eastern states (12 per cent) and southern India (8 per cent).

The occupational pattern of tribals as hunter-gatherers, pastorals, shifting cultivators, settled cultivators, artisans, etc, are discussed in a lucid way in chapter two. The indigenous knowledge of the tribals and their subsistence systems in tribal areas of AP are clearly shown. Indeed, the

symbiotic relationship of tribals with forests is established here. As rightly pointed out in the Dhebar Commission Report 1961 'to a vast number of the tribal people the forest is their well loved home, their livelihood, their very existence'. Forests and tribals are closely related as the former provides livelihood and income to the latter. Unfortunately, the present day forest conservation laws have denied tribals a just share from the forests. Rather the tribals have become intruders in their own place! The author also outlines the recent programmes for safeguarding the forest wealth vis-a-vis the life modes of the tribals and cites the successful launching, on a limited scale, of a joint forest management project, actively involving the local inhabitants.

The socio-cultural dimensions of development with regard to tribal communities are discussed in detail in chapter three. The author has demonstrated his in-depth understanding of the moorings and motivations of the tribal people and their subtle play in deciding the success or failure of a particular development programme. Among the Chenchus, trust exists between affinal kin and not between consanguineal kin. By ignoring this crucial fact, administrators have failed in their programmes involving contiguous allotment of house sites and cultivable land to groups of agnates in the Chenchu area.

The need for agricultural extension workers to understand the importance of certain ceremonies in tribal areas is explained here. The Araku valley tribals conduct a festival on a particular day during March and April, during which the priest sacrifices a cock and mixes its blood with a quantum of grain, which is then thrown into the outstretched clothes of the cultivators. The latter mix these gains with the seeds they are going to sow in their fields. They sow no other seed except the one so sanctified. The agricultural extension officers' efforts to propagate improved variety of seeds often ends in failure as the seeds are supplied much too late for the sanctified grain to be mixed with them. The author also shows various cultural practices and habits of tribals of AP. The

tribal cultural practices are such that they do not accept the allopathic medicines but rather use roots and plants, which have medicinal value. An officer of DM and HO, Adilabad district stated that he could not conduct the pulse polio programme in tribal areas of Adilabad district. Finally, it was a total success due to the initiative taken by the naxalites. The point here is that the naxalites persuaded the tribals by explaining to them the utility of the programme. Therefore, if any programme has to be successful in tribal areas, it requires *awareness campaigns and education*. More importantly, the government officials should maintain very good rapport with the tribals.

It is important to note that the tribals are against the habit of milching the cattle even though the cow population is very high. This is for the simple reason that they believe that just as the mother's milk is for the child among human beings, so also the cow's milk is meant for the calf. Another interesting habit of Kolams, a primitive tribal community found in Adilabad district, is that they grow local not hybrid variety jowar. The reason given by them is that the bread or 'roti' prepared with the flour of hybrid jowar is hard to eat and digest. Further, they do not eat new varieties of foodgrains, fruit, etc, unless it is offered to their gods. The author makes an interesting observation that the tribal women should be given appropriate skills to prepare leaf plates with adda leaves and deseeding of tamarind, which will lead to value-addition, and increase in their income. But the Mahila Mandals are engaged in imparting the skills of cutting and stitching of blouses which have no relevance for them. As a matter of fact, the tribal women do not wear blouses nor tie the sari in a traditional way. The author concludes the chapter by saying that the modern technological advancement and scientific methods can promote the well-being of the tribal societies when they are planned carefully keeping in view the cultural values, local beliefs, customs and traditions. Therefore, there is a need to take cognisance of the traditional values and practices of tribals while formulating schemes for their development.

The process of tribal land alienation is very well depicted in chapter four. The author explains the various ways by which non-tribals are circumventing the laws and grabbing the land. Non-tribals include landlords, particularly Baniya community

(Vysya) who lend money at an exorbitant rate of interest in scheduled areas of AP with a view to capture the land of tribals. As a result, the farmer-tribals become landless labourers in their own fields. Further, the author gave an account of land transfer regulations and the vacuum left by the prospective application of some of the acts, as a result of which 50 per cent of the cultivable lands are still with the non-tribals in the scheduled areas of AP. This being a serious problem of tribals, the author has probed meticulously into the loopholes that exist in the acts and suggests some remedial measures to safeguard the interests of tribals.

Chapter five discusses the unrest and extremist activities in tribal areas of AP. The beginning of tribal revolt dates back to 1778 against the British regime and feudal landlords in Chhotanagpur area of Bihar. In AP it begins with the Rampa rebellion of 1879 by Koya community against the Muttadars and the British. The genesis of the Rampa rebellion was due to the introduction of Abkari regulations preventing the drawing of toddy for domestic consumption and leasing the toddy revenue to renters. 'The unpopularity of the police, who had assisted in introducing the new toddy rules and also oppressed the people on their own account was a contributory cause' (CVF Haimendorf 1945): *The Reddis of the Bison Hills: A Study in Acculturation*, Macmillan and Co, London).

Similarly, the Konda Reddy and Koya revolts of Godavari districts under the leadership of Alluri Seetharama Raju during 1922-24 and Gonds (Babjhari) uprising of the 1940 in Adilabad district were some of the important revolts against the rulers before independence. After independence, the naxalite movement of Srikakulam district during 1968-70 and the Indravelli Gond uprising of 1981 showed that tribal land alienation is the main cause of their revolt as land is the major source of income. Likewise, several revolts took place in tribal areas of AP due to social and economic problems including scarcity of cultivable land in tribal habitats, inclusion of cultivated land by tribals within the reserve forest boundaries, alienation of tribal land by non-tribals, complicated revenue system of administration, tardy implementation of protective regulations, etc.

Chapter six focuses on literacy and education among the tribals of AP. It is

really disheartening to note that tribal literacy in AP is just about 17 per cent, which is the lowest among all states in the country, whereas the all-India literacy of tribals is about 30 per cent. In this connection, Mohan Rao has dealt with this problem in detail and evaluated governmental efforts in educating the tribals. Further, the author has pointed out that the incidence of dropouts in ST areas was very high. For instance, in 1993-94 the dropout rate in primary level school (1 to 7) for general population was about 68 per cent and among SCs and STs it is 85 per cent. Further, the dropout rate in ST girls was 89.20 per cent showing the extremely difficult situation in improving the educational levels of STs. The reasons for these drop-out students include poverty of the parents, inaccessibility to good educational institutions, absence of creches, lack of awareness about the utility of education, medium of instruction, etc. A relevant point worth noting here is that Telugu as a medium of instruction has added to the existing problem. Instead of teaching them in Telugu if we could impart education to them in their own language, at least up to primary level, it would certainly improve the educational levels of STs in AP. Further, the teaching-learning process should continue with the help of tribal teachers alone.


Chapter seven pertains to the reservations to STs in education and employment. It is clearly stated in Article 16(4) and Article 335 of the Indian Constitution that the SCs and STs should be given reservations in order to help them to improve their social and economic status. The author points out the depressing fact that even in the mid-90s the representation of the STs in groups A and B of central services remained at about 2.8 per cent and not 7.5 per cent as it ought to be. Further, this problem is aggravated due to the menace of bogus ST certificates and claims depriving the genuine ST claimants. For this, the AP (SCs, STs and BCs) regulation of issue of community certificates act 1993 was enacted by the AP legislative assembly mainly to curb the false ST certificates. The district collector is authorised to investigate into such false claims.

Chapter eight is related to the Joint Forest Management (JFM) and tribal development in AP. The author has described the tribals' economic relationship associated with the forests. He discussed the JFM and its success through participatory approach especially by STs in scheduled areas.

Chapter nine discusses the aspects of empowerment of tribal women. In this context, the author has identified certain areas for the empowerment of tribal women including functional literacy and education, health and nutrition, development of skills to take up new income generating schemes, organisation of thrift, credit and processing societies, etc.

Chapter ten discusses policies pertaining to sustainable tribal development. The author provides details of policies and their approaches in each five-year plan separately. The author also focuses on the empowerment of tribal communities and suggests measures such as the creation of institutions like Village Tribal Development Association (VTDA), Girijan Mahila Thrift and Credit Societies (GMTCS), Tribal Youth Association (TYA) and establishment of gram sabha.

Chapter eleven is about the panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996) in Andhra Pradesh. This act is basically passed to cover the following three aspects: (1) Safeguarding of social and cultural heritage. (2) Economic development. (3) Regulatory role. In principle, this act, which is popularly known as central act no 40 of 1996, will empower the panchayats in scheduled areas and bring about a sea change in their development provided it is implemented in its true spirit. Further, the elections to panchayats in scheduled areas of AP were held but the results were withheld due to Supreme Court stay on reservations. The tenure of the elected body in the case of others is over, but the tribals in scheduled areas could not view the elected body or their development.

Chapter twelve is devoted for the contributions of Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf, a distinguished Austrian anthropologist who has dedicated his life to the tribals of India. This is an excellent book that should be read by social scientists, administrators and social workers. 

Economic and Political Weekly

available at

A H Wheeler Bookstalls

Western Railway
Borivli to Vile Parle