ACCULTURIZATION AND CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE TRIBAL COMMUNITY IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Dr. M. Padmavathi, Assistant professor, Dept., of Women’s Studies, Sri Padmavati mahila Visvidyalam, Tirupati, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh.

ABSTRACT

Cultural change is ‘change in knowledge, attitudes, ideas, behaviour, religious beliefs, and moral doctrines of individuals who compose the community or the society.’ Thus, cultural change is a multi-factorial process. Tribal communities in India and Andhra Pradesh have been intimately associated with forests. A large number of tribal communities inhabit the agency areas surrounded by mountainous forests. A variety of occupations are professed by them which include food gathering, shifting cultivation, rain fed and terrace cultivation of cereals and pulses, vegetables, fruit and aromatic crops. Some also utilize the water bodies for irrigation. Apart from these, they collect non-timber forest produce (NTFP), work for the Forest Department in afforestation, plantation and deforestation activities. They also depend on forest for various domestic needs such as food, fuel, fodder, fiber, timber for shelter to humans and live-stock, medicinal plants, for manufacturing implements and household equipment etc. Further their world-view and religious life is intertwined with forest, its trees, animals, water bodies, mountains, soils etc. Number of their customs, practices and beliefs are said to help protecting the forests and its biodiversity.

Several factors as identified by Raha and Dubash Roy which have brought about changes in the tribal culture are: measures undertaken by the government, communication facilities, spread of education, process of urbanisation, occupational mobility, community development projects, frequent contacts with the neighbouring Hindus in the urban areas, construction of dams in the tribal areas, impact of Christianity, facilities of bank credit, modern medicare, cooperative societies, modern legislation, cash and market economy, and reformist movements.

Keywords: Culture, Economic Empowerment, Mobility, Community development.

INTRODUCTION:

The tribe-caste interaction and the process of acculturation is found among many tribes in different States. Tribals in partial or full isolation and strongly advised that these people should be allowed to maintain their traditional and original tribal life as far as possible. While we do not want tribal culture to be destroyed, at the same time, we do not want that tribes should remain ‘backward’ and not be benefited by industrial development, occupational mobility, education and benefits of welfare schemes. The isolated and segregated condition of the tribal world which results in their poverty, illiteracy, exploitation, etc., cannot be tolerated in this age. Their exposure to justice, enlightenment, help and cooperation is essential.
For the past several decades, the bondage between the tribes and forests has been breaking away due to various reasons. Tribal communities constitute a significant segment of Indian society and civilization. In the recent past they were labelled as autochthonous people, Jana Jati, vanyajati, Adima jati, Girijan, Indigenous people etc. and notwithstanding their rich cultural heritage, ethos, ideologies, values and worldviews they represented the weakest of the weaker sections because of their economic backwardness. During the colonial administration they were secluded, isolated, deprived and remained below the subsistence level of economy and faced the threats and challenges of survival. Inaccessibility, eco-hostile habitat, poverty, illiteracy unemployment etc., kept them away from the mainstream of national culture. Soon after the achievement of Independence and launching of five-year plans for national development, welfare and development of tribal communities were given a new direction. The constitutional status of these communities as "Scheduled Tribes" under the article 342 and provision of protective measures and safeguards redefined the social identity of tribal communities.

The socio-economic development effort during the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) for tribal people witnessed an humble beginning through community development approach. During the Second Plan (1956-61) period, Special Multi-Purpose Tribal Blocks (SMPT) functioned selectively in tribal concentrated areas. The principal objective of the Third Plan (1961-66) was to bring about comprehensive and integrated socio-economic development of tribal people through tribal development blocks by pooling together funds under the T.D. and C.D. sources.

During the Fourth Plan (1969-74) period there was shift from area development approach to specific target group oriented approach through introduction of special programmes, like Tribal Development Agencies (TDA), Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agencies (MFAL), Drought Prone Areas programme (DPAP) etc. The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79) as a landmark in the history of tribal development brought a new approach, which is known as the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy. The development blocks with more than 50 per cent of tribal concentration were identified (e.g. 118 out of 314 blocks in Orissa State) for launching massive integrated efforts for the all round development of tribal communities.

The Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDA), as autonomous bodies, were introduced (eg. 21 I.T.D.As in Orissa State). Funds for both infrastructure development and family beneficiary oriented schemes for additional income generation were made available. There was quantification of funds under the State Plan, Central Ministries including Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Special Central Assistance and Institutional Finance. In addition, beyond the TSP, Modified Area Development Approach (MADA), pockets and cluster area approach pockets were identified for implementation of development programmes. In Orissa State, 46 MADA pockets spread over 47 blocks and 14 cluster approach pockets are in operation. Further, for the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG) identified on the criteria of declining/ stagnant or near stagnant population growth, pre-agricultural mode of subsistence and low level of literacy, the Union Government provided the entire funds under
Special Central Assistance (SCA). At present, in Orissa as many as 17 Micro Projects are functioning for 13 identified Primitive Tribal Groups for their over all development. During the Sixth Plan (1980-85) period, vigorous attempts were made for tribal development under the multisectoral approach. The Seventh Plan (1985-90) approach aimed at speedier development and reduction of socio-economic exploitation for ensuring social justice. The quantification of funds for tribal development was re-emphasized during the Eighth Plan (1992-97) and there was prioritisation of efforts based on the felt needs of the tribal people. The Ninth Plan approach cherished sustainable socio-economic development, women development/ empowerment, conservation of forests, preservation of ecology etc. And it is expected that the focus of the Tenth Plan in this respect would be even more realistic.

It may be summarized that the five-decade old tribal development intervention has brought out socio-economic transformation in the tribal micro-world, although our achievements are not in consonance with our aspirations. It opens avenues for further efforts in order to attain sustainability in the field of development, so that the tribal people become self-reliant, reasonably free from exploitation and enrich their quality of life. The enhancement of the quality of life vis-à-vis the enrichment of the quality of environment would develop people, fulfil their basic needs, promote self dignity and assure them freedom from servitude with empowerment and social Justice.

**The process of undergoing acculturation by this tribe is found in the following changes:**

1. The structural change in the tribe is found in discarding egalitarianism (with least of functional dependency) and accepting caste system and thereby introducing the system of stratification in the community.

2. The community is hierarchically divided in four segments on the basis of ritual superiority which resembles Hindu Varna framework. There is functional distribution of occupations among the four divisions like the four varnas—hunting and fighting, worshipping, cultivation, and dancing and singing respectively. The difference is that while in the Varna system, worshipping occupies the highest ritual status, in this tribe it occupies second place in the hierarchy. Secondly, purity and pollution is absent in the Sabaras tribe as it is found in the caste system. Thus, Sabaras are accepted as a separate ‘caste’ and not as a tribe in the village.

3. Like the caste system among the Sabaras too, each sub-caste has its own panchayat which acts as a watch-dog of the community customs and taboos.

4. Each sub-division of the Sabaras claims descent from three Sabaras who figure in Hindu mythologies—Mahabharata and Ramayana.

5. The imprint of Hindu culture is prominent on the marriage customs of Sabaras, though inter-caste (inter-segment) marriage is absent. Polygamy is a taboo. Bride-price has been replaced by dowry.
Why the adopting of Hindu traits by the Sabaras is termed as a process of ‘acculturation’ and not ‘sanskritisation’ is because:

(a) the benefit of acculturation is ‘economic gain’ and not achieving higher ritual status. By entering the Hindu-fold as a caste group, they have been assigned the occupation of wood-cutting and basket making permanently. After deforestation, they have become agricultural laborers; and
(b) the model adopted for mobility is not Brahmanic but Vaishya, which assures economic superiority to ritual superiority. Since the Sabaras are dependent on Telis for their occupations, they accepted them (Telis) as their reference group.

If we examine change in the culture of tribes in India, we find six main changes. These are as follows:

(1) The lifestyle of tribals, particularly those who live in or near the urban areas or in the midst of the numerically dominant non-tribal population, has changed due to imbibing of a large number of cultural traits of advanced Hindus. Many of their traditional traits have been replaced by alien traits.
(2) The nature of change is such that the tribes are not losing their identity and also their traditional cultural heritage. They are not being ‘Hinduised’. However, tribes undergoing the process of Hinduisation have been pointed out by Bose (1953), Dutta Majumdar (1937), Deogaonkar (1990), Raha and Debash Ro, referring to the examples of tribes like Pati Rabhas (in Assam), Hos and Juangs (in Orissa), Santhals (in Bihar), Bhumij, Oraon, Munda, and Korkus (in Maharashtra), etc. Our contention is that adopting few cultural traits of Hindus is not undergoing the process of Hinduisation. The fact that these tribes still describe themselves as ‘tribes’ and not Hindus is important in our argument and contention of rejecting the process of Hinduisation.
(3) In some parts of India, the tribals have adopted some traits of Christianity also. Nagas, Mizo, Santhals, Oraon, Munda, Kharia, etc., are some tribes in North East and North West India on which we find marked imprint of Christianity. The evidence is provided by micro- level studies of tribals made by Dutta Majumdar (1956), Sahay (1976), Sachchidananda (1964) and Bose (1967).
(4) The changes among tribal people from Chotanagpur working as labourers in tea gardens of Assam and North Bengal are more visible in their material life than in their religious beliefs and practices. Those who work in industries have developed individualistic outlook due to the economic security provided to them which in turn has made them indifferent towards their traditional life.
(5) Agro-industrialisation in the tribal areas has affected the socio-cultural life of the tribals to the extent that changes in the family structure, marriage institution, authority structure, interpersonal relationship and weakening of clan panchayat’s authority have come to be observed (Kar, 1981). Trade unions also have much impact on the adibasi (tribal) labourers. Tribal labourers have organised themselves as a ‘class’ which has ultimately opened up a wider opportunity for taking part in active politics. The tribals who work in mines and collieries since long fail to retain link with their community because of which they are so compelled to adjust themselves with the rhythm of mining work, that they relinquish many traditional
beliefs and social practices and adopt new attitudes and behaviour patterns. Sachchidananda (1964) has referred to such changes among Munda and Oraon tribes of Bihar. R. Chandra (1989) has also referred to similar change in the socio-cultural life of Juangs and Irula tribes in Orissa who traditionally were accustomed to hunting, food-gathering and shifting cultivation but have now become settled cultivators and labourers on plantations. They have attained progressive outlook and have started using modern facilities of schools, banks, cooperative societies, Medicare, etc.

(6) Discarding traditional practices and adopting modern beliefs and values due to the impact of modern forces has not always proved functional for the tribals. Many tribes face the problem of maladjustment. Baiga tribe according to R. Joshi (1984) is one such tribe whose members earlier were fun-loving and contented, who spent evenings in dancing and drinking mahu, who owned land but had no demarcated ‘pattas’, whose women wore gold and silver ornaments without worry and fear but have now become very fearful and have come to be cheated by people with vested interests. Happiness has given place to suffering.

Thus, it is evident that tribals have changed a lot culturally, socially as well as economically due to exposure to various forces which having benefited them in many ways have also brought a number of evils in their communities. Many tribals have come to be deprived of their rights over land and forests and in many cases they are being fleeced by money lenders, big landowners, traders, businessmen and others.

Here, while we think of our national approaches for the welfare and development of tribal people and their shifts from isolationism to integration through assimilation, the Nehruvian 'Tribal Panchasheel' appears before us with its humane sentiments incorporating the vision of optimism and pragmatism and a reasonable model for tribals for tomorrow. We may quote the five fundamental principles written by Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India in his preface to the book, entitled Philosophy NEFA, authored by Dr. Verrier Elwin (1958) as follows:

- The Tribal people should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them but rather try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
- Tribal rights in lands and forests should be respected.
- We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will no doubt be needed especially in the beginning but we should avoid too many outsiders into tribal territory.
- We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with multiplicity of scheme: rather we should work through and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions.
- We should judge the results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is evolved. The above policy enunciation, dispassionately speaking, was not adhered to in the tribal development process and our efforts, did not yield the desired results.
Conclusion:

The status of tribes in our county is totally unprecedented position. They are being forced to evacuate from their origin and also being threatened by the encroachers. This situation of primitive groups leads to create a pathetic and strange condition among the elderly tribes in our society. The factors of their non-migration status, diseased health, lack of economic source for survival, abandon by children hails to facilitate a worst condition in their ageing period which never met by them previously. The assistance level of government, caring from the non-government organizations, less contribution from people towards the suppressed group are the key factors which is having the direct relationship related with the welfare status of elderly tribes. The tribal cultural heritage should have preserved and protected and it may have passed to the next generation for the inculcation of rich knowledge and promoting better behaviours. The socio-economic development effort during the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) for tribal people witnessed an humble beginning through community development approach. During the Second Plan (1956-61) period, Special Multi-Purpose Tribal Blocks (SMPT) functioned selectively in tribal concentrated areas. The principal objective of the Third Plan (1961-66) was to bring about comprehensive and integrated socio-economic development of tribal people through tribal development blocks by pooling together funds under the T.D. and C.D. sources. During the Fourth Plan (1969-74) period there was shift from area development approach to specific target group oriented approach through introduction of special programmes, like Tribal Development Agencies (TDA), Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agencies (MFAL), Drought Prone Areas programme (DPAP) etc. The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79) as a landmark in the history of tribal development brought a new approach, which is known as the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy. The development blocks with more than 50 per cent of tribal concentration were identified (e.g. 118 out of 314 blocks in Andhra Pradesh State) for launching massive integrated efforts for the all-round development of tribal communities. The Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDA), as autonomous bodies, was introduced (eg. 21 I.T.D.As in Orissa State). Funds for both infrastructure development and family beneficiary oriented schemes for additional income generation.

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