



IMPACT OF COLONIAL PERCEPTION OF TRIBES ON THE POST -INDEPENDENCE POLICIES CONCERNING TRIBAL POPULATION.

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ABSTRACT - Ranging from the pre independence policies to Nehruvian Tribal Panchsheel and then the recent attempts of streamlining of tribal population in mainstream policies and measures, a mix of influences have always impacted our policy paradigm. Tracing from the same background, this paper tries to analyse the impact of colonial perception about tribal struggles or tribal population as whole on the present policies concerning the economic, social and cultural aspects of tribal population. It also tries to outline the areas in which a shift from the previous way of seeing the tribal policies to a new outlook.

KEYWORDS - TRIBAL POLICY, TRIBAL CULTURE, COLONIAL PERCEPTION OF TRIBES

INTRODUCTION

Tribal history has been interpreted as and in form of tribal struggles against the britishers, without indulging deep in the tribal times prevailing amidst the wars. This article tries to highlight the socio- economic, cultural , psychological analysis of tribal population and the corresponding colonial perceptions about those tribal patterns . It furthers the topic about formation of policies based on these perceptions and how these policies survived with time.

Colonial powers' exploitative policies have seen transformation in the post independence period as independent india was envisaged as a welfare state. With the passage of time, tribal population also sees change in all their structure be it social ,economic and cultural. This paper tries to uncover all these aspects to bring forth the changes the tribal policies has gone through and what new changes can be mooted upon to adjust to the changing times and changing ways of tribal population.

CONTOURS OF TRIBAL LAWS

Various laws related to tribes corresponds to various aspects of tribal population. And to get the fair idea about laws those developed from the pre independence period to the present, one has to have an outlook of present tribal laws. Present tribal laws have different spheres of operation as for example forest rights act , 2006 on forest issues such as minor forest produce , tribal land rights, community rights, etc.related to this law one can trace the efforts of trifed , which is to give more exposure to tribal products in market and promoting a tribal brand. On ground level, Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana is envisaged to employ minor forest produce gatherers under one platform to create a more targeted and inclusive growth.

On the front of education , government is trying to make education more inclusive and accessible to tribal youth . Major step in this direction is the establishment of Eklavya residential schools in every district which have a tribal population more than 20000 or 50% of the total population. So policy wise , efforts are being made to include tribal population in the growth journey of India.Also reservation in educational institutions to tribal students are reinvigorating the spirit of tribal excellence at par with national level. National fellowship and scholarship for higher education for ST students provides incentives to the tribal students to pursue higher education.

Social backwardness issue has been tackled by the wide array of laws such as article 17 of constitution, Scheduled tribes (prevention of atrocities) act,1989, infrastructure creation endeavours , etc.But all these are being done while keeping fine balance between the “protection of cultural identity” and “mainstreaming of the tribal communities”. This balancing is not new as it was first envisaged formally in the Nehruvian Tribal Panchsheel . It later saw more definite shape in the formulation of Panchayats (Extension To Scheduled Areas) act, 1996. It tried to recognise the difference that is present between tribal population and other population .Consequently, it provides more room for cultural identity in the governance framework.

The naxalite problem has also caught the vision of government where it puts multi- pronged strategy i.e dealing miscreants with hard power and at the same time employing a surrender incentive program for naxals. Government welfare measures are an attempt to compensate for the previous negligence which in the firts place is the major contributor of the radical forces.there are several policies running at present on these planks such as,security related expenditure scheme, Civic acion plan, Media plan, Aspirational district program, etc.All these schemes are aiming at normalising of naxalism probem through bridging of gap between administration and tribal people, targetting extreme radical elements, providing recourse to naxals and socio – economic development of naxallite belt areas.

Do these policies have any relation with colonial perspective over these issuesThis question will be analysed in next section in which we will analyse the colonial imprints on our

policy making especially from the tribal perspective. We will discuss its impact and how can we tweak these evolution of policies in favour of tribal population development and equip them to face the present stark realities that are stalking whole of tribal community as a whole.

TRIBES' POLICIES : FROM COLONIAL LENS AND FALLOUTS

Tribal population has a culture of preservation of natural resources be it forest resource, water resource, wildlife preservation etc. And the major driving force of colonial powers for colonising India was its need for natural resources for their factories in their homeland. Thus, it was obvious that colonial powers would attack the serene and resourceful forest resources of tribal population. They were duped into loss making agreements for their lands and even not allowed to do their traditional slash and burn farming. First major act in confirmity of the above fact was the Forest act of 1865 which made britishers the owner of the whole forest area. This can be seen from the lens of britishers' greed for natural resources. Then came the forest act of 1878 in which government disallowed the community use of forest produce. Government used the teak wood for railway line manufacturing. In Forest act, 1927. Government came up with the concept of reserved forest in which government can declare any forest area as reserved. So Britishers mainly tried to extract from forest resources, neglecting and minimising the role of tribal people in management of forest resources. Post independence policies tried to reverse the trend but not whole heartedly, as still now forest dwellers are being treated as outsiders with respect to forest area. It was only in forest rights act, 2006 that government recognised the rights of indigeneous people and forest dwellers corresponding to the forest resources. So we can say that government has pitched in for tribal rights but more can be done in form of a fresh law in recognising tribal land rights without hassle as the land distribution according to 2006 act needs solid documentation which seems a far cry for tribal people. A more efficient and conducive to the present environment way is to decide ownership of tribal people on basis of mutual recognition of each others' right or use of local panchayats to identify in addition. This will empower the tribal societies and reverse the historical wrong that they have suffered at the hands of britishers.

Psychologically, British policies have caused much damage to the self esteem of the tribes in india. One major policy which caused maximum psychological havoc to tribal conscience was the criminal tribes act, 1870. It notified certain tribes as criminal tribes just based on ethnicity. This was the most inhumane policy towards tribes in India. It was however being repealed in 1949 soon after independence. Now several states have Habitual Offenders act to enlist certain individuals as habitual offenders by district magistrate on district level. However, this law doesn't have ethnic specific clauses (which was the major blot on the human rights record of british colonial government). So, psychologically too government needs to assess the situation and then boost the collective consciousness of tribal population as whole. This can be done by commemorating tribal heroes by making separate war memorials, tracing back the history of tribal

history with details of every tribe, making the tribal language and script more common in for administrative purposes along with hindi and english and including tribal heroes from various fields in school textbook .This would help reverse the stereotypical approach of colonial powers.

Even today there has been a very dismal situation of the denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes(the tribes listed in the criminal tribes act, 1871).Reneke committee have recommended identification of these tribes and then allotting them reseervations in education and jobs.It highlighted the lack of focus of government on these tribes in the post independence year till now. This social backwardness needs proper caring and can't be put in the one size fit all categories because these tribes are most backward among the backward tribes. It provides for an opportunity of creating a subcategory among tribes which needs immediate and concrete steps. One more way to tackle this issue can be to organising of camps for identification of these tribes and registering them in all welfare schemes of centre and state.

Naxalism problem is seen as the post independence phenomenon. But the major cause of naxalism is been demarcated as the governance deficit according to the wider consensus among scholars.and this governance deficit has been more extreme during the the pre-independence period. As discussed earlier , the present naxal problem has been tackled through multi pronged strategy by government.One major policy in this regard was the Right to fair compensation, transparency in acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement act,2013.It tries to solve the issue of the proper compensation for the displacement of the tribes during any development work.This aspect has been a major reason for the growing discontent among the tribals. This issue also fuels the passion of naxalism. More can be done in this aspect in terms of differential treatment to the tribal lands , owing to the more backward status of these areas. Also additional fund may be used from the district mineral fund envisaged under mines and minerals development act.

In the colonial times, there was no focus on protecting the marginalised sections such as SCs and STs.There was widespread human right violations at the hands of colonial masters and forest officials of the st community. The oppressive land taxation and agrarian schemes became the instruments of oppression at the hands of britishers. There was extensive oppression of the community without any of the legal statute coming to the rescue of the ST community. But after the independence there were many safeguards provided to protect the STs from exploitation , such as Protection of civil rights act,1955(based on article 17),SC and ST (prevention of atrocities) act.1989, PESA , etc. This emergence of thinking based on separate treatment emanated from the fact that previous attempts to treat the tribals one with the others have failed, especially during the colonial times.This gets highlighted through the series of tribal revolts in india such as Santhal rebellion, Ahom revolt, Kuki revolt, etc.Further, the situations can be improved by making mandatory for NCST for creating a vision pln for the protection of ST rights and make a coordination centre for all the socio economic schemes so as to achieve the targets set under the vision statement.

CONCLUSION

Colonial treatment and perception of the tribal people gave the base upon which new theories could be framed for the tribal administration. One cant sideline the colonial perception to get the better understanding of the tribal affairs as everything unfolded in continuity. Also , it helps in tracing the future needs of the community in the backdrop of changing times.

This write up traced the evolution of tribal policy and tried to analyse the future policy moves which may help to empower the tribal community in the areas pointed out.

SUGGESTIONS

- Compensation for the tribal lands taken should be increased under right to rehabilitation and resettlement , giving differential treatment to the lands of tribal population
- Special body for identification of de-notified , semi-nomadic and nomadic tribes , and then joining them to the socio welfare schemes of state and centre.
- Tracing of tribal specific history through the help of life histories of great men related to that tribe and including some of them to the regular textbooks to fuel the tribal pride.This would boost the tribes psychologically and inspire the youth to contribute the growth journey of tribe and in turn contribute the country as awhole.
- Coordination and assesement of all tribal schemes' effort by NCST and trace the improvement through regular vision statements.
- Special act for boosting tribal languages and increasing its usage in administrative works, especially the works catering to the tribal population.
- Re-evaluation of triballaws having vestiges from the colonial times and make them more compatible with present realities.
- The equal treatment meted out to the women in tribal societies must be propagated to the overall citizenry to instill the spirit of gender equality. This will serve twin purpose.Firstly, it will uplift the tribal spirit among the national population,providing them self pride on their culture. Secondly,it will present an example of how gender neutral approach can build societal and economic cohesiveness.

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