

THE TRIBALS OF JHARKHAND : AN OUTLINE OF THEIR LOT : THE DO'S AND DON'TS

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The talks and discussions on social development of tribals in India started in pre-independence period. But, in global scenario, the problems in the lives of tribals started in the imperial and the colonial period. European colonialism established in North and South America, Australia and New Zealand and right from that period industrial expansion went on and tribals' wealth – water, forest and land faced exploitative attacks from different ways. The Europeans attacked on the lives and social texture of the tribals of India in the 17th, 18th and 19th Century. They wanted to establish industries and land was needed at first for it, and that could be found only in the tribal prone areas. The jungles were their only shelter and pilgrimage; if lost, their lives and culture would remain dormant. It is known that in the pre-independence period, the tribals waged a number of revolts and wars against the Britishers, the Jamindars and the Dikus. Among all, the Kol revolt of West Singhbhum and Santhal revolt of Santhal Pargana are the most important ones in context to Jharkhand. The revolts were because of – 1. The taxation policy of the Britishers, 2. The policing policy, and 3. The Judicial system of the Britishers. The British Government imposed laws of forest conservation which were prohibitory, not constructive. They undertook the right of conservation of the forests and kept the tribals and other common villagers away from forests. This resulted in the non-availability of opportunities to store dry leaves, hunt and use forests as pastures. The tribal youths were either sent to cities or jails, just because of trivial and minor issues. The tribal drink (handia) was restricted and licensed wine-shops were allowed which cast disastrous effect on their livelihood. The wine-trades engaged themselves in preparing chemical-wine, mostly in West Bengal and Orissa. The tribals of the touched and adjacent areas of Santhal Pargana in West Bengal had been dying in numbers owing to adulterated wine. The decline of social systems of the tribals started since the British Rule. In search of peace, many tribals shifted to other states, especially, the north-east states and the migration is still in continuation. The tribals of Jharkhand are declining in numbers also. As per the census of 2001, the total tribal population of Jharkhand was 26%, whereas it has declined to 23% in the census of 2011. This shows that the tribals have either shifted to other states or could not resist the encroachment into their places. In the book related to the rights of the tribals, 'The UN Declaration, Training Manual' (ICOLT), two kinds and reasons have been mentioned regarding the migration of the tribals of Jharkhand :- 1. Enforcingly that is , for work and 2. Self-wish migration. The reasons are :- 1. In search of peace, that is to be aloof from violence and 2.

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In search of livelihood. Interestingly, Jharkhand is much ahead of other states in industrial set up and natural resources. Even though, there are many laws and regulations, yet industries are being set up here in forests keeping the tribals in the darkness of ignorance and livelihood, as they were earlier. In a survey, it has been found that the tribal youths are less in number in the industries, even though the industries are in their ancestral places. Large quantity of coal is being recovered from Dhanbad, Hazaribag and Bokaro, many companies are there in East Sighbhum and mines are also there in adjacent places like Momabani, Rakhamines and Surdamines, the places of copper, zinc and uranium, places of West Singhbhum namely, Jhinkpani, Biskilsoi, Karo and Boro are suffused with mica, iron and coal. Under such circumstances, the tribals of these areas are to remain in peace and prosperity. But this is not so, due to uncontrolled set-up of heavy industries. The forest area has squeezed, the atmosphere is polluted and there is ample quantity of carbon and harmful gases. The water of rivers like Karo, Boro and Subarnarekha has polluted heavily. The water has turned red and filled with arsenic. The tribals of these places are also getting ill. The ill-effect is not only in forests and villages, but it has expanded to towns also. In a medical survey, it has been found that, in Jamshedpur, the average age of man is declining. People are getting ill of heart and lungs diseases. The temperature in summer is increasing to 470 to 480 degree C. Drought or flood has started. So, it is not evident to preserve the society and lives of the tribals in context to the modern civilization. To preserve the tribals is to conserve forests and natural resources but in the contrary, the resources are misused and as the situation is beyond the control of the government, it is not justified to give the tribals anautonomous right to hold lands and dwell in forests? This demand is not only of the tribals but all the land holding people, otherwise the civilization of the capitalists made of iron, brick and cement will also get destroyed. The control of government over the capitalists is very necessary for this. The constitution of India also depicts the vital role to be played by the government and others to preserve the tribal life and culture. This doesn't mean opposition to industries in forest prone areas but a call of the hour is to consider the state of living of the tribals while making policies and setting up industries.

In the era of globalization, it is impossible to discard industries or industrialists according to Marx-Angels but it is the time to build up a good relation between the industrialists and the labour group. This would bring a relief to the problem, according to the Gandhian philosophy. Food, cloth and shelter are not the only needs, but modern education is to be extended to them by the industrialists and government.

The Indian National Congress since its formation (1885) has been criticizing the British Government. In the 10th proposal of Congress, 1891, it was declared – “The strict laws imposed on the forest dwellers, have increased unrest.” In 1893, it declared more clearly – “The forest dwellers are being rudely harassed, the khariyas and others are facing injustice”. The custom laws were also opposed by the congress. In 1903, in the 9th proposal Congress opposed the policy of the Britishers to exclude the tribals from their original shelters and declared – “Congress is opposing the policy of the government to detach the tribals of Dacca, Maymansingh, Chattagram, Chhotanagpur, Vishakhapatnam from their ancestral land.” Again in 1935, it opposed vehemently. In the yearly conferment of congress in 1936 (Faizpur), 1939 (Haripura) congress declared the policy as undemocratic. We can take a speech of Mr. Churchill

as an instance to know the political policy of the British government. Churchill told – “I would not have raised any question, if whole of India was to be excluded”. After this, the National Congress formed the “Excluded Areas” Association in South India and in 1938 opposed it in all the Legislative Assemblies and in Central assembly also. And adding to it, Gandhiji in his constructive and creative list of services to nation, added ‘Tribal Service’ as the 16th one. But in independent India it hasn’t been given forest control rights to a great extent. In India, some districts of North-East States have got such rights.

In Jharkhand, as per the act passed by the central government, some rights have been given to the forest – dwellers but some parts of the central act have not been executed. In opposition to such activities of the government as association has been formed, unitedly by all the tribal groups of India. They are publishing books and magazines also to oppose the government. The Central and State Governments must pay heed to their demands. The relaxed protests may turn to revolts otherwise. I feel necessary to put down some laws which are protested by the tribals. Before that let us have a brief out-line of the different types of tribals of India.

If the tribal society is studied broadly, there may be three classes :- 1. Ancestral tribals who live in forests and far from city civilization and they are the only who have preserved their customs and culture, 2. Ancestral tribals, whose languages are local or regional but live in groups or clans and 3. Ancestral tribals, who have adopted Hindu languages and culture and turned to a ‘Caste’ or ‘Creed’. These people come in contact with the city life and lose their own customs and culture. It is nothing bad to mixup with the non-tribals but it is not good to forget own culture and be Marathi, Bengali, Bihari or Oriya. The same can be said in the rapid process of conversion to Christianity. The Indian anthropologists have opposed it and said – it would be better for the tribals to live in diversity of cultures but to keep own culture unadulterated. Then only, like other groups or communities, the tribals will also come in the main stream of development. They will have to take higher education and establish places of honour in the schools, colleges and universities, adopt special education policy and course curriculum. This is the top most way of social development but not the only one. The social-reformers and anthropologists are of the opinion that the development of the tribals can be done by using their forest holdings with great utility.

Mr. Veriyar Alluine is the foremost exponent of such thought. The tribal groups are also demanding before the governments for the re-establishment of their ancient social set-up and traditional customary laws. But, there is a gap remaining between the policy makers and the tribals. The tribals are now globally trying to unite and demand for their rights to be given – ‘Self Rule in Self Places’, in their language, ‘Aabuba:Hatu Rey, Aabuba: Raj’.

In the regime of the Indra Kumar Gujral’s prime ministership, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Dilip Singh Bhuriya, framed a nice and adoptable bill of self-governance of the tribals. That has been highly acclaimed by different tribal groups and it has been said that the traditional ‘Manki-Munda’, ‘Majhi-Pargana’, ‘Paraha Raja’, Social system has got strength through the bill. It is revised in the 73rd Amendment Act of the Indian constitution and the states were directed to execute it within a year in scheduled areas. Jharkhand government passed the ‘Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Bill-2001’ in 2001 but the ideal of ‘Gram-Sabha’ as in the central act, has not been propounded. The right of self governance over water, Forest and Land of the tribals

has been snatched away. The Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908, has been revised to please the tribals but that has also not been so finely formulated, executed, the recent protests are the proofs to it. As per the CNT act, any non-tribal can't buy tribal land. The government got praise in enacting this but in the meantime, as per section 49 of the act, in the matter of the usage of natural resources, giving the authority to the Deputy Commissioner to settle disputes, the government has denied justice to the tribals. In section 50, it has been declared that any tribal land can be acquired for any national cause and benefit of people in general.

The religious places like 'Jaher Than' and 'Shasandiri' have been under prohibitions as per sub-section 07. In the matters of mining and minerals, the judgement of the Supreme Court (Samta Judgement) is laudable which has been declared keeping the development and self-governance of the tribals in mind. In the judgement it has been depicted that the governments while acquiring land in scheduled areas should come in discussions with the tribal elected cooperative society. In course of acquiring land, the government is to work for resettlement of the tribals as per their traditional living. So, there are a number of laws framed to give rights to the tribals but due to capitalistic inclination, the states are not executing the laws correctly. Recently, 'Forest Dwellers Act' has been executed in Jharkhand, according to which people living in a part of a forest for more than three generations, will get rights to live in that place and the forest guards will not harass them, but the tribals may be punished if found using natural resources more than their need for livelihood. But, still the tribals of forests spend their lives by selling wood in cities and towns. Contractorship is still there. The tribals are not free yet. On 1st December 2011, a contractor was shot in Ranchi. On 3rd December 2011, 22 years old Sabita Riang lost her life after she was shot down by forest guards. Her guilt was that, the members of her family were cutting trees in forest for livelihood. Such problems have been put forward in the bill of gram-sabha by the tribals. They have framed a committee to run the village administration smoothly in which there would be posts of President (Munda), Vice-President (Any Honourable Person), Secretary (who is educated male or female), Deputy Secretary (who will work in absence of the Secretary), Cashier (who is honest, educated), members (one each of the villages and tolas). The committee will call meeting once a month, or four times a year to discuss on varied issues of self-governance. It will deal with any social, political, religious or individual matter. The committee would keep vigil on deforestation and point out the way of conservation of forests. The Gram-Sabha has been empowered to rule out the evil of contractorship. Every year 24th December has been declared to celebrate as the day of establishment of Gram-Sabha. The state governments should be much flexible to enact their well-framed bill for Gram-Sabha otherwise the governments will have to stoop before their revolts. In this context, let us take three examples :-

1. In the banks of rivers Karo and Koyal (near Torpa village of Khunti and Tetratoli, Basia block of Gumla), there was to construct a dam of National Thermal Power to produce 700 MW electricity. It has been successful since 1973. The tribals of 245 villages have protested it. The main cause of protest is, they will lose their farming land, forests and thousand acres of land along with that they will have to lose their religious places like, saran, sasandiri (cemetery), Jaher Than etc.

2. The same thing happened in Chaibasa. The Chaibasa Municipality desired to acquire the land of 13 adjacent villages for developmental works. The Ho tribals protested it and wished to live

away from township. It was a social revolt of near past. They had the fear to lose their ancestral cemetery which was near to the mud houses. The government had to move back.

3. There was a united protest seen on 3rd December 2012 to save a 'Jaher Than'. Villagers of nearly 50 villages under the leadership of Krishna Mardi and Lakhan Tudu, united to save Jaher Than, getting disturbed due to the construction of Tata-Kandra main road. Jaher Than is their holy pilgrimage, ritual belief is attached to it.

4. An M.L.A. of AJSU party demanded before the Governor of Jharkhand to enact the Samta Judgement to get the ancestral land-holdings of the tribals protected along with the natural resources which are being badly exploited since independence (Dainik Bhaskar, 29.01.2013, Page 9).

Thus, a disbelief has created in the minds of the tribals on the laws proposed by the government. They have developed in some cases, bitterness in regards to conservation of forests. This is one of the reasons of migration. A ray of hope is that some foreign institutions are working for tribal self-governance. Funded by Germany, a research office has been opened in Chaibasa, named, BIRSA, to work for the tribals. Its main institution is named as B.F.W., that is, Bread for the World. The Chief of the institution is a learned, Tribal expert and whole hearted man Mr. Chandra Bhushan Deogam. The programmer coordinator of the institute is Mr. Birsingh Sinku. They say that the real mode of better life and livelihood of the tribals is cultivation. There is 54% of agricultural land in the West Singhbhum district (Jharkhand) and if better irrigation facility is extended and the youths are involved in agricultural activities, the tribals will not die of starvation. The people who are having no or less land can live on forests. People may live on traditional medicines made of varied leaves, barks and roots of plants or on poultry farming, sheep and hog rearing. Mr. Deogam emphasizes on water-harvesting. He presents that 70% of rain water in Singhbhum drains away through rivers and sewers which should be tried to conserve by constructing small ponds and dams where fishery can be done. He dictates that no one should give fish to them whereas they should catch fish by themselves. They are working people. They have been existing by hard work and they should labour for livelihood. He wished thus, to see the modern tribal youths to work hard. He in the meantime, wanted educates the tribals in schools,colleges and universities and makes them self-dependent. I take Mr. Deogm as a good example. I find the whole Jharkhand in him. He hasn't adopted Christianity. He deserves many awards in respect to his education and social service.

The tasks conducted by Deogam and others in many parts of the country must be encouraged to keep the tribals in a happy state of mind and thus they can be channelized into the stream of development with self governance and self – motivation.

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