



Impact of Ecology/Environment on Economic Condition of Tribals

Shalini Gupta*

Department of Commerce, M.P.G. College, Mussoorie, U.K., India
Email: drshalinigupta@gmail.com

Abstract

The relationship between human race and flora and fauna has been, currently is and will always be the basis for a harmonious co-existence of humans on Earth. Dependence of mankind on forests has been well known but so is the fact that we have exploited the resources bestowed upon us beyond repair. Tribal communities have historically been greatly dependent on forest resources for their livelihood. They have been able to strike a balance between using resources without exploiting nature. A lot can be learnt from their practices. But they have faced multitude of challenges in light of so-called civilisation and globalisation. This paper presents an analysis of their plight and the laws which have been established to emancipate them. Focus has been laid on their economic condition and how it changed over the period. Several recommendations have also been provided which can help in improving the economic condition of these communities while allowing them to maintain their interaction with environment.

Key Words: Ecology, Tribal, Forest Rights.

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*Corresponding Author

1. INTRODUCTION

From the time immemorial man has to depend upon nature for fulfillment of his basic needs. But the exploitation of nature was very much dependent upon his culture which basically shaped his external environment. It seems that simpler the culture, the more directly, the more dependent man is on nature – hence there is not much of difference between nature and his external world.

In a primitive group, characterized by pre-agricultural level of technology, small population, low level of literacy, fairly isolated and having distinctive linguistic and cultural traits' the economic system is purely Ecology based, hence, the perceived need to maintain the ecological harmony. The perceptions of Ecology of such groups is in a state of conflict, in the changing scenario, when they were forced to keep pace with the so called developed societies and to be part of the natural mainstream.

The tribals of India live in forest hills and isolated regions known by different names, *Vanyajati* (forest dwelling communities), *Vanvasi* (inhabitants of forest), *Anushuchit Janjati*, (Schedule Tribes) is the constitutional name covering all of them.

Hunting – gathering tribes find their totalistic expression in forest ecology. Forest is not only the unit of living but it is a symbol of life. Forest oriented Ecology has been intermingled with the life – situation forming a particular cultural tradition which has penetrated into the value – attitude system of the people living in association with the forest Ecology.

2. HISTORY OF TRIBAL WELFARE EFFORTS

In the constitution of India, due importance has been given to tribal being. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru approaches, widely known as Tribal *panchsheel* has been endorsed. Dhebar Commission (1961) recommended that "Forest Department could be deemed to be charged as branch of the government. The Hari Singh Committee on tribal economy in forest (1967) suggested to provide the tribals work employment in major and minor produces to save the forest from denudation. Emphasis was laid on tribal interest in forest management and on welfare of the inhabitants of forest rather than revenue collection. In the fifth five year plan the Ministry of Home Affairs identified fifty two tribal communities which was raised to seventy four in the report of the working group of scheduled tribes during seventh five year plan. As primitive tribal group (P.T.G.), who remained, completely dependent on forest and were endangered communities. The tribal sub plan strategy was adopted during the fifth five year plan and much emphasis was put on family oriented program during sixth five year plan with the aim of bringing substantial portion of families above the poverty line.

The conference of state ministers of Forest and Tribal Welfare on the "Role of forest in Tribal Economy (1978), recommended that the forestry development instead of being planned in isolation should become as integral part of the comprehensive plan for the area in which needs of local economy should get the higher priority. The conference underlined the need for operative base in conjunction with forest department. It is also recommended that the tribals in forest villagers should be given heritable and inalienable right over the land which they cultivate without any loss of time.

National Seminar on economic development of scheduled tribes (1979) recommended that the forestry plan may be prepared to satisfy the basic needs of tribal economy and to uplift the

communities living in the areas by way of commercial forestry and intensive utilization of forest resources (1980-85). The working group on tribal development recommended that local tribal communities should be accepted as partners in the local forestry development efforts in each area. The working group on development of scheduled tribes during seventh five year plan has made fifteen similar recommendations in its report for 1985-90.

Forest villagers were setup to provide labour to forest department to carry out its commercial activities. Forest villages are located in and around the reserved forest zones. However, the means of communication and other infrastructural facilities are rarely provided to these villages. As per Census 2011, there are about 4526 forest villages in fourteen states of the country.

Major constants which are part of tribal economy are low collection at grass root level, inadequate road communication, lack of storage facilities, lack of processing units, lack of techniques of cultivation and lack of knowledge of the economic use of many items. The forest products such as seed, lac, honey, herbs etc. are those products which are other than timber and are classified as non-timber forests products. Those involve in marketing are (1) Contractors, (2) Cooperatives (3) Government departments. The Govt. of India has established a tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India in August 1987 as a national level apex cooperative marketing organisation. It aims at providing support to the state forest corporations for the interstate and international marketing of minor forest produce and other tribal products. In 1988 National Forest Policy pointed out that all agencies responsible for forest management should associate the tribal people in the protection, regeneration and development of forests.

New outlook was developed towards forest lands during Britishers for they realized the importance of timber and value of teak. The first forest policy was laid down in 1894, highlighting the need of agriculture and animal husbandry for the first time. In 1982 B.K. Roy Barman submitted his report to the ministry of Home Affairs, urging to integrate the forest policy and tribal sub plans for the benefits of tribal economy, regional economy and consequently national economy to balance the ecology through conservation of soil, moisture and plantation program.

The national forest policy of 1988, had as its principal aim, "The essential stability and maintenance of ecological balance including atmospheric equilibrium which are vital for sustenance of all life forms, human animal and plant. It gave due importance to tribal, scheduled casts and other forest dwellers, particularly their requirement of fuel wood, fodder, minor forest produce and small timber so as to provide them sustenance, also visualize that local communities be associated closely in protection, regeneration and development of forest. The policy also ensured the ecological balance took precedence over the economic benefit; for only they can life survive on this planet. It was against this background that the detailed policy "Guide lines" on the Tribal Forest interface were issued in September 1990. By M.O.E.F. after arriving at consensus in state forest ministers conference in 1989. This guide line of 1990's are in way the pivot around which the proposed policy of tribal forest right revolves.

3. OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES

Despite that efforts have been make in the direction of tribal welfare and forest conservation, a combination of historical injustice, cultural exclusion and insensitivity and an inadequate as also depleting resource base both material and human seems to have mitigated against India's tribal.



A major problem is that traditional home lands of tribal communities have been classified as forest land rested with state. In the absence of clearly defined property right, millions of tribal families living in or around forest land can be deemed encroachers and thereby illegal occupants, continually under the shadow of eviction. It is a matter of historical record that all such areas have witness serious conflicts over land rights agitations, dharanas and *rastarokos*, often resulting in loss life.

Survival and livelihood of tribal people by securing for them firm entitlements and property rights is the equally pressing concern about India's declining and degrading forest cover and consequent threat to wildlife and environment.

4. ANALYSIS OF RECOGNITION OF FOREST RIGHTS BILL

An attempt made in schedule tribes (Recognition of Forest rights) Bill, 2005, which is an attempt to settle tribal claims to forest lands by laying down a procedure for recognition and vesting of certain forest rights in forest dwelling tribals.

The rights proposed to the Adivasis include -

- (a) Regularization of forestlands occupied by them before 1980, up to a maximum of 2.5 hectares.
- (b) Nistar or ownership rights to forest resource
- (c) Grazing rights including seasonal ones of nomadic communities.
- (d) Habitation rights for those classified as primitive tribal groups.
- (e) Conversion of forest villages in to revenue villages (Also long standing Government policy).
- (f) Right to community intellectual property, traditional knowledge and cultural diversity related to forest.
- (g) Right to protect traditionally conserved community forest resource.
- (h) Rights accepted under relevant state laws or as customary laws in north eastern states.

The bill specified that no tribal person is to be evicted from currently occupied land till the process of determining rights is completed for the first time in any legislation the process of determining rights has clearly been laid.

The proposed process is as follows. The claims to land and other rights are to be determined through a due process by the Gram Sabha, whose recommendations are to be examined by sub-divisional committee consisting of forest and revenue officials and civil society representative. Then by a district level committee consisting of relevant departments and independent citizens. It is only this committee that can accept or reject the claims.

As regards the conservation is concerned that bill is intended to encourage the use of tribal conservation ethos and practices and to provide a permanent stake for the forest protection by removing the alienation caused by earlier policies.

Within the bill's operative sections the following are worth notion:

- [i] Haunting is explicitly excluded from the list of forest right.
- [ii] All rights are meant only for bona fide livelihood needs and not for exclusively commercial purposes.

- [iii] In no case would forest land beyond 2.5 hectare be allotted, even if someone is currently occupying more.
- [iv] All rights are to be accompanied by the responsibility for protection, conservation and regeneration of forests.
- [v] All the right holders also have the duty to conserve forest and wildlife, protect catchment areas, water resources and ecologically sensitive areas and intimate to *gram sabha* as well as forest authority of any activity that is ecologically destructive.
- [vi] The *gram sabha* is vested with responsibility and authority to stop any activity that adversely affects wildlife, forest and biodiversity.
- [vii] At all level of decision making above gram sabha, forest official are to be involved.

At least these suggest a sincere attempt at providing for conservation safeguards.

The scheme of bill outlined above clearly shows that most of the fears of wildlife and forest conservationist are unrounded. The bill simply ensures that legitimate tribal claims to forests are recognized and accommodated while emplacing the need for participatory mechanism forest preservation.

The bill reinforces and utilizes the rich conservation ethos and cantons against any form of unsustainable or destructive practices; lays down a simple procedure for recognition and vesting of forest rights so that rights vested in forest dwellings tribal communities become legally enforceable proved for adequate safeguards to avoid any further encroachment of forest and thereby strengthen the conservation regime by giving permanent state to ST's dwelling forest in a symbiotic relationship with the entire ecosystem.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is an age when everyone has to interact trade with each other. Invariably the less educated people end up being exploited. The fact is that no one including tribal, now want to deprive of decent livelihood opportunities, education, roads, hospital and other modern social amenities. The total tribal population which was 52 million in 1981, will rise to 121 million by the year 2011. The act talks about, tribal existence should be protected, but promises every encouragement to younger generations who live in and around to forest, move to urban surrounding to give them access to development opportunities.

Bona fide livelihood needs are distinguished form commercial purposes which result in profit or involve large scale trade. While the bill empowers the tribal communities to the extent of their localized livelihood needs to expressly forbid the exploitation of forest or its products from commercial purpose. The fear in many quarters that bill will open up the forest for commercial exploitation and development-induced destruction, the bill in section 4(3) makes forest right heritable with tribal families but inalienable and nontransferable. Therefore the land and other forest rights the tribal people gain from this bill cannot be simply taken away, not even by any coercive or fraudulent means.

In sum, tribal communities ought not to be blamed for the degradation of the forest. They are poor and often violently oppressed community fighting for the recognition of rights that are historically and essentially theirs. There are far more powerful actors with vested commercial



interest who threaten forest but do not evoke the suspicion they deserve. Poachers and celebrity hunters are no less detrimental. It has to be viewed in right perspective to recognize the historical injustice and deforestation that modern development and imbalanced conservation have created. Conservationist, human right activist and marginalized communities should come together to see that forests became symbol of life.

It is only recently that forest management regimes have realized that tribal communities, who depend primarily on forest resources can should be integrated in their design management process. Forest have the best chance to survive if communities participate in its conservation. Insecurity of tenure and fear of eviction are perhaps the biggest reason why tribal communities are fearful. This historical injustice now needs correction before it is too late to save our forests dwelling Scheduled Tribes on all kinds of forest lands for generations. Both bona fide needs of forest land for sustenance and usufruct from forest are the fundamental basis on which the proposed legislation stand.

With some improvement it will integrate conservation with sustainable livelihoods, restore dignity in to the life of millions of the tribal people and forest dweller put in place new governance system in the forest, where the legitimate citizens of the forest well themselves take on the duty to protect the forest wealth of the nation. For are prime duty to make them fully aware to the extent to which they can manipulate and not exploit there ecology on which they depend for their very sustenance. For large scale exploitation only means death and destruction economy is so much ecology based that we should keep in view holistic and sustainable developments.

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