

## **A Study on Empowering Scheduled Tribes towards Political Process in India**

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**Abstract:** The concept of 'tribe' has generated much debate in colonial and post colonial discourses, yet its contours lack explicit definition, despite its popular use in the discourses of social anthropologists, administrators, lawyers, tribal activists, politicians, and the government and international agencies. There has been more concern with the identification of tribes than with their definition in India. Popular discourse uses terms such as tribes, Scheduled Tribes, indigenous people, vanjati, adivasi and jana interchangeably. Nevertheless, each evokes different connotations and genealogies of use and representation in India. The concept of empowerment in its current usage is very new, as it does not find place in the Encyclopaedia, a number of dictionaries and glossaries of sociology textbooks. According to Biteille (1999:589), empowerment is related to certain context in Indian society. In his own words, "in a nutshell, that context is the contradiction between a hierarchical social order and a democratic political system". He opines further, "the idea of empowerment may be invoked in virtually any context: in speaking about human rights, about basic needs, about economic security, about capacity building, about skill formation or about the conditions of a dignified social existence".

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Date of Submission: 10-01-2018

Date of acceptance: 25-01-2018

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Indian tribal communities are distinguished by religion and culture from the caste groups. Many 19th and 20th century monographs on India habitually confused tribe with caste, although caste is a different kind of social category. The 1901 Census of India used 'animism' as the criteria to distinguish between castes and tribes. Tribes were defined in opposition to caste, as lacking caste attributes. - hierarchy, purity and pollution, kinship-based, technologically primitive, economically homogenous, and politically segmentary groups, practicing animism, possessing distinctive languages and placed at the margins of the state control. Postcolonial ethnographic studies have debunked representations of tribes being 'an isolated, self-contained and primitive social formation', since tribes and castes have coexisted in proximity with other social formations.

On the basis of geographical distribution, ethnical characteristics and linguistic affiliations in India of the tribal groups can be broadly divided into three distinct zones viz., north-eastern, central and southern. The first one is the habitat of the Naga, Mizo, Khasi, Garo, Rabha, Dafla, Apatani belonging to Mongoloid racial stock and speaking dialects of Sino-Tibetan and Tibeto – Burman family of languages but for a little admixture of Mon-Khmer speech. They are spread over the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, etc. The central zone spans the States of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat in which major tribal groups like the Oraon, Santhal, Munda, Bhil, Gond, Kolam, Khond, Baiga, Bhil, Savara live. In general they speak dialects of either Austric or Dravidian family of languages, their physical features bring mostly proto-Australoid. The tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala form part of the southern zone where the Chenchu, Koya, Bagata, Gadaba, Kadar, Irulu, Toda, Kota, Yerukula, Yenadi inhabit. They belonging to the proto-Australoid racial stock and speak dialects of the Dravidian family.

### **II. HISTORICAL VIEW ON LAW AND POLICY FOR THE SCHEDULED AREAS:**

In fact, the State Government was statutorily enjoined to give effect to the advice of the Council. It was obligatory for the Governor to act accordingly on the advice of TAC on matters such as land, village administration and village Panchayats and customs of tribes. The transfer of land in a Scheduled Area from a tribal to a nontribal was forbidden and the State Government was prohibited from allotting State land in a

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Scheduled Area to the non-tribals. Likewise, if advised by the Council, the Governor was obliged to license money lending. These complicated provisions were reconsidered by the drafting committee and it was felt that conferring so much legislative and executive powers on the Tribal Council in complicated matters of law and legal procedure might adversely affect the safeguarding of the interests of the tribal population. Consequently, several amendments were proposed and the role of the TAC was eventually reduced to a purely consultative body. The responsibility for the welfare of Scheduled Areas was squarely on the State Government subject to the control the Central Government.

The founders of the Indian Constitution were deeply conscious of the miserable conditions of the tribals who were segregated from the national mainstream. After Indian Independence, the tribals acquired a new significance as they were subjugated through a number of conscious and elaborate influences. The Government of India has launched various projects for tribal welfare, and various special provisions have been laid down in the Constitution as planned economic development has been inaugurated by the post independence Government. Under the Constitution of India, special provisions have been made for the promotion of socio, economic and educational development of Scheduled tribes. The main provisions relating to Scheduled Tribes are contained in the Articles 15(4), 16(4), 19(5), 23, 29, 46, 164, 275(1), 330, 332, 334, 335, 338, 342, and Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution.

### **III. GOVERNANCE IN SCHEDULED AREAS**

The Governor of a State has special powers of legislation with respect to the Scheduled Area. They are: legislation by notification and legislation by regulation. The Governor of a State is responsible for deciding whether an act of Parliament or of the State legislature is suitable or unsuitable for Scheduled Areas. The State Governor by public notification can direct that any act of Parliament or the State Legislature shall not apply to a Scheduled Area. The Governor can issue the notification without any reference either to the Tribal Advisory Council or to the President of India. The Governor has been empowered to make regulations for peace and good Government of Scheduled Areas. Such regulations may in particular prohibit or restrict the transfer of Scheduled Area land by or among members of the Scheduled Tribes. The regulations may regulate the allotment of Scheduled Area land to members of the Scheduled Tribes. The regulations are also concerned with regulating the business of moneylenders, who lend money to members of the Scheduled Tribes in Scheduled Areas. The regulation making power of the Governor is subject to some limitations as specified in the Fifth schedule of the Constitution. The regulation should be made with prior consultation of the Tribal Advisory Council. The regulation should be submitted to the President and shall not have effect until as sented to him.

Fifth Schedule (Para 3) of the Constitution provides that the Governor of each State having Scheduled Areas should annually or whenever required so by the President make a report to the President, to keep the Union Government informed of the administration in Scheduled Areas. On the basis of this report, the Union Government issues directives to the respective State Governments for better administration of the Scheduled Areas.

### **IV. TRIBAL POPULATION IN INDIA:**

Tribals constitute 8.61% of the total population of the country, numbering 104.28 million (2011 Census) and cover about 15% of the country's area. The fact that tribal people need special attention can be observed from their low social, economic and participatory indicators. Whether it is maternal and child mortality, size of agricultural holdings or access to drinking water and electricity, tribal communities lag far behind the general population (Tribes in India. The population of Scheduled tribes had grown at the growth rate of 24.45% during the period 1991-2001. More than half the Scheduled Tribes population is concentrated in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand and Gujarat. The decadal population growth between the Census Year 1971 to 1981 in respect of the tribal population has been higher (35.79%) than that of the entire population (25.0%). The decadal population growth between the Census Year 1981 to 1991 in respect of the tribal population has been higher (31.64%) than that of the entire population (23.51 %). Similarly during census year 1991 to 2001 it has been 24.45% against the growth rate of 22.66% for the entire population. The ST population in the State of Karnataka has witnessed the highest growth rate of 80.82% followed by Nagaland (67.23%). The increased rate of population growth, in some cases, however, is as a result of addition of new communities to the STs list. The lowest growth rate in respect of ST population as per 2001 census was recorded in Andaman & Nicobar (10.08%) followed by Himachal Pradesh (12.02%) (**Marbaniang S.L.**, Status of Scheduled Tribes).

**Table-1: Trends in Proportion of Scheduled Tribe Population**

| Census Year  | Total population (in millions) | Scheduled Tribes Population (in millions) | Proportion of STs population |
|--|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1961   | 439.2                          | 30.1                                      | 6.9                          |
| 1971   | 547.9                          | 38.0                                      | 6.9                          |
| 1981#  | 665.3                          | 51.6                                      | 7.8                          |
| 1991@  | 838.6                          | 67.8                                      | 8.1                          |
| 2001\$   | 1028.6                         | 84.3                                      | 8.2                          |
| 2011   | 1210.8                         | 104.3                                     | 8.6                          |
| # Excludes Assam in 1981 @ Excludes Jammu & Kashmir in 1991<br>\$ The figures exclude Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur, census 2001, |                                |   |                              |

Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs Statistics Division, 2013:2

The trend in ST population since Census 1961 is illustrated in Table-I. From 30.1 million in 1961, the ST population has increased to 104.3 million in 2011. The size of Scheduled Tribe (ST) population is at considerable level. The latest Census, 2011, shows that there is about 5.9 million ST population forming 7% of the total population in state. There is about four-fold increase of STs in the state during last five decades period i.e. between 1961 and 2011. It was about 1.3 million in 1961, accounted for 3.7% of the total population. The proportion of STs in the total population has increased over time in the state as well as in the country. However, as compared to all-India, the percentage of STs in the total population was nearly 2 percentage points lower in the state. The share of the state in India with respect to ST population had declined especially since 1991.

#### SEX RATIO:

As compared to the sex ratio for the overall population (940 females per 1000 male), the sex ratio among Scheduled Tribes is more favourable, at 990 females per thousand males (2011 Census), though also declining (Ministry of Tribal Affairs Statistics Division, 2013:2).

**Table-2: Comparison of Population of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and All Categories (In Crores)**

| Type      | Scheduled Caste |      | Scheduled Tribe |      | All Categories |       |
|-----------|-----------------|------|-----------------|------|----------------|-------|
|           | 2001            | 2011 | 2001            | 2011 | 2001           | 2011  |
| Male      | 8.6             | 10.3 | 4.3             | 5.2  | 53.2           | 62.3  |
| Female    | 8.1             | 9.8  | 4.2             | 5.1  | 49.6           | 58.7  |
| All-India | 16.7            | 20.1 | 8.4             | 10.4 | 102.9          | 121.1 |

Source: Census 2001 & 2011

#### SCHEDULE TRIBE POPULATION IN ANDHRA PRADESH

In fact, STs in Andhra Pradesh as well as in the country are not homogeneous group, there are a number of sub-castes/groups – they are about 33 sub-tribes in the state. Important ones in the state are *Gonds*, *Koyas*, *Konda Reddies*, *Savaras* and others. As a matter of fact, a sharp rise in the size of ST population in the state particularly during the 1970s was due to the inclusion a community called *Lambada/sugali*, which mostly lives in the plains, into ST category in 1977. When *lambadas* were notified as STs in Andhra Pradesh, many *lambadas* from the neighbouring states of Maharashtra and Karnataka migrated to Andhra Pradesh to claim ST status. The *lambadas* are, in fact, the single largest tribal group and constitute about 40% of the ST population in Andhra Pradesh (Venkatanarayana, 2006). While some of the tribes like *Sugali*, *Yanadi* etc., are located in plain areas, most of the Primitive Tribe Groups (PTGs) are still living hill forests.

Thus, across districts in the state, STs are mostly concentrated in the hilly and forest areas of Srikakulam, Vijayanagaram, Visakhapatnam, East and West Godavari, Khammam, Warangal and Adilabad districts. Of the total ST population in the state, the major proportion (nearly 55%) is located in Telangana. In some districts, the ST and SCs together account for more than one-third of the total population. The share of SC/ST together was highest (43%) in Khammam followed by Adilabad (35.3%), Nellore and Warangal (each 31.1%). The share of SC/ST was lowest in Hyderabad (8.9%) followed by Srikakulam (15.0%), Anantapur (17.6%) and Kadapa (18.1%).

In terms of growth of population in Andhra Pradesh, while the total population of the state was growing at 2% per annum between 1961 and 2001, the ST population of the state had grown at 2.5%. More specifically, between 1991 and 2001, the total population of state grew at 1.4% per annum whereas the ST population grew at 1.8%. It is interesting to notice that the community (STs) in the state has registered a

relatively lower rate of growth during 1991- 2001 than that of all India average for all communities (1.9%). It is also noticed that state had registered a decelerated rate growth of population across social groups especially during last three decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **DEVELOPMENTAL PLANS FOR INDIAN SCHEDULED TRIBES:**

Along with being geographically and socially isolated, the tribal groups have historically been politically under-represented. Their regions of residence also have been economically underdeveloped. Scheduled tribe status under the Indian Constitution has designated reserved seats for tribals in political forums, such as the parliament, along with job reservations in the civil service and educational institutions (Indian Scheduled Tribes).

Indira Gandhi introduced what is called as Tribal Sub-Plan in the planning process, earmarking a portion of funds for tribal development. Only to ensure their share of the Central Plan allocations, the States started the notification of tribal areas again. However, the money seldom reached the tribals.

When Rajiv Gandhi's successors passed 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution to enact Panchayat and Nagarpalika Bills, *they simply forgot that these do not automatically become applicable to Tribal and Scheduled Areas* and hence failed to pass an appropriate law through the parliament (Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996. pp.7-8,.

#### **EMPOWERING TRIBALS IN GOVERNANCE:**

The landmark achievement of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution in 1993 and the enactment of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, in 1996, has brought forth a definite shift in the strategy of the Government to bring the people, especially the tribals into the main arena of planning and implementation of various development programmes. This, in fact, acts as the means for achieving social justice and empowerment of tribals at the very grassroot levels where their life and activities operate and their communities function.

With the strength and support of PESA Act, 1996 the traditional Gram Sabhas in the tribal areas are being endowed with special functional powers and responsibilities to ensure effective participation of the Tribal Societies in their own development and in harmony with their culture so as to preserve/ conserve their traditional rights over natural resources. All states, except Bihar have, so far, enacted parallel State legislations to give effect to the provisions of the PESA Act, 1996.

Thus, the PESA Act, 1996 is a landmark legislation which is going to legitimise the involvement of tribals in their own empowerment process not only as active participants, but also as effective decision-makers, implementors, monitors, supervisors and evaluators.

#### **POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA:**

India is a federal republic with a parliamentary system of government, where the formal political structure parallels that of the national structure. The Parliament of India consists of the President of India and the two Houses (The Upper House (also called the Rajya Sabha or Council of States) and The Lower House (also called the Lok Sabha or House of the People). Those elected or nominated to either house of the Parliament are referred to as members of parliament (or MPs). The states in India follow similar structure where The Upper House is called Vidhan Parishad (or Legislative Council) and The Lower House is called the Vidhan Sabha (or Legislative Assembly). Those elected or nominated to either house of the Parliament are referred to as Member of Legislative Assembly (or MLAs). Both federal and states are divided into single-member constituencies and characterized by a first-past-the- post election system. Electors cast one vote for a candidate in their respective constituency and candidates compete in elections to win the single-member legislative constituency by plurality. Elections are scheduled to take place every 5 years; although it is possible to have elections before the 5-year term mostly due to shifting of political alignments.

A large number of seats in the Parliament of the country, State Assemblies, Local Municipal Bodies and Village level institutions are reserved for Dalits or Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The election of SC and ST candidates is by a Joint or mixed electorate, which includes all castes, even though the SC/Dalits and ST/tribes may be in a minority in the constituency. This system was introduced by the constitution of India in 1950 and was supposed to be in place for the first 10 years, to ensure participation in politics by these groups which were deemed weak and needing special protection. However, the reservations have been continued even after that period and have become a permanent feature of Indian politics, as the SC/Dalits and ST/tribals constitute a quarter of the total voting population and no politician can afford to be seen as doing anything seemingly against the interests of these groups, as that is considered political suicide in India. In practice, out of 543 constituencies represented in India's parliament, 84 (15.47%) are reserved for SC/Dalits and 47 (8.66%) for ST/Tribes. Allocation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the Lok Sabha are made on the basis of proportion of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the State concerned to that of the total

population, vide provision contained in Article 330 of the Constitution of India read with Section 3 of the R. P. Act, 1950. In addition, SC/Dalit and ST/tribal leaders are also chosen as their representatives by non-reserved constituencies with substantial Dalit and tribal populations. Therefore, the SC/ST group is eagerly wooed by all Indian political parties, who want to be seen as the most ardent protectors of SC/ST interests (Reserved political positions in India).

#### **POLITICAL REPRESENTATION:**

There are reserved seats for scheduled tribes in Parliament and the state legislatures. In the two houses of Parliament, the Lok Sabha and the Rajiya Sabha, 7 per cent of the seats were reserved for members of scheduled tribes, and similar representation occurs in the state assemblies in proportion to the percentage of scheduled tribes in the state's population. However, since the scheduled tribe voters are always a minority (except in the north-eastern states where they are a numerical majority) in the reserved constituencies and in the legislatures as a whole, favourable legislation can be blocked by vested interests. Furthermore, the system does not encourage organization of scheduled tribes by separate parties but limits it to organization and representation by the major parties, especially the Congress Party. Governments usually have ministers from scheduled tribes, including sometimes cabinet ministers, specifically to look after the affairs of scheduled tribes. The Bhuria Committee was set up by indigenous MPs to secure the extension of the 73rd and 74<sup>th</sup> articles of the constitution, which devolve authority to the Scheduled Areas. It presented its report in January 1995. The Bhuria Committee Report has drawn mixed reactions. While many feel that the process initiated by the Committee should be supported, it has been criticized because its recommendations do not extend to many indigenous areas, and because of a lack of gender sensitivity. There have been very few attempts to found distinctive scheduled tribe political parties, apart from those in the north-eastern states. Perhaps the most notable example has been in eastern and southern Bihar, where an Adivasi regionalist movement known as the Jharkhand movement has been a factor since independence. The roots of this movement lie in the Santhal peoples of eastern Bihar and western Bengal, the scene of one of the early indigenous revolts against land alienation under British rule. Some of this area also contains India's richest mineral deposits and mining, and subsequent industrialization and deforestation have added to Adivasi grievances.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Biteille gives a concrete proposal of empowerment by suggesting a radical change in social composition of the strategic institutions of society, in particular the various organs of the state. He opines that the institutions of society with diverse social groups will be more open and more sensitive in its approach to the larger problems of society (Biteille 1999: 596). For achieving empowerment in the society, he suggests two paths: one, there is a laborious and unexciting process through expansion of the civic, political and social rights of citizenship. Second is by providing as extensively as possible quota to the un-empowered on the basis community, caste and gender. But in this case, we have to compromise with the ideals of our Constitution, which assigns the rights and capacities to the citizens as individuals, and not to castes and communities, or men and women separately.

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IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

K. Annamani Rao "A Study on Empowering Scheduled Tribes towards Political Process in India." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 23 no. 1, 2018, pp. 58-63.