

Tribal livelihood and the tribes of pre-divided Koraput in the development discourse

Dr. Kapila Khemundu*

* Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Central University of Odisha, Koraput, Odisha,
Sunabeda -763004, India
kapilacuo@gmail.com

Abstract

Objectives: To understand tribal livelihood in pre-divided Koraput with reference to tribal development.

Methods/ Statistical Analysis: This study is an attempt to highlight tribal livelihood opportunity in the pre-divided Koraput region, the plight of tribes and their exploitation in the various spheres of social life. This study is based on observation and experience accumulated from field visits accompanied with secondary sources of data collected from SC ST Research Institute, Bhubaneswar, Central Library CUO, and District Planning Office Koraput in India.

Findings: Entire tribal life was revolving around their natural resource based economic activities. The excessive interventions of human civilization in development activities based on natural resources have created major challenges for the sustainability of the tribal livelihood. After India got independence in 1947, several plans and programmes were under taken for the development of tribes in pre-divided Koraput and in the KBK region but no such remarkable achievement has made so far in bridging the gap of inequality among tribes and non-tribes. The illiteracy; alcohol practice and drug addiction; tradition bound culture; lack of awareness among the people; poor infrastructure facility; various forms of exploitation by non-tribes; unfriendly development policies; deforestation; mining activities; and lack of leadership poses a major challenges for tribal livelihood and tribal development.

Application/Improvement: The commercial utilization of available forest and mineral resources with the participation of tribal community can generate employment opportunity. Along with educating the tribes, the development practitioners may extensively work on sustainable livelihood among the tribes enhancing their traditional skills.

Keywords: Tribal Livelihood, Development, Discourse, Natural Resources, Koraput Region

1. Introduction

The pre-divided Koraput district was consisting of present four districts namely Koraput, Rayagada, Malkangiri, and Nabarangpur. All the aboriginal inhabitants of Koraput were notified by British Government as Hill Tribes in 1917. In [1] the recent trend of economic development the issues pertaining to Tribal livelihood seem to be like old wine in a new bottle. The tribal livelihood has its historical roots largely depend upon the natural resources. From time immemorial tribes of Koraput region habituated to live in and around forest and perennial streams. Their traditional livelihood base on the practice of food collection and hunting along with fishing and shifting cultivation now in the brink of lose. In otherwise speaking the entire tribal life was revolving around their natural resource based economy. With the excessive interventions of human civilization in development activities based on natural resources have created major challenges for the tribes as well as for the nation as a whole. Keeping modern occupations aside from their traditional livelihood practices, these tribal communities either reluctant or unable to take up the science and technology based livelihood opportunities. Because the livelihood system are made up of very diverse components including their physical and mental ability, economical viability and ability to adapt socio-cultural complexities in a given social set up. Surjit Sinha pointed out; it was the British scholars who felt that the tribes were outside the frame of varna-jati system.

The tribes themselves presented a wide spectrum of relationship with the plough cultivators from complete isolation to close interaction. He analyses the mutually adaptive strategies of Indian civilization vis-a-vis tribal culture. The civilization absorbed the tribes but maintained their identity, and also determined their isolation [2]. After India's independence many tribal development projects have been undertaken for the tribes in pre-divided Koraput and in the KBK region but no such remarkable achievement has made so far in bridging the gap of inequality among tribes and non-tribes. The Major question is that though the tribes own the land, they have their representatives from their own communities in various decision making bodies and government functionaries but yet to achieve the goals of tribal development. It is perhaps due to the recent trend of economic development driven by market economy, the tribals are increasingly facing threats to their sovereignty, loss of environment, and access to natural resources. The large scale deforestation has threatened their subsistence livelihood. With the impact of modernity, industrial progress and displacements of people and due to mining activities, the growth of urbanization has jeopardized their social life. Indeed the recent trends of economic development along with globalization processes pose a threat to tribal identity. It is also seen that, particular tribal communities are, due to historical and environmental circumstances found them outside the state-system and underrepresented in decision making processes both at local as well as at national level. S.P. Srivastav pointed out that the development strategies followed today are under the promising guidance of international monetary policies of the economically and industrially developed countries. In the wake of liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG) and alarming presence of market forces, the developing countries are slowly trailing from its power to identify its improvement programme that suits to India's economy and power [3].

The implementations of welfare programme and special development project like KBK is necessary for the wellbeing of the tribes and ensure their livelihood. In India tribal groups are discriminated in different ways on because of their particular culture, mode of production, and their marginalized position in the society. The term livelihood refers to arrangement of living situation of people in other words it a technique and way of people's attempt to secure their livelihood. Providing secured livelihood in general and particularly among illiterate tribes in an undeveloped place like schedule area of Koraput, it is a major constrain for the people as well as government to keep pace with the growth of science and technology and get trained in modern occupations. The word livelihood could be understood through multidimensional approach. The factors like polity, culture, economy, education, science and technology, and available natural resources largely impact the livelihood conditions of the people. After independence government of India is committed for tribal development and have been undertaken several development projects through Planning Commission of India (now renamed as NitiAyog) and created a separate department known as Ministry of Tribal Affairs. With the implementation of tribal development programmes there is significant changes taken place in the living conditions of the tribes. Tribal representations in various positions in government offices, Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) through 73rd Constitutional amendment, State Legislative Assembly, and in the Loksabha of Indian Parliament have brought significant changes among the tribal groups all over the country. But in the backward and isolated remote pockets like pre-divided Koraput region is yet to witness the tribal development. The road conditions, *kutchha* house with thatched roof, inadequate infrastructure in public offices tells the story of economic progress in the region. There are various approaches to tribal development.

Prakash Chandra Mehta in his work Some Critical Issues in Tribal Development has discussed five major approaches i.e. political, administrative, religious, voluntary agency approach, and anthropological approach. It is observed that, all these approaches are at work in the pre-divided Koraput region for the sustainable livelihood and economic improvement of the tribal communities. There may be argument that enough has been done for the tribal welfare and tribal development since independence, but the irony is that even after more than 73rd years of India's independence and implementations of affirmative action's, tribes as separate racial groups have not been occupied an adequate place in the government offices and democratic institutions of our country. If we look at, in Odisha about 45 % of state geographical area is falling under schedule area and tribes comprise a significant size of its population. Tribal population in Odisha comprises a significant size of its total population but in development index as well as their representation in democratic institutions their number is very few or nil in some cases.

Democratic institutions here it is referred to government offices, school, college, bank, cooperatives, temple, church, civil society organizations, public undertakings, etc. for the purpose of development discourse. This suggests the real scenario of tribal development in pre-Koraput region. As a researcher, if we analyze this situation and locate it in development discourse several question may arises. The question like, what is the reason for having these democratic institutions in tribal region? Who owns these democratic institutions? Who are the people who run these democratic institutions? If we search answer to these questions, it may not be wrong to point out that the several thousand years old past legacy of ideological orientations and rivalry sharply divide between the tribes and non-tribes. Anthropologist L.P. Vidyarthi and Binay Kumar Rai identified that we have actively thought of and planned for the uplift of our tribes since independence. They have also suggested that, our former Prime Minister late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru gave serious thought to the problems of tribal welfare and suggested his own enlightened approach that, tribal development may be carried out as per the skill and proficiency resources available. We should not call tribes as primitive and consider ourselves as highly civilized [4].

2. Livelihood opportunities for tribes in pre-divided Koraput: prospects and challenges

The Koraput in Indian States of Odisha has rich deposits of natural resources in the form of minerals, water and forest resources in its lush valley of mountains and hills. The traditional livelihoods of tribes are largely gets affected because of the following reasons. (i) Firstly, the new trend of economic development based on natural resources in terms of mines, industries, hydro-electricity projects, forest based and agro based industries create employment opportunities but tribes do not possess required and adequate skills to get themselves engaged in available job opportunities. In the other hand, some of them possess the skills but they face fierce challenge from the non-tribes and fail to compete with their superior skill. (ii) Secondly, fetching the job by the non-tribes with their bureaucratic influence, political affiliation and giving bribe is another challenge for the tribes which they cannot do. Though tribes including the population of previously (1917-1950) called hill tribes constitutes about 90% of its total population and despite having their numerical strength they fail to secure their livelihood opportunities. (iii) The gradual depletion of forest and natural resources also adversely affects tribal livelihood. The forest policy of the government of India and Wild Life Protection Act also discourage their traditional livelihood. (iv) The traditional livelihood of tribes also heavily depends on the agriculture activities. The substantial growth of tribal population and division of stringent agricultural land among the family members have changed the land holding pattern and reduced its size. The irregular monsoon also largely affects the agricultural produces and farmers suffer in several occasions due to either flood or drought. (v) The price hike of the essential commodities in this globalized open market and lack of encourage for the promotion of the products produced by the tribes are the responsible factor that affects their livelihood. (vi) The ineffective implementation of tribal plans and programmes, unspent allocated budget for tribal development affects the tribal livelihood. (vii) The low level of literacy and awareness among the tribes due to inadequate road, schooling, electricity supply, and health facility, supply of drinking water, transportation and communication facility adversely affect their livelihood. Seventh, the work culture among the tribes and their living styles of consuming alcohol and country made liquor addiction do not allow tribal mind set to move out from their villages and take livelihood opportunities available in the nearby urban centers. (vii) Various forms of exploitation of tribes in the form of land, resources, market places, and public offices due to their simplicity, humbleness and honesty.

3. Tribes of pre- divided Koraput in development discourse

Pre-divided Koraput is a schedule area and lots of fund allocated in the name of development as tribal sub plan grant. That apart the region is covered under KBK a special project for the development of the tribes. Other than private industries like Balarpur Industrial Ltd. (paper mill at Jeypore), JK paper at Rayagada, IMPHA Therubali, cement factory at Ampavali Pottangi, there are also some large industries like NALCO, HAL, Utkal Alumina, and Vedant mining works are going on in the region. The multipurpose river dam and irrigation project like Machhkund Power House, Upper Kolab, Indravati, Balimela, Jolaput Dam, and Sileru Dam, etc.

There are fair chances for the tribes of this region to secure their livelihood opportunities but in reality they are being deprived of it. Though the tribes of the region have to bear a huge cost of losing their fertile agriculture land native places for the sake of development and national interest, their problems are not being addressed properly. There are civil society groups working for the tribal development and under taking various issues concerning to tribal livelihood but the situation is yet to be improved. Other than the state and central Government funds, some of the eligible large industries are also carrying out corporate social responsibility activities in the region.

If we analyze the overall development of the region in the context of tribal livelihood it seems the word tribe has been used like commodity. Whosoever wants would like to materialize the word tribe in the name of development. If it continues the tribal survival strategy with sustainable livelihood will be under threat. The question arises who is using the word tribe as a commodity? The answer to this question requires a meticulous understanding and a careful analysis in the development discourse. Undoubtedly in the context of tribal development, tribe as an abstract category became instrumental to have a vote bank in political processes, unique legislation for policy formulation, for bureaucrats it is a separate target group and achieving target is an award winning objective, for the academicians it is paradise for research and documentation. The major question in the context of tribal development discourse with reference to tribal livelihood is that, who is talking about the tribes and why? The answer to this may be sought from various corners where people are being involved and concern with tribal development approach. There are people from across the discipline and profession having sympathetic view in their thought and actions. Their efforts are not enough to solve the issues and challenges facing by the tribes in their livelihood strategies. Despite having remarkable achievements through various development approaches, the problems and issues concerning to the tribal livelihood remained as most important focal point with lack luster spirit of executions. In the study of issues with reference to tribal livelihood and various forms of tribal exploitation in the context of ongoing identity politics determining racial and ethnic boundaries in a rational approach it is felt that tribals have been subjected to social injustice. If a careful analysis is done regarding lack luster spirit of tribal development, what is happening now? There may be many answers and some of them are reflected here. In the recruitment in government jobs despite having reservation reserved seats for tribes are not being on the ground of merit, efficiency, skill, performance and career assessment. In many cases seat reserved for tribes are scrapped on the ground of non-availability of suitable candidate. These vacant seats are deserved and converted to open category. The government policies like forest policy, displacement and rehabilitation policy, land policy, industrial policy, immovable property act. Mining policy, etc. are failing to protect the interest of the tribes. The inclusive economic growth of India with the principles of social justice is not adhered.

In [5] pre-divided Koraput region some of the major development projects like Machhkund, HAL, Indrabati, Kolab, NALCO, Sileru, Vedant, Utkal Alumina, JK Paper, IMPHA, BILT, Jolaput Dam, and some other irrigation Projects have displaced lakhs of tribal families and rooted them out from their traditional livelihood creating environmental degradation and industrial hazards in the region. Whereas, the non-tribes with the help of their political nexus and unfair means acquired key positions in democratic institutions, government and private services, trade and business enterprises in Koraput region also regulate the forces of productions and acquire the ownership of resources in the schedule area of pre-divided Koraput region. According to Behera and Jumyar, in the recent trend of development the status of tribes reduces from resource guards to resource refugees, the promises of a better standard of living to project-affected people in the relocation site are list fulfilled. The development process that alienates the tribes from their resources marks the continuity of historical injustice which people had to suffer during industrialization and colonial rule.

4. Conclusion

The pre-divided Koraput in Indian States of Odisha is the ancestral home of some of the primitive tribal communities. There are some other tribal groups; they are not declared as the primitive tribes but they are in the primitive stage of development. Poverty, illiteracy, superstitions, oracle, magic, believe in naturism and animism governs their social life.

Looking into the diversity in Indian society and in the wake of communal as well as divisive politics, competitive ideology based on contemporary socio-cultural obscurity the survival of tribes are under threat and tribals being the most backward and poor community of Indian society are vulnerable and prone to fall in danger in their livelihood. It is felt that the socio-cultural values of tribal community must be taken care of while framing the various plans and programmes for their welfare. The participatory approach is an important strategy for their capacity building. Their resource bases of livelihood must be preserved and protected through a sustainable approach. The centuries old various forms of exploitation, suppression and dominance has broken the backbone of the tribal communities. As a result it became difficult on their part to create leadership among the tribes. It is the tribes who could able to express their problems and issues in a better manner than the non-tribes. The tribes in the region have a unique cultural heritages and each tribe is having their unique practices. With decline of the forest lands, agriculture became their main sources of income. There is the wide technology gap and tribes use the traditional primitive technology in the agricultural practices. Agriculture is one of the single largest sector of that provides livelihood opportunities to the tribes. The promotion of modern technology in agriculture sector along with use of ICT may improve the living conditions of the tribes. The tribal development sector needs to take extra effort to take care about the tribes and protect them from the exploitation from non-tribes. There is the dire need of research and survey works regarding the feasibility for potential uses of ICT for Tribal Development which could be helpful in the policy making processes.

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