



Natural Resource Management: Where We Went Wrong? The Ground Situation of Forest Dwellers in Forest Resource Rich Area of India

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Abstract The world is not a fair place and it became more evident with the numbers shared by the Global World Databook. These numbers are not just the numbers but something that should force us to ponder over the folly of our apathetic and ignorant approach to development and the unjust distribution of the resources. India's half of the total wealth, nearly 49%, is owned by only richest 1%. The remainder of 99% have no option left but to share the other half amongst them. In the remainder, the 74% or 3/4th of the total wealth is owned by the top 10% of the Indians whereas on the other side of the scale we have the other 26% or nearly 1/4th of total wealth being owned by the bottom 90%. The facts become more horrifying when we realise that globally, among the 20% of the World's Poorest of Poor, one in four is an Indian. This paper discusses in detail the ground situation of tribal people, with particular focus in India.

Keywords Tribal, Poverty, Forest, Development, Inequality, Injustice

Introduction

As the general perception about the process of development and the economic growth goes on to propose that the growth and inequality go hand in hand, therefore it is not a thing to get worried about because after all it

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is the economic parameters on which a nation is considered developed, and it is where the problem lies (The Hindu, 2016). It is also believed that as the economic activities mushroom in the 'influential zone of the industrial units' in urban areas, there will indeed be a generation of inequality in income and development but after it has touched the threshold, inequality gradually declines forming an inverted 'U' of Kuznets curve (The Hindu, 2016). But this is not the case. In the name of the development, we have created the classes of have(s) and have not(s); the manifestation of which gets deeper at each successive level from the base level of villages. To get a real picture of the background, we need to expand our view by doing away with the lens of an existing egalitarian regime and consider the spectrum of sub-districts or block to analyse the extent to which the benefits of industrialization of urban areas have on the rural areas.

Though, we Indians have registered a high economic growth rate and the poverty rate sloping downwards but the same cannot be said for the matter of inequality (Roy, 2012). The official data shared on all parameters of development, we see tribals experiencing the onslaught on their livelihood, culture, economic resources and rights in the wake of nation's development (Choudhary 2014). In the context of the 65-70 million people displaced in the process of development, 40% of the group are tribals (Choudhary 2014). The mismatched regional development comes to stark with country's 50% of the minerals and dams being located in the areas inhabited by these aboriginals yet these regions are amongst the most underdeveloped ones; in complete contrast to the economic theories of development filtering into these pockets (Angelson et al., 2003; Roy, 2012).

Majority of the districts have both the most developed and the most undeveloped sub districts on their board (The Hindu, 2016). The fact becomes clear with the study of 92 districts, with their sub-districts making to both the top 20% and bottom 20% (The Hindu, 2016). The districts of Thane, Vadodara, Ranchi, Vishakhapatnam and Raipur have both types of sub-districts, serving as the prototype (The Hindu, 2016). To further corroborate our argument, we have the districts of Korba and Raigarh (Chhattisgarh); Valsad (Gujarat); Paschim Singhbhum and Poorvi Singhbhum (Jharkhand); Kendujhar, Koraput and Mayurbhanj (Odisha) which have the both types

of sub-districts (The Hindu, 2016). And to our no surprise, these underdeveloped sub districts are termed as 'tribal'.

Forest Resources and Forest Dwellers in Forest Regions

There exists a close nexus between the forest tribal and poverty (Tripathi and Rai, 2016). Nearly, quarter of the world's poor and 90% of the poorest have forests as their economic mainstay (Tripathi and Rai, 2016). Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) are helpful in addressing the issues of the marginalised, forest-dwelling communities. They act as the sole source of income for them providing them with food security, health and well-being.

The India State of Forest Report states that the total forest sheet in the country is approximately 78.29 million ha or 23.81% of the geography (Somayaji, 2011). Out of this forest coverage, 12.06% can be labelled as the dense forest; 46.35% is moderately dense forest whereas 41.59% is an open forest (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2016). The forest cover in the recent times has seen durability since 1980s when the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 was enacted with the changed management approach from timber to the whole of forest ecosystem embracing every component of forest (Gopalakrishna, 2015). This changed attitude towards forest has helped in bringing down the deforestation with a productive yet sustainable management of forest resource. However, the howling desire for power and greed and the politics that revolves around this poses a constant threat to the forest and the tribal inhabiting them.

If we place the distribution of tribal population in India over the map, we can see that the tribal population in India is concentrated in the 3 pockets of (i) North-Eastern region including the state of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura; (ii) Central Tribal Belt (CTB) including Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu; (iii) Other states- Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, J&k, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep (Ministry of Environment

and Forests, 2016). The pre-dominant tribal populated states in the country are: Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Orissa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2016). The areas which have a higher tribal population also have a dense forest cover implying that the tribes prefer to live nearby forests and their lives are strongly associated with the forests.

India's overwhelming chunk of the population resides near forest with 1.73 lakh villages India is located in and around forest (Gopalakrishna, 2015). Due to the close proximity with forest and lack of opportunities nearby these people are depended on forest ecosystem for earning their living (Tripathi and Rai, 2016). The over burdening on these forest resource with excessive population dependence on them for their products and the unsustainable agricultural practices, continues to remain a constant threat to these hotspots of biodiversity (Gopalakrishna, 2015). The study on forest-poverty relationship has put forward that the overwhelming percentage of the Indian population lives in these forest brim areas (Cernea, 2015). Subsequent researches point out that these communities not only depend on these 'hub of resources' for fulfilling their consumption needs but also for commercial/ mercantile needs. The income generated while using these resources with sale in the market amounts up to 40-60% of their total disposable income. The forest in this sense gives impetus to the income generation in rural economies (Tripathi and Rai, 2016). Income from the sale of firewood from forest adds up to 11% of the populace. Due to the lack of employment opportunities outside the pockets of forest nexus areas, people end up depending on them for living and causing an over- burden on them.

Agriculture and livestock rearing are the other economic activities, these tribal engage in. These ventures do provide economic sustenance to them but most of the time overgrazing by the herds of grazing animals leads to desertification and also adversely affects the regeneration capacity of forest soil, being eroded with top soil. The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) estimate that Indian forests support 270 million cattle against its actual carrying capacity is of only 30 million. This huge pressure on our forest resource have rendered 78% of the forest affected of

which 18% are highly affected, 31% are moderately affected and 29% have low level of degradation (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2016). The high density of livestock creates an unprecedented demand for fodder trees which creates an extra pressure on our already scarce resources. The annual requirement of dry and green fodder is 569 MT and 1025 MT respectively whereas the generation capacity of the forests is 385 MT and 356 MT respectively (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2016). This shows how the human-animal population creates the pressure on our forest resource.

Nevertheless, it will be wrong to assume that all the economic activities centrifuged around forests by tribal cause degradation to these resources. There are forest products which have been sustainably utilised by the forest dwellers replenishing the resources.

Agriculture in forested areas is intimately connected with the forest ecosystem catering to the demands of the people dependent on them (Chowdhury, 2014). The leaf litter is beneficial for the manure, herbs and medicinal plants helps in getting away with the pests, forest products help in adding to the agricultural inputs. But the other side of the picture says that these practices put the pressure on the forest resources (Gopalakrishna, 2015). The shifting agriculture, the subsistence agriculture, short period of allowance of fallow recovery and the traditional agricultural practices adds to the problem (Kujur, 2008). As per few estimates the population engaged in shifting agriculture varies from 3 to 26 million people practicing shifting agriculture on 5-11.6 million ha of land in 16 different states in the country (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2016). This shows how our forest resources are being depleting at an alarming rate.

Forests, Tribal and Rural Society

The appalling condition of the forests is aggravated by the large no of poor populace depending on forests, directly or indirectly, for living; the growing need for agricultural expansion; the livestock pressure; the deforestation ;the commercial needs; the need for industrialization and urbanisation

(Tripathi and Rai, 2016). However, the agricultural intensification through increasing agricultural inputs to improve per hectare yield rather than expanding area under cultivation has a positive impact too namely by reducing the marginal forest land and further encroachments onto our forests.

Many forest conservation laws have been tabled in India but it is the effective implementation of the laws where we are lagging behind (Choudhary, 2008). In spite of having a large and well articulated forest resource, we still face problems in the strategy to implement the well structured plans to conserve and utilize our forest resources.

The evolution of forest policy in India has seen three stages:

Stage 1: Industrial forestry

Stage 2: Social forestry

Stage 3: Protection

The industrial forestry, on one hand, aimed at harvesting a forest for commercial needs whereas social forestry, on other hand, aimed at the management and protection of the forested land for social, economic and rural development. But, since we have seen that we cannot prioritize any policy method because of the holistic development of the rural and urban population, therefore, a balance of all the three policy phases needs to be worked out.

India being the 7th largest country in the world holds about only 1.8% of world's forests (Tripathi and Rai, 2016). The huge livestock and human population being 450 million and one billion respectively are one of the biggest contributors to the unabated pressures on our forests. The commons are shrinking at a faster rate with 30-50% between 1950-1980 not only creates another pressure on our forests but also adds to the brunt of the landless people.

Forests are one of the biggest and important gifts to us by the Mother Nature. It harbours some of the richest natural resources and provides livelihood to nearly 375 million people directly or indirectly.

Poverty in rural India is intimately connected with the low productivity and inadequate arable land because of the unequal distribution and fragmented landholdings. Therefore, forests appear to be a bounty of opportunities to support their meagre income from those meagre agricultural lands (Duraiappah, 1996). Collection of fuel woods and Non-Timber Wood Products (NTWP) and their contribution to the per capita income in rural areas of the people living nearby forest are unaccounted. Moreover, tribal women folk are the main actors in utilizing the forest resources in whole of the developing world. Both women and children collect fuel woods and fodder for both the household consumption and for the sale in the market. This is one of aspect how women play an important role in managing and running economy at both micro i.e. household and macro i.e. regional/rural level.

With The global trends of Privatization, liberalization and corporate development, there is a great threat that swings over the forest resources (Somayaji, 2011). These forces have motivated our government to convert forest enclaves into corporate ones which drive away the indigenous people from their lands (Roy, 2013). As per the 29th Report of the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Tribes recognises the fact that though tribal are a marginal community in India but over 40% of those displaced till 1990 came from these tribal communities (Somayaji, 2011).

The apathetic approach of the policymakers towards the tribal rights was revealed with the recommendations of the National Commission on Agriculture, 1976 that favoured the use of the forest land for the production forestry to augment the industrial production. The report also established the office of The Forest Development Corporation that was financed by the industrial set ups (The Hindu, 2016). The natural forest was gradually overshadowed by the monoculture of the rapidly growing species. The Report did not recognise the tribals as having any claim on the forests and saw them as encroachers using the resources without putting any inputs (The Hindu, 2016). Nevertheless, the change in the outlook of the regime of has come in recent years recognizing tribal as not encroachers but the shared holders of the common resources.

Development Related Displacement in Tribal Regions of India

One of the most social disruptive process across the country is the displacement of tribal communities in the name of development related projects. We know that 8% of the country's total population is constituted by the tribal community and around 40% of the total tribal population have been displaced by large dams since independence (Somayaji, 2011). Is displaced tribal population get no or leaves benefits from these development projects and and in another study, we get to know that the living condition of these tribal groups get deteriorated as a result of this displacement.

The situation of resettlement and rehabilitation people is dismal as they have lost their life and livelihood and further it is concluded by Somayaji by stating that "this is the main reason why development induced displacement more often than not entails improvement" (Somayaji, 2011). The development related large-scale projects benefited either directly or indirectly to the other sections of the society like politicians, contractors, project officers, urban and elite classes state landlords and bureaucrats etc. The major displacement according to Cernea's study, shoes that it is led by the displacement due to large dams. Around 16 to 38 million people displaced only due to the large dam and half of them are tribal (Somayaji, 2011).

According to the world commission report 2000 the Curzon dam project in Gujarat displaced 100% of the tribal population, Maheshwar dam in Madhya Pradesh display 60% of tribal population and due to Chandil dam in Bihar 87% of tribal population was displaced, Keolkae dam in Bihar displaced 88% tribal population etc. This report basically shows stunning facts on tribal displacement due to dam related projects (The Report of World Commission, 2000).

Another important factor which led to the threat of the tribal's extinction is the establishment of industries. Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa are the three major States which has the maximum occurrence of natural resources and at the same time States with maximum number of displacement of tribal population. Like in 1954, Odisha government approved

33 villages to set up a steel plant of Rourkela and further 31 villages were uprooted for the construction of Mandira dam in 1956-57. Recently to set up 60 sponge iron factory 400 to 500 villages were uprooted in Sundargarh, Orissa (Somayaji, 2011). For Utkal Alumina International Limited 20,000 tribals from 82 villages were displaced (Somayaji, 2011).

Uprooting deprives tribals of the vital sustenance and eliminates them from their common property resources particularly land, forest and water. Water Commission on Dam Report concludes: even after massive investment in water resource management billions of children, women and men in rural areas lack access to even basic water and sanitation services. In a large number of cases about 75% of people are never resettled (Tripathi and Rai, 2016). The main reason that kept the tribal labour in the deprivation, poverty, penury, hunger and starvation has been the non-recognition of tribal over common property resources and restrictions on use eliminating them from the means of production, denial of due labour misappropriation of funds.

Due to displacement adivasis feel deluded and disillusioned by the state which leads to tribal unrest and rebel in form of lobbying and Dharnas etc. Some examples are: Khedut Mazdoor Sangh Jai Adivasi Yuva Shakti in Madhya Pradesh, Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti in Orissa state, Narmada Dharangrasta Samiti, Maharashtra. Raja Adivasi Bachao Abhiyan and Sarvatra Jan Andolan in Maharashtra state. Jharkhand Disom Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Adivasi Sengle Abhiyan in Jharkhand state are some examples of tribal outfits.

Tribal Inclusion through Good Governance

The patterns and idea of development needs to change, currently the pattern of development and growth is not inclusive. Our focus should be more on inclusive growth rather than jobless growth or only GDP growth. This can be further explained with an example of comparison between industry or service sector and the enterprise sector. The faster growth for the micro, small and medium enterprises segment will generate more per

capita income and opportunities and is more enclosed than industries of service sector.

The study suggests, after looking into current state of India's forest ecosystem and poverty that the poorest regions are the most eco fragile and the status of tribal can be improved through their increased per capita income and for that we need to offer them sustainable livelihoods including income from agriculture, forest and forest products. Particularly non wood forest products, which can create many opportunities including huge income generation and biodiversity conservation in tribal dominated forest areas of the country.

Through participatory governance these marginalised sections of the society can raise their voice like Panchayati Raj institution including Gram Sabha can be empowered and activated for participation and in decision making that could affect their lives. In India sustainability must be at the core of our development strategy and core meaning of reforms is to make a pro-poor not pro-corporate. Without these reforms, inequality will continue and threat will exist to the Indian democracy.

State's Effort Towards Rehabilitation of Internally Displaced Person

In India, the problem of land acquisition and payment of compensation is handled by the colonial land acquisition act 1984. The land acquisition procedure has become a complex one, prohibiting the payment of fair compensation to project ousters. The operation of the said act has given the state the authority to abuse power and fix the rate of compensation in a most arbitrary manner.

To address various issues related to land acquisition and rehabilitation and resettlement comprehensively the department of land resources has formulated a national rehabilitation and resettlement policy, 2007. The new policy has been notified in the official gazette and has become operative with effect from the 31st October 2007, based on which many state governments have their own rehabilitation and resettlement policies.

- The national resettlement and rehabilitation policy 2007 is applicable to all development projects leading to involuntary resettlement of people.
- The policy aims to minimise displacement and promote, as far as possible, non-displacing or least displacing alternatives.
- The policy also aims to ensure adequate rehabilitation package and expeditious implementation of the rehabilitation process with the active participation of those affected.
- The policy also recognises the need for protecting the weaker section of the society especially members of the scheduled caste and scheduled Tribes.

To give legal backing to the policy, the cabinet also decided to bring legislation on the lines of resettlement and rehabilitation policy and to suitably amend the land acquisition act 1894. In this direction, government has introduced bills on similar lines in Lok Sabha in 2009 named as the land acquisition (amendment) Bill 2007 and rehabilitation and resettlement bill, 2007. Both bills lapsed with the dissolution of the 14th Lok Sabha.

Conclusion

The planning process in India has not been fructuous to all sections and has not been able to integrate tribals in mainstream of development. While deciding on development process in the country, tribals were never given a place in decision making body even if such decisions like development projects related displacement and rehabilitation allocation of resources etc affected their life severely. In a democratic setup like India development needs to be more inclusive, people-oriented and participatory. Constitution makers incorporated some special provisions for tribals like article 46. Article 46 states that state shall promote with special care the economic and educational interest of scheduled Tribes and should protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Sixth schedule in the constitution makes specific provision for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram. Article

338 A, provides for establishment of a national commission ST for providing safeguards for the tribals and to enquire into specific complaints regarding to their rights, to participate and advise on the the planning process of socio economic development of tribes and for welfare, development and advancement of the tribals etc despite the safeguard these tribes are further marginalized.

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