Tribal Development: 
Journey So Far and the Way Ahead

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Background: 
Approximately 300 million indigenous peoples, representing 5,000 distinct cultures, live in over 70 countries on five continents. The UN defines the designation Indigenous peoples as "first peoples, tribal peoples, aboriginals and autochthons. They have a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories. They consider themselves distinct from other sectors of society now prevailing in those territories."

Introduction: 
The social scientist have generally suggested the four statement for understanding the situation i.e. Understanding of tribal organization, Identifying the problem of tribes of different levels of technological, economic and cultural development, Identifying the integrative forces in tribal life, Cautious formulation of welfare plans. There is much in tribal life that can be preserved without reducing the tribals to the position of museum pieces. The tribal people of Indian have for centuries lived their own secluded and traditional life and because of their age-old isolation they faced a number of problems.

Journey so far: 
In pre-independence period there was area wise isolation began with the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1870 and a few tracts were specified as “Scheduled tracts” viz in the Himalayan region, Assam, Kumaon, Garhwal, Tarai Parganas and in central India. Again in 1936 two areas were created “Excluded Areas” and “Partially Excluded Areas”. In 1939 Elwin advocated for the establishment of a sort of National Park of the tribal and advised that their contact with the outside world should be reduced to the minimum. He thus supported the idea of "isolationism” to a great extent. In post – independence period Policy of isolation was modified with welfare measures.

Westernization followed later. In the post World War II-Postcolonial era, the governments of newly forming “underdeveloped” states, India and many other countries, saw modernization, particularly in terms of industrialization, as a means to economic growth. The Indian government, under the leadership of Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, embarked upon a massive “planned development” strategy with considerable support from both within India as well as from international donors including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank (Sukhatme 1989). Development at the time was built upon an ideal of economic progress, i.e. greater production, economic growth, and industrialization.

In the middle of 1960s, our development was mainly focused on industry toward issues of agricultural production due to drought and famine in eastern India and a global food crisis. Thus (Lipton and Toye, 1990) have found that the total official aid allocated for agriculture rose from a mere 2% to 30%, while aid allocated for industrial development fell from 60% to 30% from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s as a result, the Green Revolution technologies played an important role in development strategies from the mid-1960s, as India’s planners sought to achieve self-sufficiency in food-grains (Bernstein, 1992). This period marked a shift in perspective amongst development planners away from ‘macro level industrial growth strategies’ to ‘efforts focused on meeting the basic needs of the poor’. Thus, the government initiated programs in the early and mid-1970s to improve food supply, nutrition, elementary education, rural health facilities, and basic infrastructure including water supply, roads, electrification, and housing (Guha, 1988).

This period was also notable for the planners and practitioners to refocus on the conditions of individuals rather than on the national economy at large, and was fueled by a pledge in 1973 by Robert McNamara, the then President of the World Bank, to allocate resources to improving productivity and welfare of the rural poor. In June of 1976, the International Labour Organization
(ILO) organized a conference where it proposed a Basic Needs Approach to development ‘aiming at the achievement of a certain specific minimum standard of living before the end of the century’. The increased attention to issues of basic needs was not, however, at odds with the perceived ideal of linear and ever-increasing economic growth. Advocates of a basic needs approach justified it in terms of relatively low-cost investments that would eventually lead to increased human and economic productivity (Ruttan, 1989).

Besides this, the government has taken efforts to improve the life of tribals. Then comes a rather relevant question, why tribal development? It is a social demand since; the tribals represent an early stage of socio-economic life. The progress is universal but, its pace has been differing at different times in different communities. Thus, there should be a need for a balance in progress among the three basic elements of development: organization, natural resources, and technology (Das, 1993). It is also worth mentioning about the views of (Roy Burman, 1989) on international convention on this, here before going to the details of tribal development in India: “In June 1957, an international convention (convention no 107) in respect of indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal population was adopted by ILO. It was later ratified by a large number of countries including India. The convention laid down that the member states should enable such populations to pursue their material well-being and spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and cultural specificities, which hinder them from benefiting fully from the rights and advantages engaged by other elements of the population and also help the process of integration of such populations into the national community”.

Before discussing the issue of tribal development, we must see first what we mean by ‘tribals’ and ‘development’? Tribals are the people, who in anthropological literature are characterized generally by the following features namely isolated ethnic groups, low density of population, primitive economy, primitive technology, primitive political organization, primitive religion and lack of script of their language. The tribals in India comprise the groups which are declared tribals as per an order of the President of India. In other words these are the scheduled Tribes. The constitution of India does not define scheduled Tribes as such. Article 366 (25) refers to Scheduled Tribes as those communities who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. This Article says that only those communities who have been declared as such by the President, through an initial public notification will be considered as Scheduled Tribes.

The essential characteristics were first laid down by the Lokur Community for community to be identified as Scheduled Tribe. These characteristics are :-

1. Primitive traits
2. Distinctive culture, shyness of contact with public at large
3. Geographical Isolation
4. Backwardness – social and economic

Defining ‘development’, one can say, “Development is a change in the positive or progressive direction. Again, when we talk about tribal development, the question that automatically comes is: whose desires – those of the planners of implementers or tribals themselves. In full, development should be defined as the “change in desired direction with in stipulated time”. Like most other concepts in social sciences, the meaning of development is differently defined by different scholars; schools of thought, organizations/ institutions/ agencies. Mahapatra has high lighted two major approaches to development: (i) development of the material and human resource is sought as catering to the material progress of the nation and (ii) development of region or its people in terms of the objectives, goals and values of the people concerned, which may not always be in conflict with the national objectives and requirements, which in turn must respect and accommodate regional people’s aspirations and potentialities’ (Mahapatra, 1980).

Development, in a very general or common sense may refer to a qualitative change or progress so far as the material needs are concerned. The development may be basically said to imply creating required condition in a particular society for whole-some living of its members (Behura, 1982). Bhownick has mentioned two types of changes. Firstly, the change comes, “from within, when motivated and organized from within a group to interplay of the internal factors and agents.” Secondly, the change from without that is, “motivation of or change in a group due to interplay of external agents”(Bhowmick, 1982). Such factors of change must be required while planning for the development of the people. According to Belshaw, “development presents and increase in the capacities of a society to organize for its own objectives, and to carry out its programme more efficiently” (Belshaw, 1977). The Marxian view of development usually moves around the key factor “material forces of production” which considers the factors like modes of production, change or development. To him the
progressive change or development of a society comes in a cyclical process through a series of evolution, revolution, etc. Regarding development, the famous economist Schumacher opined, “development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organisation and discipline (Schumacher, 1977). In the light of the above anthropological concepts of development, the development approach of the Government of India can be shown through various five year plans (till the beginning of the fifth Five Year Plan) although had attempted to develop the condition of the tribals.

The total population of the Scheduled Tribes in the country stands at 84326240 which constitute 8.2 percent of the total population (the 2011 census). They are spread over all the states except Punjab and Haryana and over all the union territories except Chandigarh out of their total population in the country. The latest data released by the Census of India shows that the child sex ratio (number of girls per 1,000 boys) among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the country has declined faster than in other categories of the population between 2001 and 2011. But the number of girls born per 1,000 boys is still higher in the ST category than in the general population.

For the Protection, Socio-economic and Political development of scheduled tribes, the constitution of India says:

Social Development:
1. Equality before Law (Article 14)
2. The state has to make special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Tribes and others.
3. Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16).
4. For reservation in appointment, posts in favour of any backward class citizens which in the opinion of the state is not adequately represented in the services under the state (Article 16[4]), in matter of promotion to the scheduled tribe (Article 16 [4A]).
5. A National Commission for Scheduled Castes and scheduled Tribes to investigate, monitor and evaluate all matters relating to the constitutional safeguards provide for the STs (Article 338).
6. Appointment of a commission to report on the administration of the Scheduled Areas and the Welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in states (Article 339).
7. Appointed by the Govt. of India, the commission has to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes and to make recommendations to remove their difficulties which they faced during their work (Article 340).

Economic Development:
1. The state to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, scheduled tribes in particular and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46).
2. The claims of the members of the ST in the appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the union or of a state to be taken into consideration consistent with the maintenance of efficiency of administration (Article 335).

Political Development:
1. Through the Fifth Schedule, the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and the Scheduled Tribes in any state except Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram by ensuring submission of Annual Report by the Governors to the President of India regarding the Administration of the Scheduled Areas and setting up of a Tribal Advisory Council to advice on such matters pertaining to the Welfare and advancement of Scheduled Tribes (Article 244[1]).
2. Special provisions through the Sixth Schedule for the administration of Tribal Areas in the states of Assam, Meghalay, Tripura and Mizoram by designating certain tribal areas as Autonomous Districts and Autonomous Regions by constituting District Councils, Autonomous Councils and Regional Councils (Article 244[2]).
3. Reservation of seats for the Scheduled Tribes in the House of the people (Article 330).
4. Reservation of seats for the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assemblies of the states (Article 332).
5. Reservation of seats for the Scheduled Tribes in every Panchayat (Article 243D).
6. Extension of the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the constitution to the Scheduled Areas through the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 to ensure effective participation of the tribals in the process of planning and decision making.

The way ahead:
The concept of tribe or tribal social formation was referred by most social anthropologist as a stage
destined to move toward a better or more
developed stage towards the 'Mainstream' society
by means of history within their own political
space, promising to change whatever existed for
long.

There is no doubt that there has been a significant
change in the lives of the tribals in the past 66 years
of independence. But the question is, has the
majority of the tribals in India benefitted from this
model of development? Tribals continues to
occupy the lowest economic strata, its areas of
habitation is the least developed in infrastructure
and all aspects of development.

Keeping this state of affairs of tribes in mind; we
need to question the very definition of the tribes as
given by the colonial anthropologists which is still
continued to describe tribes as a certain
categorization of pre-literate cultures, covering a
wide range of forms of social organization and
levels of techno- economic development. Many
Sociologists specializing on the subject have
pointed out; that what is missing in the process of
conceptualization is the acknowledgement of
history and of a complex political economy.

Hence, tribal ways of life, its rich cultures, its
political economy and social structures were
treated as inferior as compared to the so called
advanced or westernized societies. Tribal ways of
life were to be replaced and it was a white man's
burden to do so. Religion, especially, Christianity,
was to come in handy in this. Meanwhile there is
little historical record to convey how many peoples
and their cultures were decimated or destroyed
through the acceptance of this simple logic.

There also exists a problem with the concept of
"region" as it is defined. Region signifies for
political administrator, only a
province/administrative block in the eyes of the
state in terms of certain demographic and
linguistic/cultural traits. Nowhere do the term
incorporate a region's other traits like its history,
culture and social formation. It is simply a
political-administrative unit and seen as
representing a near-homogeneity of the people
living there with some degree of autonomy under
the centralized nation state system. Post-colonial
compulsion and a lack of consideration of history
and culture determines the term "Region", thereby
implying that such term are unchangeable or
immune to change.

In spite of the inner line regulation and the
provision of the 6th schedule of the Constitution,
the tribal in some region has become a minority in
their lands and other resources have been alienated.
However, compared to the Central Indian belts,
North East tribals controlled the survival resources.

They are in fact a majority in Arunachal,
Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. The tribals of
North east India struggles have little to do with
land alienations or exploitation of survival
resources by the state. The movements here are
political autonomy including secession and
independent state formation. The formation of mini
states has not curtailed the urge for freedom with
dignity.

This was because the colonialist expediency alone
determined the State boundaries without any
concern for history, tradition, culture, languages,
economy and geography. This empirical
predicament is often used as an excuse to repress
and persecute the marginalized communities
especially the tribes of the border regions. Their
value structure are rejected as obscurantist, whereas
of the dominant communities are imposed upon
them by cajoling or coercing. The colonial policy
of westernization and the post-colonial global
capitalism has devastated tribal cultures, languages
and their collectivities. They are made to think they
are inferior in matters of their own lifestyles,
customs and folklore. Myths have been nurtured
that tribal social formation are archaic hangovers,
remnant of a bygone era, unchanging entities
paralyzed by customs and thus their ways of life
should be raised to the advanced culture of life
enjoyed by the western societies or by the so-called
advanced society.

The threats to tribal collectivities face a formidable
challenge from the dominant religion, culture
and language. And sadly they have received little
protection from the State system. Faced with
continuous pauperization and endangering of
linguistic and cultural identity, several tribal
peoples across the country have independently
launch strategies of various types directed towards
recuperating their traditional rights over their
resources and in order to maintain and develop
their legitimate social, linguistic and political rights
and as well as to demand a cessation of abuse and
discrimination. This is not to be treated as a
parachiolization of social consciousness but the
outcome of years of neglect, discrimination and
misunderstanding. These movements are brutally
suppressed in the name of secession or diabolical
international conspiracy. Yet many movements do
survive and are recurrent. The strategies of divide
and rule, distribution of patronage, mediations
structures, intimidation, illegal and arbitrary
detention, torture and 'encounters' have yielded
small dividends.

The Resolution:
The resolution of the crisis demands simultaneous
struggles against economic and cultural
domination. The tribals of the country should be given a chance to have their own internal determination which should be the guide in setting up the standards for control over their own economic, social and cultural development. This should not be treated as some romantic idea but rather it should provide for a chance for reform of traditional customs and practices after proper evaluation. But the overall choice of adjusting with the larger society should be left to the tribal themselves. This internal self determination of the direction in which the process of development will lead, be taken by the tribals should not be seen as secession but should be seen as redefining the composite multi-cultural tribal society which will contribute to the nation building process.

The indigenous groups are discovering their own philosophy and cultural uniqueness and potentialities. We can see these in the rise of inter-tribal unity and consciousness, undermining the internal divisions and thus legitimately may allow for autonomy within the nation state system. The principle of internal self determination including legal recognition of all tribal organizations, respect of customary rights, survival resources and their own socio cultural practice which do not clash with the accepted standard of human rights should be studied and incorporated in the new development model. It is proposed that all development strategies must be fixed by informed consent, self sufficiency, social justice and ecological equilibrium.

We recommend these five principles for overall upliftment of tribals. These are Encourage traditional art and culture, Tribal Rights in land & forests, Try to train and build up a team of their own people, No over administration, Judge results by quality of human character involved but not by statistics & money.

It is a time to acknowledge that traditional tribal cultures and knowledge system has much to offer the imperial planet and hence it cannot be separated from the collective rights of the peoples. The concept of development has different connotations in different contexts. In a narrow sense, ‘it means, change, and progress, either whole or, partial’ There are people with difference of opinion regarding development. This is true since; the history of development has been shifted in thought, policy, and practice over time this process could be the beginning of emancipation of the tribal people and the others as well.

References: