

Tribal Development in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh: A Historical Study on the Socio-economic Life of Tribes

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Abstract

The present paper is an examination of the historical tribal development in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh state with respect to the socio-economic life of the tribes. The main purpose of this article is to bring out the government programs and schemes that are designed especially for the growth and development of tribal communities during the post-independence scenario. To assess the historical development schemes in this article, government-initiated programs and policies are studied critically to estimate the growth and development of tribes.

Keywords: Tribal Development, Historical Study, Socio-Economic Life, Five-year Plans, Girijana Cooperative Corporation,

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I. Introduction

Andhra Pradesh is one of the States with a large chunk of population of Scheduled Tribes. As per the 1991 Census, the ST population in the State stood at 41.99 lakhs, constituting 6.38 per cent of the total population of the State.¹ The extent of the Scheduled Areas in the State is 31,485.34 sq km, which constitutes about 11 per cent of the total area of the State. The Scheduled Areas fall in the nine districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, West Godavari, East Godavari, Khammam, Warangal, Mahaboobnagar, and Adilabad. Of the total tribal population, 26.05 lakh tribals accounting for 62.03 per cent live in the Scheduled areas, while the remaining 15.94 lakhs accounting for 37.97 per cent reside in the non-Scheduled Areas where they are interspersed with the advanced population.² Most of the Scheduled Areas in the State are covered with dense forests, which are endowed with rich mineral and forest wealth. The difficult and inaccessible terrain made the tribal societies somewhat closed ones with distinctive socio-cultural patterns of their own. Their physical and social isolation, coupled with low standards of living, marks them off from the rest of the population.

The tribal situation in Andhra Pradesh presents a complex and uneven picture with considerable social diversity. The tribals living in the State are broadly divided into 33 ethnic groups. There is considerable variation in the size, mode of living, and levels of development among these tribal groups, apart from differences in language and dialect. Based on geo-ethnic characteristics, the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh can be divided into the following five geographical regions:

1. Gond-Kolam Region - the tribal areas of Adilabad district.
2. Koya-Konda Reddi Region - Tribal areas of Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam, West Godavari, and East Godavari districts - area along the Godavari gorges.
3. Khond-Savara Region - Tribal areas of Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam districts.
4. Chenchu Region - Tribal Areas of Mahaboobnagar, Nalgonda, Kurnool, Prakasam, and Guntur districts.
5. Plain Areas - Areas of habitation of Yanadis, Yerukulas and Banjaras or Lambadas, or Sugalis (GOI, 1989:22).

As regards the growth of ST population in Andhra Pradesh, it increased from 7.67 lakhs in 1951 to 13.24 lakhs in 1961 (72.61 per cent) and from 16.57 lakhs in 1971 to 31.76 lakhs in 1981 (91.67 per cent). There was a substantial increase in the ST population in 1961 because of the inclusion of three communities, viz., Lambada, Yerukula, and Yanadi of the Andhra area under the Scheduled Tribes in 1956. Similarly, the ST population was almost doubled between 1971 and 1981 because of the inclusion of the above tribes residing in the Telangana area, also under the Scheduled Tribes in 1976. At present, Lambadas have emerged as the largest tribal group in Andhra

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¹ Government of India, 1991

² Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1993.

Pradesh, accounting for 36.42 per cent of the tribal population of Yanadis. (1981 Census), followed by Koyas, Yerukulas and Yanadis.

The literacy levels of the Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh are far lower when compared to the national level. The tribal literacy was only 17.16 per cent in Andhra Pradesh when compared to 29.6 per cent for the tribal population in the country as a whole (1991 Census). Andhra Pradesh occupied the lowest position among TSP States and Union Territories, except Rajasthan, in the matter of tribal literacy, both for males and females.

The Socio-Economic Life of Tribals in Andhra Pradesh

The tribal economy is influenced by the habitat in which they are inhabiting and the level of knowledge accumulated about the natural resources and skills for exploiting these resources. The tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh may be broadly classified into six groups on the basis of economic levels, viz., food gathering, pastoralism, shifting cultivation, settled cultivation, artisans, and industrial and mining labour.³

Agriculture is the main occupation of most of the tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh. As per the 1981 census reports, 43.21 per cent were cultivators and 43.72 per cent were agricultural labourers. The percentage of agricultural labourers was reported to be higher among the plain tribes when compared to the hill tribes. Further, most of the cultivators were reported to possess holdings of less than one hectare (43.76 per cent) and between one hectare and two hectares (23.07 per cent). The percentage of irrigated area was also found to be lower in tribal areas (10.32 per cent) when compared to the State as a whole (23.97 per cent) (Mohan Rao, 1993:18-20). Thus, small holdings and negligible irrigation facilities, coupled with lower levels of literacy and awareness, render the adoption of modern technology difficult for the tribal communities.

The weekly markets or shandies are very popular in tribal areas. It is known as 'Hat' in the tribal areas of Visakhapatnam and Santa' in other parts. The weekly markets are organised at fixed places and fixed timings on a particular day. The transactions in the weekly markets are mostly exploitative as the traders never reveal the prevailing market rates and adopt various malpractices to cheat the tribals both in the purchase of agricultural produce and the sale of consumption goods. The weekly markets not only serve as places of economic transactions but also provide a meeting place for the tribals and contact places with other ethnic groups. Thus, they play an important role in promoting socio-cultural change and in the integration of simple tribal societies with the mainstream of the nation.

The tribal groups, such as Koya, Konda Reddy, Bagata, Valmiki, Kondadoras, Jatapu, and Khond, are mainly cultivators who, in the course of time, became peasantized. The tribals of Andhra Pradesh practice two types of cultivation - shifting cultivation, locally known as 'podu cultivation', and settled cultivation. The settled cultivation is practised wherever flat land is available, while shifting cultivation is carried out in the interior areas on hill slopes and hill tops, and also in the foothills and low-lying areas. 'Podu' cultivation is extensively practiced in the Scheduled Areas of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, and Khammam districts. Thus, 'Podu' is mostly confined to the tribals living in the Coastal Andhra region.

There are a few pastoral tribes like the Sugali and Gond. The Yerukulas who live in the plains are engaged in basket-making and pig-rearing. The Yanadis, another plains tribe, are snake and bird catchers. They also collect and market herbs and barks of Lateli, many of the plains tribals have taken to agriculture; a sizeable number of these groups gave up their traditional activities and are working as agricultural labourers. The tribals who practice cultivation are in a relatively advanced stage than the other tribal groups. They have developed interaction with plains people and acquired the status of peasantry and are drawn into the vortex of the broader economy.⁴ The tribal groups like Porja, Savara, Gadaba, Khond, Thoti, and Chenchu are recognised as extremely backward and primitive, enveloped in the pre-agricultural stage of economy and subsisting mainly on a collection of forest produce and hunting. The remaining tribal groups fall in between them, leading a semi-traditional life.

The social life of the tribals of Andhra Pradesh is still custom-bound. Traditions, beliefs, and superstitions are an integral part of tribal life. The hill tribes are predominantly found in forests, and the existence of one depends on the other. Hence, the tribals hold a symbiotic relationship in great esteem, whereby they regard various species of forest as their kith and kin. The social organisations of tribal societies are generally based on totemic clans. The various tribal groups claim a mythical affinity with certain species of nature or specific inanimate objects which they regard as their ancestors. The belief system and associated practices are called 'totemism'. The tribals do not eat new fruits, flowers, etc., unless they are ritually offered to their Gods and Goddesses. They observe annual rituals and ceremonies in honour of forest Goddesses. Several tribal communities have their names for self-identification, and they believe that the popular names by which they are called are given to them by outsiders.

Even though different pattern of housing is found among different tribes in Andhra Pradesh, most of the tribes live in small thatched huts with poor ventilation and the absence of facilities such as electricity, sanitation,

³ Mohan Rao, K. "Tribal development in Andhra Pradesh: problems, performance & prospects." (*No Title*) (1999).

⁴ Mishra, S. N. *Participative Management and Rural Development*. Mittal Publications, 1992.

drainage age and drinking water. Thus, the housing conditions of the majority of tribals may be described as poor. In addition, most of the tribal groups reside in secluded places, even in the case of the plains tribes living in mixed villages.

Thus, the tribal societies are characterised by subsistence agriculture, absence of adequate avenues of employment opportunities, inadequate supply of credit and marketing facilities, and lack of communication facilities. Besides, they are subjected to different kinds of exploitation by the non-tribal landlords, businessmen, and moneylenders. Further, they reside in poor houses and in secluded places with low levels of interaction with other communities. All these factors contributed to their backwardness in social and economic spheres when compared to the relatively advanced sections of the State.

Protective Legislation in Andhra Pradesh

The Andhra Pradesh Government recognised the effect of exploitation on the tribal economy by non-tribal people. Exploitation became an obstacle in the achievement of tribal development, and hence it should be put an end. Consequently, in 1959, the Government enacted the Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Areas) Land Transfer Regulation to prevent the passage of land from tribals to non-tribals.⁵

The Government also paid serious attention to the dangerous effects of indebtedness on the tribal economic conditions. Several tribals lost their meagre lands to the non-tribal moneylenders and merchants to repay the debt that they incurred for different purposes.

The Government enacted two legislations for curbing the activities of money-lenders in the tribal areas, viz., the Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Areas) Money-lenders Regulation, 1960, and the Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Areas) Debt Relief Regulation, 1960, to curb the ubiquity of money lending business in the Scheduled Areas.⁶ The first Act prohibits unlicensed money-lending in the tribal areas and also imposes certain limits on the rate of interest on the loans advanced by the private money-lenders to the tribals, and the second Act provides for scaling down of all debts incurred by tribals at the commencement of this regulation. In 1970, the Government enacted the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Tribes Debt Relief Regulation, which is designed to strengthen the earlier regulation, imposing a moratorium on the repayment of sealed down debts to that part of the principal originally advanced⁷

The government created a separate machinery to implement the protective regulations enacted by it. A special Deputy Collector was appointed in each district having Scheduled regulations. Areas to implement the provisions of these include the implementation of protective regulations, particularly the Land Transfer Regulation Act of 1959, made remarkable progress as evident in the government land transfer regulation act of 1959.

It may be noted that out of 56,856 cases of occupation by non-tribals in Scheduled Areas of Andhra Pradesh covering an extent of 2,36,404.81 acres, enquiries were initiated in 77 per cent of the cases involving 93 per cent of the land occupied. Of the cases initiated, as many as 89 per cent were disposed of. The restoration of land to the tribals took place in respect of 44 per cent of the cases disposed involving about 82,500 acres of land.

Administrative Set-up for Tribal Development

At the State level, the Department of Tribal Welfare is headed by the Commissioner, who belongs to the senior IAS cadre. He will be assisted by Joint Directors and Special Officers in the concerned subjects. He is responsible for the implementation of all tribal development programmes through the project officers of ITDAs and District Tribal Welfare Officers. In the agency areas, the ITDAs function under the control of a project authority headed by the District Collector. The executive administration of the projects is carried out by a chief administrator designated as the Project Officer, who belongs to the IAS cadre. The Project Officer is assisted by a team of subject specialists. He implements the project programmes through the mandal level development machinery consisting of a Mandal Development Officer and Village Development Officers. In the case of non-agency areas, the District Collectors are responsible for the implementation of tribal welfare schemes. The Collectors are assisted by the District Tribal Welfare Officers, who prepare action plans and execute different programmes of tribal development through the general development machinery at the mandal and village levels.

Tribal Development Under Five-Year Plans

As per the directives of the Constitution and under the policy directions of the Central Government, the Government of Andhra Pradesh paid special attention to the development of tribal areas along with other weaker sections of the society. From the beginning, the Government increasingly addressed itself to the problems of tribal societies. As a result, a new policy for the development of tribals with a strategy of State intervention and

⁵ Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1981:15.

⁶ Ibid, 17.

⁷ Ibid, 18.

comprehensive planning came into being. In the first Five-Year Plan, the CDP launched was extended to the tribal areas along with the rest of the State.

During the Second Five-Year Plan, four SMPT Development Blocks were started at Araku, Paderu, Utnoor, and Narasampet. Multi-sector programmes, i.e., programmes in agriculture, irrigation, animal husbandry, public health, education, cooperation, and communication sectors, were to be implemented in these blocks for the development of the tribal people. Besides these programmes, certain special programmes were implemented for settling the shifting cultivators in sedentary agriculture, encouraging tribal arts and crafts, opening up of the tribal areas through the construction of roads, organising special institutions like Ashram Schools for educating the tribal children, starting forest labour cooperative societies, operating mobile medical units to take medical facilities to the doorsteps of the tribals and so on.

In the remaining tribal areas, Rs. 12 lakhs were provided in the budget for each C.D. Block (Ministry of Home Affairs, 1980:37). During the Second Five-Year Plan, the SMPT development blocks were modified and reconstituted as the Tribal Development Blocks (T.D. Blocks) in the State. During the Third Five-Year Plan period, the Tribal Development Blocks were started in all the tribal areas where the tribals constituted 55 per cent or more of the total population. The Tribal Development Blocks were entrusted with the responsibility of bringing all-around development in the tribal areas through the implementation of a package of schemes and programmes with the priorities on economic development, education, health, housing, and communications.⁸

The Tribal Development Block scheme led to the progress of some areas and groups, while some others did not change because of defective formation and implementation of development programmes. Nevertheless, during the Third Five-Year Plan period, the tribal areas witnessed a new phenomenon with the introduction of the Panchayati Raj system in 1959. Under this system, all the existing Tribal Development Blocks in the tribal areas were converted into Panchayat Samitis. These grassroots-level democratic bodies provided an opportunity for the tribals to participate in the decision-making process relating to the development of their areas.

During the Fourth Five-Year Plan, the Government modified earlier policies and introduced a new policy known as 'Specific needs of specific areas' for the development of tribal areas. Under this approach, the Tribal Development Agencies (TDAs) were established in the Srikakulam district to solve the specific problems of tribal farmers. The TDA, which was an agriculture-oriented project, emphasized the implementation of schemes like a supply of inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc., and improvement of irrigation facilities to boost agricultural production in these areas. It also concentrated on the development of communication facilities for the marketing of the agricultural produce of the tribal farmers. Besides, it implemented certain special programmes like the Special Nutrition Programme to correct the nutritional deficiencies among the tribal children and the Crash Employment Programme to remove unemployment among the tribal youth.

In consonance with the sub-plan strategy adopted during the Fifth Five-Year Plan, the tribal sub-plan areas of tribal concentration were delineated in the first phase. The Scheduled Areas existing in the eight districts, viz., Adilabad, East Godavari, Khammam, Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Warangal, and West Godavari, are identified as the areas of tribal concentration. All the agency areas are covered by ITDAs. The Tribal Development Agency has taken necessary steps on three aspects of development, i.e., economic, protective, and social problems relating to the development of social services, including drinking water, education, and health. For planning, the entire State is considered as the macro level unit consisting of the Scheduled Areas in the eight districts. The existing Tribal Development Blocks in these areas at the grassroots level are regarded as micro-level units for the implementation of the sub-plan. During this plan period, a separate agency was established for a primitive tribal group, i.e., Chenchus, to implement intensive and systematic developmental programmes for their benefit.⁹

During the Sixth Five-Year Plan period, the main emphasis was to integrate the tribal development programmes with other general programmes in the context of the overall development strategy of the Plan under target-oriented programmes. During the Plan period, 38 MADA pockets were identified for extending welfare programmes with special central assistance to benefit 302 lakhs tribal population in plain areas, i.e., outside tribal sub-plan areas. The expenditure incurred during the plan period was 48.79 crores¹⁰

During the Seventh Five-Year Plan period, major development efforts were initiated towards poverty alleviation within the tribal sub-plan so as to achieve the specific objectives of the plan programmes. In this Plan, the cluster approach was adopted in 17 clusters to cover the smallest areas of tribal population, which were still left over under the tribal sub-plan to provide economic assistance under poverty alleviation programmes. Margin money being sanctioned was enhanced from Rs 1,000 per family for a programme of Rs 5,000 per unit to Rs 2,000 per family for a programme of Rs 10,000 per unit. During the Seventh Five-Year Plan, it was proposed to bring

⁸ Sharma, B. D. "Administration for tribal development." *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 23, no. 3 (1977): 515-539.

⁹ Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1974

¹⁰ Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1980

the primitive tribal group, i.e., Chenchus, above the poverty line by sanctioning 80 per cent of the unit cost of Rs. 10,000 per family as a subsidy.

On the whole, an amount of Rs. 579.69 crores was spent during the Seventh Plan period on tribal development.¹¹ The Tribal Welfare Department in the State prepared programmes to conform with the overall development approach during the Eighth Five Year Plan period, Special care was taken to supplement the efforts of State planning department under tribal sub-plan and centrally sponsored schemes for tribals and to propose schemes not covered by tribal sub-plan or centrally sponsored schemes. Towards the economic development in the tribal areas, a proposal was prepared (i) to introduce horticulture programmes in 4,000 acres of tribal lands in non-ITDA areas by a provision of Rs. 5.00 lakhs and (ii) to distribute Rs. 150 lakhs of consumption loans to the tribals during the lean (rainy) season who are especially dependent on the collection and sale of minor forest produce. The scheme for Rehabilitation of Yanadis and Chenchus has been continued during the Eighth Five-Year Plan period also. A minor irrigation programme has also been implemented in the non-ITDA districts.

Educated tribal youth were given coaching under a pre-examination training coaching scheme to equip themselves to appear for competitive examinations. Special emphasis was laid on the education of tribal girls by starting 25 Ashram Schools, 10 Residential Schools, and two Industrial Training Institutes exclusively for them. In order to improve the health of the tribals, the Special Nutrition Programme was implemented. Along with these schemes, survey and settlement activities were taken up to settle the land problems in tribal areas. Accordingly, land survey to demarcate the boundaries between the forest lands and the land under occupation and enjoyment through cultivation by the tribals has been taken up on an extensive scale during the Eighth Five-Year Plan period.

The Girijan Cooperative Corporation activities expanded during the Eighth Five-Year Plan period by starting the commodity cooperatives and industries to process the forest produce bought from the tribals. Further, efforts have been made to improve the quality and increase the value, and also professionalise the activities of the Corporation to meet the changing credit and marketing requirements of tribals. In order to increase the coverage under the Scheduled Tribe Cooperative Finance Corporation (TRICOR), financial assistance has been increased to provide margin money to the development schemes being implemented under Special Central Assistance and Bank Finance during this Plan period. An amount of Rs 1399.60 crores has been earmarked during the Eighth Five-Year Plan for tribal development.¹²

It may be noted from Table 2,3 that the allocation of budget for tribal development increased from Rs. 18 crores in the First Five-Year Plan to 350.00 crores in the Eighth Five-Year Plan. However, the share of tribal development in the total budget declined from 1.21 per cent in the First Five-Year Plan to 0.50 per cent in the Third Five-Year Plan. Thereafter, it increased to 1.15 per cent in the Fourth Five-Year Plan and further to 3.60 per cent in the Fifth Five-Year Plan. It was highest at 4.32 per cent in the Seventh Five-Year Plan, but declined again to 3.31 per cent in the Eighth Five-Year Plan. On the whole, it may be observed that the allocation for tribal development has shown a marked increase from the Fifth Five-Year Plan onwards, with the launching of the Tribal Sub-Plan in the State.

As regards the impact of tribal development programmes on the quality of life of the tribals in Andhra Pradesh, the results are more or less similar to those noted at the national level. The literacy rates for the tribals remained low, and the percentage of the tribals living below the poverty line continues to be high. There has not been much improvement in their housing conditions. Further, the percentage of cultivators among the Scheduled Tribes declined from 57.6 per cent in 1971 to 54.43 per cent in 1981, which indicates a loss of land among the tribals, a major cause for discontent among them. Further, lack of proper understanding about the diverse social situation in the case of different tribal groups seems to be largely responsible for the limited impact of development programmes. Besides, more than a quarter of the tribal population falls under the category of dispersed tribes, most of whom are still left uncovered under TSP, MADA and cluster approach.

Their living conditions are no better than the other tribal groups covered under special programmes. Moreover, there is little empirical evidence on their participation in the general development programmes. Hence, these tribal groups need to be given special attention in the strategy of tribal development to prevent future discontent among them. Further, lack of proper understanding about the diverse social situation in the case of different tribal groups seems to be largely responsible for the limited impact of development programmes. Besides, more than a quarter of the tribal population falls under the category of dispersed tribes, most of whom are still left uncovered under TSP, MADA and cluster approach. Their living conditions are no better than the other tribal groups covered under special programmes. Moreover, there is little empirical evidence on their participation in the general development programmes. Hence, these tribal groups need to be given special attention in the strategy of tribal development in the future.

¹¹ Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1985

¹² Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1992.

II. Conclusion

To sum up, it may be said that despite the Constitutional safeguards and the launching of several programmes for the tribals in the country as a whole as well as in Andhra Pradesh, the living conditions of most of the tribals have not shown significant improvement. Even though the budgetary allocations for tribal development have shown a marked increase, apparently, they are not commensurate with the results achieved. This suggests that there are some serious flaws in the strategies and approaches adopted for tribal development. Besides, there is growing discontent among the tribals in different parts of the country since the State policy has not contributed to their development in the real sense. Hence, there is a need for reorientation of the policies and programmes for tribal development on the basis of intensive research on the diverse social situation in tribal societies and the selection of appropriate development programmes.

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