

**Govinda Chandra Rath** *Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. 2006. 340 Pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 450.00.

The word 'Tribe' denotes a group of people living in primitive or barbarous conditions. It is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialisation of functions. They have a headman or a chief who controls the activities of that group. Tribals have several sub-groups all of them together known as 'Tribal Society'. It is really difficult to say whether they are Indigenous or not but they are the earliest settlers of India. They were inhabitants of forests since pre-history and even now some of these groups follow the same trends and live in forests. Tribals constitute around 8.08 percent of the total Indian population, and of the total tribal population around 80 percent are found in Central India.

Development implies creating conditions in a given society for wholesome living of its members. Logically, it stands for the rise in the standard of living of the weaker sections, greater participation in the affairs of the larger society and the state, freedom from poverty, unconstrained development of individual's among the various sections of the social composition. After independence, constitutionally it was committed to bring about comprehensive and integrated development of this weaker section of the Indian society. Attempts have been made for the rapid development of tribes. Central governments and the various state governments have launched a number of schemes for the overall up-lift of the tribal people. But, in reality, achievement has been very unsatisfactory though not distressing but the desired results have not been achieved yet.

The tribal struggle for political autonomy and land alienation; rights to resources and decision-making process in the tribal economy; the decline in traditional occupations, environment and ecology; displacement caused by large infrastructure projects in tribal areas; the impact of development schemes on gender relations in tribes; and globalisation and shift from isolation to integration are the main issues discussed in the book under review, which is a collection of 13 research papers depicting diverse experiences in tribal development in India over the past 50 years. These research papers are divided into four sections.

Section I of the book, which consists of 3 research papers, presents a very thought-provoking and critical debate on the imperfections of different approaches, which were central to Indian planning for tribal development over the years. In this section, the first paper discusses these imperfections on the lines of Nehru and Elwin. Nehru's point of view was to eliminate the class based differentiation between rich and poor while Elwin was of the view that the gap between the savage and civilised should be narrowed down. Elwin's isolated, and Nehru's integrating approaches, provide guidelines for 21st century policy-makers to review the earlier paradigm of tribal development in a new context. The paper concludes that neither isolation nor

large-scale development without tribal participation should be central, but rather intensive decentralisation of power over policy-making and resources, and active participation of the tribal people for the development process of their tribes, is important. The second paper also poses the same argument that the planning process ignores the social side and participation of the tribal people, but rather imposes the policies, which therefore, leads to unrest in the area. At the end of the section, a very fundamental question can be asked: what should be the nature of planning in a multi-cultural country where people live in multiple layers of poverty?

The second section highlights the fact that tribes are still of the opinion that political autonomy would be an effective way of achieving the development purpose. Two papers in this section explain the root-causes of the political autonomy movements to demand separate state status among the tribes. Furthermore, these papers provide suggestions for alternative development models for the tribes.

The papers included in the third section explain how a segment of the tribes, excluding those demanding a separate tribal state, struggle to regain control over their principal resources. Three papers provide an insight into three kinds of reaction to such alienation. The first kind is no reaction, which means tribal inertia; the community continues to suffer from land alienation but does not resist the agencies responsible for it. The second kind of reaction is just the opposite of the first. In this reaction, the state is considered as an oppressor and agent of the process of ousting the tribes from their land. The third reaction is as the government fails to protect tribal rights to land and also as some tribes themselves are not able to protest against the state, then the situation needs a third agent, for example, civil society organisations.

The last section emphasises some other aspects of tribal underdevelopment as well as some success stories in the current development process. There are four papers in this section, which discuss development opportunities in the social sectors from various angles. Two papers deal with education status and programmes in tribes, one in an advanced state like Uttanchal and one in a poor state like Orissa. The tribes in Uttanchal are showing the positive side of development through an increase in education in males and females, which facilitates them to participate equally in the development process. While in the poor tribes of Orissa, the negative side of development has been observed and poses a very sensitive question for planners and researchers: first, to identify what leads to the failure in achieving and qualitatively improving the teaching and learning activities in tribal areas? And second, what kind of measures are needed to improve the current situation?

All research papers included in the book portray a diverse outlook of development in general and that of tribes in particular on the bases of available evidence. The book's conclusion that the mainstream development model has limited impact on the people living at the periphery, specifically for the tribal society in India, is important for future policy-making. The welfare model of development

complements the lapses by elevating the standard of living of the tribal people through introducing a series of welfare policies, self-employment and wage-employment programmes. Over the past more than 50 years, the mainstream and welfare models of development together have brought very little to the tribes but the overall performance is not as distressing as it was at the time of Independence. Now it is the time to integrate state, market, social activists and, most importantly, the tribal people themselves as the target group for the development of the tribal territories.

It is expected that the book will be immensely useful in guiding the policy makers, planners, tribal administrators, and social researchers in formulating policy for tribal development in the country. This book can also be useful for teachers in anthropology and social development to understand the development process of the tribal areas over the years.

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