

## Alcoholism and Rise in Widows among Tribals in the Post-Veerappan Era

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### Abstract

*The British administrators pursued a 'policy of isolation' and tried to keep the tribes away from the mainstream of national life. The tribal issues received prominence in the draft constitution, largely through the efforts of Baba Saheb Ambedkar and Jaipal Singh. In the new millennium, the central government increased the outlay for tribal development, resulting in the expansion of infrastructural facilities, fulfillment of basic needs and betterment of the living standard of the tribes in the country. A large number of welfare measures have been taken up both as policy measures and developmental programmes in all the fields of tribal development. The tribal women are known for ignorance, ill health, malnutrition, unemployment and other complexities of development. Mahaswetadevi fought for the empowerment of tribal women in India. Veerappan earned the attention of the media and society as a notorious forest brigand. There are certain noticeable positive and negative changes which have taken place in the areas of operation of Veerappan after his death. The present situation demands a revitalizing of existing development strategies and new orientation to the perspectives of tribal development. The Government of Karnataka and other stakeholders of tribal development should closely collaborate and redraw their research agenda to fulfill two goals of tribal development and tribal women empowerment in the Veerappan's area of operation.*

**Keywords:** Tribal Development, Women Empowerment, Community Development

### Introduction

Veerappan earned the attention of the media and society as a notorious forest brigand. He killed about 120 people and 2000 elephants in his area of operation covering Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala states. The people were subjected to isolation from the mainstream of national life and paid a heavy price for the misdeeds of Veerappan. Veerappan's area of operation could not prosper educationally, economically, politically and culturally because of the fear psychosis of the policy makers, administrators, businessmen and the general public's. People did not come forward to invest money in various productive activities because of the threats posed by Veerappan. There are certain noticeable positive and negative changes which have taken place in the areas of operation of Veerappan after his death. A good number of tribes

reside in the area under backward educational, social and economic conditions. The tribal women have become the worst victims under the changed circumstances. The present article evaluates the menace of alcoholism and forced widowhood of helpless tribal women in the post-Veerappan era.

### **Tribal Development before Independence**

Prior to the arrival of the European colonial forces, the tribal areas were relatively undisturbed. The Mughal and native rules prior to the British occasionally looted the tribal resources by using their unconstitutional power. The imposition of regular taxation through the passage of the Bengal Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 marked the beginning of unrest and rebellions in all tribal areas of the country, depending on when the Act was operationalized. Widespread tribal resistance movements compelled the British administration to negotiate workable peace in the tribal areas and this led to the concept of partially or completely excluded areas of administration in British India. The British administrators pursued a 'policy of isolation' and tried to keep the tribal's away from the mainstream of national life.

Birsa Munda fought for the rights and privileges of tribals in India and earned a new identity for Indian tribes. The tribal freedom movements such as Kol Rebellion, 1832, Santal Rebellion 1855-56), first, freedom movement, 1857 and so on also played a major role in the organization of tribes in Indian society. Several acts such as Cleveland's Hill Assembly Plan, Bengal Act, 1833, Wilkinson Act, 1855, Scheduled Area Act 1874, Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, Government of India Act 1919, and Government of India Act 1935 also paved the way for identity development and proactive measures for the development of tribes before independence.

### **Tribal Development in the Post-Independence Era**

The founding fathers of the Constitution, especially Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting Committee, were fully aware of the iniquitous forces embedded in the social systems, economic institutions, and political organizations in India in relation to the weak and vulnerable sections of the society and therefore, considered it necessary to provide for specific corrective measures and mandates in the Constitution in their favour (Sankaran, 2000). The overall pre-independence arrangements continued in the post-independence era after the State re-organization in the early 1950s. The otherwise contiguous tribal areas remained dissected and distributed over several non-tribal states except in the North East, where the tribal people have their own states formed along ethnic lines. Another important aspect of tribal development is that tribes are allergic to the legal system and developmental network.

The tribal issues received prominence in the draft constitution, largely through the efforts of Jaipal Singh, the most prominent among the tribal leaders of that time, on the advice of Verrier Elwin. The basic principles that should guide the approach to the development of tribes were closely set out by the Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who formulated 'Tribal Panchsheel' which was later endorsed by the Renuka Ray Team (1959:19), Dhebar Commission (1961) and the Shilu Ao Committee (1969). These commissions made important recommendations for the uplift of tribals in India.

The Community Development Programme was launched during the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) to empower tribes in India. The entire country was covered by the Community Development approach by the end of the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61). In the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74), a series of special programmes were formulated for specific target groups and that similar programmes for tribal development areas were also implemented on a pilot basis. The tribal development agencies were also established all over the country. The Tribal Sub-Plan was evolved in the year 1974-75 to facilitate the overall development of the tribals in India. The Tribal Sub-Plan strategy adopted the Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP) for tribal areas with substantial tribal populations.

The Sixth Five Year Plan visualized the raising productivity levels to several economic fields in order to enable the tribals to cross the poverty line. It had some impact on generating employment and increasing the earnings of the tribals. The Modified Tribal Development Approach (MTDA) was also initiated with a view to empower the tribes in India. At the beginning of the year 2000, the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy was implemented through 194 ITDPs, 259 pockets of tribal concentration, 82 clusters and 75 primitive tribal group projects. In the new millennium, the central government increased the outlay for tribal development, resulting in the expansion of infrastructural facilities, fulfillment of basic needs and betterment of the living standard of the tribals in the country.

Other prominent approaches to tribal development in India include; Special Multipurpose Tribal Block (SMPTDB), Tribal Development Block (TDB), Tribal Development Agencies (TDA), Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs), Integrated Tribal Development Programme, ITDP, Tribal Sub-Plan Strategy, TSP, National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), National Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (NRLEGP), Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban and Rural Mission (JNNURM) and so on. Besides these, Five Year Plans also had tribal development components consistently. Several specific

institutional mechanisms for providing assistance for the integrated development of tribals were created in India.

The XI Plan claims to set the path of tribal development in the direction of 'inclusive growth' of the socially oppressed classes, economic destitute minorities and tribal groups. Despite these efforts, the laggard groups are yet to catch with the general pace of development taking place in the country. There was substantial increase in the flow of funds for the development of tribals in India in the XII plan resulting in the expansion of infrastructural facilities and enlargement of coverage of the tribal population. Protective measures have been taken for the welfare of tribes like forests, shifting of cultivation, abolition of bonded labour, rehabilitation of displaced family, land alienation, land reforms, tribal education, vocational training, health and nutrition and so on in the country over all period of time.

Several scholars have also examined the problems and prospects of tribes in India. Empirical studies have revealed that bulk of the tribes still reside in the rural areas. Males and females among the tribes are almost evenly distributed with males having a small edge over the females. There is visible difference in urban-rural tribal literacy level. The outlays for the development of scheduled tribes ranged between 0.5% to 4.0% of the total plan outlays up to the Eleventh Plan period. The attention to development of tribes is not satisfactory in the country. Funds are not set apart in proportion to the percentage of tribes in the country.

Burman (1975), Kumaran (1980), Deogaonkar (1980), Pachuari (1984), Katoch (1986), Devan (1988), Chand (1988) and others have evaluated the impact of tribal development programmes in India. Studies have revealed that the level of tribal development in certain areas is dismal. Others have noted that tribal development programmes have created a positive impact on generating employment and increasing the earnings of the tribals. Some scholars have also observed that tribal development programmes are not effectively implemented by following an integrated approach. Tribal activists have lamented that the benefits failed to reach the lower strata of the tribal community in India. The non-tribals have also availed the benefits of tribals through various projects due to lack of scientific identification of the beneficiaries.

Our tribal development programmes are largely plan based and target oriented and take care of the disbursement of a given amounts of funds in the so called tribal sector. They are not need based, one may venture to say. The problems of the tribals are basically different in different regions of the country and in different areas of the regions. They need a micro level analysis and immediate attention and essentially

local solutions. Governmental interference is needed at the local level itself. Tribal development is at crossroads. Objectives have been planned and declared. Financial resources have been generated and earmarked. The planning process, set in motion, has proceeded far. If we fail to achieve the objectives, tribal expectations having been aroused, we shall succeed in generating frustration (Singh, 1982). There is the possibility that, having failed to secure satisfaction, the tribal leaders and the tribal mass may turn to the assertion of their identity through other channels i.e., sub-nationalism, separate state, etc.

Reservation granted to all the sections of STs regardless of their levels of education, income, social status and political power has created difference between different tribes and within tribes. The policy has resulted in the poor getting more poor and rich getting richer. This preferential employment policy benefitted the affluent tribes living in plain areas to grab most of the benefits. De-reservation of the progressive sections of STs could not take place due to organized mobilization and pressure politics of the advanced sections (Singh, 2000).

Commencing with the Constitutional commitments and the special legislations to secure equality and human dignity, a large number of welfare measures have been taken up both as policy measures and developmental programmes in all the fields of tribal development. Despite various measures to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the Scheduled Tribes, they remain vulnerable. They are subjected to various atrocities, indignities, humiliations and harassments. They are also denied a number of civil rights. This will call for efforts not only on the part of the State and its myriad agencies, but collective efforts on the part of the large democratic section of the society. Apart from the laws and state action, the society itself has to accept, imbibe and internalize the values of equality, non-discrimination, human dignity, justice and democratic practices (Sankaran, 2000). The development of Scheduled Tribes is thus a part of a continued quest for equality and social justice, the objectives enshrined in the Constitution and pursued since independence in the free India.

### **Status of Tribal Women in India**

The tribal people have remained untouched by modern developments since they mostly live in rural and remote areas. They have lost their land, resources and rights due to increasing industrialization, urbanization and modernization. These processes have posed series of threats to the peaceful coexistence of tribes in India. A tribal woman occupies an important place in the socio-economic structure of her society. The tribal women are also exploited in many ways. A comprehensive review of educational, health, employment and developmental status of tribal women presents a pathetic picture. The tribal

women are known for ignorance, ill health, mal nutrition, unemployment and other complexities of development. There has been a good deal of studies on the status, problems and prospects of tribal women in India and abroad. The tribal women also lack significant leadership positions in tribal economy and political sectors even though they played an active role in tribal movement.

Social stratification has also affected the tribal society since the tribal people are subjected to rapid alteration, addition and adjustment due to structural and cultural change across the country. Modern activities like tourism promotion, mining and commercialization have resulted in a complex tribal stratification which has affected gender justice and equity in tribal community. The traditional patterns, dimensions and processes of social stratification have changed in the modern times due to the forces of modernization and urbanization. Empirical studies carried out by Parkins (1972), Goldthrope (1983), Crompton and Mann (1986), Mann (2004), and others have reported that the topic of gender has been relatively neglected in the mainstream stratification theory and research which has brought about the oppression of tribal women. Studies have also reported the tribal women do not constitute a collectivity in modern society.

Tribal women continue to be the bearers and rearers of children. There are many factors associated with gender identities of tribal women. The tribal culture has facilitated the construction of positive gender identity for tribal women. Anthropologists like, Anantha Krishna Iyer, Ghurye, Iravati Karve and others have also provided a new dimension to research concerning the tribal development in India. There is a rich tradition of tribal studies in Indian society. These scholars have reported that developmental projects have adversely affected the tribal women. Sushma Sahay Prasad (1988), Jaynti Alam (1998), Sinha et.al. (2002), Vinita Damodaran (2002) and others have observed that tribal women in the informal sector have experienced several disadvantages in India. Empirical studies have reported that tribal women experienced severe economic stress and oppression due to the destruction of the forest in the name of development.

Mahaswetadevi fought for the empowerment of tribal women in India and noted that tribal women are subjected to two-tier exploitation—as a laborer and also as an instrument of sexual gratification to the new controllers of the economy. Devi also presented the politics of oppression hatched by the newly formed mafia group which is responsible for the saddening state of affairs of tribal women in India. The process of tribal development did not have a positive impact on the structure of tribal society in general and status of tribal women in particular. The new forces of modernization have drastically affected the indigenous

systems and their culture, tradition, social practices, occupational pattern and so forth according to Bodra (2008).

The implications of social change, modernization and development of tribal women are scientifically analyzed by the anthropologists. They have reported that the penetration of an alien culture in the age of globalization has adversely affected the status of tribal women. The emergence of a new market economy has increased the control of market forces over tribal communities and reduced the status of tribal women. The changes in the tribal land structure and dispossession of the movable and immovable property from the hands of tribes and the ownership of non-tribal affluent classes have severely affected the status of tribal women. In the market economy, tribal women have been taken for granted since they have not learnt the art of managing the commercialization of economy. The division of labor among tribal communities in the new millennium has brought about the exploitation of tribal women who are considered only as workers and commodities by the market forces.

#### **Future of Tribal Development in India**

The Constitution enshrines a number of important provisions for the safeguard as well as promotion of the tribes in India. These provisions include – protective provisions, developmental provisions, administrative provisions and reservations provisions. The tribal leadership is not powerful enough to assert the rights of tribes across the country. The tribal movement is also at the cross roads like any other progressive mass movements in the country. A historic breakthrough is awaited regarding the devolution of power to the grassroots of the tribal communities. Scholars have expressed serious reservations about the tribal developmental initiatives which lack coordination and prompt implementation. The bureaucracy is also primarily responsible for the ineffective implementation of the tribal development programmes. The fact is that the weakest link in the chain in the entire gamut of the tribal development process is the implementation component. The tribal development programmes cannot be implemented successfully with the existing formal and complex structures of various developmental agencies. Among the tribes, the so-called primitive tribal groups are extremely vulnerable. They are still living in isolation and their lifestyles show little change over the years.

#### **Plight of Tribal Women in the Post-Veerappan Era**

Karnataka state actually heaved a sigh of relief after the downfall of forest brigand Veerappan. However, the end of his tyranny in the region has opened the gates of misery for many tribals living in scores of hamlets as the liquor is flowing more freely than water. There is an alarming rise in alcohol consumption

and addiction among the poor schedule tribes, including those among the Soliga community in Yalandur taluk of Chamarajnagar district, Karnataka.

Alcohol sale and consumption in the nine tribal colonies Bongale podu, Hosapodu , Muthukadagadde poddu, Yerakanagadde podu, Seepeybetta podu, Manjigundi podu, Kalayani podu, Purani podu and K Devara halli in Biligiri Ranaga hills is a major problem , particularly among the youths in recent years. Though, alcohol was not available in tribal hamlets till late 1990s in the open, as no one dared to visit the tribal hamlets deep inside the forest fearing abduction from forest Brigand Veerappan. There was also no increase in movement of vehicles or visitors to the temple in the woods falling in Biligiri Ranganatha Wild Life sanctuary which is now declared as Tiger reserve.

The State Government then headed by Chief Minister S M Krishna was keen to improve the socio-economic and educational status of tribals. The government also had held a mini cabinet meeting in 2001 and banned sale of liquor within 2 kms from tribal hamlets. This was lauded by the activists and people of tribal community. However, the death of Veerappan in 2004 and the subsequent withdrawal of Special Task Force (STF) from the region opened up B R Hills and tribal hamlets to tourists. The people engaged in the illegal liquor business managed to enter interior villages, supplied liquor to shops and houses in some colonies.

The growing employment opportunities in nearby coffee estates, exposure to urban lifestyles there, increase in wages in recent years has also contributed to the factors luring the tribals towards booze. The interactions reveal that the flow of tourists, partying and consumption of liquor in woods have also influenced the tribal population. There are also instances that employers attracted tribal youths to work offering them liquor or paying them for alcohol in order to get the things done either in their land or in the business establishments.

The entry of alcohol and growing addiction in hamlets has affected many families. The nine tribal hamlets with 672 families have 132 widows of which sixty percent of the widows are less than 40 years. The only solace is that the majority of them are covered under widow or old age pension schemes. The alcoholism, the addiction to electronic gadgets, cell phones, migration of tribal people to nearby towns and cities for jobs had socio- cultural implications.



Maramma, a 110 year tribal woman, stands tall in Yarakana gadde podu, with her grown up great grandchildren, on the other side the falling life span of tribals is a serious concern from alcoholism addiction. The alcoholism and use of locally available 'ganja ' have increased psychic cases in tribal hamlets and resulted in the people suffering from chronic diseases. There are more than one dozen youths with mental disorders moving around in darkness due to sleep disturbances and allied mental disorders.

No deaddiction camps, awareness programmes like streets plays are held in recent years in tribal hamlets where education and awareness levels are low. There is need for conducting detailed studies on these aspects in the tribal populations that involves counseling, motivate them on psychologically, educate the community on healthy practices and its positive impact on their families in need of the hour. There was no alcohol during Veerappan prawl in woods. "There was no much influence of urbanization. But, the flow of tourists and their habits have influenced the innocent tribal population", laments Bommaiah, a tribal leader.

### **Conclusion**

In reality, the economically and politically strong within the tribal communities are cornering most of the policy benefits. There is no scientific monitoring and evaluation of tribal development plans in India. Effective machinery has not been set up at the grassroots level, regional and national levels in order to ensure that tribal development benefits percolate to the members of the target groups. A multi-dimensional approach to tribal development is the need of the hour in India. There is no doubt about the need of diversities of strategies for tribal communities in India. Planning for the tribal development needs to be continuously evaluated and upgraded throughout the nation.

It must be noted that the cycle of planning and evaluation, ideally operates in a continuous feedback pattern that modifies plans as a programme rolls towards its goals. The present situation demands a revitalizing of existing development strategies and new orientation to the perspectives of tribal development. The mass literacy programmes should be made more purposive, which should go hand in hand with improving the cultivation and marketing. The government should create awareness among the tribals before implementation of the development programmes. Infrastructural facilities should be developed in the tribal areas including minor irrigation facilities. Commercial banks, cooperatives and self help groups should provide financial assistance to the tribals. Food processing, medicine and other small industries should be set up in the tribal areas in order to create employment opportunities and achieve the goal of self reliance among tribals.

The Government of Karnataka and other stakeholders of tribal development should closely collaborate and redraw their research agenda to fulfil two goals of tribal development in the Veerappan's area of operation. All tribal development programmes should be implemented after proper analyses of the situation. Awareness drive has to be accelerated through proper media intervention programmes in order to enlist the active participation of tribes in the prevention of alcoholism, drug addiction and unlawful activities. The tribal women are suffering from untold miseries and disadvantages due to system failure and absence of social activism. Qualitative research approaches are also required to provide deep insights into the problems of the tribal development, while participatory research is required to establish the reliability and validity of the information pertaining to tribal development programmes in India.

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