

THE NOMADS IN INDIA FROM COLONIALISM TO NEOLIBERALISM: GOVERNANCE AND LIVELIHOOD ASPECTS

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This paper attempts to study the nomadic communities in India under the impact of colonialism and neoliberalism, particularly on their occupations and livelihood aspects. Nomadic communities live across the India, migrates from place to place in the pursuit of their lives. They engage in different occupations with their unique set of skills. Many of them were once severely affected by the Criminal Tribe's Act during the colonial regime. That stigma and brand has been carried now also in the journey of their nomadic lives. Many of their unique occupations lost their significance under the agenda of neoliberalism. With this, the paper tries to bring the comprehensive study of these communities related to their social exclusion and economic discrimination, it also looks into the question how these nomadic communities are able to sustain in the period of great political and economic instability, rising inequality which are instilled through the neoliberalism. Paper came up with the finding that, neoliberal policies displaced the occupations of the nomadic communities with the power of capitalist mode of production. Nomadic communities had to give up their traditional occupations and transform into proletariat since their traditional occupations became redundant. Finally, paper looks into the role of government and its assessment in addressing issues of these nomadic communities particularly their livelihoods.

Key words: Colonialism, Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Nomadic Tribes, Social Stigma, Economic discrimination, Livelihoods, Occupations, Governance and State.

I. BACKGROUND

Nomads in India are known as group of communities who travel from place to place for their livelihood. Different nomadic and semi nomadic communities living across India with different occupations, particularly getting livelihood from forest resources and, or from the animals (by making the street plays with animals). Further they also have been engaging in other occupations like Some are salt traders, fortune-tellers, conjurers, ayurvedic healers, jugglers, acrobats, story tellers, snake charmers, animal doctors, tattooists, grindstone makers, basket makers, hunter gatherers, pastoralists and the peripatetic or non-food producing groups. Anthropologists have identified about 500 nomadic groups in India, numbering perhaps 80 million people around 7 per cent of the country's billion-plus population¹(Anthropological Survey of India, 1982). Total Denotified Tribes and nomadic tribe's population in 2001 is 10, 74, 50,018 constituted

¹ (Proceedings of the National Seminar on Indian Nomads, Mysore, 1978, jointly sponsored by the Anthropological Survey of India and the Indian Statistical Institute.)

by 1, 36, 05,034 Denotified Tribe (SC & ST) Population, 4, 49, 59,058 Nomadic (SC & ST) Population and 4, 88, 85,926 Nomadic (OBC) Estimated Population (National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, 2008). But still many communities have not included in this count and the population of Denotified communities which has been calculated is only partial as only 15 States had provided the lists of Denotified communities.

Many of these nomadic tribes had been identified as criminals in British regime, that stigma has been haunting these communities even today. New laws had been enacted to control and restrict these tribes to a sedentary life style. The term Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) refers to various pieces of legislation enforced in India during British rule; the first enacted in 1871 as the Criminal Tribes Act, applied mostly in North India. The Act was extended to Bengal Presidency and other areas in 1876, and, finally, with the Criminal Tribes Act, 1911, it was extended to Madras Presidency as well. The Act went through several amendments in the next decade and, finally, the Criminal Tribes Act, 1924 incorporated all of them.

From colonialism to present neoliberalism, India underwent lot of structural changes in its economy. Particularly in agriculture, industrial and service sector. Agriculture was mainly developed with green revolution by introducing the HYV seeds, advanced techniques of production, large scale investments on irrigation, electricity, credit facilities etc. Eventually industrial and service sector also created new economic opportunities and comforts to the people which accelerated the economic development. In the year 1991, Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG) reforms were introduced to overcome from the economic crisis. Reforms relaxed the many of government rules and trade restrictions to encourage the private and foreign investors to invest more capital in different sectors of India. With this all initiations the economy was succeeded to achieve the better growth rates, but simultaneously there was destruction and displacement of existing order of life of the people has begun which caused by the same policies. Many of the artisans lost their occupations, this can be observed or seen. But in the shadow region there are many nomadic communities whose lives also have been adversely affected by these changes. This is undocumented in the economic history of India.

With this background the paper tries to study the 1) Impact of colonialism and neoliberalism on the occupations and livelihoods of nomadic communities 2) Role and assessment of government in addressing the issues related to nomadic communities such as livelihoods, social exclusion and economic discrimination.

II. IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM ON NOMADIC TRIBES

From colonialism to recent 1991 economic reforms, India underwent lot of structural changes. Different sections of society have been effected differently. Many saw colonialism and neoliberalism as implementing the ideas like rationalism, utilitarianism, secularism, and market values derived from the Adamsmith. He also envisaged that economy should be in *laissez faire*, there should not be government intervention, market will adjust automatically if any kind of disequilibrium exists.

During 18th century sovereignty got replaced with government, even though the process started in 16th century. These are seemingly contradictory modalities of power. One, totalising and centralising and the other is individualising and normalising. How the colonial political rationality and the market economy evolved and was organised in Indian princely states in order to meet the overall ends of the paramount power, the colonial state. In the process of achieving these power, it destroyed or reshaped long established practices and livelihoods of subaltern communities (Bangya bukya, 2010).

Before the advent of colonial rule, though India was divided on the basis of caste, but Indian communities were living relatively autonomous and self sufficient. But advent of colonialism disrupted these positions of Indian people and forced them to engage in new occupations. The new market economy and political rationality was used by the Britishers to plunder the resources and raw materials for their merchantile trade. The impact of merchantalism and market economy not just affected the main stream Indian masses but the tribals living in forest and hilly regions and the nomadic tribals who migrate from place to place were also adversely affected.

Based on their occupations, nomadic communities have been divided into three major types pastoralists, hunter-gatherers and peripatetic nomads. Apart from these occupations, they used to engage in small trading activities like transportation of goods and services from one location to another location. They used to carry the goods to the nooks and corners of society where there was no transport facility. Since they had greater knowledge of forests they could easily be able to transport the goods by passing through the thick forests. They were engaged in bartering of the forest produce to different areas which is seasonal in nature. Cyclically they moved to different places to trade the grains and salt. This trading enriched them to have a greater knowledge on the varieties of different societies. Trade became part of occupation along with their traditional occupations.

Their traditional occupations such as basket makers, rope makers, acrobats, snake charmers, fortune tellers, Ayurvedic healers, jugglers, story tellers, tattooists, hunter gatherers, pastoralists and the peripatetic etc. They fall in between the plain land and forests where they commute from forest to plains and from one village to another village to seek their economic and social life. Their livelihoods are mostly dependent on forest produce, animals and skills which they possess. Many of these communities provided services like entertainment, physicians etc. where they used to provide these services by moving from place to place. Their unique culture and different art forms are always a learning experience and helpful for the needs of plain people.

1. Colonial Economic Policies and Its Impact On Nomadic Lives

In the year 1871 Criminal Tribes Act was enacted mostly in north India, further in the year 1911 the act was extended to Madras presidency. Under the act, ethnic or social communities in India which were defined as "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences" such as thefts, were systematically registered by the government. Since they were described as 'habitually criminal', restrictions on their

movements were also imposed; adult male members of such groups were forced to report weekly to the local police (Meena Radhakrishna, 2001). The criminal construction of nomadic communities is merely a tool to detach these communities from forests so that they can use forest resources. They also forced the nomadic tribes to settle in specific places and extracted their labour for tobacco plantation and other commercial agricultural practices. Under the Salvation Army many settlements were created with an intention to reform the criminal tribes so that they can live like normal citizens by abiding to the laws and rules.

The forest laws of the 1880s prevented the koravas and other tribes from collecting forest produce, which is an important item of their trade and livelihood. The laws also did not allow them to collect bamboo and palm date tree leaves, which they used for making mats, baskets, brooms, etc. Common pasture land and grazing areas were cordoned off and not available any more to their cattle. They were also affected severely affected by new salt policy of government in the 1880s, which allowed large trading companies to enter the salt trade. Apart from salt laws and forest laws, nomadic livelihoods were severely affected due to the famine in the 1876. Famine caused the death of so many cattle which were owned by the pastoral nomads. Further, famines were managed under the policy of laissez faire, allowed grain merchant to hoard grain and sell at prices which could not be afforded by majority of people. As a consequence, the Koravas who used to have grains as important item for the barter trade suffered at a great set back. As a result of the above factors, the Korava and other nomads suffered a massive economic set back in the period between the 1850s and 1890s. Apart from the trading nomadic communities, a number of other communities such as Dasaris, Vaganur Parayas, Paidis, Rellies, Yanadis and many others were lost their legitimate means of livelihood during the 19th century and thus qualified as criminal tribes.

With the consolidation of colonial power, new market economy gradually restricted many nomadic communities to engage in their regular activities, they were forced to engage in the labour according to the colonial interests. With this, nomadic communities lost culture, independence and autonomy of their lives.

2. Neoliberalism and Nomadic Tribes at present

In both colonialism and present neoliberalism, we can see many similarities in its characteristics and its impacts on different sections of society. Since from independence India was concentrated and encouraged both private and public investment for accelerating GDP and reducing balance of payment crisis. Even though we have adopted the concept of mixed economy, but initial phases of independent India were more skewed towards the public sector in which government having pivotal role in controlling the economy and natural resources of the country. Eventually India started privatizing and liberalizing its economy by giving up public sector role. The major paradigm shift was happened in the year 1991, India opened its economy majorly in the name of liberalization, privatization and globalization. This decision was justified by giving various reasons like to decrease fiscal deficit, reduce the balance of payment crisis and curbing the inflation etc. The norms and terms of opening of the economy was proposed by the international organizations

International Monetary Fund(IMF) and World Bank. India had to accept these norms and terms majorly to seek loans and funds from the same organizations.

1991 reforms gave so many implications, particularly weakening the vulnerable sections of society. Role of state is very much important for a country like India where different languages, cultures, ethnicities, castes etc. exists. State need to look after the welfare of the weaker sections to establish the principle of our constitution such as, equality liberty and fraternity. This can be possible only when state has control over the natural, human and capital resources of the country. Present situation is very evident where the international agencies and private players are very much influential to work out for their profits and desired ends. State has been continuously minimizing its role, limiting itself to mere regulator and also increasing its disinvestments. This is adversely affecting the weaker sections, particularly the Tribals and nomadic communities who majorly dependent on their traditional occupations and requires major support from state.

Due to the neoliberal policies all the production activities in the country are going on in large scale by the capitalist class who owns both economic and social capital in India. simultaneously there is increasing trend in economic inequality during post liberalization period. Since the economic liberalization in the early 1990s, the evidence suggests increasing inequality (in both spatial and vertical terms) as well as persistent poverty. The macroeconomic policies possibly re-sponsible for these trends include—fiscal tightening, regressive tax policies and expenditure cuts; financial sector reform that reduced institutional credit flow to small producers and agriculturalists; liberalization of rules for foreign and domestic investment, leading to more regional imbalance and skewed investment patterns, and trade liberalization, which has affected livelihoods and employment generation (Parthapratim Pal and Jayati Ghosh,2007)

The corporatisation of bigger companies drove out smaller communities from their pretty trades and transformed them into hired labourers. The nomadic communities have been severely affected by the neoliberal policies. Many of the big companies started producing the goods at large scale which replaced the traditional products produced by nomadic communities. The modernity failed to provide alternative means of livelihood to them. For example, Yerukala community livelihood has been much connected with the nature and forests, such as making brooms, baskets with wild palm date tree leaves etc. these all product got substituted by the new plastic products. The patronage for handicrafts also declined because of the inflow of cheap factory made goods by modern manufacturing sectors, further all these products are transported to the nooks and corners of the country through the newly established improved transport system. Many of nomadic communities who used to entertain people with different set of skills like acrobats, snake charmers, street performers, animal performers, folksingers, fortune tellers lost their livelihood, importance and recognition for their occupations due to modern forms of entertainment like television, cinema, internet etc. Most of these communities have been wrongly understood as robbers, criminals and sorcerers etc. Because of this social stigma they were victimized and mob lynched by the mainstream societies.

As their occupations became redundant, many nomadic communities are failed to cope up with the existing capitalist system. Most of the people from these communities are migrating to urban areas either to perform their occupations or in search of some other work. But even there also these traditional occupations are not paid attention by the people which finally culminating them to become the labourers in some menial jobs or as construction workers etc. This indicates how the neoliberal policies eventually drives these communities to become the proletariat. Social stigma has been haunting these nomadic communities, they are treated as criminals and sorcerers, which excluded them to perform high competitive jobs, in other words, they are excluded to perform the jobs where high industrial reserve army exists. Most of them secure with some of the menial occupations like rag picking, hair gatherers and municipality labourers where relatively less competition prevails to get these jobs.

3. Governance and Livelihood aspects

The analytical stance of main stream neo classical economics is characterized as a methodological individualism. It believed that economic institutions are structured such that society wide outcomes result from aggregation of individual behaviours. It presumes that if individuals are act on the basis of their self-interests, the market dynamics dictate equal treatment of for equal individuals, irrespective of their other characters for example race. This is strongly disagreed by the economist who are classified as methodological structuralists. They believed that aggregate outcomes are not the result of a summation of individual behaviours but rather arise from constraints and incentives imposed by organizational and social hierarchies. As a result, Hegemony exercised by dominant groups, resistance offered by subordinate groups and institution mediates their relationship. Further they also understand that discrimination is inherent feature of economic system (Darity and Shulman 1989: 105). These two perspectives have different policy implications, where neo classicalists (methodological individualists) argues that discrimination can be self-corrected by strengthening competitive market mechanisms. On the other hand, structural methodologists argue that, discrimination persists despite the presence of competitive markets. Therefore, interventionist policies are necessary for eliminating discrimination. Correcting discrimination requires legal safe guards and policies needed for facilitating fair access to discriminated groups in various compasses. State intervention is not only required in land labour and capital markets but also in product and consumer markets. Mainly in the spheres of education, health and housing.

Indian constitution has provided so many rights and provisions to secure its citizens from injustice and inequalities.

“The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Indian constitution, Directive principles, article 45&46).

Even though many attempts were made to address the existing problems of nomadic communities, there are not much advancements in their lives and livelihoods, this is mainly due to failure of policy makers to have

comprehensive understanding of these communities. The different approaches to address the problems of tribals like Isolationist, assimilationist and integrationist failed to meet their objectives. Policies have not been adopted with pragmatic and holistic approach for the Development of tribals. Apart from this, new problems and challenges had come to affect the livelihoods of nomads. Particularly issues related to occupational redundancy, displacement, discriminations in educational institutions and health etc. Many tribes who displaced from their occupations became vagabonds failed to adjust to the new existing capitalist situations. They have been facing the discrimination, stigma, prejudices from mainstream Hindu caste society. Since nomadic tribals are a minority and their number is not much decisive in deciding the political power of politicians, it led to the cornering these nomadic communities.

In order to make specific and necessary schemes for the welfare of nomadic and denotified communities, it is necessary to understand some of the aspects related to their living conditions. National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic & Semi Nomadic Tribes(NCDN&SNT) has pointed some of the aspects in 2008. Their socio-economic and cultural back ground can be understood differently in the following aspects, 1. Geographical spread- the kind place they are living in, what the resources they are accessing to, and what are the problems they face to pursue their livelihoods. 2. Social, structural and demographic aspects- this is related to their religious believes, marriages, inter community relations and with society at large, customs educational and occupational status. 3. Cultural aspects- their value system, ethos, system of belief and institutions of social organization. 4. Economic aspects- the resources that they possess, the livelihoods they pursue, financial support from formal and informal sources, problems face in their living, benefit they got from development policies, government's economic development and entrepreneur programmes, market network and support. 5. Infrastructural aspects- health care facilities, educational set-up, roads, housing, general hygiene and sanitary conditions, transportation and other aspects and 6. Human rights aspects- harassment by police, and other communities, which exploit their vulnerability and perpetrate violence on them and abuse the dignity and honour of their men, women and children, and gender discrimination, both within and outside the communities. The above aspects will help to understand socio economic back ground of nomadic denotified communities, this understanding really helpful for the policy formulations(NCDN&SNT,2008).

Many recommendations have come out from the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Tribes(NCDN&SNT). Some of the important recommendations are, 1. Denotified and nomadic communities are not being included properly in census of India, so it is better to register their population separately, indeed this will be useful for policy formulations. For this union government should take step to enumerate these tribes separately. 2. It is suggested that the State Governments may constitute an Advisory Committee at the State level/Union territory (UT) level under the Chairmanship of the Chief Minister/Administrator of the UT. The Committee may include prominent anthropologists and sociologists, activists and community leaders of Denotified and nomadic tribes(DNTs). 3. It is necessary to formulate and implement separate welfare schemes for them as separate target group irrespective of the fact whether they

belong to SCs, STs and OBCs. 4. Steps need to be taken by the Union Government, the Election Commission of India, and the State Governments to undertake a special campaign for inclusion of their names in the voters' lists. So that they can exercise their democratic voting right. 5. DNTs live either in the open, small and makeshift tents or in small hutments or improvised pucca or kachha houses. Their houses are far and inadequate in comparison to the size of their families. The Commission found that these settlements did not have the facility of common amenities like sanitation, clean drinking water, sewerage, electricity, roads and public latrines, etc. The local body did not appear to have done anything in this regard. The need of the hour is that the local bodies ensure that the situation in such settlements are improved forthwith so that the DNTs are able to enjoy at least the basic civic amenities till they get shifted to better places of settlement. 6. It is suggested that the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment may earmark appropriate outlays for such schemes for DNTs in the same ratio as is being presently done for SCs & STs through a dedicated delivery system. Similarly, the Ministry of Rural Development may earmark separate funds for old age pension to DNTs. It is also suggested that all the Ministries/ Departments/ PSUs and other Government agencies and institutions may extend the same benefits and concessions, etc., to DNTs as are being done for SCs. 7. It is also suggested that the Union and the State Governments may launch a scheme to develop Special Socio-Economic Settlement Zones (SSESZ) for Nomadic Tribes at suitable locations on the lines of the Special Economic Zones for industrial units. 8. Skilled manpower in the changing economic context as also the need for creating opportunities for the employment of DNTs. The development of entrepreneurship and also training in various trades to men and women of DNTs is necessary in contemporary times. 9. A large number of members of Denotified & Nomadic Tribes are small artisans and make a variety of handicrafts in various parts of the country. These include items made of clay, plaster of paris, glass, stone, marble, bamboo, etc. The major problem being faced by these artisans is in the areas of procurement of raw material, marketing and credit, etc. It is suggested that special market zones may be developed at suitable places in large cities, giving them priority in the allocation of space. 10. Government has new flagship programme called Financial inclusion. In this context, it is strongly recommended that the Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes be extended the benefit of this policy on priority basis by forming Self Help Groups of men and women among these Tribes (NCDN&SNT, 2008).

Unfortunately, none of these recommendations have not been implemented by any scheme or policy of government.

III. CONCLUSION

In the contemporary times nomadic communities have been living in vulnerable conditions, their poverty and others human development indicators are extremely alarming. The political representative virtually lost sight on them since their number is not much decisive in deciding their political power. It is high time to all the academicians, politicians, institutions and other civil society organizations to work for them for bringing the appropriate policies in order to uplift them to avail the better living conditions in terms of employment, education, health, food and housing etc. and they should be protected legally without facing any kind of economic and social discrimination.

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