

# SITUATING THE ROLE OF THE NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT: A QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF DEVELOPMENT TO THE TRIBES OF THE DOOARS REGION OF WEST BENGAL

Karma Yangchen Lhamu,  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Political Science,  
Kurseong College.

## Introduction.

The meaning of development has changed its connotation with every phase of its flourishing dimensions from economic growth to welfare, from statistical gains to the positive change in the quality of human life. The study of development cannot be made in isolation because it involves a holistic idea where each variable is completely dependent upon the other making it multidimensional in nature. The human factor in development is very important because the ultimate question that needs to be addressed first is that development for whom? Therefore this gives us a clear indication that the overall improvement in the quality of human life should be the primary target of development or the developmental agencies either in the form of the state, the non state actors, the civil societies or the non-governmental organizations. Likewise, the idea of development in a developing nation like India must not be confined to the majority sections, the powerful groups and the intellectual classes alone, but on the other hand should focus on the overall holistic betterment of all, thereby bringing the poor, backward and the illiterates on a common platform with the better off sections of the population. The scheduled tribe communities of India constitute 8.06% of the total national population. It is important to note that in spite of the constant efforts of the government for the past seventy years post national independence, the overall result has not been able to meet the desired requirements. It is interesting to note that alongside the governmental efforts, the third sector of development i.e. the non-governmental organizations have been playing a major role in the development of the scheduled tribe communities of the nation. However the loopholes of such efforts cannot be underestimated either. Therefore it is very interesting to figure out and address the loopholes first and then address the superstructure so that we can bring about an overall development of the nation. This paper tries to understand the meaning of development both from the scholarly viewpoint as well as from the lenses of the tribal people themselves. This shall be followed by the analysis of the role of the non-governmental organizations in tribal development in the study area i.e. Dooars region of North Bengal.

## Understanding Development

Development in general terms means the use of productive resources of society to improve the living conditions of the poorest people. In its loose sense, development means a more of everything for everyone in the context of lot more for a few (Peet, R. 2005.) Though economic growth is an important component of development, yet it cannot be taken to be the whole of it. Other aspects such as human development, environmental development, capacity building and sustainable development, welfare based development and equitable distribution of wealth all of which are generated as the vectors of economic growth occupy a place of strategic significance in the understanding of the concept of development. Stemming from Enlightenment notions of the use of the modern scientific mind for improving existence, development entails human emancipation in two senses: a) liberation from the vicissitudes of nature through advanced technology and b) self – emancipation i.e. control over social relations, conscious control over the conditions under which human nature is formed. In both senses development refers to economic, social and cultural progress including finer ethical ideals and higher moral values. In other words development means the improvement of the complexly interlinked nature, economy, society, culture and political conditions.

Development is considered to be an internal, social process taking place within every country, where the basic requirements of the people are fulfilled by the wise and durable application of the country's resources. Economically, the definition of development suggests the nation's fulfillment of people's needs, employment, and the improvement of national wealth. As a matter of fact, "Development Theory by itself has little value unless it is applied, unless it translates into results, and unless it improves people's lives" (Lewis T. Preston, Former President, World Bank, Quoted in Todaro 2000, p. 77). The Positivist school of thought begins with the understanding of the concept of development as something closely related to "Value Judgment". Very often the idea of development is regarded to be a normative issue, a synonym for improvement.

In most of the third world countries, the role of the government is very important in generating developmental policies for the people. Due to backwardness in education, social structure and awareness, participation of the public is not seen to be in the vanguard. The governmental policies have remained half way successful which created a vacuum for the emergence of a third front in the form of Non Governmental Organizations. These bodies have originated with a visionary approach of upliftment of the common people and in turn social service and nation building in the long run. This makes it clear that in order to understand the meaning of development; one cannot get a clear picture without understanding the role of the NGOs in it. When we talk about the marginalized sections of the society, the debate remains incomplete without addressing the tribal issues. The government to a large extent has been successful enough in achieving partial success in the mainstream

development, yet there are groups of aboriginals called the tribal people whose holistic development has still been left to be a mirage.

In trying to assist the government in reaching out to the needy that also includes the tribal communities, the Non Government Organizations have now come to the forefront with the ultimate aim of social welfare. However, to what extent has these bodies done justice to their existence is a matter of debate which we propose to place it in this paper. The area of study we propose to take up for our research is the Dooars zone of North Bengal which is largely inhabited by the tribal communities working as tea plantation labourers, forest dwellers and other jobs in the unorganized sectors.

### **Approaches to tribal Development**

The vast territory of India with diverse ecological, cultural and linguistic zones is a home to 51,628,638 tribal population (Padmasambha, 1983). A study on the Tribes and Tribal Development in India points out the fact that though the total population of the indigenous group of 8.08% may stand to be in the minority section, yet with their unique nature, diverse linguistics and multiple cultures, they happen to comprise an important part of the overall population of the country. Studies have been dedicated to this particular section of society right from the era of independence till date, yet the application of such studies in the form of governmental policies have not been a complete remedy to address the problems faced by these groups of people.

Right from the initial Five Year Plans, measures for tribal welfare was taken up and so does it continue till today. Keeping aside the British approach and policy of isolation where the tribal groups were kept aside because of the problem of administration, the government of independent India has taken up many projects to bring about development among the Tribals. Though the First Prime Minister of Independent India, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was busy looking into the overall development of India he did not ignore the tribal population as well. He appointed many Commissions and Committees to look into the matter as to how the tribal issues could be solved. Verrier Elwin suggested the Isolationist or the National Park Approach which he later on changed to Integration Approach. Nehru was however not in favour of such extreme policies but instead believed in following the middle path approach.

Post independent India has witnessed the policies and programmes for tribal development based on Nehruvian guidelines. However even after six decades of planned developmental strategies adopted in India the results or outcomes have not been satisfactory. Unequal rate of development has taken the upper hand because of which rampant inequality amongst the inter tribal groups is witnessed. There has been the presence of a well off group within the same tribal group who have been able to take the advantage of the facilities provided by the

government of India for the reserved categories whereas there is the other group which is still far away, untouched by the blessings of modernity, living a life as though that of the ancient cave ages.

Due to the lack of success on the part of the government in bringing about the desired output in the field of Tribal Development in India “To translate the constitutional provision into reality”(John K. Thomas,2005) the new trend that was witnessed was the grand scale emergence of the Non Governmental Organizations in the Indian soil with the primary purpose of reaching out to those sectors where the government had failed to touch properly. Having analyzed the theoretical approaches to Tribal Development and the practical ground reality one can make a stand that there does prevail a huge gap between the two. Due to the governmental failures there has emerged many Non Profit Organizations who swear by their name of maintaining integrity in the process of bringing about development of the subject.

### **The Meaning of Development to the Scheduled Tribes and the role of the NGOs**

The survey conducted with the help of a questionnaire that raised vital questions on the level of development of the local tribals, the areas that need to be addressed immediately, the dimensions of development – social, political and economic, the meaning of development in their terms, idea of gender equality etc. proved to be very helpful in extracting the inner details of the level of development of the local tribal population. In simplifying the entire core discussions, we can state some of the vital points under the following numbers –

- i. In addressing the question of where would you rank yourself and your area in the ladder of development (underdeveloped, developing, developed), 70% of the respondents stated themselves and their area to be underdeveloped, while 25% regarded their area to be developing and the rest 5% chose to stand in between underdeveloped and developing.
- ii. The immediate question that follows is how do you compartmentalize development? In addressing this vital question 90% of the respondents laid emphasis to better roadways, drinking water, health facilities, electrification, education, job facilities as the major deciding factor to demarcate an underdeveloped area from a developed one. 5% of the respondents believe that the projects and policies designed by the government fail to reach the grass root level in its purest form due to rampant corruption on the part of the *giver* and massive unawareness on the part of the *taker*. If one can overcome this obstacle then they believe that a brighter picture awaits the tribes to flourish on. Rests of the 5% of the respondents believe that the developmental projects must address the core issue of empowerment where the tribes can speak for themselves without the aid of any external agencies.
- iii. The researcher moved forward with another vital question as to why do they think must be the reason behind their underdevelopment in spite of the constant governmental assistance. 40% of the people believe

misuse of public money by the leaders at the local level to be the prime factor behind their underdevelopment. They believe that the menace of corruption has been transcended from generation to generation which is a severe problem in itself. 50% of the respondents believe that the policies of the government fail to address their immediate needs. For example, Joynath Rabha believes that if the government would provide a handloom machine to every Rabha family, then that would be better than a hundred piglets or beetle nut saplings. Such complaints are innumerable in number. 5% of the respondents believe that the lack of awareness amongst the Scheduled Tribes followed by acute alcoholism to be the major drawback in achieving developmental targets. The rest 5% of the respondents blame frustration to be the major reason behind their underdevelopment. They believe that the non-tribals look down upon the tribals as a lazy lot that only appreciate drinking, dining, dancing thereby failing to secure an alternate source of livelihood.

iv. So therefore, what is development to you? In answering this question, 60% of the respondents believe that descent facilities of alternate sources of livelihood, better roadways, advanced education, proper health facilities, electricity facilities instead of relying completely on the solar energy, proper housing facilities to be the parameter of development. 40% of the respondents lay emphasis on job security, advancement or empowerment in all works of life i.e. social, political or economic. They believe that their unique cultural heterogeneity must be protected at any cost and also advocate the point that development at the cost of their cultural degradation would be futile.

## Conclusion

To an advocate of the main school thinking, the voice of the generally silent 8.08% of the Indian population may seem to be perfectly sugarcoated under the banner of either developed or on the verge of development, yet the ground reality may hint towards the opposite direction. No nation can regard itself to be developed if one of its organs/ limbs is not developed enough. To sideline the needs and healthy demands at the cost of the majority interest would be unwise. The very basis of the Indian Federation with a strong demarcation of powers between the centre and the state happens to aim at development on a micro level of all. This has been aided by the implementation of local governance at the grass root level. No doubt, development cannot be brought about by the governmental efforts alone; it also requires an active participation of the tribals themselves. Therefore, in such a situation, it becomes difficult to accept a top down approach model of development to address the core areas of tribal development by the non-tribals assuming themselves to be hypothetically tribals in the hour of policy making.

In other words we can state that the conceptualization and significance of development has witnessed a constant change with the passage of time. The idea of economic growth oriented development has now been clubbed

together with the human factor in it. Simply bringing about growth in terms of the economic achievements does not qualify itself to be termed as development because the present era of globalization demands an environment that must be based on the grounds of environmental sustainability, social security, economic equality and political stability. Development of the tribes of India is nothing new to the academic and bureaucratic arena. However the loopholes in the conceptualization and contextualization of development of tribes by bringing together both the academic as well as grass root lenses on a single platform are the major thrust of research in this paper. The role of the Non Governmental Organizations in educating and advocating the ideas of development to the grass root tribes cannot stand to be ignored. In this paper, the researcher tries to make a serious attempt to define and redefine development especially from the point of view of the subject i.e. the tribes themselves. The role of the NGOs in functioning as a catalyst of development has been questioned and analyzed in this paper alongside a refined understanding of development has been portrayed from the field based studies.

## References

- Aguirre, D. (2011). *The human right to development in a globalised world*. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Bhandari, J.S. & Channa, Mitra S. ed. (1997). *Tribes and government policies*. Cosmo Publications.
- Chaudhury, S. (2004). *Tribal identity, continuity and change among Kondhs of Orissa*. Rawat Publication.
- Danda, A. (1991). *Tribal Economy in India*. Inter- India Publications.
- Desai, V. & Potter. ed. (2011). *The companion to development studies*. Great Britain: Hodder Education.
- Doshi, S.L. (1978). *Process of Tribal Unification and Integration (A Case Study of The Bhils)*. Delhi: Concept Publishing House.
- Haq, M.(1998). *Reflections on human development*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hopper, P. (2012). *Understanding development Issues and debates*. Cambridge: Polity Press