



Issue of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Indian Tribes

Sheetal Thakur

*Department of Sociology,
Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, (HP)*

ABSTRACT

The quandary in tribal administration has been centering around the issue of tribal development in a right direction. What is right or fair is the big question. There is lot of controversy over the present day development paradigm of tribal. The tribal people have been facing problems from both inclusion in to and exclusion from the dominant development paradigm of the country. The tribal societies have experienced religious and other cultural inclusion in to the so called universal or dominant culture, and education etc. has led them to a situation where they find it difficult to cope with the outside world at present day situation. The paper tries to find out what were the means and aims of tribal exclusion, inclusion, and the consequences of the same with some instances.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'social exclusion' and 'social inclusion' are two terms most widely used in recent years by politicians, social scientists and the public as well. The term social inclusion originated in French social policy in the 1970s. It came into play in the 1980s economic crisis (Benn 2000: 310) when state sponsored republican tradition of solidarity was in vogue (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997: 414). By the year 1990 the term was theorized by scholars like Bourdieu and Luhmann. The latter clarified the concept in the following terms:

The concept of inclusion means the encompassing of the entire population in the performances of the individual function systems. On the one hand, this concerns access to these benefits and, on the other, dependence of individual modes of living on them. To the extent that inclusion is achieved, groups disappear that do not or only marginally participate in social living (Luhman 1990: 34).

With this adoption, social exclusion moved on to the political agenda in Europe in the 1990s. The conceptual development of social exclusion draws from two leading social policy traditions: that of social democracy, in terms of concerns surrounding inequality and equal opportunities, and that of the social catholic concern for social ties in the community and within the family. The term 'social exclusion' is ambiguous and contested. Definitions range from little more than a re-naming of poverty (Burchardt et al. 1999: 228) to broader based concepts based on a lack of, or inability to participate in society. Rodgers (1995: 46-7) visualized exclusions which include, 'exclusion from goods and services', 'labour market exclusions', 'exclusions from land' and 'exclusion from security'. Discussion of social inclusion and exclusion also relates to citizenship debates, particularly in terms of the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism. Atkinson and Davoudi (2000: 434), for example, refer to the differentiation between: the European social model [which] places considerable emphasis on maintaining social solidarity and ensuring that all individuals are integrated into, and participate in, a national social and moral order' and 'the concept of poverty which lies within the Anglo-Saxon tradition, where a liberal model dominates [and] is based on the idea that society is fragmented and composed of individuals who are in constant competition with one another.

Silver (1994) distinguished three paradigms of social exclusion, depending in particular on the ways social integration has been conceptualized, and associated with 'theoretical and ideological baggage'. In the 'paradigm' dominant in France, exclusion is the of the social bond between the individual and society cultural and moral. The poor, unemployed and ethnic minorities are defined as outsiders. National solidarity implies political right and duties. A 'specialization paradigm', dominant in the US, and contested in UK is determined by individual liberalism.

According to liberal individualistic theories, individuals are able to move across boundaries of social differentiation and economic divisions of labour, and emphasize the contractual exchange of rights and obligations. In this paradigm, exclusion reflects discrimination, the drawing of group distinctions that denies individuals' full access to or participation in exchange or interaction. A 'monopoly paradigm' is influential in Britain and many Northern European countries, and views the social order as coercive, imposed through hierarchical power relation. Exclusion is defined as a consequence of the formation of group monopolies.

The term 'disadvantage' has been widely used for conceptualization of 'social exclusion.' Hence, disadvantage refers to circumscribe the opportunities and life chances of individuals and groups in a given society. Now, poverty is recognized to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon, encompassing income, assets, education, health, dignity, and voice. But, still poverty continued to be understood as a single phenomenon that is the root of social exclusion in economic terms. Sociologists, on the other hand, have paid greater attention to identity-based forms of disadvantage. Such disadvantage reflects the cultural devaluation of groups and categories of people in a society. The identity in question may relate to a distinct and bounded group of people who are defined by their distinct cultural practices and shared way of life. Caste, ethnicity and religion are examples of such group identities. In practice, the dominant sections of society construct and re-construct the members of these groups or categories as persons of lesser worth through beliefs, values, attitudes and behavior which disparage, stigmatize, stereotype and discriminate.

Group based disadvantages give rise to 'horizontal' model of inequality where the inequalities in question cut across economically defined strata and differentiate the ability of different groups and categories within society to access valued resources and opportunities. The two paradigms, thus, focus on a quite distinct understanding of disadvantage: one relating to lack of resources and the other to identity based discrimination. Another dimension, the spatial disadvantage may lie in the remoteness and isolation of a location which makes it physically difficult for its inhabitants to participate in broader socio-economic processes or it may operate through the segregation or urban environments and the 'sub-cultures' of violence, criminality, drug dependence which often characterize the territory excluded. Social exclusion has to be seen as an institutionalized form of inequality, the failure of a society to extend to all sections of its population, the economic resources and social recognition which they need in order to participate fully in the collective life of the community. Social exclusion is a kind of mechanism by which 'access' and recognition is granted or denied. Economic theory suggests the distinction between 'open' and 'closed' groups as one way of understanding access and exclusion. Open groups are those which achieve their objectives by expanding their membership because the benefits they seek increase with the increased membership and outweigh the bringing new members. Closed groups like trade unions, on the other hand, achieve their objectives by restricting their membership on the basis of some agreed set of rules.

Thus, in totality, social exclusion denotes the following characteristics of a society at large or individuals at least.

- i) Inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life.
- ii) Distance and alienation from a so-called mainstream society.
- iii) Isolation from major societal mechanisms which produce or distribute social resources. Social exclusion is a broader concept. It is a related concept with unemployment and poverty, but not an identical one with them. Social exclusion is a relative term particular to a place or country on certain circumstances. It is always related to a social agent or agents. Exclusion is also dynamic term depending upon people's immediate condition.

Impact of Inclusion and Exclusion

Though it is generally presumed that exclusion is detrimental and inclusion is for good, in practice this may not be true. Coercive inclusion by market or by dominant social system in any form may cause harm to the social web of the new entity. Coercive inclusion may be in the form of child labour, women in wage labour with differential payments, putting tribal people in unskilled and unprotected labour force and as immigrant workers etc. For similar reason, exclusion is not always bad. To those who do not accept the value of the market system and do not resemble or depend on a social system outside their traditional domain, any voluntary exclusion from those entities should be perfectly accepted. Both from social and market perspective discourse on inclusion and exclusion of tribal people cater relevance in present situation. Because, it is said that exclusion and poverty are mostly interrelated. Conventional poverty indicators reveal that there is a strong correlation between being indigenous or tribal and being poor or extremely poor. Tribal people are more likely to have lower income, poorer physical living conditions, less access to health care, education, and a range of other services, worse access to labour, land and capital markets and worse returns to work as well as weaker political representation. The poverty and social exclusion experienced by tribal people are largely due to discrimination at social and institutional level during colonial and post independent era. The present paper tries to highlight the characteristics of inclusion and exclusion of tribal societies in Indian situation.

THE TRIBAL WORLD

Definition of Tribal Societies: On the basis of certain specific characteristic some human societies are defined as tribal societies across the world. These characteristics are not uniform for every society. But there are certain characters universal to all of them; at least they had derived from such a social arrangement at certain point of time. According to the ILO Convention No. 169 indigenous and tribal peoples are those peoples “whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations”.

Indian Tribal Groups: In India we come across many social groups or societies who might have some of these characteristics. But all of them are not denoted as tribal groups. The term tribe is more functional in nature in India. There was a purpose to declare or recognize some societies as tribal societies through constitutional Act of the country. Thus, when we talk of tribe, we talk of the Scheduled Tribes, the social groups recognized or listed in the Schedule of the Constitution of India. Therefore, by definition, the Scheduled tribes are those social groups who are “*such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution*”. This delineation shows that there is no characteristic definition regarding tribal groups. The recognition is done on purpose or functional aspects only. But it is generally accepted that in selecting the tribal people the following characters are taken some sort of priority: indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. The criteria are not spelt out in the Constitution but have become well established. It subsumes the definitions contained in 1931 Census, the reports of first Backward Classes Commission 1955, the Advisory Committee (Kalelkar), on Revision of SC/ST lists (Lokur Committee), 1965 and the Joint Committee of Parliament on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (Amendment) Bill 1967 (Chanda Committee), 1969.

Tribes are at Different Levels of Transition: Culture and society are dynamic. Culture and society change over time due to several factors - exposure, invention, experimentation and change in surrounding environment. The tribal societies are also no exception. When we observe the social status and cultural components of tribal societies, we find that in our country the tribal societies are in different stages of transition. They are in different stages of picking up or imbibing

Components of modern world like education, economic activities, dresses and recreation, food habit, health seeking behavior and world view etc. There is lack of uniformity in these domains among the different tribes in different regions of the country. These specific characteristic of the tribal groups attach the importance in that while making policies for social and economic development, one has to be aware of such levels of transition. For example, we have come across highly educated tribal groups in north eastern states like Mizoram whereas, areas like Orissa and Bihar the tribal people are very less educated. The situation is same for many other social indicators of development among tribal groups across the country. Thus, tribal policies must be group specific or region specific. Flatly generalized uniform policies may not serve the purpose.

Tribes as a Unique Self-Excluded Group of People: By traditional definition, tribal societies are self-sufficient (though not strictly in economic front). Self-sufficiency means they need not to interact with non-tribal societies for their social, cultural and physical existence. This very nature of tribal people kept themselves away from the rest of the other societies. The tribal people had crude form of trade relations with non-tribal world, but that was not sufficient to penetrate their social core. Thus, it is quite clear that exclusion of tribal societies was a self-imposed criterion. Contrary to this fact, the caste societies were the integral part of Hindu caste system. The Scheduled Castes, generally the lowest in the social rank, have socio-cultural and economic dependency on other caste groups. Thus, exclusion of such societies is due to its social customs, work attachment and legendry mandated by social authorities present among the greater Hindu society. The perceived and manifested exclusions are mostly due to the fact that the other part of the society think them not suitable to be in the same line of interaction. From these two explanations one can draw the difference of exclusion: *Tribal groups are excluded groups because they are not a part of the greater traditional Hindu society. At best they may be termed as the parallel segments in a different domain. Scheduled Castes, on the contrary, a part and parcel of the greater Hindu society, are excluded as*

neglected parts thereof. Therefore, it is opined that in the nation building process, while the Scheduled Castes need uplifting in social status, the tribal societies need a meaningful integration and positive inclusion.

CONSEQUENCE OF TRIBAL ASSIMILATION

In Socio-Cultural Sphere: Indian tribes and issue of social inclusion and exclusion In both the cases, a lot of tribal traditional entities and identities were either merged or lost to universal religious domain. Along with religion, social and economic front has witnessed a drastic change afterwards. Thus, we come across a term called detribalization, giving rise to the problems of identity crisis. Identity crisis arises when a group of people does not left with anything unique of their own from others, except the undesirable differential treatment they receive from the others. Needless to say that there is a difference between the Hinduised tribal the Christian tribal groups' assertion. In case of the later, though most of traditional religious norms are lost, it hardly altered the traditional identities and cultural components of the converted tribal groups. Christianity could not evolve as a universal dominant culture among the tribal people and the ethnic and regional variations remained in the core. Thus, being itself in a minority status in the country it could not absorb the tribal into the greater Christian society in the real sense. Moreover, Christianity itself offers as a shield towards loss of identity being a separate entity from Hinduism and so-called greater Indian culture. For the Christian tribes, the ethnic assertion, therefore, seems to be political in nature.

In Economic Sphere: Inclusion of tribal world into the non-tribal domain was mainly aimed at or focused on economic exploitation of tribal people and their resources. Intentional or not, the tribal people lost their traditional authority over their economic resources — land, forest and other resources. Several land reform policies, land acquisition act and land distribution policies deprived tribal people of their livelihood. The colonial laws did not recognize the community or clan ownership over forest and land resources. In the absence of clear ownership title land and forest went to the State. Inclusion also had great impact on tribal social and economic front. This was because the open up of tribal belts became the heavens of fortune runners who were basically non-tribal. During colonial administration numerous nontribal people entered tribal areas as traders, service providers, contractors and money lenders etc. They exploited tribal people in various ways. The tribal people, ignorant of monetary economy could not cope with the changing situation and reduced to land less wage labourers in most of the cases. Large scale migration and maladjustment occurred in tribal zones. The post independent inclusion of tribal territories into development map of the state has displaced millions of Tribal people of their home, making them dependent on others' mercy. The excluded area concept was mostly used for political gain in terms of security and smooth administration in and around tribal areas in contrast to the general view that it was meant for the betterment of the tribal people. Since the exploitation of resources and the breakdown of tribal tradition were in vogue in those areas, the political exclusion had some definite impact on tribal societies. The economic development, education and infrastructure etc. were suffered in those excluded areas, barring the areas where Christian missionaries were in operation.

Caste Sphere: It has been stated that tribal people, at present, have experienced detribalization and identity crisis. In spite of being self-sufficient groups of people in the past, what have made them bound to come forward to get assimilated with non-tribal domain? To answer this question we have to look into several circumstances the tribal people once went through in their ethnic history. It has already been stated that except a few tribal groups in the north east region, most of the tribal domains were either surrounded by the non-tribal domain or they were aggressively near to non-tribal entities. The political intrusion of non-tribal into the tribal authorities made the tribal people vulnerable to socio-economic exploitation. Thus, the tribal people were bound to come out of their traditional domain in search of better quality of life by accepting jobs, education and non-traditional way of life. The already penetrated parochial religious identities and resemblances made the tour easier in the initial stage. But there were certain constraints. These constraints were in terms of social recognition. In a caste based ranked society, as it was prevalent during colonial era and at the dawn of Indian independence, the tribal people were unable to identify themselves and place themselves in social strata. They had to identify, at best, as caste people for meaningful social interaction. Thus, the only way left open for the tribal people was to imbibe several caste components leaving behind their own traditional rites and rituals, customs and food habits and ways of life. There are numerous instances that show that by abandoning the tribal gods and goddesses, by leaving tribal customs, the tribal people could attain the status of lower caste groups in greater Indian society. In this rush for identity formation the tribal people lost a lot – language, customs and even their traditional names and surnames etc. The legendary stories flourished everywhere linking tribal people with the caste groups and caste literature (mythological) and greater Hindu traditions. We have come across several caste and tribal groups having similar customs and traditions in the

lower strata of society. Definitely, such similarities are due to the process described above. Social scientists have forwarded a term very similar to this situation as Tribe-caste continuum. A very general observation also can make it clear that the parochial legends found at regional level do not find their place in the domain of universal or all Indian level. There are different places known to people for those legends. The Hindu religion never penetrated in the land from where the forefather of the Ahom came to Assam. It might have been due to necessity of the Ahom kings to accept a broader religious ideology to administer the conquered country in later period. The story of the Koch Rajbonshis certainly was coined by the royal priests who were the Hindu Sages. It is to be noted that a lot of legends and stories were adapted and translated to local language using local elements and examples so that the people at local level can accept them as their own. The Koch themselves now-a-days do not accept their kshatriya status and deny the link with lord Siva or so on. The story of Gatotkach is also not above controversy. For logical reason it is very hard to believe that the Pandavas would come to Dimapur from Hastinapur crossing Ganga and the Brahmaputra. The famous Hadimba temple in Himachal Pradesh reveals the improbability of north-east links. The instances from Assam clearly show that a lot of ethnic groups imbibed Hindu ideology at different degrees. Some of them accepted it in totality and abandoned their traditional rites and rituals and observances. Some followed a dual form of religious belief blending both traditional as well as Hinduism. Following the advent of the colonial rule, the social and political scenario changed a lot in the state. This was a time of formation of greater Assamese society. Modern Assamese language was flourishing under the print media provided by the Christian Missionaries. To be able to speak and write Assamese language was a matter of pride and was attached to status in society for the non-mainstream Assamese (tribal) groups in the state. In this way, many ethnic and tribal groups left their traditional dialects and accepted Assamese as their mother tongue. Acceptance of Vaishnavism was also a means to raise one's status in the newly emerged society. The advent of the British rule, open up of market and monetary economy, large influx of outsiders and break down of traditional system and domain among the tribal group made it appealing to catch a new identity and status in the emerging society. By imbibing Vaishnavism they were able to forward their identity to the non-traditional world. Thus a trend of massive detribalization occurred during this period. These were some of the instruments through which tribal people wanted to raise their status or in some of the cases the priest and preacher tried to find their followers so as to build up religious society where they can be benefited financially, physically and others. The contemporary ethnic history of tribal India clearly reveals that this process of identity formation and detribalization was not at all a prudent move from the part of the tribal people. The newly created identity did not serve the purpose to the tribal people. Except a few, most of the tribal groups could not assimilate completely with caste traditions. The converted tribal were, too, placed in the lowest strata of the society and ultimately experienced more severe exploitation and negligence from the greater Hindu society and elite groups. The same way they also lost their age old dignity as a self-sufficient society. The tribal people who had their own gods and goddesses, had own priest and norms of religion, society and way of living, who were independent lot, now had to obey alien dictatorship of higher castes and elites.

Frustrated at the deteriorated condition the tribal groups in many regions of the country have started rejuvenate their age-old tradition to regroup and re-assert their unique or separate tribal identity. A process of retribalization and revivalism has sprung-up in the country at different times. Thus, an excluded identity began to appear in tribal world again. Tribal societies are now seemed to be smarter than before. The exclusion, now, is selective in nature. They are very much concerned about preservation of their remaining traditional culture and entity, while in economic front and skill formation they are inclusive in nature quite voluntarily. Thus, exclusion is now, again, self-imposed and it is basically meant for group identity preservation aiming at political, social and economic assertion. Thus, we see a different kind of inclusion –exclusion dynamic in case of tribal groups in India. One has to be careful while talking about contemporary trends or dogmas of inclusion-exclusion because the tribals have a complex web of socio-political history to accept or deny them.

CONCLUSION

There is constant change and also relative stability to maintain equilibrium. It accepts new components-invented, derived or borrowed, adapt to its own niche and merges it to enrich its totality. Thus, exposure to non-tribal domain at different period of ethnic history has earmarked numerous changes in tribal cultural component. The extent and intensity of such changes primarily depends on a society's need-based integrity to its cultural components and life ways. A-two-way change- say for example, the exposure to new culture and change in surrounding environment, physical, social and economic, speeds up the change process in cultural domain of a tribal group. In a negative inclusion process these two forces are rampant and, therefore, cultural disintegration is rapid. This is a negative trend among the tribal groups, who in turn are in the verge of losing its unique identity, and thus problems of identity crisis occurs. One has to be clear about the fact that no one can deny changes in society. But penetration by

an alien culture that does not have basic linkage to the core of people's life ways is not a welcome change at all. Social scientists have mentioned that social and cultural disintegration through such forces has made tribal people more vulnerable to severe exploitation throughout the country.

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