

## The Origin of Tribal Development



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The system of administration especially of tribal areas during the British regime can be described as paternalistic in mode and depended largely on the personal qualities of the administrator, his character, initiative and vigour. Military officers were preferred to civilian officers for administering the tribal areas which were known as non-Regulation Provinces. This was not only because of their efficiency but also due to their capacity to suppress the unrest or tribal rebellion if required. Blunt who had experience of tribal administration of civil justice in Arracan in 1828 and later became a member of the Governor General's Council was followed by Wilkinson and Dent who worked as special commissioners for suppressing the Great Kole Rising of 1832. Wilkinson had direct experience of running administration in the tribal areas of Nagpur for more than a decade and was influenced with the ideals of administration of relief. In Chota-Nagpur during 1834 when Wilkinson's rules were promulgated and even during 1855 when a separate Santhal Parganas District under the Yule Regulation was created the British policy for these non-Regulation Areas still remained isolationistic in nature.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were tribal rebellion in many areas which compelled the Government to think of and apply legislative and executive measures in these areas. An adjunct of the policy was induction of the Christian Missionaries in the tribal areas. In 1874 the Scheduled District Act was passed and when the Government of India Acts of 1909 and 1935 were passed the tribal areas from various states were excluded from the purview of the legislature as "Partially Excluded Areas and Excluded

Areas". Thus isolation of the areas and the paternal despotism of the administration were continued and the government felt that this would help in suppressing tribal rebellions and weaning them away from the national movement.

When national leaders and Mahatma Gandhi gave a call to the national, the tribal leaders from many areas responded, for example, in Bihar the Tana Bhagat Movement cooperated with the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by Gandhi and participated in agitations like the flag Satyagraha of Nagpur. Due to this coming together the national leaders could understand the conditions and problems of the tribal population and became aware of the need of integrating the tribal people with the mainstream of Indian life.

Social workers such as Shri A.V. Thakkar of the Servants of India Society started pioneering work among the tribal people and this helped in creating new attitudes and approach in the mind of national leaders towards the tribal population. Even some British officers who had studied tribes and created a vast literature such as Dalton, Risley, Haton, Grikson, Grierson and later Dr. Elwin or missionaries such as Bishop and others helped in giving a new direction to the administration of tribal areas.

After independence the Constituent Assembly appointed a sub-committee for the "Excluded areas and partially Excluded Areas (other than Assam) with Shri A.V. Thakkar (Thakkar Bappa) as Chairman, thus demonstrating its responsibility towards the tribal people Sardar Patel also advocated that every tribal must reach a high level. All these efforts were reflected in the Constitution of India which provided different safeguards for the welfare of about 427 Scheduled Tribe communities numbering 38.2 million at the commencement of the first Five Year Plan (as per the Census of India 1971). Later, planned development concentrated on tribal development starting with the First Five Year Plan and went on innovating new structures and models with sufficient financial outlays for tribal development.

In West Bengal the tribal people numbering 30, 70,672 are spread over the whole length and breadth of the state. But nowhere in this state are they found to form a concentrated tribal zone as is found in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and some other states. These 30, 70,672 tribal peoples as per 1981 Census, have come from 38 tribal groups. Since 1950 the number of Scheduled Tribes have been increased from 7 to 38. The number of Scheduled Tribes was 7 in 1950, became 19 in 1956 but finally increased to 41 in the same year with the reorganisation of the states and ultimately amended to 38 in 1976.

These Scheduled Tribes may be classified into three distinct categories. Tribals like the Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Mahali, Malpaharia, Bhumij, Kheria, Ho, Kora and others who seem to have migrated from Bihar are distributed throughout the state including the tea-estates of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts. Secondly, tribes like the Rabha, Mech, Garo, Magh, Hajong and Chakma who have come from Assam, Tripura or Bangladesh are mainly found in Terai or foothill areas (Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts), and the third category includes tribes like Bhutia and Lepcha who possibly have come from Bhutan and Sikkim, have ultimately possibly have come from Bhutan and Sikkim and have ultimately settled in Darjeeling district.

Racially tribal groups of this state may be divided into two distinct types: the Australoid type which includes most of the tribal groups such as Munda, Santal, Birhor, Savar, Lodha, Bhumij, Kora, Mahali, Malpaharia and others (Tribal Situation in West Bengal, p. 5-6.) and the Mongoloid type covering the Bhutia, Lepcha, Rabha, Magh, Garo, Mech, Hajong and Chakma. According to 1971 Census, the first type covered 97.92 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the state whereas the share of the second type was only 2.08 per cent.

In West Bengal these 30, 70, 672 Scheduled Tribes form 5.63% of the total population of the state (5, 45, 80,647)) and 6.16% of the total Scheduled Tribe population of India (4, 98, 03,435) as per 1981 Census. Of the total tribal population of West Bengal a little over 90% were shared by nine communities during 1971. These nine communities were the Santal (54.35%), Oraon (11.49%), Munda (7.85%), Bhumij (6.69%), Mahali (1.87%), Lodha/Kheria (1.81%), Bhutia (1.33%) and Malpaharia (1.22%). It is interesting to note that the first five ethnic groups alone contributed 84.07 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the state in 1971.

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