

Tribal Development in Jharkhand: A Multidimensional Critical Perspective

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ABSTRACT Here an attempt is made to look at the very concept of development in the context of a tribal milieu. Our contention is that in the name of development, tribal community in particular and Indian society in general should not adopt the model of western modernisation uncritically. Rather it has to be planned and implemented locally with active participation of the subaltern tribal community that cannot be reduced to their so-called 'representatives'. Further, one needs to distinguish real social development from superficial development.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about development and tribal development. Development usually means some kind of social change in a particular direction for the betterment of a group or an entire society. But, unfortunately, there have been several myths about development such as following:-

- (a) Development is what the West has thought and done, i.e. western modernisation or westernisation.
 - (b) Development denotes the prevalence of machine over humans.
 - (c) Development refers to having skyscraper pucca buildings, a kind of concrete jungle.
 - (d) Development means unchecked and unrestrained use and exploitation of various natural resources for maximum production.
 - (e) Development is economic growth in terms of increase in income/gross domestic product.
 - (f) Development means high rate of urbanisation-migration from rural areas to urban areas.
 - (g) Development means that the livelihood of the maximum people is based on non-agricultural activities, viz industry (secondary) and service (tertiary) sectors.
 - (h) The unit of development must be individual.
- These myths are imaginery, hence need to be demystified. For a critical appreciation of development, we will discuss the paradigms of development.

PARADIGMS OF DEVELOPMENT

Various sociological and anthropological

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studies have shown that in India in particular and developing countries in general, Western model of development, i.e. 'modernisation', as reduced to Westernisation, has not worked and would not work because the social-cultural specificities of Western Europe and North America have been quite different and exclusive from those in the Third World. For instance, nuclear family is the dominant norm in Western societies whereas the extended family is the norm in the Third World. Secondly, the Western countries have been primarily industrial societies whereas most of the Third World countries are primarily agrarian societies, hence their priorities differ from the west. Thirdly, the western model of maximising production without any kind of checks and balances have led to the environmental destruction and imbalances. Fourthly, the western model has used labour-displacing technologies resulting into mass unemployment and poverty; therefore, the gap between the rich and poor as well as between the different regions has widened manifold. Fifthly, the western model of development over-emphasises the one-dimensional economic growth forgetting social, cultural, psychological and political dimensions. Sixthly, there the market dominates over State resulting into various kinds of distortion, especially the marginalisation of the weaker sections. Finally, the Western model over-stresses on consumerism; thus it is greed-based, not need-based.

Thus the western model is a kind of superficial development. On the other hand, real social development requires community development, labour intensive technology, respect for indigenous culture, need-based use of natural resources

(sustainability), growth with social equity, active people's participation and decentralisation, respect for traditional knowledge system, community empowerment and State's intervention in the interest of the community. Thus two paradigms of development—superficial and real-social—are poles apart. This may be vividly shown in following table 1 :

TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT IN JHARKHAND

Jharkhand was born on November 15, 2000 and Bhartiya Janata Party led National Democratic Alliance formed its first government there. The government has declared that its priority would be development. But the question arises as to what kind of development is needed. First and

Table 1 : Paradigms of development. Parameters superficial development real social development.

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>Superficial development</i>	<i>Real Social development</i>
(a) Unit	Individual	Community
(b) Technology used	High tech machines (labour displacement, joblessness).	Labour-intensive (job creation)
(c) Culture	Westernisation (rootlessness)	Indigenisation (rootedness)
(d) Use of natural resources	Greed-based maximum use and exploitation (unsustainability)	Need-based minimum use of natural resources (sustainability)
(e) Rural-urban sector	High level of urbanisation	Low level of urbanisation.
(f) Economy	Industrialised (including services)	Agrarian.
(g) Theme of change	Economic growth (one dimensional)	Growth with equity health, education, employment (multi-dimensional)
(h) Decision-making process	No people's participation and more centralisation (voicelessness)	More decentralisation, policy planning from below, more people's participation. (voicefulness)
(i) Size	Big is better (big dam, big industry, big project)	Small is beautiful
(j) Knowledge system	Modern western (lab-tested and formal)	Traditional, indigenous (experience tested & informal, non-formal)
(k) Goal	Conspicuous consumption (individualism)	Restrained & shared consumption—community empowerment (collectivism)
(l) Market versus State	Dominant role of market, State has no role.	Market within limits, State can intervene for the sake of community.
(m) Consequences	Uneven growth, regional imbalances, social inequality, environmental destruction, increase in unemployment, pressure on towns, alienation of people.	Inter, and intra-generational equity, more employment, regional balance, social equity, less rural-urban divide, mass awareness & people's empowerment.

Source: Prepared by the author based on his research work "Why people protest?" (University of Manchester, Manchester, UK, 1998)

foremost, there is a need for a shift from absolutely exclusive and one-dimensional tribal ethnicity to an inclusive and multi-dimensional regional identity because one should not forget the crucial fact that, historically speaking, the rigid tribal ethnicity failed to get mass involvement in Jharkhand movement. The first great leader of

the movement was Jaipal Singh who is often accused of betraying the movement for the sake of individual gains but this seems to be also true of many Jharkhand movement leaders in recent past. However, more important issue is that Jaipal Singh had formed 'Adivasi Mahasabha' in the beginning but it could not attract the masses in

general because of its narrow perspective and exclusiveness. He, later on, realised it and, therefore, dissolved it and formed an organisation called Jharkhand Party. This newness had broader base, socially and structurally. Secondly, it encompassed cultural, economic and political issues together. Thus there was a major shift from absolutely exclusive tribal ethnicity to multi-dimensional regional identity. This dimension is to be strengthened and made more inclusive and the myth of 'Jharkhand for the tribals, of the tribals and by the tribals' should be demystified. This is required also because there are regional and sub-regional as well as inter-tribal differentiation and stratification. Santhals of Santhal Pargana region suspect the Mundas and Oraons of Chota Nagpur (Ranchi to be precise). Similarly, in Santhal Pargana itself, a sizeable primitive tribe, namely Paharia tribe, highly distrusts Santhals who have grabbed their land and forest over the years. Their practice of jhoom cultivation (Kurwa) involves conflicts with others, Santhal tribals as well as non-tribals.

Therefore, the basic need of the hour is that at first economic condition is to be improved by creating infrastructure with more jobs based on local resources.

Second major issue is whether the tribals should be given priority or dominance in development. The very conception of dominance presumes some kind of subordination, hence it is to be discarded otherwise there will emerge a 'reverse discrimination'. Hence priority, instead of dominance, of subaltern tribals should be the motto. However, in a matter of plans and schemes, all the local people in general and tribals in particular should be actively involved. But it does not mean that there should be some kind of appeasement, because appeasement costs very heavily and we have paid a heavy price for that from time to time. Rather there should be fair play and justice. For instance, if a tribal commits a crime, he should be dealt with as harsh as non-tribal criminals are dealt with.

Third aspect is revival and rejuvenation of traditional tribal institutions like 'Parha', 'Manki-Munda', 'Parganait', 'Pradhan', and so on. But it poses a great challenge. There has been a structural conflict between traditional tribal institution and modern institutions of local self-governance, namely Panchayati raj system. Unfortunately there has been no genuine attempt, at political level to evolve a reasonable conciliation between

the two. It may be so due to non-holding of Panchayat elections for over two decades otherwise some mechanism of partnership would have evolved slowly and slowly. Actual tribal institutions should be made non-party election-based, instead of hereditary. A few years back, the govt. of India accepted Dileep Singh Bhuria Committee's report for restoring tribal institutions in Scheduled Areas and Jharkhand govt. should immediately implement it in letter and spirit. However, there are different conflicting perceptions about some great tribal leaders, specially Birsa Munda. Unfortunately there has emerged a trend of God-like worship of one's caste and creed. Like Ambedkar among scheduled castes, Birsa Munda is also being mythologised among Jharkhand tribals. But we have to answer this question: was Birsa Munda a God or a revolutionary? The answer to this question depends on how you look at the tribal society. The moment one declares him a god or God, he ceases to be a thinker, activist, leader and revolutionary. The dichotomy is mutually exclusive. A god is a thing of worship, connoting unbridgeable distance from the human beings, is vested with certain kind of invisible supernatural powers of creation and destruction, never dies nor becomes a martyr, has no ideology and never mobilises the masses. But on the other hand, Birsa Munda was an activist thinker, down-to-earth revolutionary, fought against the mighty British empire and organised the masses for an 'ulgulan' (revolt) against the foreign regime as well as the local moneylenders. So did Siddho, Kanho, Chand and Bhairav (Santhal leaders) in Santhal Pargana or Tilka Manjhi in Bhagalpur. Therefore, it will be in the interests of the tribals in particular, and all citizens of Jharkhand in general, to treat Birsa Munda as a revolutionary rather than a passive and mythical God.

Fourth aspect is tribal women's empowerment. It has been a general practice in Jharkhand that usually women work, men shirk; women earn, men spend. Only women are seen to collect fuel wood from forests at a distance of 5-6 kms. and carry load on their heads as 'Bojharis'. Males don't carry load on their heads as per custom. There is a perceptible discrimination against women both at social and economic levels. A few years back a Santhal woman in Dumka was ploughing her field in absence of her husband and for this she was tortured by all the men of the village, including the tribal 'Pradhan'.

Similarly several kinds of superstitions rule the roost. Witchcraft is very much prevalent and its target is more often the women, especially the poor widows, issueless women and old women. If some one falls ill or there is a natural calamity or an epidemics spreads such poor women are blamed and tortured beyond imagination. Actually the malafide intention of the clan members and neighbourers is to grab their lands, houses and other moveable and immoveable properties. Similarly women selling 'handia' are also cheated daily. Hence there is a genuine need to start literacy and health awareness campaigns door to door. But this should not be imposed; rather local educated youth should be encouraged to launch such a drive and/State should play the role of a facilitator.

Fifthly, Jharkhand people's identity is directly linked with 'jungle, Jamin and pani, (forest, land and water). Hence these should be allowed to be protected by themselves. Forests, especially village forests, should be managed by the people themselves in lieu of unsuitable and exploiting forest officials. A related issue is the question of displacement from their lands, houses and villages due to big dam projects like DVC, Chandil, Koelkaro, Tilaiya, Auranga, etc. Now 'small is beautiful' should be the norm where local, indigenous and intermediate technology should be fruitfully applied. Now any land acquisition should be done only with the consent of the local people after payment of market rates and if that

land is not used by the acquiring agency in due course of time, it should be returned to the original landholders without any hindrance.

Finally, the administration should be made responsive and for this the right to information should be implemented at all levels of planning and execution. Every Govt. department or office should notify a nodal officer for this and every month relevant information should be disseminated through booklets/newspapers, leaflets/internet etc. Civil society, at grassroots level, should flourish but one should not forget to distinguish between the people and people's 'representatives'. Unfortunately the latter have fallen prey to several evils and lost their credibility to a large extent, hence almost the entire political class is disliked by the common people in their daily life. It has been observed that tribals are very sensitive to their cultural traits and, therefore, the administrators have to regard them from the core of their hearts.

Thus we may observe that the conception of tribal development in Jharkhand should be multi-dimensional, inclusive, voiceful, job-oriented, community-based and women focused, so that not only the local subaltern people's feelings are assuaged but their socio-economic condition is also improved substantially. This is an age of achievement, let the subaltern tribals achieve what they think socially suitable, culturally accommodative and economically useful for them.