

UNREST IN TRIBAL AREAS AND IMPACT OF EXTEREMISM ON TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT*

The normalcy of human existence is under severe strain in the tribal regions of the state, due to increasing unrest and violence being perpetrated by extremist forces in the name of tribal liberation. In such a scenario, any effort at development by the government or other agencies are deliberately sabotage so as to keep the flames of militancy at a high. The magnitude of the problem in tribal areas calls for an urgency in reviewing the causes for the rise of militancy and the need for reorganising our policies with regard to indigenous communities.

In Andhra Pradesh, the insurgency movement has unread a fresh strategy of offensive and is making capital of the degrading tribal situation. The underlying comes for the prevailing unrest can be clearly understood but as long as the government chooses to ignore the causes and deals with the problem only perfunctorily, the future of the tribals and any sustainable development activities is predictably bleak.

CAUSES FOR THE UNREST AND EXTREMISM:

1. LAWS AND TRIBALS:

The laws laid down by the constitution have rarely provided justice to the tribals. This holds good with all laws - forest revenue, excise, criminal or civil laws which have basically two major lacunae - they have snatched away the tribal rights over land, forest and resources, and secondly, have failed to recognise the traditional legal system and management practices of the tribals with regard to either resources or to the social systems. Even laws which are protective of tribal interests have not been implemented with earnestness as a result of which land alienation prevails as the most serious problem until today. The ignorance and docility of tribal people in confronting the exploitation of non tribals has shifted to gradual awareness of laws and assertion of their rights. This unwillingness to no longer accept governmental or non tribal injustice is causing unrest and revolt in the tribal communities.

2. DEVELOPMENT POLICIES OF THE GOVERNMENT:

One traces the historical process of development intervention by the government in the tribal areas, one can perceive a very illogical, insincere and shortsighted attempt at defining 'development' in the hill regions. Government policies have always been in contravention of the laws of the scheduled areas and there was scant respect paid to the implementation of these laws. Moreover, the abundant resources of land, water or forests have been utilised for the benefit of external societies and people but never was there development of the local communities. Further, they have only been displaced, at times more than once and meagerly or never compensated for their loss of resources or livelihoods. This is true of irrigation, drinking water, electricity or any other development projects.

The present policies of the government are to violate, circumvent or amend the laws which protect the interests of the poor tribals, falling over backwards to help private companies or industries commercially prosper, like mining industries, tourism paper mills, film or wood-based industries. The experience with such unscrupulous development policies of the government is spurning the tribals, especially the unhappy youth into the tantalizing calls of extremist exhortations.

* Paper prepared by Ravi.R.Pragada, Ex.Director, Samata (NGO) for panel discussion on Unrest in tribal areas and impact of extremism on development of tribal areas, at Dr.MCR Institute of Administration.

3, NON TRIBAL NATURE OF ALL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The underlying non tribal nature of any development approach is a serious factor to reckon with. Non tribals dominate the government machinery in the tribal area and not only feel bitter about the various welfare programmes designed for tribals, but also get into an exploitative relationship with the local traders, contractors and police. This results in very few benefits actually reaching the tribals. While tribals revere the natural resources as life sustaining forces, the non tribals outlook is one of utilitarian and short term commercial exploitation. This disregard for tribal - nature symbiosis is causing not only a threat to tribal survival but is also leading to depletion of resources in the tribal regions.

The ignorance of tribals has given advantage to the flourish of trade and business by non tribals who hold the reins of the economic and political powers in the tribal region and the functioning of the government machinery. Whether directly or indirectly they have total control over the lands and resources of the tribals. This suppression of rights through the nexus with the politicians and police has emboldened the tribals to strike back with the aid of extremist forces of whom they are again victims of.

4. ATTITUDES AND PREJUDICES:

The officials and employees of the government posted in tribal areas approach the tribals with all the prejudices of non tribal society. The tribals are considered uncouth savages, steeped in crude superstitions and rituals due to their ignorance of external mechanisms of life. Their culture and social systems we looked down upon and it is with condescension that they relate to tribals when they visit the tribal villages. There is anger among the tribals at this ill-treatment which is now showing itself in various forms of protest.

5. INEFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES:

There is a discernible lack of concentration on addressing the basic issues of the tribals on the part of the government administration. Mw programmes implemented for the tribals look into the peripheral needs of the people and display apathy towards the primary causes of unrest, mainly land alienation and land related problems. Tribals being inseparably bonded to land and forest face serious problems with non-tribals and the in regaining their control over their lands. The present administration chooses to ignore this aspect.

POSSIBLE REMEDIES:

Depressing as it is, there is scope for setting straight the disturbing situation of the tribal region. What is necessary is the genuine interest of the government in making a serious effort at remedying the causes of unrest. Some factors which could be looked into are:

1. A SENSITIVE ADMINISTRATION NT HE TRIBAL AREAS:

The government has to recognise that the tribal people have a distinct socio-cultural living and the administration has to understand and respect these systems while designing and implementing development programmes. Programmes should be sympathetic to tribal needs addressing the real issues and conflicts. It should be, emphasised that the machinery should work without social and political biases toward tribal communities. For instance, any conflicts or disturbances that arise between tribals and non tribals are dealt by the police, revenue and other departments with anti-tribal and pro-non tribal stand and tribals are

booked or convicted while non tribals are never booked -in any cases even if they are in violation of the law.

2. NEEDS TO GIVE MORE POWERS TO THE PEOPLE:

Governance of tribal areas cannot undertaken with the same method adopted in the plans. Conflicts of customary laws verses universal laws, conflicts over control over resources and tribal-non tribal disputes in the tribal areas all over the country has lead to the formulation of the New Panchayat Raj Act for scheduled areas which lays emphasis on the local self-governance and powers to the gram sabha in scheduled areas. The state government should, in all sincerity, implement this act without any dilutions to ensure that stability of administration is maintained.

3. BALANCED DEVELOPMENT POLICIES:

The state government should follow a people-friendly and sympathetic development policy with regard to any programmes to projects planned in the tribal areas. It should first consider the social and economic progress of the local communities in the overall development planning in the region instead of displacing people, destroying their livelihoods and taking up only an apparent development.

4. INCONSISTENCIES IN LAWS AND POLICIES:

The existing inconsistencies in the constitutional laws and the changing trends in the policies of the state government which are in violation of the protective laws are causing unequal and discriminative programmes with regard to tribal communities. If clarity in laws and implementing policies were followed there would not be necessity for people and organisations to question the projects of the government.

5. EDUCATION:

Ignorance and illiteracy of tribals are the basic problems to any development. Government should also take it up as a thrust activity to bring literacy and education to the tribals. Government institutions like ITDA have a responsibility to make the tribals aware of their laws and programmes so that education in al aspects is achieved.

IMPACT OF EXTREMISM ON DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT:

Tribal areas were totally closed an neglected by the government till the insurgence of extremist forces who have the credit of making the government focus its attention on the development of tribal areas and in improving the conditions of the tribals. It is as a result of militant movement that government set up welfare institutions like ITDA, and brought administrative remedies like single line administration, special deputy collectors, etc and brought about the Land Transfer Regulations Act of 1970. Extremism in this sense has been very beneficial to tribals and gave relief to some of their problems. The land issues resolved by the government were also a result of this pressure from the extremist forces.

Interestingly, the latest developments in the strategies of the extremists seems to have a populist and welfarist approach while so far it has been a political and social movement. Today, the extremists are declaring that they would assist the tribals in activities like providing credit and banking facilities, medical aid, irrigation and agricultural programmes, etc. They are also encouraging the people to regenerate forests but with species specified by them. It has to be observed what impacts this parallel development approach from the underground would have on the tribals and the government. However, it is seen that some of the divisions of the nexalite groups are dealing with the tribal situation arbitrarily the repercussions of which have to be taken note of by the larger society.