

Development and Cultural Change Among the Kandh Tribals of Kandhamal

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Development means — to advance from a lower to a higher state or grow. It is a continuous process. Due to this process *cro-magnon* man reached to the present stage as we see now. But here development means that development of a human society from bad to lead a better life. The meaning of development is now divided into developed, developing and undeveloped categories. The so called developed societies look other two categories inferior to them. Likewise we the so called elite group of our society feels superior than the downtrodden mass.

Now development measured according to GDP growth rate at national level. But there is no indicator to measure the development at ground level. Tribals and rural mass at lower level of our society are enjoying the fruit of development in lesser degree in comparison to GDP growth rate. But if they look behind they feel developed from their forefathers and the least development in them is able to change their society and culture.

The term tribe has been derived from a middle English term *Tribuz* which has a Latin root. The term means three divisions into which the early Romans were grouped. The meaning of the term thus varies from nation to nation. For example Roman conceived the term as a political division,

while the Greeks seemed to have created the term with fraternities and in Irish history the term means families or communities having the same surname (Bagchi : 1992)

In Vedic period — A section of Dravidians who escaped defeat and did not surrender to the Aryans, continued to maintain their independent existence in the remote hills and forests. They are believed to be the forerunners of the various tribes in India. (Verma 2002 : 6). They were called as *Sudras* in Rig Veda and later renamed as *Jana* in Buddhist, purimic and secular literature of early medieval period, just to designate many communities whom we often refer to as the tribe (Bagchi : 1992).

So many definitions are also found to denote the term tribe. The Oxford Encyclopaedic Dictionary Vol.3 (1983) gives the meaning of a tribe is that — group of primitive or barbarous clans under recognized chief. The dictionary of Anthropology (1948) defined tribe that — tribe is a social group usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organization. It may include several sub-groups, such as sibs or villages. A tribe ordinarily has a leader as have a common ancestor and patron deity. The families or small communities making up the tribe are linked together through social,

religious family or blood relation. The Imperial Gazetteer in 1891 gave the meaning that — A tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not endogenous, though originally it might have been so.

Many scholars also attempted to define tribe according to their own observation in Indian context. Some of them are mentioned below : -

1. Distinctive tribe language and segmentary social structure (Baily, 1960)
2. Low level of techno-economic development (Dube, 1960)
3. Distinctive political mechanism and tribal solidarity (Orans 1965)
4. Habitat in a contiguous geographical territory (Naik — 1968)
5. Educational backwardness (Vidya : 1972)
6. Lack of specialization and least functional inter dependence (Bhoumik — 1980)
7. Predominantly rural, overwhelmingly illiterate, abjectly poor and depressingly malnourished and unhealthy (Singh, 1987) (Bagchi : 1992)

Government of India adopted following criteria to identify communities as the scheduled tribe.

1. Traditional occupation of a definite geographical area.
2. Distinctive culture which includes whole spectrum of tribal way of life, i.e. language,

customs, traditions, religious beliefs, arts and crafts, etc.

3. Primitive traits depicting occupational pattern, economy etc.

4. Lack of educational and techno-economic development (Verma 2002:9). Some scholars hesitate to accept the term Tribe for Scheduled Tribe people in Indian context. They used some other terms for them. Risley (1915) designates as aboriginal i.e. man of the soil. Hutton (1933) coined the term primitive tribe, while Shoober (1933) designated the tribe as a true aboriginal community. Ghurey (1959) referred the tribe as backward Hindus as according to him, the tribes of central India are neither isolated from the Hindu caste of the plains in the terms distribution and tradition, nor are they true autochthonous in their present habitat. They are imperfectly integrated with the caste system. The tribe is also termed in different names, viz, Adivasi (first settler or autochthonous) Bhumiputra (son of the soil), Janajati (folk people), Adimjati (original people), Vanabasi (inhabitants of forest), Vanyajati (Caste of forest), Upajati (sub-caste), Anusuchita Janajati (Scheduled tribe), Girijan (hill dwellers) and so on. But none of the term except the term Adivasi seems to be appropriate (Bagchi : 1992). Although, after long discussion by scholars the term tribe is widely used to denote Adivasis or aboriginals.

India adopted liberalization economic policy in 1991. This process opened the door for globalization. As such multi-national companies rushed to India and established heavy industries in tribal areas causing displacement of tribals from their beloved homeland and deprived of their culture. No doubt industrialization developed the surrounding area but tribals loose rights from natural resources which are exploited by the

company. Hence they became poorer to poorer. On the other hand modern market facilities increased in the area allured the Adivasis to drag from their culture and changes occurred very fast. But, though no heavy industry has been set up in Kandhamal district it is also not free from the effect of globalization as it influences every nook and corner of the country. As such changes could be witnessed in every sphere of Kandha inhabitants of Kandhamal district.

I feel it better to put here some demographic data of Kandhas of Kandhamal for better understanding of the tribe by the readers. Kandha tribe is the highest figured tribe in Odisha having a population of 11,04,037 as per 1991 census. The population of Scheduled Tribe in Kandhamal district is 3,36,309 as per 2001 census which is equivalent to 51.96% of the district population.

Scholars divide Kandhas broadly in three sub-tribes i.e. Kutia Kandha, Dongria Kandha and Desia Kandha. Dongria Kandha and Kutia Kandha are classified as primitive tribes. Desia Kandhas and Kuttia Kandhas are inhabiting in Kandhamal district. Kutia Kandhas form a small group having a population of about 10,000 who concentrate in Belghar hill ranges of Tumudibandha Block and some Gram Panchayats of Kotagarh Block area. Desia Kandhas are more developed than their counterparts and live in foot hill ranges and plain areas of all over the district.

Kandhas are settled agriculturists. They practise shifting (Podu) cultivation. Having a very little, most of them are marginal farmers or landless persons. Hence they are poor and comes under the category of below poverty line. Literacy rate of Scheduled tribes is 27.49% against 37.03% of total population of the district as per 1991

census. In 2001 census literacy rate of total population of the district increased to 52.68%. As literacy rate of S.T. is not available, it may be 37%. The literacy rate was 11.82 in 1961, 12.37 in 1971 and 18.59 in 1981 census. So literacy growth among S.T. community is very slow and most of the population is suffering from illiteracy.

Although, as the country is marching ahead through developmental programmes, tribals are also influenced by it and changes are witnessed in their every walk of life. We can find changes in their social, political, cultural, economic and religious spheres. Now it will be discussed in detail in following paragraphs.

Social Changes:

Now Kandha boys and girls are going to schools and some educated individuals have been employed in good jobs also. But they hesitate to identify their tribal origin at their service place as they feel shame. Dr. Manmath Kundu, former Director, Academy of Tribal Dialect and Culture, Bhubaneswar narrated his experience about a tribal Bank employee of Phulbani placed at Cuttack and one Minister of tribal origin - how they tried to hide their tribal identity before him. According to him — what Gandhi said about then English knowing people is true of educated tribals. They are foreigner in their own land and among their own people x x x. Thus education is deculturising tribal society and poor illiterate tribals are the true carrier of their culture. I have also experienced during my field visits about this. Half educated Kandha youths are fond of viewing cinema and composing Kui songs in cinema song style. Now they are using fullpants, shirts, boots and shoes, wrist watches, spectacles etc. Some tribals are riding bicycles and two wheelers also. They are also using bathing soaps, scented oils etc. which were not known to them before one

or two decades before. Kandha youths are also chewing pan, smoking bidi and cigarettes, drinks foreign liquor at times. They also take meals, tiffin and tea in hotels when they came outside their village, but the older generation hesitate to do this. Kandha girls are now wearing imitation jewelleries leaving traditional ornaments. Students of both the sex are wearing modern garments now a days. Need of footwears are increasing among the Kandha youths.

Deforestation is a big problem in Kandha area now. Forest was the rice bowl of Kandhas. They collect root, tubers, fruits from forest and materials for constructing houses as well as collect minor forest products also. But deforestation brings the Kandhas a big setback. So now they are searching for wage earning, which is not the culture of Kandhas.

Kutia Kandhas were liking to remain unexposed to outside world. I have noticed a house in 1996-97 at a little distance from the main road to Belghar. The house was not visible from the road as a small jungle was in front of it. To my astonishment in 2003 I found there the house from the road and the jungle was cleared up. This shows the change of their belief system. N.G.Os and govt. agencies are able to create awareness among the Kandhas about their rights by constant touch. Another factor is that time to time ethnic disturbances also make the Kandhas aware about their rights instead of adverse effect. In 1996-97 I with a research scholar for doctoral degree went to a Kutia Kandha village surrounded with thick forest near village Matrugam in Mundigarh G.P. of Tumudibandha Block and heard songs from a tape recorder. There is no electric facility in that village. The owner of the tape recorder replied to my question that an A/C battery is used to activate the instrument and at intervals the battery is being charged at Mundigarh. We also found that a family also used modern cot. Now radio, television is

widely found in Desia Kandha villages which enhanced communication facility.

Political Change :

There was a village council in every Kandha village headed by a Head man (Deri loku). Except the Headman the priest (Jani) the medicine man (Disari) etc. are the main members. One adult male member from every household is selected as member of the council. All disputes with families in the village, land disputes, divorce, other problems regarding marriage relations, functioning of religious institutions were discussed and decisions made in the council unanimously.

But introducing of voting process after independence of the country enhanced power of village council. Adoption of Panchayati Raj system caused a great loss to the village council. Village council in Desia Kandha villages almost all are defuncting and Ward Members, Sarapanch, Samiti Members took the place of village council. As regards land dispute and marriage problems Kandhas now take shelter of police station and court.

There were oneness with all the families in every Kandha village. All the members spread helping hands for the needy family in the bygone days. But the party politics system of election created enmity with each other which causes a great loss to their oneness concept and Kandhas became self centered gradually. The party politics system deculturised the Kandhas from their original culture.

An example may be cited here regarding construction of a Gram Panchayat office building which divided some villages to create vote bank with the motivation of non-tribals. A new Gram Panchayat has been created under reorganization scheme in Kutia Kandha area. The office building also constructed at the headquarter village of the

G.P. But some other party members succeeded to influence some villagers that the G.P. headquarter is distant to their area. Hence they pointed out a village to construct the G.P. office to facilitate them. As such, the problem dragged the notice of the Secretariat and the knowledge of minister also. Whatever the result may be the tussle broke peace and brotherly relations among tribal villagers which is a great cultural loss to tribals.

Cultural Change :

Dormitory system was prevalent in Kandha society for unmarried girls. Girls attaining the age of ten and above were permitted to sleep in the dormitory. Boys from other villages visit dormitory and the girls entertain the boys with country cigar and then they dance with the boys. This dance is known as Dhangada Dhangidi dance and they choose life partner from it.

Dormitory was the cultural centre of the Kandhas. Dormitory was the birth place of folk literature like songs, tales, riddles etc. Moreover it was the place to learn social behaviour and social laws.

But since some years past the system has been stopped. So the stream of folk literature has totally dried-up and learning of social behaviour and social law also disturbed. This is a great cultural setback to Kandha society.

Tattooing was practiced among the Desia Kandha females. That was their clan identity. But tattooing on the face makes the female ugly. The system has been stopped. Though it may not be a cultural loss but Kandha women lost their clan identity mark.

It is the custom in Kandha society that bride price is given by the groom to the father of the bride. Dowry system was not known to Kandhas. But now a days employed educated

mass are taking dowry like motor cycle, cycle, wrist watches, radio, television and other modern accessories. Marriage is solemnized by Brahmin priests in Hindu pattern and earthen platform (bedi) also constructed for the purpose. Last year I have invited to such a marriage of a Kandha friend. I do not find any tribal element there, rather I felt that it is a Hindu marriage. Invitation cards are now printed and distributed to the friends by the Kandhas for different ceremonies. Brahmin cooks are also engaged for feasts. Some educated Kandhas solemnized birthday of their children by lighting candle and cutting cake just like English men. They are also naming their children in modern names instead of traditional name.

Effect of economic growth :

Systematic attempts were made in all the five year plans for all-round development of tribals of the country. So different projects were implemented in tribal areas including some micro projects for primitive tribes. Loans on subsidized rate are also given to tribals. So contractors were created by village committees and Gram Sabhas. The contractors tried to get self benefit by cheating their own people in wages and otherwise. He tries to finish the contract work possibly in low cost and low quality. But the economic condition of the person concerned increases and his behaviour and life style began to be changed mixing with officials. Hence he felt proud and began to hate others of his village. So a gap between the contractor and other people of the village has been increased and he became a foreign member within his own people. So also the educated people who are employed in different jobs and got monthly salary could be able to increase their economic condition.

The half educated youths became lazy, idle and felt ashamed to their day to day traditional work. They are allured towards modern

civilization. Hence their economic condition deteriorated day by day. Those who availed loan from Banks also lose their mortgaged lands due to non-payment of loans and became poorer. An example may be cited to understand the fact. During 1996-1998 district administration of Kandhamal decided to launch road transport scheme to improve communication facilities to every corner and to improve the economic condition of tribals. Accordingly a group has to be formed consisting of more than twenty members to form a society with President, Secretary, Treasurer according to the norms of Society Registration Act, 1860 and the society should be registered. Then the society has to purchase a jeep or commander or a tractor with the availed loan from a nearby Bank. The Bank financed to many societies and they also purchased the intended vehicle. But the business failed with loss within a year or two. Then Bank authorities took legal action and the poor tribals lost their lands or crops.

The reason behind loss is that tribals never carried any business and they do not have any idea of business. Very often the Secretary of the society was a non tribal mostly belonged to Pana caste and he misappropriated the income derived from the business. So it incurred loss from the very beginning and the tribals compensate the loss with the value of their property. But one thing happened here that tribals were aware about cheating of nontribals and they began to disbelieve them.

Religious Change :

Religious faith depends upon belief system which is the binding force of a society. Accordingly Kandhas have their own belief system. But that belief system also changed during the course of time. Some Kandhas converted into Christianity

and they abandoned their tribal belief system. Some of them also initiated in Sanatan pantheon of Hindu ideology. They do not eat meat or fish and gave up drinking. They also adorn with sandal wood paste on their forehead and wears purple cloth and worship Hindu gods. But they do not give up their tribal belief system. They also wear thread like Brahmins. Nam Sankirtan is spreading in northern Kandhamal from last three decades. Kandhas originally believed that suffering is caused by evil spirit and they called Jani, Disari to appease the evil spirits to cure the patient. But now they take the help of hospital and modern allopathic medicines for curing diseases. Traditional worships and festivals are found decreasing among the Kandha society day by day also.

Developmental plans introduced by government to uplift the tribals make changes in the life of Kandhas. No doubt the aim of the government to bring the tribals to the mainstream is a good sign. But the effect of development causes negative. The tribals are deculturised from their own culture. The reason behind it that development plans made in the A/C rooms at capital city are not suited to tribal environment. So developmental programmes are felt to them as burdens.

In Chapter-III of the 'Report of Special Multipurpose Block Committees' headed by Verrier Elwin the great anthropologist suggested in 1860 that —

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional art and culture.
2. Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.

3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will no doubt, be needed, specially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.

4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.

5. We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but the reality of human character that is evolved. (Elwin : 1960)

It is a matter of regret that when developmental activities implemented in tribal territories suggestions of Elwin Committee are overlooked and greatly neglected. So the very aim of the Committee to keep tribal areas unexposed for conservation of tribal heritage in fact has been totally failed. The process now adopted by government agencies to bring the tribals into the mainstream through developmental work deculturised them. So programmes may be drafted in such a manner, that tribals will come to the mainstream without harming to their colourful heritage. If not, we cannot deny negative impact of the developmental schemes and we have to lose the valuable tribal heritage very soon. So also the peer group may lose tribal identity within coming fifty years.

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