

Original Article

Corridors of Power Administration in Santal Tribe: A Study of Jharkhand, India

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Abstract - The political approach to tribal development and welfare has been influenced by three different tribal policies: Segregation, Assimilation, and Integration. The isolation policy initiated by British rulers was intended to protect the tribals from the exploitation of moneylenders, contractors, zamindars, and middlemen. The assimilation policy advocated by some nationalists strongly argued for the total assimilation of all tribes into the mainstream of the National Population. Social reformers, politicians, anthropologists, and government officials who were sensitive to tribal culture approved the gradual integration of all the tribes into regional and national settings. Policy aims to protect tribal customs, values, norms, and mores, as well as their distinct way of life.

Keywords - Administrative, Panchayati, Political, Power, Santal, Tribal.

1. Introduction

Humans live in a world of strife from birth. Although there may be debate about who the real players in this conflict are today—economic classes according to Marxism, geopolitical groups (first world versus second world East), the more industrial North versus the agriculturally inclined South, or whether it is more a question of gender or color splits—the fact remains that, whether people realize it or not, they are forced to choose sides in a global conflict from the moment they utter the first cry on earth. The constitutional provisions used to protect the tribal people from social issues, including exploitation, land debt, and discrimination based on caste, religion, or race, are referred to as the political approach in the current environment. An ethnocentric mindset is essentially the source of the emphasis on marginality rather than agency (Guha, 2002).

State and federal governments have passed a number of laws, although some specialists in indigenous development have questioned how beneficial these are. In reality, not every legislative act and constitutional measure has been successful in accomplishing the intended objectives. There have occasionally been conflicts between formal laws and tribal customary laws. In other cases, both tribal and non-tribal people have agreed to circumvent the restrictions.

The rules have not been implemented to the intended degree because of growing ignorance, a lack of understanding of tribal people, and the antagonistic attitude of outsiders. Adivasi communities have evolved in response to their interactions with mainstream society and their closeness to governmental institutions. In addition to adopting one religion or another, some Adivasis nowadays

have also embraced the cultural customs of non-Adivasis. Additionally, there are forces within Adivasi society that are attempting to restore their identity in order to resist absorption. Therefore, identity politics challenges the integration rhetoric and seeks a framework that is better suited to support the expression of differences (Kumar, 2014).

2. Objective of the Study

To identify the traditional power distribution in the administrative work of the Santal Tribe.

3. Approaches Involved in the Administrative Work of the Santal Tribe

3.1. Administrative Approach

The Indian government has established extensive administrative frameworks for the growth and well-being of indigenous people. The introduction of community development and tribal development programmes was intended to improve the socio-economic condition of tribal people. Large amounts of material and human resources through the Five-Year Plans were allotted and continue to be allotted for tribal advancement. Over and above the administrative personnel, the President of India, the Prime Minister, and the Welfare Minister at the National level, and the Governor, the Chief Minister, and the Welfare Minister at the state level are directly responsible for the tribal development programmes. The government has occasionally established several commissions and research teams to examine and evaluate the programs for tribal development.

While this paper focuses on this second approach to Tribal development, namely the administrative approach to



tribal development executed in the context of community development programmes, local units promoting this administrative approach are the Institution of the community development block. The distinction of being a tribal-dominated region, the erosion of indigenous languages and oral cultures, poses a significant threat to the identity of these communities (Yadav, 2022)

3.2. Religious Approach

The religious approach refers to activities initiated by different religious agencies, such as the Christian institutions, the Ramkrishna Mission, the Arya Samaj, and other local religious institutions, for the advancement of tribal people. Among the religious institutions promoting tribal development, Christian institutions are the most active and controversial. Even though evangelism has always been the main focus of Christian missionaries, their development and welfare work—economic, social, sanitary, and educational—has always come next. The missionaries have recognized the significance of comprehending tribal culture for their practical and spiritual efforts.

The main Christian missionary activity among the Santhals started after the Santhal rebellion of 1855-57. The Santhal mission of Northern churches, the United Free Church of Scotland, the American Methodist Episcopal mission, the Plymouth Brethren, the American Seventh Day Adventists, the Wesleyan Mission, the Bengal Baptist Dipti Mission, and the Roman Catholic Church contributed and continue to make contributions in the field of Santhal language, education, medical care, and social welfare. On the other hand, several Indian anthropologists and social scientists, while acknowledging the contributions of Christianity, severely indict Christian Institutions for the destruction of social Unity and communal life of tribal people.

3.3. Voluntary Agencies Approach

The advancement of tribal people in various fields is supported by a number of nonprofit organizations, including the Indian Council of Child Welfare, the Servants of India Society, the Indian Red Cross Society, the Bhartiya Adimjati Sevak Sang, the Bhartiya Depressed Class League, and the All India Backward Classes' Federation. Among these voluntary agencies, the most well-known is the Bhartiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, which was initiated under the chairmanship of Dr Rajendra Prasad (the then President of India) in 1948. In the district of Santal Parganas, the Santal Paharia Seva Mandal is engaged in promoting tribal development programmes through education and agricultural practices. Besides publishing studies on tribal welfare activities and tribal problems, the voluntary agency personnel act as specialists and experts in the administrative committees and conferences.

Although voluntary agencies have performed a great deal of humanitarian work in tribal communities, their knowledge of tribal structure, values, and issues has frequently lagged behind their idealism and spirit of service. They have failed to recognize that their well-meaning

reforms have negatively impacted Tribal socio-cultural life, despite the fact that their intentions were likely admirable within their own cultural context. The underdevelopment of Adivasis will undoubtedly continue if middle-class Adivasis minimize power dynamics. In the context of anti-dispossession struggles, framing of adivasi society on the basis of culture and identity runs the risk of putting the resistance on some imaginary edifice incapable of addressing the livelihood issues (Hebbar, 2011).

3.4. Anthropological Approach

As early as 1807, British administrators recognized the need for anthropological knowledge for the effective management of tribal territories. Following independence, a number of Indian anthropologists conducted research on the value of applied anthropology in programs for tribal welfare. Through a number of organizations, including the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the National Institute of Community Development, the Tribal Research Institutes, the Census of India, the Anthropological Survey of India, and the Research Program Committee, anthropologists have made contributions. The planning commission established working groups to suggest policies and action plans for tribal territories, and the anthropologists are part of these groups. Numerous anthropologists are also represented in a number of training facilities and organizations that carry out programs, as well as on the central advisory board of Tribal Affairs.

In spite of this involvement of anthropologists and development programmes, the overall contribution to tribal development planning does not appear to be very impressive (Mathur, 1976). The involvement and the utilization of the services of anthropologists in the fields of agriculture, education, population control, communication, and public health have been marginal and consequential. The contribution of anthropologists as a profession mostly passed platitudinous resolutions, making claims for their disciplines which were never demonstrated in the shape of concrete accomplishments (Dube, 1979).

3.5. Panchayati Raj

Following the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act of 1948, Gram Panchayats, the statutory panchayats, have been established on a statutory basis in Chhota Nagpur and Santal Parganas. A gram panchayat is set up for a population of about 1,000 people living within a radius of two miles. The main functionaries of the Gram panchayat are the Mukhiya, the Sarpanch, and the Gram Sevak. While the first two are elected, the Gram Sevak is a paid government servant. The Mukhiya, as the executive head and chairman of the Gram Panchayat, is assisted by an executive committee and Karya Karini Sabha, normally consisting of eight members, two of whom are volunteers, while the rest are elected by respective villages.

One of the functions of the Gram Panchayat is to assist the Block Development Officer and other development personnel in planning and implementing development programmes. The Mukhiya, by his office, is a member of

the Block Development Committee, which guides and advises the Block Development Officer in the various stages of development activities. Besides discharging these functions, the Gram Panchayat is also a judicial body. The Sarpanch or the judicial head is elected and assisted by fifteen panchs, each of whom is in turn elected for a period of three years. The Sarpanch has been vested with the powers of a third-class magistrate. The Gram panchayat acts as an appellate Court over the traditional Village panchayat, the Pargana, and the Annual Hunt Council. It also settles intra-tribal disputes as well as those between tribal and non-tribal people.

4. Distribution of Administrative Power in the Santal Tribe

Just as the Centre has its history, art, and tradition, so does the periphery. But, as in all such matters, the former dominates the latter. Indeed, it does this so effectively as to identify its culture with that of the entire nation, region, or group. The other cultures and traditions, by that token, are reduced to the status of non-cultures and non-traditions. In other words, side by side with the very eloquent styles of music, dance, and painting – whose development and publicity are encouraged and fostered with generous grants, not to mention a substantial amount of occasional foreign aid – there is a culture of silence which desperately struggles to keep alive. This is the folk dance, the folk art, and so on of the tribal, the dalits, and other underprivileged and economically disadvantaged groups. There is scant hope that the Centre will release funds for the preservation and development of such forms of culture. This expression of art is ignored, falls silent, and dies off. In Latin America, many of the ancient tribal languages are disappearing, and Spanish is replacing native languages. The same things are happening in India, too.

A full-fledged village council traditionally consists of seven administrative elders: a headman (Manjhi); his assistant (Jog Paranik); a messenger (godet); and the village priest (naeke) and his assistant (kudam naeke). These officials were chosen by the villagers at the time of a village's founding. Though their offices are almost always patrilineally hereditary, villagers could dismiss incumbents for serious misconduct.

4.1. The Village Headman: Manjhi

The village headman embodies power and authority in the village. He represents the village both in external and internal relations, and the executive and judiciary place a unique emphasis on the role of the headman. The other tribes of India under review are the office of the headman, so important as among the Santals, and in no other case have his rights and duties been so elaborately laid down. No public event can be properly discharged without the headman's consent and presence, or at least the presence of his substitute (Sachchiananda, 1968).

4.2. The Deputy Headman: Paranik

The Paranik is the chief assistant of the headman. He cannot act on his own authority but may be asked by the

headman to act in his stead during temporary absences. He used to assist the headman in land use and revenue collection matters. The paranik has the right of succession if the village headman dies without a male issue or a brother.

4.3. The Guardian of Morals: Jog-Manjhi

As the village guardian of tribal morals, the jog-manjhi is held responsible for the observance of tribal endogamy and clan exogamy rules. When there are allegations of immoral behavior, he is called upon to investigate. If a Santal maiden becomes pregnant, he identifies the responsible male and tries to force him to marry the girl. If he does not agree, the jog-manjhi prosecutes him before the village council. He also acts as master of ceremonies at birth, marriage, and funerary ceremonies.

4.4. Assistant to Jog-Manjhi: Jog Paranik

The Jog Paranik is the deputy of Jog Manjhi, and he is one of the village officials, and he acts in cases when Jog Manjhi is absent. During the Sohrae festival, he assists Jog Manjhi in looking after the Youths.

4.5. The Priest: Naeke

The naeke is responsible for village ceremonial rituals. In Santal ceremonies, his role as the religious leader who conducts worship, including sacrifices to principal spirits on behalf of the village community during annual festivals, is second in importance only to the village headman.

4.6. Assistant Priest: Kudam Naeke

The naeke's assistant is known as kudam naeke. His responsibility is to propitiate the pargana bonga and the spirits, and he notes that the function is on the outskirts of the village. Culshaw of the priest is to deal with the tribal spirits; it would seem that his co-priest and assistant must propitiate relatively unknown and fearful spirits. The villagers generally reward him with various gifts.

4.7. The Messenger: Godet

A godet functions as the village messenger and news bearer. He is responsible to the headman and the village council, for whom he acts as public prosecutor. He also carries news of births, deaths, and marriages to the villagers. For his remuneration, he gets some rent-free land. His duties are limited to the village.

5. Conclusion

In the field of socio-economic development, the Mukhiya of this panchayat did not play an active role since the Block Development Officer directly takes charge of all the development programmes of the villages. The villagers approach the Mukhiya for signatures and other kinds of routine matters. The participation of Panchayat officials in development programmes is nominal. Although the Gram panchayat has several advantages over the traditional Santal panchayat, such as collecting its own taxes and having close collaboration with governmental services, the Santals still express a profound respect and affection for their own traditional institutions, with their egalitarian emphasis and their strong preference for consensus and adaptability in

dealing with the concerns of community life. The almost uninhibited competition of modern Panchayat elections, pressure to form coalitions with alien groups, the linguistic

difficulties of political discussions in a multi-lingual setting, and other difficulties have discouraged most Santals from entering the political life of the new Panchayat system.

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