

Significance of Non-Government Organizations for the Tribal Development in India: An Overview

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Abstract

Tribal people used to have several traditional rights over the forest. Forest was their home, forest produces were the sources of their livelihood. So were they in chains everywhere with the forest habitat. They protected the forest and forest protected them. Forest was bountiful, tribal were faithful. No wonder they were described as the eyes and ears of the forest. The tribal people have the right to share the fruits of development with the rest of the society. Their ambitions are to be achieved and their personalities are to be developed. Improvement of their status can be achieved fully only through their integration into the mainstream. The tribal people are also citizen of this country. It is improper and illegal to keep them in isolation forever making them eleemosynary. In short, the need for socio-economic development of the tribal people warrants integration. Those who favor, however, strike a note of caution and there should be no sudden transplantation of the tribal into the mainstream. The process has to be slow, caution and without disturbing the tribal ethos. The role of NGOs in the welfare of the tribal communities of India is very significant. They supplement the efforts of the government. They address the needs and the aspirations of the people. They operate with little investments but ensure greater participation of the community. They recruit local youth and train them to achieve the objectives of the organization. This research paper a study is made as to the role of voluntary or non- governmental organizations, with their local roots as their sense of service has become increasingly importance in upliftment of the tribal people.

Keywords: tribal, social welfare, development, rights, empowerment.

1. Introduction

India is a diverse country marked by its long history, uniqueness of geography and demographic diversity. Still one can find a commonality of culture in the country. Since independence³, government has adopted several policies to establish governance which can serve the purpose of maintaining unity within the nation and to ensure development. But there exist governance challenges in India like many multicultural societies of the world. Here comes the importance of NGOs. NGO initiatives which are aimed at development have a long history in India. There are many NGOs which are working in the tribal areas in India for the development and social welfare of tribal people¹. Non-Government Organizations (NGO's)²

¹ Pankaj Chakraborty, "NGOs in tribal Areas in Tripura", Tribal Research and Culture Institute, Agartala, 2020.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nongovernment_organization#Definition

are often known as the ‘*harbingers of change*’. They play multifarious roles like that of advocates, educators, catalysts, lobbyists, conscientisers, and protectors of human rights and mass mobilisers who work incessantly for the development. They have come forward with a human face to serve a human cause. They have emerged as the universal “third force” striving for empowerment as well as social transformation. They are innovative and flexible in building confidence in the people.

The activities of the NGOs in Tribal affairs are of two types:

1. To supplement the effort of the government in such fields where the government is unable to reach the outreached.
2. To launch a crusade against the policies and actions of the Government which result in injustice and exploitation³

The Role of NGOs in brief:

- Care and welfare
- Service and delivery
- Mobilizing resources
- Research and innovation
- Human resource development
- Public information
- Change and Development
- Welfare organisations
- Development organisations
- Environmental organisations
- Indigenous people’s organisations
- Women’s organisations
- Environmental groups
- Income generating projects
- Job creation programs
- Children organisations
- Disabilities organisations
- Workers organisations

Apart from the above the NGOs can add thrust in the following fields⁴:

- They contribute in a positive note to the development of the tribal health and in the protection of their indigenous knowledge base.

³ Nanjunda, Devajana C, & Dinesh P.T, “ Role of NGOs interventions on tribal health: Some annotations from grass root level”, International NGO Journal, 2011, Vol.6 (9) pp.193-196

⁴ Bhasker,S.K., “ Role of NGOs in Rural Development in India” Journal of Business & Economic policy, 2013, Vol1(1), pp.93-109

- They have a profound knowledge of the flora and fauna, the appropriate plant species with medical importance, their location, the parts to be used, time of collection, preparation and administration of the same.
- To start the sale counter of the Minor Forest Produce
- Education- put tribal children to school.
- Improving the economic, social, environmental standards of people
- To stimulate self-help and self-reliance through various field training programmes
- To provide and education to women and children
- To carry out environment promotion programme through safe drinking water among the needy, establishment of toilets in the school campus and in common.
- Publishing of news, letters, booklets, periodicals, leaflets, etc with the aim of creating awareness among people.
- To arrange irrigation facilities and other facilities to the lands of small and marginal farmers for production of more food grains.
- To provide environment education and promote village sanitation
- To develop human resource and literacy
- Handicraft promotion and development of rural artisans
- Revamping of culture for better living
- Marketing of rural agricultural and handicraft products
- Sustainable development of livelihood of under-privileged marginalize oppressed
- Women's empowerment, promotion and strengthening of self-help groups.

❖ **Concerns –**

- It is an astonishing fact that sometimes there are no linkage and coordination among the different NGOs that are working in the same geographical area and for a nearly identical purpose⁵.
- There should be more transparency in the function of the NGOs so that they may garner the support and faith of the ordinary people.
- There is a need for closer interactions and exchange of ideas between the beneficiaries and volunteers of the project. They should explain their programs to the beneficiaries and involve them in the decision-making process.
- The NGOs should try to apply indigenous knowledge base and the work should be a sustainable nature.
- Fragmentation, powerlessness, corruption, nepotism, and internal weaknesses are some of the negative traits of the NGOs.
- The NGOs hardly disclose their funding source and expenditure patterns. They refuse to reveal the names of their funding partners and reasons for tying up with them.
- The NGOs are often alleged of using foreign money to undermine the state's authority. In a free market economy, the donor agencies are often found scouting around the philanthropic houses. A proliferation of easy money often alters the operation style, the cost calculus, basic ethos, motivations, idealism and ideological underpinning of the sector.

⁵ Jaganathan.S , “ The role of non-governmental organizations in primary education: a study of six NGOs in India”, World Bank Policy Research Working, 1999 p-2530

- NGOs are in a need of regularized code of ethics and conduct. Flamboyant attitude of the NGO professionals are definitely not encouraging.
- With the easy availability of foreign aids, working for an NGO has become a very good career option. Many retired bureaucrats take interest nowadays in opening up an NGO both as pastime and a financially viable alternative. Therefore, the idealism with which the NGOs appeared in the social panorama is declining now.
- There are allegations against the NGOs for large scale bungling, cheating and forgery.
- Lack of accountability and commitment to the welfare of the masses are often witnessed.
- They bring temporary solution to the problem and often fail to address the root cause of it and eradicate it.
- The NGOs fail to scale or successfully transplant their lessons and experiences into large organisations and programs for they fail to take into account the socio-cultural and are specific realities.
- The NGOs are themselves entrenched between the welfare state on one hand and economy driven by globalization on the other.

The Voluntary agencies have been playing a key role in the development of society since time immemorial. According to Inamdar (1987)⁶, “During ancient and medieval times, voluntarism operated freely and exclusively in the fields of education, medicine, cultural promotion and even acted as succor in crisis like drought, floods, epidemics and foreign invasions” (p. 11). In the modern era, voluntary agencies are popular as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). The concept of a voluntary organization or NGO is multidimensional in the form and operation. Ideally, they adopt democratic and decentralized approach for economic and social development. Vannucci (1989) remarked “NGOs can succinctly encourage real values that come up, satisfying genuine needs and fills gaps in knowledge” (p. 11). However, there is confusion and suspicion among the people about the nature and purpose of voluntary organizations. The NGOs are successful in most of the cases in wiping out such suspicions with participatory approaches. The recruitment of self-motivated and service-oriented people is an asset to these organizations. The aid and finances also play important role in functioning of NGOs.

Indian NGOs have been involved in development work of one sort or another for over hundred years and have been important in Indian government programmes⁷, as well as being partners for international NGO (INGO) donors since the nation’s independence in 1947.

The role of NGOs in the welfare of the tribal communities of India is very significant. They supplement the efforts of the government. They address the needs and the aspirations of the people. They are innovative and flexible. They operate with little investments but ensue greater participation of the community. They recruit local youth and train them to achieve the objectives of the organization. They build confidence in the people. Vannucci (1989)⁸ opines “the existence of powerful NGOs creates a double

⁶ Inamdar N.R, “Role of voluntarism in development “ Indian Journal of Public Administration, 1987 pp.423-430

⁷ Patnaik.S.M and Supriya Singh, “ Seminar Report: tribes, Policies and NGOs” 2004, Indian Anthropological Association, Vol.43, No.1, pp.83-94 State

⁸ Vannucci M, “ Role of NGOs for the advancement of science and civilization” Indian institute for the Advancement of Science, 1989, pp.9-13

security system whereby governments may express their needs and requirements". The knowledge and commitment of NGOs help in making the implementation process more transparent and accountable.

The Central Government and State Governments implement a number of schemes for the welfare & development of STs. However, Voluntary Organizations (VOs)/NGOs also play an important role in enhancing the reach of Government Schemes and in filling the critical gaps of service deficient tribal areas. While governmental efforts are supplemented through VOs/NGOs to achieve the ultimate objective of delivery of services to remote and unreached tribal areas, the standard of services provided is equally important. Each partner VO/NGO is therefore, expected to strive towards delivery of quality services⁹. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs¹⁰ implements the following schemes for the socio economic and educational developments of STs through State societies/VOs/NGOs which supplement Government efforts:-

- Grants-in-aid to Voluntary Organizations (VOs) working for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes.
- Strengthening Education among ST Girls in Low Literacy Districts.

The NGOs committed to Tribal welfare in India:-

- Mrida Education and Welfare Society
- Nilgiris Wayanad Tribal Welfare Society (NWTWS)
- Kalinga institute of Social Sciences
- Parivaar Education Society
- Rajasthan Bal Kalyan Samiti

The Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK)¹¹ is committed to the holistic, sustainable development of tribal people, keeping in mind their socio-cultural background and their rights. VGKK is now 35 years old with development experiences from the Soligas and other tribes in Chamarajanagar, Mysore districts of Karnataka and subsequent experiences with tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and other states. This experience has resulted in integrated approach to tribal development with health, education, livelihoods and biodiversity conservations the means to sustainable development and empowerment. Karuna Trust, established in 1986¹² is affiliated to VGKK located at Biligiri Rangana Hills (B R Hills) in Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka that works for tribal empowerment. Karuna Trust reaches out to those who are in the remote and inaccessible areas, hilly and tribal regions, naxalite and insurgency areas with poor roads, no phone and electrical connectivity, where both public and private health services have hardly reached the poor.

Suggestions and Conclusion

The requirement for prior study on the tribal mores and needs for ideal formulation of tribal upliftment and development schemes has been emphasized by almost all the respondents. Many have pointed out that no proper study had preceded the current development programmes. However, some have stated that

¹⁰ <https://tribal.nic.in> 1999

¹¹ <http://www.vgkk.org/>

¹² <http://www.karunatruster.org/>



studies from census, personal contacts with tribal and from empirical investigations have helped formulating programmes. Tribal welfare schemes should suit the tribal genius, instill confidence in the tribals and guarantee their hearty involvement. This pre-purposes a sociological and anthropological probe into the tribal behavior, customs, nature and aspirations for meaningful involvement of tribal communities. In designing the strategies it is essential that due emphasis should be placed on tribal education. Development plans should not be designed from above and imposed on the tribal the plans should mould themselves from the crucible of tribal values and tastes. Neglected by the forest department, exploited by the settlers and corrupted by the plainsmen, the tribal people of today are not of yester years. Many gained at their cost. Their grip on the forest is lost inasmuch as their lands have been grabbed by the encroachers. Initiated into the corrupt practices of illegal felling and smuggling, unknown to them in the past, there emerge different tribal communities which are no longer amenable to the traditional tribal discipline and to the control of the headman. Tribal values eroded. The tribal became cats-paw of the plainsmen. Lakhs and lakhs of money flowing into the tribal stream vanished which has not benefitted the tribes. All welfare programs turned out to be flash-in-the-pan operations bringing few benefits to the tribal people. The successful programs are also facing challenges in sustaining their results due to lack of follow-up. The inconsistency in funding and lack of trained and committed staff are other constraints. Although it is difficult in some cases to convince all the stakeholders, it is the responsibility of the NGOs to be transparent and convince people on their activities. They should also act as a bridge between the government organization and the people by playing an active role. This would be helpful not only for the people but also to the NGO for the implementation of the programs. Despite the loopholes, the NGOs are undoubtedly acting as a safety net and playing a vital role in the development of tribal communities.