



COLONIAL LEGACIES AND CONSTITUTIONAL INTERVENTIONS: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF TRIBAL WELFARE IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND TELANGANA

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Abstract

This article explores the evolution of tribal welfare policies in the regions now comprising Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, tracing their development from the colonial era through the post-independence decades. Beginning with the Government of India Act, 1935, which institutionalized the classification of Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, the study examines how British administrative priorities sidelined comprehensive welfare for Scheduled Tribes (STs). It then shifts focus to the constitutional foundations laid by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, which catalyzed state-led affirmative action and targeted development schemes. By examining both central and regional interventions—including the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), the role of Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs), and efforts in Hyderabad State under the Nizam—the article assesses the historical trajectory, limitations, and impact of tribal welfare from 1935 to 1997. Drawing on policy evolution, legislative frameworks, and region-specific implementations, this analysis situates tribal welfare within broader narratives of marginalization, resistance, and state intervention.

Keywords-Scheduled Tribes, tribal welfare, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Government of India Act 1935, Ambedkar, Tribal Sub-Plan, ITDA, Nizam's Hyderabad, Excluded Areas, land alienation, agency tracts

1. Introduction

Tribal communities in India, particularly in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, have long experienced systemic marginalization marked by land alienation, poor health outcomes, and limited access to education and economic resources. Though constituting over 6 million people in these two states alone, their integration into state-sponsored development has historically lagged. This article investigates the socio-political roots and transformations of tribal welfare from the late colonial period through the end of the 20th century. It aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how historical categories of exclusion evolved into constitutional mandates for development, and how implementation has reflected the tensions between protection and assimilation.

2. Colonial Frameworks and the Government of India Act, 1935

The 1935 Act marked a pivotal moment in tribal administration, formally classifying regions as Excluded or Partially Excluded Areas. This designation limited the applicability of provincial laws and reinforced direct colonial control, especially in tribal-majority territories such

as the North East and parts of Central India. While framed as a protective measure, these classifications often resulted in further isolation of tribal populations and minimal developmental input.

The Act failed to outline any substantive welfare programs for tribal communities. Instead, its emphasis lay in administrative efficiency and political containment, with tribal affairs being placed under the Governor-General's discretionary powers. Education and healthcare remained sporadic, largely administered by missionaries whose agendas were more spiritual than developmental. Land alienation, forced labor, and lack of political representation persisted, laying the foundation for structural deprivation that would continue post-independence. The long-term effect of these exclusions was not simply developmental neglect, but the establishment of a governance framework in which tribal communities were subjects of control rather than partners in progress.

3. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Constitutional Foundation of Tribal Welfare

Post-independence, the constitutional vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar transformed the paradigm of state responsibility toward marginalized communities. Although Ambedkar's primary advocacy centered around Scheduled Castes, his structural interventions—Articles 46 and 275(1), and the Fifth Schedule—extended protective discrimination to Scheduled Tribes.

The Fifth Schedule established administrative autonomy in tribal areas, empowering Governors to oversee and adapt laws, while Article 275(1) secured financial commitments from the Union government to states for tribal development. These provisions catalyzed the institutionalization of tribal welfare mechanisms, including the eventual creation of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in 1999.

Ambedkar's ideological emphasis on education and socio-economic equity also had long-term implications. His indirect influence shaped landmark initiatives such as the Tribal Sub-Plan and the Forest Rights Act, and his philosophy of state intervention in redressing historical injustice underpins much of India's tribal policy architecture. Crucially, Ambedkar's approach underscored the necessity of legal empowerment as a safeguard against exploitation, embedding social justice as a constitutional mandate.

4. Welfare under the Nizam's Hyderabad State (1936–1948)

The tribal regions of Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam, and the Nallamala Hills fell under the semi-autonomous Hyderabad State until 1948. Welfare schemes during this period were rudimentary and largely reactive. Land protection efforts, forest-based economic initiatives, and small-scale education and health interventions were implemented primarily under the influence of Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, appointed Adviser for Tribes and Backward Classes in 1944.

Though limited in scope, these schemes introduced basic protections for tribal landholdings and modest welfare services. An estimated 10–15% of the tribal population benefitted from these

interventions, with Gonds and Chenchus among the more visibly impacted groups. However, feudal resistance, budgetary limitations, and wartime exigencies significantly curtailed their effectiveness. This period represents a transitional moment, where ethnographic insight began to inform policy, albeit within a highly constrained political environment. The seeds of decentralized, culturally informed welfare administration were sown, only to be scaled up post-integration into the Indian Union.

5. Post-Independence Tribal Welfare Trajectory (1947–1997)

Early Years (1947–1957)

In the immediate post-independence years, Andhra Pradesh did not exist as a unified entity. Tribal welfare was administered through Madras and Hyderabad states. The legal designation of STs under Article 342, alongside reservations and Article 275(1) grants, laid a constitutional foundation for future schemes. Ashram schools, land transfer regulations, and scholarship programs began to take shape, albeit unevenly across regions. These programs were foundational but minimal, reflecting the broader national challenge of transitioning from colonial governance to inclusive nation-building.

Institutional Consolidation (1958–1967)

This period witnessed greater institutionalization of welfare mechanisms. The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation (1959) was a landmark in preventing land alienation. Educational outreach through ashram schools expanded, and forest rights were incrementally protected. The establishment of the Directorate of Tribal Welfare and initial cooperative movements under Girijan Cooperative Corporation provided basic economic support. However, the reach remained limited, and welfare remained more reactive than anticipatory.

Emergence of the Tribal Sub-Plan (1968–1977)

The introduction of the Tribal Sub-Plan (1974) during the Fifth Five-Year Plan marked a turning point. With dedicated funding and the establishment of ITDAs, this phase focused on economic empowerment, land security, and educational infrastructure. Welfare began to shift from passive protection to integrated development. Vocational training, health outreach, and nutritional support for tribal women and children were prioritized. This era marks the state's recognition that general development alone could not redress the distinct socio-economic disadvantages of tribal groups.

Expansion and Formalization (1978–1997)

During this period, TSP and ITDAs were scaled up across Andhra Pradesh. GCC expanded its procurement operations, while rural development schemes such as IRDP and TRYSEM targeted tribal youth and farmers. Legal empowerment increased with stronger enforcement of APSA LTR and the introduction of decentralized governance. Social protection mechanisms were enhanced

via nutrition programs, mobile health units, and subsidized housing. Despite gains, gaps persisted in implementation, especially in the face of political unrest and administrative inertia. The 1990s saw a shift toward rights-based approaches, setting the stage for later legislation such as the Forest Rights Act (2006).

6. Discussion

The trajectory of tribal welfare in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana reflects the interplay of constitutional vision, regional politics, and grassroots resistance. While Ambedkar's structural safeguards and subsequent planning frameworks laid the groundwork, actual implementation has been uneven. Colonial legacies of exclusion and the exploitative governance of Hyderabad State required not only legal reforms but sustained administrative commitment.

The decentralization of tribal development through ITDAs, combined with targeted schemes like TSP, enabled some progress in education and economic security. However, deep-rooted issues such as land alienation, limited healthcare, and political underrepresentation remain persistent challenges. Gendered dimensions of tribal welfare—especially in education and land rights—also require closer scrutiny and targeted policy responses. Additionally, the role of civil society, especially in mobilizing against displacement due to mining and infrastructure projects, added a new layer of advocacy to tribal welfare.

7. Conclusion

Tribal welfare in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana has undergone a complex evolution from colonial administrative categorization to post-independence constitutional inclusion and planned development. The Government of India Act, 1935 laid an administrative framework that both acknowledged and isolated tribal communities. Post-independence, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's constitutional interventions provided the philosophical and legal scaffolding for a state-driven welfare model. The development of the TSP and ITDAs further institutionalized these efforts.

Despite these advancements, significant gaps remain. Addressing historical marginalization requires not just continuity in welfare programming, but also adaptability to local contexts, gender-sensitive approaches, and political empowerment. Future policies must build on this legacy with greater transparency, decentralization, and tribal agency. Moreover, ongoing threats such as environmental degradation, cultural assimilation, and loss of traditional livelihoods due to modern economic interventions must be countered with inclusive and participatory policy design. Only then can tribal welfare move from marginal inclusion to substantive justice.

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