



## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES AMONG TRIBAL COMMUNITIES: TELANGANA STATE RECENT EXPERIENCE**

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### **Introduction**

There are number of economic inequalities are there, most notably measured using the distribution of income and the distribution of wealth. Besides economic inequality between countries or states, there are important types of economic inequality between different groups of people prevailing among the people. Such kind of inequalities ecumenically ostensible in the Tribal community. Important types of economic measurements focus on wealth, income, and consumption. There are many methods for measuring economic inequality, the Gini coefficient being a widely used one. Another type of measure is the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index, which is a statistic composite index that takes inequality into account. Globally greater inequality hinders economic growth, and that land and human capital inequality reduce growth more than inequality of income. Whereas globalization has reduced global inequality between nations, it has increased inequality within nations. Global income inequality peaked approximately in the 1970s, when world income was distributed bimodally into "rich" and "poor" countries with little overlap. Since then, inequality has been rapidly decreasing, and this trend seems to be accelerating. Income distribution is now unimodal, with most people living in middle-income countries.

### **Inequality among tribal communities in Telangana State**

A tribal economy is always characterized by the collection of their social, institutional, technological and finally economic arrangements through which the community seeks to enhance their material and social well-being. They have little knowledge and little power to influence the direction of change taking place due to broader changes in society due to impact of development of science and technology in every field. All economic and social development activities are planned for the welfare of its people and this is truly reflected in their levels of living which is the end product of all economic efforts. In recent times, the rich are very rich and poor are very poor. The middle-class people are almost absent. There is rampant social corruption with no social audit. That is, income inequality is very rampant. Therefore, there is a vast scope for research to examine the economic inequality between these two groups in the level of their living in intra and inter region.

So far the development consists of a series of poverty alleviation programmes, designed to widen the income earning opportunities for the poor to enhance their socio-economic status. Several rural development and poverty Alleviation Programmes have been implemented by Governments. But such programmes have not yielded the desired result. The objective of the study is to search the income inequalities among the rural tribal people by taking the concept that (1) poverty and inequality do not change at the same pace and they may even change in the same directions and (2) there are differences in the levels of living of

people between regions, villages and even within a village due to inequality of income earned by the household or unequal distribution of wealth.

### **Who are Responsible for the Backwardness of the tribal people?**

India has been home to tribals since time immemorial, and they are naturally considered the original inhabitants of India. There are 32 Scheduled Tribes in the State of Telangana as per A.P. Reorganization Act, 2014. The Tribal population account for 9% of the total population in the State. ST population in ITDA districts is 52.96 % of the total ST population in the State and remaining 47.04 % Tribals inhabit the plain areas .The main communities of Tribals in the State are: The Gonds of Telangana State have a Population of 2.97 lakh and reside in Adilabad, Asifabad and Mancheriyal districts. Their main occupation is agriculture. Their traditional festivals are Nagoba Jatara and Dandari festivals. Pardhan: Pardhan community is spread across Adilabad, Asifabad and Mancheriyal districts with a Population of 0.24 lakhs. Their traditional occupation is Singing and storytelling as Bards of Gonds. Kolams: Largest PvTG Community with 0.44 lakhs population, spread across Adilabad, Asifabad and Mancheriyal districts. Their main occupation is Basketry and Bamboo craft. Their traditional festivals are Bheemanna jatara and Laxmidevara Jatara. Chenchus: PvTG Community in Nallamalla Forests, with a population of 0.16 lakhs. Their main occupation is foraging, Honey gathering, Hunting and fishing. Their traditional festivals include Saleshwaram and Bhourapur Jataras. Lambada: They are the largest Tribal Community of Telangana with a population of 20.44 lakhs spread across the State. They speak Banjara language. Their main occupation is agriculture. Their colorful native dress and intricate needle work are distinct. Their main festivals are Santh Sevalal Jayanthi and Teej. Yerukala: These Tribals inhabit the plain areas of Telangana with a population of 1.44 lakhs, concentrated around Hyderabad, Rangareddy Districts. They speak yerukalabasha. Their main occupation includes piggery and Basket weaving. Their traditional culture includes Sooth Saying by women. Their main festival is Nancharamma jatara.

However, the tribal people have been victims of social, economic and religious discrimination and exploitation notwithstanding their rich history. They have been deprived of education, have been socially looked down upon and rejected, have been made to serve as bonded labourers: a fact that has been time and again accepted, officially and unofficially, by politicians, social workers and scholars alike. Usually, non-tribals are also responsible for the backwardness, excesses on and exploitation of tribals. There is some truth to this generalization. But then are the non-tribals only to be blamed for tribal backwardness? Actually, if anybody has to be blamed for tribal backwardness it has to be the tribals only. The facts speak for themselves. Take for instance the tribal sub plan area of Telangana. They are well represented in governing and legislative bodies. Yet, the common tribal is still struggling to make both ends meet , and only the tribal politicians, leaders, officials and employees and the youth can be blamed for the backwardness of the tribal society as they together have failed to discharge their responsibility toward their own community. Here, we will explore all this one by one.

### **Role of Tribal Politicians**

As we all know, tribals face social, economic and religious exploitation and excesses which bring the role of tribal politicians into question because they have failed to tackle these problems by mobilizing the community into a movement. The main reason of this failure on

their part is the lack of leadership among the tribal community. In addition, after independence the community panchayats have been usurped by party politics, which has become a bane for the tribal society. The party politics has divided the tribal society into various party ideologies. As a result, most of the tribal leaders are not concerned with development and uplift of the tribal society, rather they only try to only fulfil their political ambitions. Most of the tribal leaders work to mobilize crowds for their party rallies. They seldom work toward solving the problems of the community. Consequently, even after a period of more than six decades since independence, there has been a lack of programmes and schemes.

When some tribal politicians, rising above party politics, raise the issues concerning the development of tribal, they are accused of promoting casteism, and their party concerned retaliates by downsizing their political stature and putting checks on them. The threat of denial of tickets for the next elections is the most potent one that makes the tribal leaders helpless. Furthermore, there is no dearth of talented people among tribals, but they get divided gradually along party lines and social groupings, and they are engaged in pulling down each other and fulfilling their political ambitions. This has only harmed the interests of the tribal society. It has been observed that the tribal leaders from Telangana have little grip over the government administration. Lack of education, no influential positions in political parties, lack of awareness about constitutional provisions and rights, lack of information about development programmes and procedures of government departments are some of the reasons for this. The tribal leaders are worried only about their own future and work as 'yes men' of their political masters, to the detriment of the larger interests of the tribal society.

### **Role of Tribal Officials and Employees**

Tribals of Telangana have very low representation in government administration in comparison to non-tribals. They have little representation in Telangana Group-I and Group-II Services. In other words, there are only a handful of tribal officials and employees from this region and most of them work under pressure and fear. They never participate in activities conducted for the prevention of excesses and exploitation perpetrated on tribal society. Keeping in mind that they have to raise their children, they think they would work for their community after they retire from job. This is how the tribal officials and employees have failed in discharging their duty towards their society. But when they smell an opportunity to become MLA and MP, they are seen running around for tickets; they want to become politicians but not social workers.

These officials and employees have little interaction with their community members. Most of them have become city dwellers, and they never encourage their children to participate in social activities of their community. Thus, they do not discharge their responsibility towards their community. The tribal officials and employees posted in this area have to face immense pressure from their political masters and have to work under fear as they are transferred by the politicians to serve their party interests and personal ambitions. This fear keeps them from participating in social development activities. They are thus unable to bring awareness among their fellow tribesmen and set an example before the youth. They only bid their time while waiting to complete their service period. But when they retire, it is too late as they are unable to contribute anything substantial towards their community.

### **Role of Tribal Youth**



Owing to their poor economic condition, most of the tribals send their children to government schools and hostels. Needless to say, the government educational institutions are ill-equipped to provide quality education to the children of the tribals. For instance, they don't have qualified teachers in enough numbers, lack well-equipped science labs, particularly in rural areas, have no playing grounds, libraries and reading rooms, lack furniture and classrooms. To top it all, students have to face caste discrimination in these institutions that reflects on the results of practical examinations of tribal students.

Aware of all these pitfalls of government schools, when the poor tribal families try to get their children good education through missionary schools, some fanatic elements, who have a sway upon the larger society, dub this act as proselytization and create social and political pressure to deprive their children of education, although this is unconstitutional. How many tribal politicians, officials and social workers have turned their attention toward such occurrences? How many of them have ever bothered to visit the schools and hostels set up in rural tribal areas and tried to do something about the various problems that tribal students face there? How many students they have ever bothered to help and guide? But people venturing into this kind of endeavour are few. Further, such efforts are few and far between. Even those poor tribal students, who try to overcome all difficulties in their studies, focus only on getting a government job, and most of the time their efforts go in vain.

#### **The way ahead to eradicate the inequality**

The above analysis draws the attention towards important deficiencies of the tribal community which can be removed by the following suggestions: Tribal politicians, officials and employees may have taken advantage of reservations to improve the socio-economic status of their families. But most of them seldom discharge their duty towards the less fortunate fellow tribesmen. Such individuals should be entrusted with special responsibility of contributing towards the socio-economic development of their fellowmen living in poor rural tribal areas. They should be involved especially in educational, health and awareness programs. And if they don't fulfil their duty toward the community, they should not be allowed to enjoy the benefits of reservation. Owing to the limited resources, the implementation of various schemes designed by the government for the uplift of tribals is an uphill task. As a result of this, the tribals dwelling in poor rural areas are deprived of quality education and health care, thus keeping the tribals backward compared to non-tribals. Various government and non-government studies show that various government schemes meant for the socio-economic development of tribals have failed to reach the intended beneficiaries for lack of adequate staff and resources. The government has now taken an initiative to implement such schemes by involving non-government agencies. But no positive results have emerged from such initiatives. We all know that the missionaries have played a crucial role in providing quality education and health care to the rural poor. It is evident from the socio-economic condition of the tribals of the north-east, including Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur, etc., and Jharkhand, which is much better than Telangana tribals. The tribals of these areas are contributing their mite in a significant way in many countries. It would be advisable to handover tribal development programs in Telangana. Due to missionaries functioning, the tribal communities of Telangana State, become aware of their human rights and become equal partners in the socio-economic development along with the

non-tribals. No tribal will ever oppose the theory of merit. I also feel that till the tribals avail the benefit of reservation, their abilities will be questioned by the larger society.

But if such beneficiaries contribute significantly towards the development of the society and the country, their abilities will be much less questioned. It is, therefore, necessary to make those who are enjoying the fruits of reservation to serve at least for the first five years, after they get a government job, in tribal areas and contribute to the welfare and development of the community, adopt a tribal child to raise and educate him and contribute a certain percentage of their earning to the development work in tribal areas, such as digging of wells, construction of schools and community centres so that it helps the ordinary tribals lead a life with dignity. And they can say with pride, when time comes, that they are discharging their duty towards their community in return for the benefits of reservation that the government has provided them.

### **Conclusion**

Party politics has pushed the tribal panchayats to the brink of ruin. The traditional tribal panchayats have historically played a crucial role in tribal society. It is, therefore, necessary to revive and strengthen them, as in their absence it would be difficult for the tribal community to reclaim its pride and rightful place in the society. It is apparent from experience that party politics is not going to resolve the problems that the tribal community is besieged with; had the decisions inspired by party politics been beneficial, the tribals would have not been still living in pathetic condition. If any tribal receives lathis in the movements and rallies held for tribal dignity and resolution of tribal society's socio-economic problems, is jailed and takes bullets, such person should be revered by the community.

The community panchayats can also promote community participation in rural development work so that we don't have to depend on government alone for our socio-economic development. Every villager should be encouraged to contribute to mobilize resources and remove various deficiencies besetting development work. Villagers should also be encouraged to set up self-help groups so that a positive change is harnessed in their economic condition. The tribal community is depicted in a wrong light in many films, papers and magazines. So it is pertinent for us to expose such tribals and non-tribals, organizations and groups, who are hurting the tribal interests and defaming the community, and give them a befitting reply. Many fundamentalist organizations are working overtime to create a deep wedge in tribal community, making tribals their own enemies. If such dangerous tendency is not checked, the time is not too far when the tribals will have strife amongst them where tribals will kill tribals. Against the above background, one can say that it will be erroneous to hold non-tribals solely responsible for the backwardness of the tribals of Telangana State. If the tribal community has to suffer excesses and exploitation, and has remained a laggard in development, then tribal politicians, official, employees are as much to be blamed for this sorry state of affairs. Although the government time and again claims to have spent crores of rupees on the development of Telangana, the reality on the ground is opposite, as there has been too little development to support such claims. This has led to growing socio-economic and political dissent among tribals of this area. Keeping in view this discontent, some individuals have taken laudable initiatives.

Generally, it can be observed that the socio-economic condition of an ordinary tribal person is so pathetic that all his concerns and efforts focus on making both ends meet,



so much so that he is unable to think of his own development, let alone making any effort towards resolving the problems the community is beset with. He simply gives up, and hopes that some leader, some official or holy man will descend and deliver them from their pathetic socio-economic condition. The ordinary tribal has left his fate in the hands of government and God. If somebody perpetrates excesses on them and exploits them, they simply bow down before them. If any tribal youth or leader dares raise his voice against such excesses and exploitation, the ordinary tribals fail to throw their weight behind him, as they are in awe of the socio-economic status of the perpetrator. And if some youth goes to jail for fighting for the dignity of the tribal community or dies for the cause of the tribals, he becomes a part of statistics as his fellow tribesmen, taking such event as something too ordinary to be remembered, forget such sacrifices after a few days. This is one of the biggest faults that lie with the tribal community itself.

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