

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Notes

Introduction

Differences have been the hallmark of Indian society. These differences emerged as the result of various long and complex historical processes. These differences have been diverse and varied depending upon caste, language, religion, and region. Adding to these differences, the new one that was added during the colonial period was the tribe. Discussion on the nature and significance of the tribe as a distinct category was at the forefront during the colonial rule in India. Several scholars reflected on the nature of tribes. But the most famous one is the debate between the Ghurye-Elwin.

The Ghurye-Elwin debate

After India became independent, formulating and implementing an appropriate policy for tribes assumed critical importance. Even before independence, the nature of the policy to be adopted had become a matter of heated debate between two scholars, namely Elwin and Ghurye.

Verrier Elwin was an Anthropologist who came to India in 1927 as a missionary and later known as an ethnologist and tribal activist and scholar as his works on tribal groups in India made a remarkable contribution.

Some of his well-known books on tribal life are *The Baiga*, *The Aborigines*, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, *Songs of the Forest: the folk poetry of the Gonds*, *When*

the World Was Young: folk-tales from India's hills and forests, The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin: an autobiography, etc.

Govind Sadashiv Ghurye called G.S. Ghurye was a sociologist who wrote on several issues during his time. Some of his books are The Scheduled Tribes, The Aborigines so-called and their Future, and Caste and Race in India, etc.

The debate between these two scholars made a remarkable contribution in defining tribal identity and their position in society, especially during colonial times. Their view on the tribal situation before independence that is 1943 and the focus was on the three policies: isolation, assimilation, and integration.

To understand the tribal issues in India, there are three main policies namely:

- The Policy of Isolation
- The Policy of Assimilation
- The Policy of Integration

1. The Policy of Isolation

The debate had its genesis in Elwin's work "The Baiga" published in 1939 and "The Aborigines" in 1944. Verrier Elwin proposed the policy of isolation. He was known for his work in tribal areas. He was in favor of protecting or retaining a tribal way of life by supporting the isolation policy. He was in favor of the isolation of tribal communities from mainstream society. He was of the opinion that the tribal community should not mix with the others; if they get to mix with others there is a possibility that the tribal community might imitate and adopt the lifestyle of so-called civilized society. So he was in favor of giving the opportunity to the tribal community without harming their own identity and protecting them from exploitation and oppression. He termed his view as 'National Park'. Because of this position, Elwin was termed a 'revivalist' and a 'no changer' by his critics, most noted of whom was the famous sociologist, G.S. Ghurye. This approach is not accepted by society.

2. The Policy of Assimilation

G. S. Ghurye advocated the policy of assimilation in his famous work 'The Scheduled Tribes' (1963). He argues that the tribes were Hindus, or to put it more bluntly, Backward Hindus. He thought of them as inferior and backward because they were cut off from the large mass of the Indian population. He also identified them as standing a step lower on the evolutionary ladder, and in

fact, not being very different from the mass of the Indian population. His considered view was that tribes should be assimilated into the larger society so that they could be lifted out of their abject poverty and base living conditions. This view placed the tribals at the lowest position on the tribe-caste-class continuum, a conceptual paradigm used for understanding the processes of change in tribal life.

For Ghurye, this continuum suggested a movement of the tribals from tradition to modernity, from pantheism to a higher form of religion, from a base and crude way of life to one morally and ethically superior. This was a way of tracing the assimilation-integration stage of the tribals into the National mainstream society.

3. The Policy of Integration

In India, neither of the two policies was thought adequate in independent India by the Nationalist leadership. Elwin's strategy could not work and therefore his approach of isolation failed. Whereas Ghurye termed tribes as "backward Hindus" while defining the caste system structure in India.

The provisions pointed to an approach that was quite different from those propagated by Elwin and Ghurye. The provisions included statutory recognition, proportional representation in the legislatures, the right to use their own language for education and other purposes, the right to profess their own faith, and the right to pursue development according to their own genius. The Constitution also empowered the state to make provisions for reservations in jobs and appointments in favor of tribal communities. In addition, the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution required that the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of society, including tribals, should be promoted. Moreover, the Constitution empowered the state to bring areas inhabited by tribes under the Fifth and Sixth Scheduled for the purpose of special treatment with respect to the administration of tribal people. These constitutional provisions thus aimed at safeguarding, protecting, and promoting the interest of tribal people. If one were to examine these provisions more carefully, one would find that the Constitution clearly adopts a policy of integration rather than of isolation or assimilation.

The Government of India, especially after Independence, the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru propounded the integration policy for the

betterment of the tribal community. It was based on the Panchsheel. The Panchsheel is five fundamental principles underlying the constitutional provisions for tribal development in India.

The Five Principles underlying the Constitutional Provisions

The five principles put forth by Nehru were:

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius, and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
2. Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
3. We should try to train and built up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. 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 to in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
5. We should judge results, not by statistics of the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

These principles have been the guidelines of tribal development more for the north-eastern region than for mainland India, where the reality has been a situation characterized more by assimilation than by integration.