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Strategies for the Sustainable Development of Tribes of Purulia District in West Bengal

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Abstract

This paper provides the existing inter relationship between environment and sustainable development among the tribes of Purulia. The study provides insights on the environmental concerns of 'Sustainable development' of tribal communities of Purulia. The main objective of the study is to analyse how tribal communities of Purulia district in West Bengal react on environment and sustainable development. The data was collected from various tribes of Purulia and the data was analysed by qualitative method. In this paper researcher found that tribal culture, tribal livelihoods, indigenous knowledge of tribals in protection of environment, their sustainable behavior for conservation and regeneration of natural resources and their traditional strategies for save environment. The effect of deforestation, unscientific digging of mines, excessive cutting of hills and land and their negative effect on environment in Purulia are also stated here. For protection of environment tribals use several sustainable methods but more Government help should be needed for protection of tribals of Purulia.

Keywords: Environment, Sustainable Development, Tribes, Traditional Knowledge, Cultural heritage, Tribes of Purulia.

Introduction

Previously men's needs are fulfilled from the nature. After that, various technology are invented to solve various matter. With the advancement of technology, men exploit the natural resources and create various hazardous phenomenon of nature and men emitted large quantity of waste material in the nature. But tribals still make different artifacts from natural elements (Subramanyam & Veerabhadru, 2013).

In Brundtland Report 'Our Common Future' it was stated that, 'Sustainable Development means to meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. In general, sustainable development describes a process in which the natural resource base is not allowed to deteriorate.

Sustainable development has certain goals, these are basic needs of all human beings i.e. food, clothing, shelter, education, health, security and self-esteem must be met adequately, priority must go to these needs. These needs will be determined by natural and technological resources available and the global socio-economic context. And development process should not disturb the environment and the ecological balance. So, sustainable development demands a change in men's attitude towards nature.

To save earth from pollution, deforestation, flood, erosion and also to save humanity men should behave like the primitive group of human being. More clearly it can be said that men should behave like the tribal people, they know how to sustain the culture and the natural resources for the next generation.

So, in this paper researchers try to make a study on tribal communities of Purulia district in West Bengal and to know their strategies of sustainable development.

Objectives

The study has the following objectives:

1. To study the status of tribal communities of Purulia district in West Bengal.
2. To study how tribal communities of Purulia district in West Bengal dependent on environment.

3. To study how tribal communities of Purulia district in West Bengal react sustainable development.

Methodology

Through observation, interview the primary data were collected from tribes of Purulia district in West Bengal. Secondary data were collected from different books, journal, Government documents etc. The data collected was analysed by qualitative method.

Results and Discussion

India is the home to the largest tribal population in the world. According to the census of 2011, total 104 million tribal people live in India. Indigenous people mean 'Tribal people' or 'Tribals'. They are the poorest and the most marginalized, oppressed and deprived people in the country. 40 different types of tribal community live in West Bengal which are the 5.79% of the total population of West Bengal. Most of them are found in the Southern, Western and Northern part of the state. Purulia is one of the most backward and deprived tribal populated district in West Bengal. According to the Census 2011, the number of tribal people in this district is 5,40,652, which is 18.45% of the total population of the district and 10.52% of the total tribal population of West Bengal. The tribal habitats of Purulia is the main focus area of the study. Santal, Kheria Sabar and Birhor are different tribal groups who stays in this area. Most of the tribes of Purulia belong to Proto-Australoid race with dark skin, sunken nose and lower forehead. Tribes of this area basically speak in santhali, gond and kheria. Tribals of Purulia district have distinct age-old social system, cultural tradition, customs, values, life style and languages (Daripa, 2018).

Tribal people of Purulia are very much depending to their Forest habitat and it is their basic life supporting system. Their economy is agro-forest based which substituted with livestock and skilled labour. Previously they were totally depending on the flora and fauna of forest. And mostly they were nomads, and now slowly adopting to sedentary life. They also do employment in Forest department and in other government offices also but this number are very few. Now some tribes also engaged with tourism business.

Tribes of Purulia mainly do cultivation, they raise paddy crop during kharif season. They also grow crops like turmeric, maize, tobacco, chillies, cotton, cashew, orange, ginger, pepper, different varieties of beans, pulses, millets, oil seeds etc. They use freely available surface water for irrigating the crops. They have the traditional knowledge of water resource management even in the hills. Terrace cultivation is also seen here and there in between the two hillocks where springs flow in rainy and winter seasons. In hill forested zones, the tribal cultivators are now facing the problem of soil erosion one of the reasons for this is deforestation. They also rear cattle, selling milk and milk products. They can also manufacture all kinds of agricultural implements, household articles etc. They can do carpentry, sculpturing, embroidery. They can make metal ornaments, bamboo works, jute products, baskets also. Tribal peoples have inborn creative artistic skills but their artistic skills are not recognized and developed properly. Occupational mobility among the artisans is basically due to non-availability of raw material in the natural environment and less demand for their products.

Environment and Tribes of Purulia

Forest degradation, soil erosion are some environmental hazardous which reflected on the livelihood of tribal people of Purulia. The establishment of hydro-electrical power generation project at Ajodhya Hill and other project in different region of Purulia also created survival problem to some of the tribes who were rehabilitated into other places and allotted agricultural land to them. They were displaced from their habitat. Because of that they are now facing the problem of adaptability to new environment in their personal and professional life both. Now some of them become beggars, thieves and some of them taken up the profession of wood selling. Nowadays still tribes are facing of low economy, low literacy and they relatively live in isolation.

Soil erosion problem is associated with the forest degradation. Agriculture is mainly dependent on land and rainfall, year by year there is a declining trend in rainfall due to forest degradation. It is accepted by tribals that the deforestation is the major cause for decline of rainfall. Tribals are facing water scarcity problem in summer months. So, the tribal women have to walk miles to take fresh drinking water from the river, hill streams, springs or any other sources which are faraway places from their home. Scarcity of agricultural land, in sufficient rainfall and lack of irrigation facilities in the habitats of settled cultivators, are also creating food insecurity to them.

Deforestation is an acute environmental issue, there are varied reasons for the deforestation. No doubt the practice of shifting cultivation, cutting trees by the tribals are causes to some extent of deforestation. But the large-scale deforestation take place in the Ajodhya Hill is due to smuggling of timber by the non-tribal timber merchants, usage of valuable timber in house construction, making of hotels, industry by cutting trees. Huge number of public constructions works and mining operations also destruct the natural forest environment. Large scale of forest degradation is taking place due to 'commercialization of forests.

Tribals have the knowledge to maintain eco-friendly relationship with the forest environment in which they inhabit centuries together. The tribals who are still at pre-agricultural stage of economy are struggling hard to save their livelihood in the degraded forest environment.

Moreover, the government sanctioned development schemes are not reaching to the needy people, only a section of the tribal people benefited with these schemes.

Cultural activities of tribal communities of Purulia

Purulia district is known for its various tribal festivals, which is celebrated throughout the year. Tribal communities of this district observe various cultural activities based on their belief, religious practice, custom and tradition which shows their love to nature. Some of the festivals and fairs observed by the tribal community of Purulia district are as follows.

Disum sendra: Disum Sendra is one of most popular festival of the tribals of the district and also known as Shikar Parab (festival of hunting wild animals). This festival celebrated in every year in the month of April and May. Due to deforestation and various government rules and regulations on killing animal, the popularity of this festival is decrease.

Erokh Sim: Erokh Sim is a popular festival celebrated by

the santhal community of this district in mid-June to mid-July to mark the sowing of seeds for agricultural activities. In Munda this festival is known as Batauli.

Karam Parab: Karam parab starts with Jhumur song and Pata dance which is celebrated in the month of August.

Jathela Utsav: It is celebrated by santhals of Purulia in mid of November to mid of December.

Tusu: Tusu is the most popular festival of Purulia district which is celebrated by all sections of people i.e. tribal and non-tribal people. It is celebrated in mid of December to January month.

Magh Sim: Magh Sim is the popular Santhal festival celebrated in Bengali month of Magh.

Baha: Baha is spring festival of the Santhals. This festival is celebrated with night long Song and dance programme by Santhals.

Charm of these century old festivals is declining because present tribal generation is not interested in celebrating their traditional festivals, rather they participate and celebrate in non-tribal festivals. Primitive rich cultural heritage of the tribal people is declining now. A change is seen in social and cultural sphere in the tribal community due to technology and modernization. This cultural diffusion is mainly observed due to contact between tribal and non-tribal population. The pace of diffusion is faster among the tribals. Dependence on external economy and settlement with non-tribal people is one of the major reasons for cultural erosion among the tribal population (Daripa, 2018).

Indigenous Knowledge of Tribals of Purulia in Conservation of Forest Resources

The tribes in the Purulia have a lot of empirical knowledge on the basis of their experience while dealing with the forest and its resources. The traditional wisdom is based on the intrinsic realization that man and nature form a part of an indivisible whole, and therefore should live in partnership with each other. Tribal communities have sensitive attitudes towards plants, animals, land and water. The whole body of knowledge centered in the economic value of plant and animal species, is part of ethno-biology, and has potential value for the forest dwellers of Ajodhya Hills. Indigenous science and technology also plays a vital role in conservation of natural resources such as forest, land, water, minerals etc. Indigenous way of life of tribals also plays a vital role in conservation of natural resources such as forest, land, water, minerals etc.

The tribals have traditional knowledge of the flora and fauna, to which they interact in everyday life to meet their basic prime need of food. It has already been mentioned that tribals have developed symbiotic relationship with the nature from primitive time. Their attachment with environment are inseparable. They draw their sustenance largely from the forest which provides them with food, timber, medicinal plants, material for constructions of houses etc. Their belief systems, social, economic and ritual activities are intricately interwoven around forests and hills. The tribals hold this symbiotic relationship in great esteem and they regard various species of forest as their kith and kin.

Tribals have the belief that spirits take abode of the mountains and forests; they also believe different elements of natural environment are the different God. The concept of 'Sacred Species', 'Sacred groves', and 'sacred land

'scape' represent various stages in social selection. The guiding Principles that regulate the use of natural resources are embedded in the codified and often non-codified institutions that they have evolved. These sacred institutions were originally intended to boost social unity. It is in the context of ensuring conservation values, management of natural resources, traditional ecological knowledge etc.

The social institutions linked to biological resource management are often linked to religious myths and socio-cultural belief system. Such a concept of 'the sacred' often has spatial dimensions and specificities.

Sustainable development strategies of Tribals of Purulia

Tribal communities of Purulia is closely linked with sustainable development of natural resources. But over exploitation of natural resources due to population explosion is resulting to depletion and deterioration of forest environment in some of the region and it have much reflections on the livelihood of tribes. Protection, conservation and regeneration of natural resources are the best solutions to achieve the sustainable environment. Stable and sustainable forest environment definitely provide ample of scope for the sustainable livelihood of tribals of Purulia. Indigenous knowledge systems are much beneficial for the sustainable livelihood of a local community in the balanced environment situation.

Tribals still live relatively in isolation of hills and forests. Most of the development services are not reaching to them due to lack of proper communication with them. The interior tribals are not allowing the outside development agencies into their habitats. Proper transportation and communication facility helps to connect with tribals and it also helps to reduce the extremists' activities in these areas.

In our country, the constitutional provisions for the scheduled tribes are one of the steps to take the responsibility to development of scheduled tribes community and bring them in mainstream. But most of these facilities are not getting by the actually needed tribes. The integrated Tribal Development strategy also not attained the expected results, especially in the interior tribal areas due to lapses at implementation level. The poor tribals may not able to develop their own, because of scanty of resources available to them in their habitats where they live. Much attention is still needed to improve the agriculture and forestry sectors in tribal areas with the soil conservation strategy.

Generally tribal population are under the below poverty line, malnutrition, deaths of children are on the rise, migration of survival is increasing, lands are getting alienated. The problem of land alienation can be tackled with strict implementation of Land Act. Restoration of land and distribution of additional land to the needy families are the immediate interventions for solving the problem of food.

Still large scale exploitation is taking place in the tribal areas, due to their innocence, ignorance and illiteracy. To sort out this problem education programmes should be intensified and to be implemented properly. Education is one of the instrument for human development. Quality of teaching learning process in the schools of this area should be increased and reintroduction of adult Education programme in tribal areas can definitely improve the literacy rate among tribal communities.

The innocent tribals are mostly exploited by the non-tribal moneylenders and traders in the area of marketing. The public distribution system needs to be strengthened by supplying the staple food grains, domestic requirements of local tribals and any other facilities.

Tribals empowerment is a good strategy which makes the tribals to participate in almost all development programmes and allows them to exercise their rights and provisions extended to them constitutionally. Empowerment of tribal women is another strategy which helps to elevate their status and participate in decision making process in all spheres along with their menfolk. In general the women in tribal society enjoy better status when compared with that of women in the caste society. The tribal women contribute more to their family incomes, work more number of hours compared to their men folk. The tribal women have indigenous knowledge in collection of Non Timber Forest Produce items without damaging such yielding plant species in forest environment. They have skills in maintenance of home gardens. Tribal women play an important role in minimizing the fuel food consumption. Their participation in all the development activities is definitely helpful for the overall development of tribal communities. The S.H.G. (Self Help Group) scheme definitely provided economic empowerment to the women in tribal communities too.

Health and nutrition programmes should be intensified to tackle the problems of malnutrition, deaths of children etc. Health is the most important factor for the economic progress and wellbeing of any human community including the tribals. Health is considered as another social indicators of development. Poverty and food insecurity are intertwined with the poor health status of the tribal communities. Education and health programmes definitely play vital role to enhance the living conditions of the tribal communities of Ajodhya Hills. Health status of the tribals should need to be improved by providing health services at their doors steps through the adoption of mobile health clinic. Tribal medical system should also need to be introduced in the existing government health facility in almost all primary health center levels.

Irrigation development and development of water conservation attitude among the tribals are also needs much attention from the concerned development agencies. Protected drinking water facility to be provided to almost all the tribal habitats in order to solve the water borne diseases among tribals. Good sanitary facilities should be provided to the tribal villages in order to control malaria, typhoid and dengue fevers.

Strengthening of the infrastructure facilities in the interior tribal settlements as well as intensifying the poverty alleviation programmes among the primitive tribes are the immediate actions to be initiated for the sustainability of the tribal. Participatory Action Research and Intervention strategies should be adopted by the researchers, Non-Government agencies, planners and administrations in order to tackle the various tribal problems and issues with appropriate solutions at community level itself. The tribals should be properly motivated in various development programmes to make them to participate fully and to achieve the progress among them in desired direction. Awareness programmes at family and community levels should be taken up with better and in a effective way, preferably by using the popular local media, arranging

audio-Visual programmes in order to make a positive response from the tribals.

Conclusion

Large majority of the tribals in Purulia still facing the problems of poverty, food insecurity due to forest degradation and scanty of food resources. Environment laws and policies are also not strictly implemented by the concerned agencies in order to maintain natural balance in tribal habitats in specific and other settlements. Forest policies are also against to the right of the tribal on forest land and other resources. That is why forest and land disputes become very regular feature in the tribal areas. They are made 'marginal' in their own habitat with restrictions placed on the entry into their age old habitat. The age old tribal customary rights and man-nature-spirit of these forest dwellers are affected. The emerging threat of globalization is another extraneous factor that needs immediate attention.

Some of the major areas of concern for the maintenance of natural balance are : 1) Pollution control must take top priority to prevent further deterioration of natural environment 2) Policies which result in effective use of natural resources such as Water, Land, Forest and minerals 3) Special action plans to take care of highly polluted water ways, degraded forests and highly denuded mountain range may have to be drawn up 4) Greening of degraded lands with community participation and involvement must be initiated, so that those who are involved in the action can gather the benefits.

It is a good sign that emphasis is being laid on people's involvement in the development process. Endowed with slowly increasing literacy and awareness levels, political consciousness guided and assisted by social activist groups, the scope for accelerated tribal development can be visualized.

In conclusion, it can be said that protection of environment is in an urgent need. To ensure the sustainability of century old culture of indigenous people who stayed in remote places, it is important to conserve the bio-diversity. Tribals are comfortable in their natural habitat. They can easily interact with their natural environment so tribals needs their sustainable livelihood very much. Different activities and actions should be introduced to preserve the nature and tribal culture and for the well-being of the tribal people. For their well-being job opportunity should be given to them. Tribal can make different handicrafts and their knowledge on medicinal plants, if these qualities should be emphasized by different governmental and non-governmental schemes, it can definitely improve their economic condition and bring sustainable development among them. And tribes should be brought into the mainstream and which will allow the ongoing development process, in order to increase their standards of life.

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