Contents

21. Amit Narula and Kusum Narula
   Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy Today

21. Parmod Chauhan
   Relevance of Gandhi in the Modern Societies

22. Ranjana Bhardwaj
   Buddhist Perspectives of Non-Violence

23. Suresh Kumar Soni
   Gandhi’s Concept of Humanism: An Overview

24. Seema Pasricha
   Gandhian Philosophy of Political Change

25. Kusum Solanky
   Gandhi’s Views on Women

26. Monica Sharma
   Women Education in Punjab: A Case Study of Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, Jalandhar

27. Ranju Devi
   Gandhian Approach to Tribal Issue

28. Sumit Narula
   Gandhi on Peace, Conflict and Conflict Resolutions

29. Ranjan Bala
   Gandhi’s Vision: A Search for Peace and Security

30. Kiyanoush Chalavand
   Mahatma Gandhi: A Life for Non-Violence

Index
Gandhian Approach to Tribal Issue

RANJU DEVI

The Mahatma's preoccupation was with the development of a technique of social action based on non-violence. He took up a few major issues, such as: national freedom, communal unity, and rural reconstruction and sought to develop through the implementation of the programmes revolving around them the people's collective will, the Lok shakti, as the solvent of social ills. The Adivasi problem, as such, did not claim his attention until the early 1940s, but he exercised the imagination of the tribal people as of other segments of the rural community, and his life and mission became known through the Adivasi welfare programmes implemented by number of organizations. A good many social movements among the tribes were influenced by him. Two key figures, Amritlal Thakkar, popularly known as Thakkar Bappa, and Verrier Elwin, who shaped free India's tribal policy, came into close contact with him; Thakkar Bappa was a life long collaborator, and he, in a way, influenced the Mahatma's interest in the tribal problem. When Gandhi saw the condition of Adivasi he was
very hurt. Commanding the programme to worker in the cause of Independence Gandhiji’s Adivasi like Raniparaja is a coined word. Raniparaja (meaning that there skin is more that of any other) was coined by Shri Jagatra The term Adivasi (for Bhils, Gonds or, described as Hill Tribes or aboriginals) original inhabitants and was coined by T. Upajati is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous and tribal groups believed to be the aboriginal India. They comprise a substantial indigenous the population of India.

Upajati societies are particularly present in states of Kerala, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Mizoram, and other states, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Tribal groups are quite sensitive to ecologic caused by modernization. Both commercial intensive agriculture have proved destructive that had endured swidden agriculture for many years. Of officially recognized by the Indian government Tribes” in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution they are often grouped together with schedule category “Scheduled Castes and Tribes”, which certain affirmative action measures.

It must be noted that the correct translation “tribe” is “upajati” and not “adivasi”, and does not appear anywhere in primary Si sources or in regional literature. Although atavika (Sanskrit for forest dwellers), vanvasi people are also used for the tribes of India, the specific meaning of being the original and inhabitants of a given region, and was specifically used in the 1930s. Over a period of terms “aborigines” or “tribes”, the word “adivasi” developed a connotation of past autonomy disrupted during the British Colonial period and it has been argued that the “original
contention is based on dubious claims and that the adivasi -
non-adivasi divide that is created is artificial. It should also
be noted that in Northeast India, the term Adivasi applies
only to the tea-tribes imported from Central India during
colonial times, while all tribal groups refer collectively to
themselves by using the English word “tribes”.

There are more than 400 groups in Indian society
which are officially designated as scheduled tribes (STs).
Scheduled Tribes are the disadvantaged groups than rest of
the Indian population. The term “tribe” is nowhere defined
in the Constitution and in fact the definition of this word
given by sociologist and anthropologist still leave scope for
definition. To the ordinary man the word suggests simple
folk living in forests and hills; to an administrator it means a
group of citizens who are the special responsibility of the
President of India, to a social worker it means traditionally
isolated population which needs help themselves for their
development.

The term Scheduled Tribes is of recent origin, which
came in to being with the birth of the Republican
Constitution of India on January 26, 1950. Upto 1919, they
were included along with other categories of backward
classes under the head “depressed classes”. Under the present
constitution the tribals are Scheduled and are popularly
termed “Scheduled Tribes”.

The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines
Scheduled Tribes as “such tribes or tribal communities or part
of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are
deemed under Article 342 to the scheduled Tribes (STs) for
the purposes of this Constitution”. In Article 342, the
procedure to be followed for specification of a scheduled
tribe is prescribed. However, it does not contain the criterion
for the specification of any community as scheduled tribe. An
often used criterion is based on attributes such as:

- Geographical isolation - they live in cloistered,
exclusive, remote and inhospitable areas such as
  hills and forests.
- Backwardness - their livelihood is based on
  primitive agriculture, a low-value closed economy
with a low level of technology that leads to their poverty. They have low levels of literacy and health.

- Distinctive Culture, language and religion - communities have developed their own distinctive culture, language and religion.
- Shyness of contact - they have a marginal degree of contact with other cultures and people.

The Scheduled Tribe groups who were identified as more backward communities among the tribal population groups have been categorised as 'Primitive Tribal Groups' (PTGs) by the Government at the Centre in 1973. So far seventy-five tribal communities have been identified as 'primitive tribal groups' in different States of India. These hunting, food-gathering, and some agricultural communities, who have been identified as more backward communities among the tribal population groups need special programmes for their sustainable development. The primitive tribes are awakening and demanding their rights for special reservation quota for them.

The report of the Scheduled areas and Scheduled Tribes commission (1960-61) observes the "largest concentration of tribal people anywhere in the world except in Africa and in India". Prior to the Constitution, the term "Scheduled Tribes" was not in existence, but the tribes were variously called as aboriginals, adivasi, forest dwellers, hill tribes, primitives tribes, adi maji, etc. Upto 1919, the tribes were included under the head of 'Depressed Classes'. The Indian Franchise Committee in 1919, accorded a separate nomenclature for the Census Reports.

The term Scheduled area is a successor. The term Scheduled tracts, backward tracts, backward areas, excluded and partially excluded areas were usual in the pre-Constitution era in the Government of India Acts 1919 and 1935. Thus the adivasis or the aboriginal population of our country are considered as early settlers. They are generally found to live in unhealthy jungle-covered regions, mostly remote and inaccessible to other people. In the Constitution of India, they have been described as weaker sections because
they are not in position to compete brethren in socio-economic sphere.

There are three important tribal communities in India where most of the tribals inhabit, viz., the eastern zones of India comprising the mountainous region with dominating tribals, the middle zone comprising the states of Orissa, Southern Uttar Pradesh, Northern Madhya Pradesh, and Northern Rajasthan, consisting of Kerala, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, Northern Rajasthan, and the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar. All tribals shared and are still known universally as Hindus. There is a socio-economic sphere.

Problems of these people are compounded much as the means of communication and the impact of extraneous influences have unfavourably on the part of tribal population. Impact we find cultural disintegration at
them. Besides these, various other factors are also responsible for their problems. They are:

(1) Exploitation by outsiders
(2) Unapproachable habitation
(3) Policy of the then British India
(4) Approach of Christian missionaries and so on

The existing problems may be summarised as (1) land problem (2) problem of education (3) cultural problems (4) problem of religion (5) economic problems (6) health problems.


Article 46 of the Constitution requires that the states shall promote with special care the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people in general and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in particular.

The Constitution prescribed protections and safeguards for Scheduled tribes and other weaker sections either specially or by way of insisting on their general rights as citizens with the object of promoting their educational and economic interests and removing social disabilities they are subjected to. Main safeguards are:

(1) promotion of their education and economic interests and their protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46);
(2) throwing open by law of Hindu religious institutions of public character to all classes and sections of Hindu (Article 25);
(3) curtailment by law in the interest of any Scheduled Tribes of general rights of all citizens to move freely, settle in and acquire property (Article 19(5));
(4) forbidding or any denial of admission to educational institutions maintained by the state or
receiving grant out of state funds (Article 29 (2));

(5) permitting the state to make reservation for backward classes in public services in case of inadequate representation and requiring the state to consider claims of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the making of appointments to public services (Articles 16 and 335);

(6) special representation in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative assemblies to Scheduled Castes and Tribes till 25 January 2000 (Articles 330, 332 and 334);

(7) setting up of tribal advisory councils and separate departments in states and appointment of a special officer at the centre to promote their welfare and safeguard their interests (Articles 164 and 338 and fifth Schedule);

(8) special provision for administration and control of Scheduled and Tribal areas (Article 244 and fifth and sixth schedules);

(9) prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour (Article 23).

With a view to effectively deal with crimes against Scheduled tribes and to tone up administrative machinery to tackle this vital issue, comprehensive guidelines containing precautionary, preventive punitive and rehabilitative measures exist, which states/UTs have to follow. Still these communities continue to be vulnerable and atrocities are committed against them in one form or other. Government enacted the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. It came into force from 30 January 1990. It specifies offences which are considered as atrocities and provides for deterrent punishments for commission of the same. It also envisages preventive measures and states have to evolve schemes, among other things, for economic and social rehabilitation of such victims. All States and UTs except Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland have specialized courts for trial of offences under this Act.

By virtue of the constitution (sixty-fifth Amendment)
Act 1990, the 'Special Officers' post in the Constitution has been substituted by the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It consists of a chairperson, vice-chairperson and members to be appointed by the President. It shall be the duty of the Commission to investigate and monitor all matters related to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution or under any other law. The Commission may receive specific complaints with respect to the protection and safeguards of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Members shall participate and advise on the planning, economic development of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to evaluate development under the Union and State. The President annually and at such other times as may be deemed fit, may cause reports to be made in such a manner as the Commission may deem fit, reports upon the safeguards; (e) to make in such reports to the measures that should be taken by the State for the effective implementation of the recommendations of the Commission. (f) to discharge such other functions as the President may deem fit, reports upon the safeguards; (e) to make in such reports to the measures that should be taken by the State for the effective implementation of the recommendations of the Commission. (f) to discharge such other functions as may be assigned to it by law or rule.

The President shall cause all such reports to be laid before each House of Parliament along with a message explaining the action taken or proposed. The non-acceptance, if any, of any of the recommendations relating to the Union or the State shall be stated in the message. Where any such report or any part thereof relates to a matter with which any State Government is concerned, the copy of such report shall be forwarded to the State who shall cause it to be laid before the State Legislature.

Government had set up Committees, first in 1966, second in 1967, to examine the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission.
safeguards for welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Committee has since been constituted as a Standing Committee of Parliament, the tenure of its members being one year.

State and UTs have separate departments to look after the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. Administrative set-up varies from state to state. In Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, separate ministers have been appointed to look after tribal welfare as prescribed in Article 164 of the constitution. Some other states have set-up Committee of members of state legislatures on the pattern of Parliamentary Committee at the centre. All the states having Scheduled areas including Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have constituted Tribal Advisory Councils as per the provision in the fifth Scheduled to the Constitution to advise on matters pertaining to welfare and advancement of Scheduled Tribes.

National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation has been set-up by the Government of India under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956 and is functioning with effect from 8 February 1989. The objective of the corporation is to stimulate economic development of Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes and also identify and fill in the critical gaps in the programmes of state level Scheduled castes development corporations and other agencies. It is also to function as an apex institution for the agencies engaged in the economic development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The corporation also plays a catalytic role in developing the 50:50 matching basis for construction of hostel buildings with a view to providing hostel facilities to Scheduled tribes girls studying in middle and higher level of education. The schemes of post-matric scholarships to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was introduced in 1944-45 with the objective of providing financial assistance to students studying at post-matriculation stages in different schools and colleges so as to enable them to complete their education.

Article 335 of the constitution provides that claims of the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be taken in to consideration consistently with the
maintenance of efficiency of administration making of appointment in services and posts in connection with affairs of the union or of a state. Article 16 (4) permits reservation in favour of any backward class of citizens which in the opinion of the state is not adequately represented in services under the state. In pursuance of these provisions, the Government has made reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in services under its control in proportion to their population. For Scheduled Tribes, reservation is 7.5 percent on all India basis otherwise open competition to facilitate their adequate

(1) Relaxation of five years in upper age limit
(2) Relaxation in the standards of suitability, for selection provided they are not unfit for the posts
(3) Relaxation of qualification regarding experience in the case of direct recruitment wherever necessary
(4) Exemption from the payment of application fee
(5) Inclusion of scientific and technical posts upto the lowest range of Group ‘A’ posts required for guiding and conducting research in the scheme of reservations have been provided for
(6) If sufficient number of suitable SC/ST candidates are not available against the share of vacancies reserved for them, the shortfall will not be filled up by general category candidates and such vacancies will be kept unfilled till SC/ST candidates become available. This scheme of reservation is also being followed by public sector undertakings including nationalized public sector banks.

State Government have also framed rules under the powers given to them by item 41 of the state list of the seventh Schedule to the Constitution for reservation of posts for these classes and have taken steps to increase their representation in state services. Reservation in state government services, however, is under the exclusive jurisdiction of state government.

In order to save tribals from exploitation by private...
traders and to offer them remunerative prices for their produce and surplus agriculture products. Government has set-up Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd. (TRIFED) in August 1987 which is registered under the multi state Co-operative Society Act 1984. It start functioning effectively from April 1988. TRIFED handled about 12 items in 1988-89. In almost all the items, the price offered to tribals by TRIFED was higher than the price given to them in the previous years. During 1989-90, it expanded its activities to cover a number of new items. It has been appointed as a canalizing agency for export of gum kerava and other seeds of tribal area, and has also been declared as the nodal agency for collection, processing, storage and development of oilseeds of tree and forest origin. TRIFED is also acting as Food Corporation of India (FCI) for procuring wheat and paddy as an agent of department of Agriculture and Corporation (DAC) for coarse grains, pulses and oilseeds.

The tribal sub-plan (TSP) strategy which was evolved during the fifth five year plan for protection of interests of tribals through legal and administrative support and promotion of developmental efforts through plan schemes to raise their level of living. There are many Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) which stands in the way of effective implementation of various schemes and projects for development of tribals.

Gandhiji felt that India is a one Nation and every unit must have this realization. He, therefore, believed that whatever difference exist should be obliterated and every unit should feel one with the other. In fact, on the demand of the nation all must appear with the one voice. For this the atmosphere of oneness has to be created. This cannot be achieved unless: (1) the inequality existing in the society is obliterated; (2) violence is eschewed; and (3) the foreign power is removed.11

He felt very deeply the inequality existing in the society then. It was not inequality of wealth that hurt Gandhiji, there was inequality in every sphere of life. Vast inequality in education, vast inequality in receiving medical treatment, and vast inequality in living conditions. On the one side there were persons who could compete in their intellectual attainment with anybody in the world, like; Shri
Ravindra Nath Tagore, Shri Jagdish others, and on the other there was vas illiterate of Adivasis, Harijans and oil urban areas were fortunate in having available on the earth whereas million rural areas died like mosquitoes for war. Similarly, some have the fortunate to conditions while others in millions lived by water, logged around them. The bewildering, and distorted with that never dream of attaining nationhood. British could always exploit this but the building of an independent nation society. Gandhiji believed that the dis maintained in a society based on vio escewed and universal franchise is ac not accept the disparity even for a day. Gandhiji, therefore, said that the building a non-violent society is to re. There should be equilibrium in wealth, universal, illiteracy should be banished available to everybody, food show everybody. Everybody should have p would need leveling down and raising grudge this operation. Nationhood car atmosphere of equality of opportunity many people are forced to live un privation, no nationhood can be but approach of Gandhiji to tribes.

It was this approach that Gandhiji workers to go to Adivasi, embrace them Adivasi responded to this attitude of G Tana Bhagats in Ranchi district and Paraganas joined Gandhiji’s non-co-ope the sacrifice which they made as a gr history of the fight for freedom. The ” join the movement as individual but a man, woman or child of the group w suffered jail and more than that the which has not been yet returned to
Hundreds of them met Gandhiji in Gaya, Kokananda Coronpor and Belagaon Congress by travelling on foot. They suffered untold miseries at the hands of the Britishers and yet undaunted they marched with Gandhiji till last.

When Swaraj was achieved the Adivasis were not forgotten. Once Shri Ambedkar suggested that Adivasi should have no representation in the legislature, and as they were simple and uneducated their representative would be exploited. Gandhiji opposed this as he had seen the devoted Tana Bhagats and demanded that their representation should be in proportion to their proportion. Gandhiji prevailed. Indian Constitution provided for the representation of the tribes in proportion to their population. Then in the Constitution a dignitary in shape of Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was safeguards provided in the Constitution. The safeguards went as far as to give representation to the tribes in service as well. Circular were issued by the Home Department. The provisions of our Constitution regarding the Scheduled Tribes are unique in the world.

In the sphere of Adivasis Gandhiji thought of sending large number of trained person unbound with spirit of service to every village and develop every village in a balanced way.

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