

The Contemporary Globalised Society and Challenges before the Scheduled Tribes

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Abstract

Following the demise and disintegration of the Soviet empire in 1991, state control and regulation based socialist economy lost much of its sheen and it gave way to the ideology of the triumphant group of nations led by the USA in the Cold War in the form of neo liberalism resulting in radical alteration in the nature of the state across the globe. Nations after nations began to lay down totally revised blue print of development on the basis of norms of the neo liberal ideology. State manifested a perceptible shift from control and regulation regime through 'licence, quota, permit raj' mechanism to the more liberal avatar of facilitator of growth where it preferred to confine itself to the task of creating the right environment to foster rapid growth. In the altered ideological perspective, liberalization, privatization and globalization became the buzz words of development and 'Retreat of State' from welfare activities in the garb of structural adjustment became quite prominent in nations displaying unequivocal proclivity to pursue the neo liberal ideological path.

With dwindling state support to marginalised sections of the society and intense competition among the competing business groups to grab larger chunk of the cake of development, it gradually became quite evident that only the fittest can manage to survive in the changed global scenario. Marginalised groups like the Scheduled Tribes thoroughly deprived of the tools of empowerment like education, skill and economic resources began to find themselves on the periphery of the altered national and global system. In this paper, an attempt will be made to explore the challenges facing the Scheduled Tribes in the new political economy of the 21st century.

KEYWORDS: Globalization, Socialism, Marginalization, Market Economy, Scheduled Tribes

'The collapse of the Soviet Empire and the retreat of communism across Europe were major events not only of the 20th century, but probably of modern history as well'. (Held, David. 2006: 225) The ideological triumph of the USA over the Soviet Union leading to the demise and disintegration of the Soviet Empire and the robust economic condition of the nations adhering to a free market capitalist economic model tremendously aided in jacking up the stocks of the free market economy on the one hand and simultaneously, dipping the fortunes of the state controlled and regulated socialist brand of economic model prevalent not only in the discredited regimes but also in many developing countries of the world like India. Thus the international community witnessed the emergence of a competition among nations to resort to a slew of measures in the economic sphere aimed at liberalization of trade, investment, production and distribution in order to surge ahead on the path of rapid economic prosperity. Liberalization of the economy meant an end of license-quota-permit raj of the era of planned economic development. Deregulation, delicensing,

denationalization and free trade measures began to be pursued vigorously. Stephen McBride and John Wiseman consider the emergence of the contemporary globalization process as the 'triumph of capitalism' which manifests ascendancy of economics over politics, of corporate demands over public policy, of transnational corporation over the nation state. (McBride et al. 2000: 10)

Trans-national capital and technology driven globalization process increased the significance of foreign direct investment and trans-national corporations. Nations made a determined bid to integrate their economies with the global economy. Policies of protectionism went into oblivion giving way to a mechanism of market driven economy. Even China dumped its commitment to socialism and opted in favour of becoming a part of the integrated global system.

Globalization seeks to strive towards the ideal of a world without borders. 153 nations of the world through their membership of the WTO, the institution set up to attain the goal of hassle free global trade, express their resoluteness to be a part of an integrated global system. Globalization is a package of transnational flows of people, production, investment, information, ideas, and authority not new, but stronger and faster. According to Jan Aart Scholte, 'globalization is an ensemble of developments that make the world a single place, changing the meaning and importance of distance and national identity in world affairs' (Scholte, 1997). A. Giddens considers globalization as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'. (Giddens 1991:64)

A few pertinent questions crop up here:

(i) Nations are not mere political entities; rather they comprise various ethnic, linguistic, cultural groups etc. as well. Does the process of globalization provide equitable opportunities to all the nations of the global community and the various socio-cultural groups inhabiting these nations to enter its arena and play a meaningful role in it?

(ii) Is it possible for a social group belonging to any nation to be a part of globalization sheer on its will?

Marginalization

Several scholars have attempted to study the process of globalization and found it a cause of growing marginalization of deprived and weaker sections of the world. (Kothari. 1995; Held. 1996; Beck. 2000; Bauman. 1998; McBride et al. 2000; Martin et al. 1997; Kiely et al. 1998; Bhambhri, C.P. 2005)

In most of the nations belonging to the developing world, the per capita income is quite low, a large chunk, often half or more than half of the total population lives below the poverty line. Will these least developed/developing nations of the world or the deprived sections inhabiting these nations be successful in integrating with the globalization phenomenon despite an earnest wish to do so? David Held comes out with a tenable reflection that 'Not all states are equally integrated into the world economy.' (Held, David 1996: 339) '....The global corporate enterprise has divided the world between regions that have been globalised and regions that have been left out of the globalisation process.' (Kothari, Rajni 1995: 1599)

In a changed global situation, which is dominated by a single development model based on multi-national capital and corporation and the campaign for the retreat of the state through deregulation, disinvestment, and de-nationalisation, the measures of liberalization without effective checks and control would only result in increased inequalities; dismantling social services, with adverse effect on the poor, restrictions on trade union rights and dislocation of indigenous people. Joseph Stiglitz, a former Chief Economist at the World Bank, makes it clear that the ongoing globalization process is beneficial for the capitalist countries and it has disastrous social and political consequences for the developing countries. (Quoted by Bhambhri, C.P. 2005:62) Benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas. “The spread of capitalist production, the global distribution of ownership of capital, the global flow of capitalist finance and the global sway of capitalist corporations, all made possible by changes in technology, have substantially eroded the power and authority of nation-states and even the international order that nation-states had built up.” (Jha, Prem Shankar. 2006)

In nations like India, a clear demarcation can be discernible. There is a vibrant private sector which unequivocally supports the policies aimed at introducing reforms in the economy, which has managed to reap rich dividends out of the process of globalization and obviously, which has succeeded in joining the bandwagon of globalization. But the vast chunk of the rural population of India and even the urban poor is forced to lead its life in conditions of deprivation. These people do not have either capital or the much needed skill to join the exclusive club of globalization. When the fortunate few manage to have access to a luxurious life style, these people mutely watch everything standing on the periphery of the process of globalization. ‘Globalisation has empowered some (nations/groups) while increasing the vulnerability of others....Cultural processes of globalisation have been intrinsically uneven, unequal and unstable.’ (Kiely Ray & Marfleet, Phil 1998: 11)

Scheduled Tribes

Of the numerous marginalized sections of the global society, who are relegated to the periphery of the process of globalization or who stand outside the zone of globalization are the tribal people of the world.

The word ‘tribe’ connotes a socially cohesive unit associated with a particular territory, the members of which boast of a distinct life style characterized by a distinct language, cultural traits, love for freedom and identity. (Sinha, Archana. 2006:3) ‘Features of tribe include a strong emphasis on kinship and clan structures and ethnicity bonds and a strong sense of identity as well as the higher position of women in these societies.’ (Nathan et al. 2004: 16) According to Mandelbaum, “Most tribal peoples of India live in hilly or forested terrain where population is sparse and communication difficult . . . within their villages and localities . . . most tribals have a strong sense of their distinctiveness and hold themselves to be quite separate from jati villages” (Mandelbaum, D.,1970: 275)

However, not all the tribes inhabiting the territory of India fall into the category of Scheduled Tribes. Scheduled Tribe is a privileged tag appended to a particular tribe; it

is a sort of constitutional recognition to its status. There is no definition of Scheduled Tribes in the Constitution itself. Through a specific procedure laid down in the provision of the Constitution of India, transmutation of the status of a tribe into Scheduled Tribe takes place. Under this procedure, the President of India in consultation with the Governor of the state concerned issues a public notification facilitating the conversion of a tribe into Scheduled Tribe. (Basu, Durga Das, 2001:392)

The number of Scheduled Tribes (STs) notified by the President of India under this provision stands at 698 at present. (Krishna Kumar, Asha, 2004: 18)

Scheduled Tribes of Jharkhand

Barring the exceptions of Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Pondicherry and Punjab, the STs inhabit all other States and Union Territories. So far as the number of STs inhabiting a particular state is concerned, Orissa captures the top slot with the strength of 68 tribes. Though on the number front, Jharkhand falls way behind Orissa with a modest figure of 30 tribes, preponderant share of the tribal population in its overall population becomes evident by their composition in Jharkhand which is 7,087,068 - 26.3 percent of the total population of the state. There are 3 districts of Jharkhand-Gumla, Lohardagga and West Singhbhum which boast of more than 50 percent of tribal population, Gumla being at the apex with 68.4 percent tribal population. Of the 30 STs inhabiting the State, the major tribes are Santal, Oraon, Munda and Ho. Together these four tribes constitute about 80 percent of the total tribal population of Jharkhand, Santal being the largest with 34 percent of the total tribal population. (Census of India, 2001)

Scheduled Tribes inhabiting Jharkhand generally belong to Proto-Australoid stock though traces of Mongoloid strain have also been found. (Sachchidanand, quoted by Prakash, Amit. 2001: 20)

Literacy Status

Severe deprivation and consequent inability to meet their basic requirements has acted as the biggest impediment in motivating the tribal parents to enrol their children in schools. Even if unceasing persuasion motivated the parents to admit their children in schools, their acute poverty compelled them to stop their children from going to schools and instead engage them in some earning activity giving birth in the process to another social evil, i.e. child labour. Thus enhanced enrolment rate fails to yield dramatic results in the form of decent literacy figures of the tribal students due to alarming level of dropout rate among the enrolled students.

As the contribution of service sector has been gradually creeping up with the advent of the era of globalization, the worth of the skilled manpower all over the globe has shot up significantly. With proper education and training in the skill needed by the market, any individual can get ample opportunities to be a part of the process of globalization. But the literacy status of the tribal people as is explicit from the table below appears quite gloomy.

Levels of Education among the major Scheduled Tribes of Jharkhand

Names of STs	Literate without educational level	Below Primary	Primary	Middle	Matric/Secondary/Higher Secondary/Intermediate etc.	Technical & Nontechnical diploma etc.	Graduate & above
All Scheduled Tribes	3.0	30.6	28.6	17.7	16.5	0.1	3.5
Santhal	3.5	34.3	30.0	17.0	13.2	0.1	2.0
Munda	2.8	27.9	29.6	18.9	17.1	0.1	3.7
Oraon	2.4	26.9	25.3	18.5	20.8	0.2	5.9
Ho	2.4	26.4	28.4	19.9	19.7	0.1	3.1
Kharwar	5.5	38.2	32.3	11.3	10.8	0.1	1.8
Lohra	3.5	35.5	30.5	16.1	12.5	0.1	1.9
Bhumij	2.9	36.1	32.8	15.7	11.1	0.0	1.4
Kharia	2.0	26.0	26.5	18.3	21.4	0.1	5.6

(Source: Census of India, 2001, Office of the Registrar General, India)

With the paltry percentage of tribal people having graduation and higher degree and a meagre 0.1% managing to have access to technical degree or diploma, the scope of the participation of the tribal people in the process of globalization becomes virtually restricted.

Though the overall literacy rate among the STs has increased from 27.5 per cent at 1991 census to 40.7 per cent at 2001 census, the improvement in their literacy rate is much below in comparison to that of all STs at the national level (47.1 per cent). Like the overall literacy rate among the STs, male and female literacy rates (54 per cent and 27.2 per cent respectively) are also considerably lower than those at the national level (59.2 per cent & 34.8 per cent respectively).

Literacy Figures, 2001

	Scheduled Tribes	Total Population
India	47.1	64.8
Jharkhand	40.7	53.6

(Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, accessed on 20/7/2010 from <http://www.tribal.gov.in>)

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Total Literacy Mission)

This is a laudable programme sponsored and launched by the Government of India in 2010 to attain the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education in a time bound manner, so that the consequent capacity building may lead to the empowerment of children belonging to the marginalized sections of the society and enhance their participation level in the governance of the country. Following the 86th amendment to the Constitution of India, right to education has become a fundamental right and so all children falling within the age group of 6 to 14 years must have access to free and compulsory education. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is being implemented in partnership with State Governments to cover the entire country and address the needs of 192 million children in 1.1 million habitations. (Accessed on 19/7/2010 from http://www.indg.in/primary-education/edu-primedu/view?set_language=en, Official website of India Development Gateway)

Despite the developmental and noble objectives of this programme, the quality of education given to students enrolled under the scheme in schools is quite doubtful as teachers under the programme are recruited on contractual basis and are devoid of normal benefits accruable to regularly appointed teachers. Such teachers can hardly be expected to uplift the morale of their taught and make them dream big. Not only this, infrastructural and manpower constraints often compels teachers to cater to the needs of students of almost all the four classes of primary section. Though such an education programme can contribute in boosting the literacy figures of the society, doubtful quality of education may severely limit the capability of the students receiving education under the programme to acquire leadership roles in the society in future especially when they have to compete with students who are the products of reputed branded schools, which are beyond the range of even the middle class people of India. This may lead to the creation of greater chasm between the haves and have-nots in the society in future.

Income Status of Scheduled Tribes

Globalization process gives unhindered access to prospective investors. But when the tribal people barely manage to meet their food requirements, how can they even fancy their prospects of setting up an industrial unit or even retail counter of their own?

Most of the tribal people are either agricultural labourers or subsistence farmers. In this vein Weiner suggests that 'most of tribals live as peasants, cultivating grain crops. Schermerhorn, more expansively, claims that 'More often than not tribesmen engage in hunting and fishing, slash and burn agriculture and cultivating without ploughs and without irrigation practices'. By contrast, the Scheduled Tribes are thought to be poorly represented in agricultural labouring (not substantiated by statistics), in trade and in industrial pursuits. (Stuart Corbridge 1988: 8)

However, their land ownership pattern reveals abysmally low per capita availability of land reducing them to the status of subsistence farmers. As per 2001 Census 50.90% of the Scheduled Tribe population are engaged as cultivators and 28.40% are agricultural labourers. The changing trends in occupational distribution of main

workers among ST population and total general population from 1961 Census to 1991 Census is as given in the Table below: -

Changing trends in occupational distribution among ST and General population

S. No.	Category of Workers	General					Scheduled Tribes				
		1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.	Cultivators	52.78	43.38	41.53	39.74	33.10	68.18	57.56	54.43	54.50	50.90
2.	Agricultural Laborers	16.71	26.32	25.16	19.66	20.30	19.71	33.04	32.67	32.69	28.40
3.	House hold Industry	6.38	3.55	3.99	2.56	3.90	2.47	1.03	1.42	1.04	1.80
4.	Other Workers	24.13	26.75	29.32	38.04	42.70	9.64	8.37	11.84	11.76	18.90

(Source: M/o Tribal Affairs' Annual Report 2003-04)

No doubt, the incidence of poverty among the tribal people is very high compared to other social groups in Jharkhand, which is substantiated by the fact that more than 66 per cent of the STs lived below the poverty line in 1993-94. This poverty figure, however, showed signs of improvement in 2004-2005 when it came down to about 50 per cent. (The Telegraph, Jharkhand Buzz, Calcutta, 15 November, 2009)

The following table unveils the acute poverty scenario of Jharkhand -

Incidence of Poverty

(In percent)

	All India	Jharkhand
Urban	25.6	20.3

Rural	46.2	28.3
Total	27.6	42.0

Source: The Telegraph, Jharkhand Buzz, Calcutta, 15 November, 2009
(<http://www.telegraphindia.com>)

Aggravation in the poverty status of the ST people became evident when N.C. Saxena Committee appointed by the Union Government, in its report, revealed that 82 per cent of the rural population of Jharkhand was living below the poverty line. (The Telegraph, Jharkhand, 22 September, 2009, P.1)

Perils of Globalization

Obviously, the tribal people of Jharkhand neither possess the capital nor the skill to be capable of becoming a part of globalization. They are forced to languish outside the peripheral limits of the globalization process, which is adumbrative of their severe marginalization. Kothari has brought the fact quite clearly when he says, 'Globalisation and marginalisation are two counter images of the same phenomenon, marginalisation being a necessary condition of globalisation while globalisation provides the framework for marginalisation of millions.' (Kothari: 1599) In the context of the weak property rights of the indigenous people (STs), the globalization process enhances the risks of their further marginalization. (Nathan et al. 2004: 19)

Their only asset in the form of their modest land holdings is under the threat of extinction with the advent of the era of globalization as the expansion plans of the corporate sector can fructify only when it manages to acquire the precious land holdings of the tribal people. With the trauma of being uprooted from the soil of their ancestors looming large over them, the tribal people find themselves in grip of tremendous sense of insecurity. Globalization threatens to accentuate the process of tribal displacement in Jharkhand without putting in place an effective and proper rehabilitation policy. Even before the advent of the era of contemporary globalization, tribal displacement had always been an acute problem in the region as it is quite rich in mineral resources. '...With various development projects launched in Jharkhand, some 30 lakh people were displaced during 1951-95, with 90 per cent of them being tribals'. (Ekka, 2000, quoted by Maharatna 2004: 5059) Even a rehabilitation policy can never be a proper substitute for the emotional and psychological affiliation which a person develops with the land belonging to his fore fathers and thus having a tremendous emotional value. 'At best, government can only help to make the displacement less painful by providing all the facilities conducive to their holistic development.... In practice, however, not even the economic rehabilitation is taken seriously'. (Behera et al 1999: 33)

Conclusion

In the contemporary globalised society, the state is reduced to the role of a facilitator of robust economic activities by creating suitable conditions from legal, physical, political and economic points of view and laying the red carpets for the potential investors so that they may be wooed to invest their surplus capital in that particular state. Land acquisition policies and labour laws are modified in the name of economic reforms so that hurdles to investment may be dislodged. In the contemporary globalised society, the people blessed with capital and skills are more likely to carve

appropriate niches for themselves and manage to survive in an atmosphere where cut throat rivalry is the order of the day. The deprived and marginalised sections of the society like the tribal people do not enjoy such an edge to garner maximum fruits of productive activities and growth. They have no option but to stand on the periphery and mutely watch the entire proceedings without having a major say in its operation. Such a scenario creates distrust among the tribal people against the existing system based on neo liberal ideology often reflected in rebellion activities against the system. If the system has to sustain, urgent steps must be initiated to increase the level of its acceptability among the marginalised sections of the society. If the goal of a just and conflict free society has to evolve, then the state must design proper mechanism to enhance the effectiveness of its existing policies and infrastructure. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, for example, is definitely an appreciable program aiming at universalization of education, but prudent and practical policies need to be designed to better the quality level of this program so that it can be more meaningful and effective. Similar is the fate of higher education institutions located in deprived and backward regions of the world where marginalised sections of the society like the scheduled tribes live and get access to higher education through local institutions, but in the absence of decent libraries, laboratories and proper educational environment they fail to inject greater spark in their profile. The tribal people born and brought up in such an adverse environment do not have the advantage of employability skills as desired by the corporate sector and business houses in accordance with the principles of free market economy. So it is high time that greater attention is paid to the principle of corporate social responsibility where urgent steps are initiated by the state in collaboration with the private sector to insert proper skills in the profile of the marginalised sections of the society so that their prospects of employability may increase leading to the evolution of a just society. As Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru said in his famous ‘tryst with destiny’ speech, “The service of India means service of the millions who suffer. It means ending poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity.... As long as there are tears and suffering so long our work will not be over.” (Quoted by H.E. Patil, Pratibha Devisingh, 2010, P. 7) “We cannot look at the future without addressing the needs of the underprivileged and the disadvantaged sections of our society, with special emphasis on the empowerment of the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections of society.” (H.E. Patil, Pratibha Devisingh, 2010, P. 6)

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