

Tribal Education: A Case Study With Reference To C.K.Janu of Wayanad

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I. Introduction

The word 'adivasi' originates from Sanskrit. 'Adi' means 'beginning' 'vasi' means 'resident of' meaning 'existed from the beginning'. The coinage is frequently used by the tribal people and they have a sense of pride in calling themselves so. It is also said to be an equivalent of English 'aboriginal'.

The tribal people, the original inhabitants, indigenous people are subjugated by the encroachers. Having lost their land to outsiders they worked for meagre wages. Tribal population which exceeds more than 40 million expects attention from the government. Isolation and minority in number prevent their movement with the main stream society. Though the government takes steps to mingle the minority groups into the mainstream society, it is doubtful whether these tribal people will enter the main stream society preserving their social and cultural beliefs.

Education Indispensable to Tribals

Government planners consider education as an indispensable one for the tribal people. It can bring improvement in their status, can form the basis for their integrated development and can lead them to prosperity and success in life. Progression of deprived, marginalized and weaker section of the society is essential for the overall development of the country. Overall growth of the nation relies on the equitable development of human resources. Education provides knowledge, confidence, ability to encounter problem and to enjoy socio-economic and political opportunities. Hence exploitation of tribals can be eliminated only through education

Formal education has little impact on tribal people. Previously the government did not make any arrangement for tribal education. The reservation policy has introduced some changes but fails to draw attention of the tribal children. The reason for low level of education is poverty. The children are considered as extra helpers and are not sent to schools.

Further the background of the tribal students is entirely different from that of non tribal teachers and schoolmates. They are outsiders and have less knowledge about them. They consider the tribals to be untidy and viewed indifferently their customs, manners language and culture. The teachers appointed must be properly oriented and facilities like textbooks, free education can bring attitudinal changes among the tribals towards education.

Land Alienation

Land alienation commences during British colonialism and they exploited the natural resources of tribal region. Following the British people, the colonists, the money lenders, Zamindars and traders occupied the tribal lands. Mines and factories in tribal habitats result in destitution and displacement. Forest policy of British government shows more interest in commercialisation rather than in human resources. Forest department permits authorized contractors to fell trees and the aborigines get isolated within their habitation. They show more interest in plundering the natural resources rather than in raising their economic and educational standards. Outsiders' intervention greatly disturbed the tribal life.

Tribal women

Tribal women comprising 50 percent of population toil hard and are regarded as an asset to the community. They play significant role in productive activities and help in social transformation. Janu organized the tribal people of Wayanad to form solid groups and fights for their rights and responsibilities

Janu leads the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, a social movement and fights for the redistribution of land to the 3.5 lakhs of landless people in Kerala. She is a semi-literate not exposed to formal education. Literary campaign in Wayanad helps her to read and write. Janu faces several hardships as is the case with many of the tribals like hunger, illness and unemployment. She begins her career as domestic servant for five years in a school teacher's house. She does the job of a maid servant at the age of six to support and share the burden of her family. When she was thirteen she returned home to continue as a labourer. Returning to Wayanad she

worked as a daily wage earner receiving Rs.2 as her income. She initiates her social career along with Varghese and joined as a member of Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union. She took a tribal tour to know their problems and to gather them to fight for their cause. Janu participated in UN Conference for the tribal leaders from different parts of the world and represented India. Her trip to Europe in 1999 gave her an opportunity to voice out her feelings in eight countries.

Land Agitation

In September 2001 Janu started a massive land agitation that lasted for 48 days claiming for their tribal lands. The government agreed to give land for 10,000 tribal families and over 4000 hectares of land in Kannur district were allotted to them. The government agreement of formal distribution of land to landless tribals over a period of five years fails to satisfy her. She believes that the process can be done within six months This makes her question the sincerity of the government in land distribution process. Further the land distributed to the tribals of Idukki is not fit for cultivation and they demanded for cultivable land. Based on the availability of the land the tribals got their land and engaged in farming activities. Her agitation and dharna opposite the secretariat in 2001 and 'Occupy Muthangal' struggle in 2003 shows the government's postponement in returning their tribal lands. These incidents reveal political lethargy towards the issue of tribal communities. The government was criticized for its brutal behaviour and for violating human rights on down trodden people. This makes various international organizations to think in other way about 'Kerala Model of Development'. Muthanga incident was a major turning point as it sows the seed of political mobilization among the tribals for their rights. She has to face 75 false cases filed against her for all the troubles she has undergone. 25 cases have been dismissed and she is ready to face the remaining 50 charges. Janu not having any guiding philosophy of her own believes in the life of ordinary people. Neither the lack of language nor the education stands in her way once she is determined to fight for her people. Land becomes an inseparable part to them. Tribal women like Janu must come forward and work for the socio – economic development of the tribal community.

Deprivation of Land

The two incidents made Janu a popular figure and this gave her an opportunity to tour Europe as a delegate of People's Global Action. Tribals, the real owners of land were denied land. The government never took any initiative measures to return their land to them. Further the tribals never have a place in the policies framed by the government. The tragic part of it is they did not have even land to bury and perform cremation rites. They were buried either in their hut or in someone's land. This sad plight of tribal prompted her to venture the agitation.

The government's delay in fulfilling its promise made the tribals to indulge in another historic action. To expose their failure in dallying its promise, hundreds of tribal families occupied the Muthanga wildlife sanctuary. A.K. Antony government which celebrates land distribution to the landless tribals with multi coloured posters unleashed firing on tribal agitators on February 2003. Firing of this kind happens for the first time in the history of Kerala. A.K. Antony a frustrated man wish to conceal his lapses and blunder of his government and calls for judicial inquiry. Police firing eviction ends in death toll of one policeman and a tribe. The autonomous militant intervention pulls the attention of M.S. Arundhati Roy to criticize the state government with blasting words ' you have blood on your hands' (Shankar 63). CBI in its inquiry sides the state government and reports the Adivasis guilty. Among 183 people who are found guilty 10 are ladies having children aged three to four months. The so called civilized people closed their eyes to the struggles of the tribes. The fierce campaign of economically disadvantaged, illiterate tribals in Kerala forces the government to cope up with their demands and this was noticed by all nations. It was a great achievement for Janu as a leader. Janu was taken in police custody and her photographs were splashed nation wide. She came out in bail and continues her struggle for her community.

The Muthanga firing incident earned them the support of foreign funded Christian missionaries. It is starvation to death that induced Janu to start the tribal land agitation in front of the secretariat in September 2001. The starvation death occurs partly by uncultivable land and partly by the abduction of their ancestral land by the settlers. The daily wages were not sufficient enough to meet their ends. The tribals lost their land in exchange for tobacco, dry fish or petty cash. The government considered it as stealing and decided to restore the stolen properties to the tribals, the real land owners. But it becomes difficult for the government to implement and ends in police firing.

The effect of globalization and economic development make the marginalized people raise their voice against injustice inflicted on them. Janu's representation makes the issue serious. Janu, not exposed to formal education fights for her community. They don't wish the children to suffer as they have suffered and they demand good education. It helps them not only in economic development but gives inner strength and enables them to meet the new challenges in life. Educating the tribals has become an important task of the government.

II. Conclusion

Swami Vivekanandha says that "If a child cannot reach education, then education must reach the child" (Sundaram) stresses the need for education. It must help in empowering India especially tribals, the neglected community. Tribal students apart from learning education must have the service mind to serve their own community. They must help their people to overcome exploitation and preserve their rights.

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