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***Socio Economic Condition of Tribal Population in India- A critical Analysis***

Widespread poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, absence of safe drinking water and sanitary conditions, poor maternal and child health services and ineffective coverage of national health and nutritional services are the factors responsible for the dismal health conditions prevailing among the tribal population in India. The number of STs has grown at a faster rate than others increasing their share in total population over the decades. The ST population in India has remained traditionally backward, in both economic and other social aspects, for historical reasons. Various policies of protective discrimination in favour of STs have been formulated and implemented. As a consequence both economic and social conditions of this community have improved. The impact of these policies has been in the desired direction but falls far short of the desired magnitude. There is a higher proportion of poor among the ST population. Every alternate person belonging to SCs and STs is poor while every third person not belonging to SCs and STs is poor. Higher incidence and intensity of poverty between SCs and STs is perhaps a consequence of lower access to productive assets. In rural India land is the most important productive asset. At the all India level the share of STs in population was 10.0 percent who had a share of 11.7 percent in land in 1992. Keeping in view the proportion of STs in rural population, proportion of landless households among them is quite high. However, there has been a decrease in the incidence of landlessness between STs. However, there is no such law for the Scheduled Castes. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes constituted the target group of the numerous land reform legislations in this country since the fifties. As regards the availability of amenities such as percentage living in pucca houses, percentage having toilet facilities and percentage of using PDS, STs are in much better position. They are relatively disadvantaged when the access to protected water and electric connection are concerned. Overall, however STs who are at the lowest levels in many spheres of economic indicators are worse off compared with the all India average. Taking education as one of the dimensions in the determination of the level of human development, STs clearly are not the better performers if the output parameters like literacy rate, ever enrolment rate, discontinuation rate and percentage of population (aged 15+ years) completing middle level are considered. Data on literacy disaggregated at the level of states and social groups analyzed here indicate that literacy among population groups who were lagging behind initially such as the females, those living in rural areas, those belonging to SCs and STs, have been rising at a faster rate. Consequently, disparity in literacy among population groups has reduced over time. The population groups with still awfully low levels of literacy include ST females in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh (5.8 percent), Madhya Pradesh (7.6 percent), Orissa (7.6 percent) and Rajasthan (2.9 percent). Even after prolonged efforts we have failed to make satisfactory progress in raising literacy among such population groups. This is despite the claim of adequate infrastructure to ensure access to primary education and other incentives. The reason perhaps, lies deeper into the economic and social fabric including basic attitudes to education among certain socio-economic groups. Planners, administrators and academicians should pay serious attention to such deplorable conditions. While as far as major morbidity rates are concerned, STs are better off than the rest. However, it is for variables like percentage of currently pregnant women receiving ante-natal care, percentage of married women having delivered last year with delivery being attended by a trained person, percentage of children immunized that the ST population loses out. Crude birth rate and total fertility rate are high and the contraceptive prevalence rate is also high between STs as compared to SCs.