

Economic changes
among raji tribe with
respect to pre-
independence and
post-indep...



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Introduction

There has been a direct or indirect co-relation between tribes and their nearest natural resources. The literature selected for my topic deals with transformation among Indian tribes through different methods, tribal (Van Raji) socioeconomic profile in relation to multiple factors associated with their livelihood. Tribal population has been undergoing some changes in social strata since the British era. The social change also raise the question if tribal groups have shifted towards caste based groups. The tribes in lower and upper Himalayan region are primarily the Tharus, the Buxas, the Jaunsaries, the Bhotias and the Rajis. Articles deals with the historical context of the Raji and the peasants in Uttar Pradesh (Now Uttarakhand). Literature has been critical of certain forest acts implemented by British in the land. It also reflects on certain government schemes and their failure in implementing at ground level.

Literature review

Virginus Xaxa talks about the changes among tribes (Scheduled tribes in particular) in a span of 100 years. These changes have been multifactorial and does not necessarily make them a caste group. Although practicing Hindu religion in order to uplift their identity is a different matter all together. The term tribe is also often considered a colonial construct. In 1881 census the tribes were called forest tribes under a broad heading of agricultural and pastoral castes. There has been a lot of effort done to describe tribes- People who follow animism to the ones who are backward Hindus (devoid of caste society). “ Roy-Burman [1972] classifies tribes into

(1) those incorporated in Hindu Society, (2) those positively oriented to Hindu Society, (3) those negatively oriented and (4) those indifferent to Hindu society.” (Virginus, 1999). The question rises- Is it that easy to absorb into a caste society like Hindu? It is more or less to what I would like to call is as pseudo Hinduisation because even if a tribal community tries to mobilise towards Hindu society, the occupancy of the tribal group to a particular caste group may raise controversy. Therefore, a concept of following rituals and beliefs of upper caste group is easier than sole mobilisation into the group. Another important factor of language also plays an important role in describing the tribal conversion. “ A caste as a social organization is operative only within a linguistic community. Hence it is possible for a tribe to become a caste only after it has assimilated into the regional linguistic community such Bengali or the Oriya or the Assamese community.” (Virginus, 1999). Tribes have also been regarded as peasant community by witnessing their ways of sustaining livelihood, example the Buxas as agriculturists. There has been a significant shift in economic way of tribal lives from nomadic culture to agriculturalists, landless labourers, miners in industries etc.

Sociologists claim that the Raji tribes are descendents of Kiratas. They used to be hunters and gatherers and led a nomadic life but now their way of sustenance has shifted towards settlement. They claim themselves to be the original settlers of Central Himalaya and are distributed in Champawat, Pithoragarh and Udham Singh Nagar. Most of the Raji families are below poverty line and a little proportion of them still practice nomadic lifestyle. “

50. 46% of total income of Raji is from wage labour, 27. 78% from forests

and 12. 55% from agriculture.” (Pushpesh, 2008). Deforestation has led to enormous damage to peasants and tribes in Himalayan region. Pre-independence, the local communities had an easy access to all the forest resources needed. So, there was no scarcity of fodder, firewood and timber. Before invasion of British, Gurkhas dominated the land and they used forest woods to make defensive weapons for wars but this act did not dominate the basic livelihood of local residents. After colonialization, the British came with an idea of commercialization of resources. Therefore, Himalayan lowlands and uplands were used for agriculture. With the expansion of agriculture, access to forest was also restricted to ensure commercial timber production. Then, there was introduction of some forest policies which denied burning of pastures but this policy witnessed outrage and as a manifestation of protest people burned forests which affected 840, 000 hectares of land. As a result, Kumaon Grievance Committee’s report was formed which excluded a defined area of pasture for the locals. There was overexploitation of Sal followed up by Deodar trees for their good timber. In 1870’s British introduced apples in Himalayan region which led to ‘ Apple Revolution’ in Himalayan economy. Apple cultivation replaced Oak forests and also led to indirect deforestation because transportation of apples required wooden boxes and these boxes were made available through wood from forests. Apple cultivation has also been an important benchmark to understand the use of pesticide and insecticides in Himalayan agriculture. The use of these chemicals altered the Himalayan ecosystem.

Post-independence, the economic development of the country was given prime importance and over exploitation of Oak was a major concern. When

the supply of Oak reduced Chir trees were planted to meet the market demand. This affected the livelihood of locals who were dependent on the leaf of Oak for manure and fodder for their livestock. In 1960's and 1970's military roads were constructed for defense and a huge part of mountain was cut off. According to Public Works Department (PWD) the total length of roads in Kumaon increased from 360 Km in 1947 to 6, 421 Km in 1991. Construction of roads increased the plights of inhabitants because it made an easy access for timber mafia. In 1977, limestone, magnetite and Phosphorite mining became very significant in this region contributing 25% of all mines in India.

The Van Rajis relied on forests for their survival. They had an economy based on barter system where they made wooden utensils and exchanged them with other villagers but this shift in economy compelled them to adopt primitive agriculture but due to degraded quality of land their labour often went in vain and they were not able to produce sufficient crop. The lack of education affected them in the sense of not knowing the new and better agricultural practices.

Conclusion

While going through different literature I realized that the economic aspect of Raji tribes has not been documented well. Articles which I sorted out were somehow related to the living conditions of these tribes in Himalayan region and the concepts mentioned merely touched the tip of the iceberg. Although, the literature is insightful in a sense that it talked about the historical context of the Tribe dealing with pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial

changes in different dimensions. The major concern which I felt was important in understanding the issue is also considering the education among them. Also, what are the outcomes of social mobilization is also something to be dealt with. The literature offered me the conceptual understanding to proceed with my selected topic by giving a framework due to which there has been the economic shift among the tribe.