

THE TRIBAL SITUATION IN INDIA: INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION

Definitional Problem:

The concepts of industrialization and urbanization are very much a part of today's academic jargon. However, the meaning assigned to them is not as uniform and precise as one would have liked. They vary from author to author.

A study of industry and industrialization must not be confined to the factory system, economic inputs and outputs, but should include 'the use of the industrial products by a society irrespective of its source of origin' (ibid). Moore emphasizes the loosening of the term Industrialization to include these products along with the factory system under mechanical power. This way of interpretation is different from that where "Industrialization" is to be understood merely in terms of "economic and technological" system involved in the transformation of raw goods to finished or intermediate goods.¹⁸

Anthropology and the Study of Industrialization:

Anthropologists were initially not interested in the phenomenon of Industrialization. The reasons for this lack of interest in it are not very far to seek. Industrialization as one of the most powerful agents of economic development was strictly confined to the western countries, and though its impact and consequences were profound. Since anthropologists traditionally confined their studies to the pre-literate societies,

anthropologists are completely ignored this. However, anthropologists conducted some studies pertaining to this problem in Africa.

Anthropological interest in the process of Industrialization was aroused when their traditional domain viz. the tribal societies and the peasantry of the non-Western world were brought within the ambience of the industrialization process. The changing political scene in the third world countries greatly accelerated the setting up to the industries, greatly accelerated the setting up of the industries, construction of dams and exploration of raw material in the remote areas for quick and planned economic development. The pace of industrial development affected the lives of the communities in these parts, which hitherto had maintained a more or less unbroken, though changing link with the past. Thus industrialization after the Second World War becomes a worldwide phenomenon. This led to change in the anthropological perspective of the studies in acculturation were merely based on contact situation, changes in the value-system due to the impact of western thoughts and ideals, which were propagated among them. All in all, the agents of change were mainly non-economic in nature. This is of course not to deny the existence of interest among the anthropologists in economic development and social/cultural changes. But those were mainly the implications of the products of industries far away from the cultures under study.¹⁹

Anthropological studies during the last few decades have indeed become diversified in the approach and subject matter. The problem of industrialization was undertaken by an anthropologist M. Mash only in the early 1950s, when he undertook a study of the Guatemalan Indian

community, which had come under the impact of industrialization in 1876 when a cotton textile mill was opened in Contel, which has ultimately become the largest textile mill in Central America.

Nash (1958) in his study has made a descriptive analysis of the impact of the factory system right in the midst of the Indian community and has also tried to refute the sociological generalization regarding the disorganizing impact of Industrialization. The time between the setting up of the factory and the conducting of the study spans well over 7 decades and hence the study is meaningful because the structural or other types of changes have become part of the present day counselee's society. Since Nash has mentioned that his was a study based on the tradition social anthropological approach of studying a small-scale society, his study of the counselees provides one model of such studies for the anthropologists. One main focus of his study has been on the persisting pattern of social life in understanding the mechanism of adjustment to neo economic form. This is a study of structure change and continuity.

The research work available on industrialization and urbanization among the tribal societies in India is extremely limited and therefore it is not been possible to make any generalization. The interest of the anthropologists in these fields is still in the nascent stage and most of the work is therefore of exploratory nature. This also limits the comparability of the researches done by different scholars in different areas.²⁰

The relevant literature, in spite of its meagreness has been categorised in order to be meaningful. Such categorisation will also facilitate comparative studies. Both points of similarity as well as difference can be studied. For

example, the plantation industry is different from a manufacturing industry and hence different types of consequences are expected.

The tribal population of India, especially in middle India inhabited what were traditionally supposed to be remote and physically isolated areas from the centres of administration and trade. The interests of administrators and outsiders in these areas were minimal and the farthest one could think of tribal population was in terms of there coming in contact with non-tribal societies. Mainly in institutional and religious spheres.²¹

Yet these very tribal areas especially in the middle zone of India, proved to be the richest in their mineral and other productive wealth. Besides the tribal societies also proved to be good source of cheap labour. Therefore, the isolation and comparatively independent economic system of the tribal communities were broken down, albeit very slowly, by the establishment of mines and quarries in their area and also by employing the tribal people as unskilled labourers in these labour intensive industries. With the establishment of tea plantations in Assam, North Bengal, and East Bengal the demand for cheap labour increased and the tribal communities become the main sources of labour recruitment. With the establishment of manufacturing industries in Bihar, the tribal people also become directly involved in the new set up i.e. in factories and mills and come face to face with an entirely new system of production and management. After Independence when new industries were being set up, the tribal regions, because of their great potentialities were gradually transformed into areas of big industrial complexes.²²

Thus chronologically speaking we have the plantation industry, the mining and quarrying industry and the manufacturing industry, which have been operating, in the tribal areas and in which tribal people have been involved.

This review of literature is thus divided into these following parts (1) Plantation industry; (2) mining and quarrying industry; (3) Manufacturing industry; (4) Tribal labour. The review of urbanization is dealt with separately. One section deals with these papers, which are of general interest.

Plantation Industry:

As early as 1835 an experimental tea garden was set up in Lakhimpur in Assam. Since then the tea industry has had a phenomenal growth both in North India as well as in South India. Today it is one of the biggest foreign exchange earners employing a very large number of people. In 1964, there were 9835 registered tea gardens in India, employing more than 4,40,085 people in Assam, 1,89,968 in West Bengal and 75,475 in Madras (Tea Board of India – Tea Statistics 1965-66) the three main tea growing regions.

Though the tea gardens are not situated in the tribal areas of any of the states, they have directly affected many tribal people because they constituted the main bulk of the labour force in the tea plantations society in North India.

The tea industry was mainly dependent upon immigrant labour. In Assam, when tea gardens were established, it was not very easy to maintain

them because of the non-availability of labour. This was because of local conditions; for example in Assam, there was no category of landless labour and hence no one felt induced to take tea garden jobs. They preferred the independence and ease of their position as cultivators to the discipline and regular labour of a tea garden (Gita p.412). The situation was more or less the same in North Bengal also. Under these circumstances, recruitment of labour was a serious problem.²³

Chotanagpur became a very important centre for labour recruitment. The tribal people of these areas were considered most suitable for labour. Other areas, which supplied labour, were Santhal Pargana of Bihar. The main reasons for recruitment of the tribal people were their extremely poor economic conditions in these areas.

The Mining Industry:

The industry is one of the oldest industries in India, which has been overwhelmingly dependent upon the tribal labourers. They have been working in the coalmines particularly of Asansol-Raniganj and the Jharia belt over a very long period of time. In recent years new areas have been opened up especially for the exploration of iron ore, in Bail data in M.P. This area is also predominantly a tribal area. But there has been no attempt to study the impact of this industry on the tribal people or the impact on the society within its ambit. There is only one paper by A.M. Kurup, which is based on his study of the tribal labourers in the Parasia coalmines in Madhya Pradesh.²⁴

Industrial set up:

In our review of literature, we find that the maximum number of studies deal with the relationship between industrial set-up and tribal communities. The literature falls mainly into two categories: 1) that deals with the impact of an industrial set-up upon a community and 2) that deals with the impact of the establishment of an industrial complex on the community, which is being displaced on this account.²⁵

This is an important monograph dealing with the problems of adjustment of a tribal community, the Santal to an industrial urban setting of which they have 'been part of the last 50 years. Unlike other studies dealing with the impact of industrialization over a short span of time which, in fact are limited to the establishment phase' of an industry this has the distinction of being one which studies the problem when the industrial complex is well established and industry and the urbanizing factors are fully integrated with the population.²⁶

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