

Tribal Livelihoods and Quest for Sustainability: Empirical evidences from South Asia

Atrayee Saha

Abstract

South Asia has an area of approximately 5.221 million km. According to the United Nations, 1.6 billion inhabitants live in the region. South Asian population has a mixture of ethnic and tribal groups. The tribal population are also called as the 'tribes' and have been noted as the 'primitive' or 'savage' and sometimes even 'uncivilised' groups of people by various scholars. Majority of the tribal population in South Asia depend on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Contemporary societies of South Asia have witnessed plethora of issues in terms of its social, economic and political frames or discourses. The discourse on rural and tribal communities have further shown the way to mapping inherent identity questions, practices, and thus debates on sociological engagement of these social groups is necessary. It is important to understand the diverse social and economic issues and dynamics of development discourses of South Asia. Further, quest for sustainability of livelihoods is an overarching phenomenon of the development agencies of the state and non-state actors. Keeping pace with the developmental challenges in the south Asian economies, there is a necessity to understand the livelihood experiences and hurdles faced by the tribal communities.

Keywords: Tribal Communities, Sustainability, Livelihood Practices, Primitive Community, Indigenous Practices

Introduction

Tribal livelihood and the quest for sustainability is a much-debated idea which has been taken up in this paper. The first point of debate lies in the idea of the tribal people themselves. The tribal population in India have been studied through a lens of backwardness. The scholarly works which have been used in the discourse of sociology of tribal community have referred to this population as 'primitive', 'uneducated', 'uncivilised', 'savage' and others (Elwin 1964). These connotations have always relegated the tribal population from the mainstream community. Some scholars have also given the tag of tribal

ATRAYEE SAHA, Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Email: atrayeesaha@mail.jnu.ac.in