

# ITDP AND ADIVASIS: REFLECTIVE NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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## ABSTRACT

The Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) are instituted by the Ministry of Tribal affairs for the Development of Tribal Communities. Claimed to be instituted after a detailed review of the tribal issues, the ministry of tribal affairs initiated the Tribal Sub Plan during the Fifth Five Year Plan through which the ITDPs are implemented targeting those areas where the Schedule Tribe population is more than 50 percent of the total. The programme aims at a comprehensive means to socio-economic development and protection for the Scheduled Tribes. This article focuses on the ground realities of the ITDPs vis-a-vis the Adivasi people in Gadchirolli district of Maharashtra, which is one of India's most distressed districts. Adivasis in India are predominantly an agrarian community, who in general work on their own farms or as labourers in farms of the landholding classes (Adivasis or other). Their settlements being devoid of advancements in technology generate a lot of physical labour requirements for subsistence agriculture. Gadchirolli district is no different to this.

This article is an Adivasi reflection on the perspective of ITDPs. The article deals with the following questions. How far the importance of Adivasis culture and traditions are considered while designing the welfare schemes? What are the challenges related to successful claiming of these ITDP schemes? Do these schemes really provide them a socio-economic development on egalitarian terms? Where does the hypothesis of development and welfare for the poor in India in India stand? Does it include or exclude a vast section of the actual beneficiaries by design?

A plethora of problems were mentioned by the Adivasi members; the results provide a useful reference point to the fact that good intentions are just not enough. An intention is legitimised only if it is backed with appropriate groundwork and yield required results. The article engages with State paternalism and the outward betraying of ITPDs.

**Keywords: Tribal Development, Adivasis, Gadchirolli, ITDP, Tribal Land, Indigenous people, Exclusion**

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## **Introduction**

Adivasis in India are predominantly an agrarian community, who in general work on their own farms or as labourers in farms of the landholding classes (Adivasis or other). Their settlements being devoid of advancements in technology generate a lot of physical labour requirements for subsistence agriculture. Gadchirolli district lying in the central part of India in the state of Maharashtra is no different. It is one of the most backward districts in India today. Though recent times have seen distress migration in large numbers from Gadchirolli to neighbouring and distant cities, the Gond tribes in these areas are still predominantly dependent on agriculture for their survival.

The Government of India during the Fifth Five Year Plan designed the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) under the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) for the development of the Adivasi communities. The ITDPs are implemented in those regions which have more than 50 percent Adivasi population. This scheme cover different facets of modernisation and development; like infrastructure, providing subsidies for agricultural equipments, vocational training programmes for youth and support for children's education.

In the Adivasi hamlets of Gadchirolli when I began to enquire on the perception of ITDP schemes, the initial response was of complete ignorance about entire programme. A few had heard about the ITDP office and referred to it as the project office. However, the common notion was that rarely did anyone receive any benefits from the project office. Thus a survey was conducted in two hamlets in order to collect primary data about the ground realities of ITDPs. As the survey began I got perplexed to note that only a couple of people had detailed information about the ITDP and the available schemes under its banner. Contrary to this, people were relatively aware of the schemes related to agriculture. When I referred to schemes related to training programmes that could help them to get a job in cities, all I got were surprise looks. Some respondents cited the extreme torturous experience for a simple diesel pump from the block office, let alone a training programme. The following is a short reflective note based on a study done in Gadchirolli. In this article, my attempt is to reflect on the plethora of problems faced by Adivasis, and what do they think about the ITDPs in resolving problems.

### **Flaws in the Design – Challenges to Claiming the Benefits**

As per the ITDP design, for an Adivasi to successfully claim the benefits related to agricultural assistance she/he needs to have land in her/his own name. The scheme is designed such that only single name land holders would be catered to and joint land holders are not. To understand this as a crisis we need to get a deeper understanding of the Gond community and their kinship pattern in Gadchirolli. Also, how this strong bonding extends to various aspects of life and livelihood. Such patterns need not be the universal principle of Adivasi communities in India.

The land holdings are predominantly at an extended family level. A particular piece of land would be owned by two or three elders (brothers & sisters), their children and grandchildren. This land would be in the name of the brothers and sisters and even at times including their father and mother as well. All members including women and little children work on this common farm. In two hamlets (Salle & Barri Tolla) of the Korchi Block in Gadchirolli, out of the 75 Households, it is recorded that just 27 (36%) of the households had the land in the name of a single owner, 34 (45%) families have the joint records with their brothers and sisters, 9 (12%) still had in their old parent's, uncle and aunt's name. The rest 5 (7%) had no land records at all. Thus the fundamental scheme for Adivasi Development excludes its beneficiaries by design itself. They have traditionally been practicing the much advocated practice of group farming for centuries, supporting each other and sharing the resources in the farm. There is no exchange of money in this practice. They would share the produce, profits and the burden of losses as well. Thus, forming the much sought after 'safety net' mechanism. Though the ITDP may have been set up based on good intentions, the programme directly results in the traditional natural shielding mechanisms to come under serious threat. A scheme which excludes its beneficiary by design is the best testimony to the fact that appealing objectives are just not good enough.

In a tribal community with such strong ties where land is held at a larger family level rather than individual or nuclear family level, it is rather an insensitive approach to provide them benefits only if they are willing to split their land within themselves. There are many negative impacts of such an imposition. There is a power struggle within the family, leading to the more powerful one in the family acquiring the better portion of the land (qualitatively as well as quantitatively). For example: the part of the farm where there is a farm pond or well would be fought over. Such dynamics results in a disharmony within the family that was living in harmony, caring and providing for each other as a single large family. It is important to understand that kinships among Gonds are a fabric made of myriad of tenderly woven dynamics and would tear apart on slightest of power struggles. This is exactly what is happening within the Adivasi community in Gadchirolli.

Laxman Kodape from the Aheri block says; *'now a day's people have stopped helping each other in the farms, everyone is only bothered about his own farm, this leads to a lot of work. When I was younger we used to work on a large farm which was of our entire family. My Uncles, Aunts, Cousin's and all of us worked together.'* This statement noticeably shows the withering away of bonding which Adivasi communities are otherwise known for. One needs to look at question if such a scheme could be called a development initiative.

### **Apathy of the Implementing Agency**

There have been a lot of Adivasi individuals who have split up the lands from their families and obtained individual land ownership records. Here a new set of problems starts. The arrogant attitude of the officials at the implementing agencies has ensured the Adivasis continue to struggle. In Korchi block of Gadchirolli the ITDP schemes

are implemented through the Ashram School where the Headmaster is in charge of ensuring implementation apart from the Block Development Office (BDO). Below are two case studies of Adivasis' experiences in attempts to claim the benefits.

### *Case Study 1*

Gyanshing Hodi has been to the Ashram School many times to find out the benefits that they are entitled to. Most times the Headmaster was either not present or sleeping. In case if he was there, he would be playing cards and ask Hodi to come later. This was confirmed when I visited the school to meet the Headmaster. Out of the three times, twice he was absent and once he was asleep in his quarters.

Mehru Supril Gotta who had applied for a pump from the Ashram school never got any response. When I checked Gotta why he did not go back to the Ashram School to enquire the reason for rejection, He said *'they would respond with abuses and say what will you Adivasi people do with a motor pump?'* When enquired as to why do they remain quiet when the authorities say things like that, and why do not they form a village committee and go to meet the Headmaster or the BDO and other officials. Mehru being a soft spoken person remained silent. His friend Ramdas Umre who was present during the conversation intervened. Umre said, *'first we have to lose a day's wages for this and that means all our families go hungry for a day. And for one person's requirement how could one expect others from the village to put their family in hunger for the day? We are mainly dependent on the income from labour.'* He went on to add, *'we all also know that it would not get solved in a single day. It will require multiple trips. Over the loss of wages we will also have to spend money out of our pockets in order to succeed in such attempts. This is not practically possible in our condition.'*

### *Case Study 2*

There is a common practice among the officials to sell the goods that are supposed to reach the Adivasis under the table. A well read person from the Adivasi community (name concealed), who was a staff in an NGO that works among Adivasis in Gadchirolli explained an incident he faced. He had applied for an oil pump and his application was approved. He paid the 15 percent which was not covered in the subsidy. This followed a wait of 4 years with numerous visits to the ITDP office to find out the status. Every time he visits the office, he got the answer, *'why are you so worried? Your application is approved and you will get the oil pump soon. Why do you keep coming here? Once it comes we will deliver it to your home'* and so on. Frustrated with this, he lost his patience and finally filed an RTI. Then things started to change and the behaviour of the people in the ITDP office also started to change. They asked him if he wanted the information or he wanted the oil pump. Being a tough and smart person he responded, *'now since it's been four years I need the information and the pump.'* The officials did not expect such a response from an Adivasi person and were shocked. Then they showed him the list. He noticed that his name was written by striking out the name of another beneficiary from the current year's list. This meant the oil pump now allocated to him was ideally sanctioned for

another person. Once again he opposed this and said this is someone else's pump and I want my pump. However this did not work well with the officials who asked him to leave the office and they will deliver the pump to his home. By now he had spent a lot of money and time on this issue and finally decided to rest the case. Finally the officials delivered the pump to his house. This particular person was an informed person and knew the ways to put pressure on the officials. Thus he was successful in claiming the pump after more than 4 years. Spare a thought for the regular Adivasi whose sole source of income is from the daily labour. How many days can he afford to follow up and how could he bear the expenses of multiple visits to the ITDP office?

The above two cases clearly portray ITDP's behavioural pattern. Instead of functioning as a responsible body to ensure welfare and development, it has behaved in a manner that forcefully deprives the Adivasis off their dues thus nullifying the legitimacy of the development programme in its entirety. Even if the government and allied bodies direct all its efforts genuinely for Adivasi development, such an attitude by the authorities at the implementation level would assure failure of the entire effort. There is no straight forward solution to this situation. The only way forward to counter such blockades are by creating a system through which only persons genuinely interested to serve the people are present. Apart from this, consistent efforts should be taken by the state headed development agencies to ensure the representatives at different levels are sensitive to the Adivasis affairs.

### **Reality post Welfare Scheme Realisation**

There has not been any revolutionary change in the life of those who have successfully claimed the benefits going through all odds. In the two hamlets mentioned earlier 73 percent (52 households) of the landholders have purely rain fed farms. Presently ITDP provides irrigation schemes for these members however each individual is entitled to only one scheme. This leads to a situation where the communities are not able to utilise the benefits for desired results. The Panchayat Samiti (PS) through Gram Panchayat (GP) and the Ashram School (AS) provide about four different schemes for irrigation such as fund for constructing a well, pond plus canal, water pipes and motor pumps (kerosene & diesel). Since one individual is entitled to only one benefit, which means a person who gets a well would not have a pump to irrigate his field with the water from the well. A person who has a pump would not have a well. A person provided with pipes for irrigation is helpless without a source of water or a motor pump. For example there are many houses where I saw excellent high quality pipes lying unused and collecting dust. Out of the 26 beneficiaries only 12 have succeeded in converting what they received through ITDP into actual benefits. This indicates the positive impact to be less than 50 percent at implementation level.

It is understandable that the government cannot afford to provide everything to every single family. It would make more sense to disperse the benefits to the land holding groups (extended families) that originally practiced group farming. Such shifts could enable appropriate implementation of the benefits resulting in a positive impact on

the beneficiaries. Under such a situation, the families could have shared the benefits as well, thus, respecting their existing traditional social and economic institutions.

### **Legitimacy of Vocational Trainings**

The Adivasi members had strong views of the vocational trainings that were available to their youth through the ITDP. The hamlets surveyed initially had little idea about these schemes. In the Aheri block there was some hamlets where people had made use of these schemes. The below is an extract from the Focus Group Discussion in the hamlet of Kottal Gudam in Aheri Block.

Very few Adivasi youth take up any jobs based on the training they avail through the schemes. Training on repairing electrical equipments like Television, Refrigerator, etc. provide jobs in the cities and towns which are far from the villages. The urban areas are filled with people who are trained in similar work and the scope of an Adivasi youth to find his foot in such a space in the urban setting is highly challenging. Even if, by some stroke of luck he finds a job, soon he gets suffocated living in the city and thus after a few months comes home for a break. He would return to the city only after a couple of weeks, in the mean time his job would have gone. The local people spoke about the very harsh situations their youth had to face in the cities as they do not find any proper place to stay and end up staying in very unhealthy conditions. Narayan Bhim Sidam says, *'these ITDP schemes are available only in the last five to eight years, before which only option for us was to go out for unskilled labour related work. These schemes are good but in reality it does not provide much opportunity for us.'*

Prakash Mara Tanada who is an activist for the revival of the Gond culture says, *'we need to get opportunities in our own locality we have a farm which we work on for five to six months and for the rest of the six months we need to get opportunity to earn money here in our villages. Migration is a last resort, which we do not prefer. The agricultural return being very inconsistent and low forces the locals into distress migration. After the farming season which is between June to November families start migration to the nearby regions. Migratory work includes hard unskilled labour in construction sites in cities of South India and Maharashtra and working in farms in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Vidharbha regions of Maharashtra. There are contractors who take the Adivasis to cities to work as unskilled minimum wage labourers.'*

The schemes for vocational trainings just come across as mechanisms that ensure continuous supply of cheap labour for the labour-hungry urban market space. In the present neo liberal economy where labour is commodified and the worth of an individual defined by his labour, indigenous groups like Adivasis are reduced to commodities is often valued based on their capability to complete tasks. Thus such communities are driven into perpetual poverty ensuring their status at the lowest strata of Indian social system.



## Conclusion

Comparing the ground reality versus the Nehruvian Panchsheel – the guiding principles behind any tribal development programme; one cannot help but state that the ITDP programme miserably fails. The first two principles of the Panchsheel talk about development in the lines of their own genius through respect for rights on land are completely violated. The scheme is not in consonance with the culturally sensitive patterns of land ownership. Their own traditional livelihood means are not protected and have been overthrown by training programmes for the requirement of the urban populace. The picture drawn here is a clear depiction of appealing intentions not proving worthy enough. The government schemes once again lack ground work and research that are fundamental to any development activity. A lack of continuous monitoring to ensure desired results all lead to the sad story where at the end the Adivasis remain as losers. They end up being laughing stalks and are mocked and bullied by the other communities. Common comment that can be heard about the Adivasis from other communities is that, they have all the schemes and reservations possible in the world, yet their condition will not improve because they are dumb and stupid people who will never develop.

A quote by Prof. Mrinal Miri during the Dec 1, 2015 winter session of Rajya Sabha is apt at this juncture. *‘Tribal religions and tribal cultures are integrally, organically, connected with each other. One without the other is empty of meaning. Tribal cultures are also autonomous centres of meaning. They are not fossilised remnants of other more “evolved” cultures and religions I shall just cite here a remark by perhaps the greatest philosopher of our times, Ludwig Wittgenstein. When a pupil of his approvingly referred to the anthropologist Fraser’s view that tribal religions are infantile, irrational or pre-rational magical practices, Wittgenstein simply asked, “Do you think tribes are plain stupid?” A tribe’s religion and its culture are the source of its notions of right and wrong, good and bad, reasonable and unreasonable, just and unjust, and yes, truth and falsehood, and they are also the source that provides answers to questions such as what is it to live well, what constitutes true happiness, etc. In other words, a tribal culture constitutes a distinct way of being wholly human.’*

Unless the govt and the development machinery attempt to understand and reach out to the Adivasi communities about their genuine felt needs, there will always remain gaps that are never going to be filled.