

Problem of Development among the Saur Tribe of Madhya Pradesh

Ashish Gupta

Department of Anthropology,
Dr. H. S. Gour University, Sagar MP

Abstract: Development, in a very general or common sense may refer to a qualitative change or progress so far as the material needs are concerned. The concept of development has different connotations in different contexts. In a narrow sense, 'it means, change, and progress, either whole or, partial'. There are people with difference of opinion regarding development. This is true since; the history of development has been shifted in thought, policy, and practice over time this process could be the beginning of emancipation of the tribal people and the others as well. Here an attempt has been made to study problem of Development among the Saur Tribe of Madhya Pradesh.

Keywords: Problem of Development, Saur Tribe, Madhya Pradesh

Introduction:

The magnitude and gravity of the problem of development among the tribals in India compounded as they are by widespread poverty, ignorance and lack of health education are daunting. Tribal populations have distinctive problems, not because they have special kind of health, rather it is due to their placement in difficult areas and circumstances in which they live. The widespread poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, absence of safe drinking water, poor sanitary conditions, poor maternal and child health services, ineffective coverage of national health and nutrition services have been traced out in several studies as possible contributing factors for dismal health conditions prevailing among these vulnerable populations. Some of the tribal groups have remained untouched by the process of development and some have been adversely affected by it. This cannot be allowed to continue. There is a lack of systematic and comprehensive research studies, which provide information regarding the health status of the tribal community. Research studies conducted on tribals for the health need assessment, which give an insight for strategic planning for tribal health development is hardly available.

The discussion regarding problem and development of Saur tribals in India remain inconclusive due to several reasons. The heterogeneity of the tribal populations prevents any generalization. The specific tribal studies have their obvious limitations though they are useful for effective planning yet the contours of a broad health profile emerges with some very important missing aspects.

Thus this part of anthropological research has gained added importance in view of the intense need in the context of the fast and accelerated population growth and to provide the people with better standard of living.

Though a few of anthropological studies in this aspect have been conducted on some population groups of India as well as in central provinces by different investigators at different times yet no such investigation has so far been undertaken among the Saur tribal population of Madhya Pradesh. Bundelkhand area is known to be the homeland of the Saur population group. this study deal with problem and development of Saur tribe of Madhya Pradesh.

Background:

Culture whatsoever it may be, primitive or modern, tribal and non-tribal it is characterized by dynamism. No culture remains isolated or static for a long time. Since the Saur are now living in close proximity with other caste Hindus and have settled in the multi-ethnic villages, they have borrowed a number of cultural traits from outsiders, as a result of interaction, integration, assimilation and cultural contact with other groups of the surrounding areas. Other factors, such as impact of Hinduization and modernization, provoke them to modify their way of life. As a result of cultural contact, there have been lots of changes in social, economic, religious and political aspects of the Saur. Their tribal way of life is now in a transitional stage and undergoing enormous changes.

The fieldwork among the Saur gave the author an opportunity to study closely the Saur culture in different setting. It also gave him a scope to understand the problems Saur faced and the way they will be really benefited in the changing situation. Saur is a primitive tribe of Madhya Pradesh. According to 2001 census, their population is schedule tribe of the district is 51593 peoples in which 48555 are rural population and 3038 is urban population in Chhatarpur district. Their main concentration are at Chhatarpur and Tikamgarh District of Bundelkhand region.

After independence, a number of developmental programmes have been introduced to improve the

condition of the tribals, socially, economically and educationally with an aim to bridge the gap of social distance between the tribals and non-tribals by raising the living conditions of these people and minimizing their social differentiation.

The government has provided ample opportunities to the tribals to come forward and integrate themselves with advanced groups. After the establishment of the Community Development Block, the rural communities also are undergoing remarkable social and economic change. The Sauris too, though not to that extent, have undergone changes. The diversity in the way of tribal life, such as traditional pattern of living, poor economy, indigenous social customs, illiteracy, supernatural belief, lack of consciousness, etc, are hindrances in the process of integration.

Like many other tribal situations in Madhya Pradesh, the Sauris share a great deal of similarity, in terms of embedded cultural traits, with the dominant caste Hindus. Comparatively, the Sauris have a prolonged history of acculturative influence. Their cultural contact with different castes since last century, provided sufficient scope for the flow of cultural traits. The process of transformation among the Sauris may be coined as the regional pattern of Hindu style of life. The rate of changes is slow but selective, accommodative and integrative. Besides the Hinduization, the modern process by means of urbanization and democratic forces is also inducing changes. The implementation of various types of development, welfare and community development schemes has brought certain economic and social changes in the Sauri life.

The transformation of the Sauris is caused by the impact of modernization, changing economic pattern and interaction and cultural contact with local groups, which have been forcing them since long to remove the indigenous cultural pattern within the wider cultural milieu. The village development programmes have also further accelerated the Sauris of multiethnic villages to adopt the new traits.

Aspect of Transformation

Some factors are responsible for transforming the way of life of the Sauris. The culture of the Sauris, too, has changed due to external aspects. These aspects are as follows:

Ecological Aspect

Forests occupy an important place in the economy of Sauris. Till 1995, they used to collect the forest produce and sell them to obtain their requirement of clothes, implements, etc. The Sauris have not only lost their privileges but the outsiders have cleared much of the forest. It is a blow to their economy.

The Sauris since long have given up the primitive economy based on hunting and food gathering as

the primary source of livelihood. Although they have largely adopted slash and burn cultivation, their economy is based on periodic felling of trees and the cultivation of millets, pulses, maize and vegetable. Slowly, those who are living in owned personal plain lands, started plough cultivation in addition to shifting cultivation and food gathering. Their economy has been shifted from primitive hunting and food gathering to settled cultivation. In the course of time the Sauris have gradually adopted the settled life by changing the techniques of production system. Primitive cultivation of crops involves hard labour for preparation of soil, felling of trees and clearing the forests, sowing of seeds, and harvesting. Such cultivation also helps them to live in a village permanently rather than to move from place to place in search of allocation and food gathering. The stable form of society creates a greater need for social control to maintaining morals, customs, ethos, values and taboos in the society.

The Sauris live in small villages in the forest. Originally, their settlements were homogeneous, dominated by a single clan people. Village exogamy was prevalent. But as the composition became heterogeneous within the Sauri people due to multi-clans settlement and migrants, marriage within the village could take place. With the growth of population as well as to find out suitable habitat and new earning arena, they settled in heterogeneous villages.

Economic Aspect

The mode of cultivation has changed to some extent. The agricultural implements of the unexposed Sauris remain the same, and the shifting cultivation has been replaced by settled cultivation. Now some farmers have started irrigating their crops by means of wells. They are more conscious for using cow-dung as manure. Some of them also use chemical fertilizer. Some people have availed loan and subsidies for improving the production of grains. Previously, people grew only millets and maize, but now they produce crops like wheat, pulses, chilies, etc. The consumption of wheat has also increased.

Network of road transportation, new technology in the form of new tools, improved seeds, modern methods, etc, have to some extent changed the traditional economy of the Sauris of exposed area. Moreover, the Sauris in the plains learnt of a diverse economy through close contact with alien cultures. Their traditional economy has also been changed and many of them are now engaged in better economy than before. Impact of modernization has affected the indigenous social as well as economic set-up of the people.

Social Aspect

With the influence of cultural contact, aged members, such as father, mother are now residing in a nuclear family. The general trend in the

institution of marriage has also been turned towards monogamy instead of polygyny. The payment of bride-price has come down. Instead of bride-price the advanced educated Saur are receiving dowry. Early, the child marriage was in practice, but now they follow adult marriage. Marriage ceremony has become elaborate and marriage expenses have increased. Like other caste Hindus, Saur practice marriage by negotiation and other forms of marriage have been stopped. As a symbol of marriage, Saur women wear glass bangles as well as kumkum. In their social life, lots of traits from caste Hindus have been merged. Extramarital sexual relations were not prohibited among the Saur in the past but with the influence of cultural contact sexual modesty has developed among the Saur. Previously remarriage and divorce were frequent and created disharmony almost in every family.

The Saur who are residing within the domain of caste Hindus have been influenced by certain customs of the communities around them. From the very early periods several cultural contacts between the Hindu castes of the area and the tribals have been established. As a result, real tribal culture has been disturbed to a considerable extent.

The villages of the plains are, structurally, composed of mixed population, where the Saur have come in contact with caste Hindus and have developed a sense of caste consciousness. They are now getting the services of the astrologer, barber, washerman, sweeper, etc. Those, who are educated and, economically well-to-do are placed in higher position in the village and society.

Religious Aspect

Their religion has modified radically and their beliefs of supernatural powers have also been reduced. Dependency on Gunia (magician-cum-priest) has gradually come down. Instead of traditional priest, they even take the services of Brahmin priests. They have adopted the Hindu forms of worship and besides their own deities, they also worship the Hindu gods and goddesses and observe the Hindu festivals.

Educational and other Aspects

Education has an enormous value in society. Generally, the Saur are illiterate and suffering from an inferiority complex which inhibits them from mixing up with other groups. Lack of interest, poor economic conditions, ignorance, social circumstances are the main reasons for educational backwardness. No doubt, the Saur children are now going to school. The Saur have also acquired the knowledge of awareness by coming in contact with the political leaders and by participation in the village panchayat.

Literacy among the Saur is very low (36 per cent). Among females the percentage of literacy is only 16 per cent. Though the schooling facility has been

extended in some of their localities, the Saur are not getting proper education for their development. Due to occasional migration of the Saur with their children for seasonal labour and also because of poverty their children do not get opportunity to continue school. So maximum children drop out from the school, before attaining primary level. Girls mostly get engaged in domestic chores; hence, they are far away from the light of education. By and large, the Saur do not utilize the developmental schemes of the government due to lack of proper education. Education and economic development are urgently required to further the steady development of these backward people. The spread of education, awareness and impact of urbanization have also influenced the Saur to assimilate with the wider society. The Saur of the plains have improved the living pattern by adopting hygienic ways of caste Hindus. Excessive indulgence in liquor by the Saur of interior areas is regarded as a barrier for assimilation.

Better communication, weekly market, fair, etc, provide them opportunity to mix with outsiders. The Saur of unexposed villages are still backward in this respect. In the plains, however, the pattern of lifestyle, including the house structure, food habit, dress, ornaments, even behaviour patterns are nearly similar to those of low caste Hindus. They have started using the modern facilities such as modern medicare system, school, drinking-water, availability of some necessary commodities through fair rice shops. Job opportunities, use of radio, watch, cycle, etc, have raised the standard of living of the Saur.

The study among the Saur of five distinct ecological backgrounds, that is, Saur of highest population village, lowest population village, nearest PHC village, farthest PHC village and unexposed forest the Saur who live in plains with mixed population, reveals that the Saur living in the plains have adopted number of traits from the caste Hindus. Social customs, manners and standard of living are similar to that of lower caste groups such as the Chamar, the Dhobi, the Dhanuk, etc, of this region. The social mixing and cultural affinity of that Saur with lower caste groups is so deeply related that sometimes the outsiders fail to differentiate a tribal from non-tribal. Secondly, the Saur of the western area and southeastern areas could be differentiated from cultural point of view. Their way of life is not similar to each other. The Saur of western part still retain more traditional pattern of livelihood than their counterparts living in the southeastern areas.

Process of Transformation

Thus, it is obvious that the process of assimilation and acculturation took place due to the factors of integration and cultural contact between Saur and other ethnic groups. Such trends of transformation and contact have raised their self-awareness. This

self-awareness has made them conscious to accept the Hindu mode of culture in their livelihood.

The pattern of cultural contact evolved through the means of transport and communication. The remote villages in the plains and forests are still backward in this respect. In the plains, however, the lifestyle including the housing structure, food habit, dress, even behaviour pattern, is nearly similar to that of peasant culture.

The growing sense of political awareness and impact of democratic ideas have given them opportunities to come nearer to caste Hindus. They have developed a feeling of equal right and responsibility towards nation and do not consider themselves inferior to others. The spread of education and urbanization has also paved the way for the assimilation of the Saur.

The lifestyle of the scheduled castes in other areas does not show a higher standard than the Saur. The Saur living in the mixed villages show a marked degree of assimilation with these people and maintain a free interaction with others on the occasion of festivals or social ceremonies.

The Saur of the remote area are much more backward in respect of hygienic sense. They do not take bath regularly, nor do they regularly clean their clothes, cut nails and hair. They are careless in maintaining their personal hygiene and habits too. Among the Saur of plains, the living pattern has improved by adopting hygienic notion for the cleanliness of the body, which has been perceived by assimilation with caste Hindus. Drinking habits and food items of the people living in hilly forest areas make them isolated, because the habits and practices of food intake are so backward that they are looked down upon by other castes.

The social customs practiced by the Saur of unexposed area, such as lack of sexual modesty, extramarital relation, remarriage, polygyny, etc, are some of the factors which hinder their assimilation into high caste Hindus. Finally, illiteracy is the root cause of backwardness and social disabilities of the Saur. Even the spread of educational institutes has little impact on the Saur. Illiteracy is the most important factor for disintegration. In religion, the outlook of the Saur of remote area is another factor for disintegration. They have a strong faith in tribal religion and believe in supernatural powers. They still depend on witchcraft for common diseases. Living in the unexposed hilly forest regions from time immemorial and struggle for existence against the unfavourable ecology also is the cause of disintegration. The people suffer from inferiority complex in different ways. Poverty makes them coward and develops a sense of helplessness in them.

Thus, it is obvious that the process of acculturation as well as transformation took place due to the factors of integration and cultural contact among the Saur. The trends of transformation have raised

the self-awareness among the Saur. Due to the impact of external factors, their sense of awareness is awakening fast. This self awareness has made accept the Hindu cultural modes in their life. Their customs at the time of marriage and death, habit of taking food, clothes, rites and rituals, etc, have drastically changed. The social interaction and cultural contact among the Saur has been expedited through the medium of political, educational and communicational institutions.

Developmental Dynamics:

In the preceding pages an attempt has been made to depict the process of transformation which took place among the Saur. The concept of transformation and change differs in its function. Transformation takes place through some process such as, integration, interaction, cultural contact, assimilation and acculturation. Change is the result of transformation. The Saur today are no more a nomadic tribe solely dependent on forest. Their traditional economy of self-sufficiency has changed and they are forced to settle in mixed villages in search of new jobs to earn a better livelihood. As a result of new cultural contacts, their tribal way of life has been undergoing enormous changes.

Main Agents of Contact

1. Saur, from time immemorial, have been working as agricultural labourers for the higher caste Hindus.
2. Government officials also visit the tribal area and the Saur come in contact with them.
3. Traders, vendors come for business purpose to the tribal areas where they sell articles and purchase the forest products from the tribals by paying cash or under barter system.
4. Weekly markets, fairs and festivals also attract large world. They imitate the style of others.
5. Since large number of Saur still live in forest and have deep attachment with forest, they have close contact with forest officials who work under forest department.
6. Through the traditional tribal council is still functioning among the Saur, the introduction of the statutory Panchayat system has influenced these people a lot. Hence, their contact with outsiders has come about.
7. With the introduction of formal education institutes and the slogan "Education for all", the Saur children have come in contact with other caste Hindus.

All these factors are together responsible for the changes in the traditional pattern of culture of the Saur. Major changes are noted in the field of economy rather than social structure, religious belief and social customs and the reasons for the same have already been discussed earlier. The pattern of culture and way of life of the Saur that had evolved through their tradition has changed from primitive type to Hindu pattern. The caste Hindus including servicing castes such as barber, blacksmith, potter, sweeper, etc, and traders also came with these kings and settled around the forts.

Such change, in the mode of living and disappearance of social isolation opened an avenue of social interaction with the Rajput invaders as well as with other caste Hindus. The Saur who reared the forest also left the semi-nomadic lifestyle and settled down in the forest. They acquired, new way of livelihood and assimilated the Hindu gods and goddesses into their religious system.

The Saur settled in isolated and unexposed areas and also came into contact with Hindu traders and servicing caste groups. They opened their eyes towards new way of life and improved Hindu philosophy in religious and social norms. The Saur gradually started observing the Hindu traits and modified their traditional pattern of life and values attached to them. Ultimately, a good number of Saur who had been living in the isolated hilly forest area since long have now settled in plains with the heterogeneous habitations. They have modified their livelihood considerably and enjoy the modern amenities of life.

So from the above discussion the problems of the Scheduled Tribes can be summed up as in under:

- ❖ The problem of development started as early as 1950s when scholars were of different opinion regarding making a policy of tribal development. The trust of the scholars was to assimilate these communities into the main stream.
- ❖ The initial ideas were based upon 'welfare', not 'development'.
- ❖ Protective, mobilizational and developmental measures were taken to 'uplift' tribal population but complex system of administration created problem to reach the goal.
- ❖ For the sake of national development the tribals got displaced from their land and also lost their right over forest, which affected their economy adversely.
- ❖ For establishment of industries in the tribal land (being it rich in minerals and ores), an influx of non-tribal population in the tribal areas took place. This with better communication facilities leads towards

growing urbanization, introduction of market economy.

- ❖ All these aspects made the tribals landless and also sometimes made them bonded labour to the non-tribal moneylenders and petty traders.
- ❖ The tribals did not get suitable job in the industries established in their land and being suppressed by the outside population became subjected to oppression and discrimination.
- ❖ Though government achieved success in establishing at least primary schools in tribal areas but schooling ultimately reached a very small fragment of tribal societies.
- ❖ Being compelled to be coped up with the 'mainstream', the tribals by and large lost homogeneity and a kind of differentiation was marked among them. Also the emerging 'elites' among themselves failed to show a right direction towards tribal development. Even sometimes the tribals found themselves under identity crisis. However, these elites led them to organize several solidarity movements in different parts of the country to achieve a particular place in the 'mainstream'.

However, since people understood the importance of the tribals in conservation of ecology, land and forest; the governmental agencies in one hand and the social scientists on the other are trying to find out the alternative development path for them. NGOs provide extreme support to achieve this goal and also are playing significant role in several frontiers like agricultural development, water conservation, education, health training, eradication of social evils, and struggle against all forms of exploitation.

Conclusion

The tribal sub plan strategy has been in force since the Fifth Five year plan but it has not been able to bring expected improvement among the Saur tribe as a whole. We need to provide primary education to all Saur, even who lives interior regions. We know their literacy rate is very poor, hence through social and formal education we have to eradicate their evil social customs like, re-marriage and divorce, consumption of liquors, extra expenditure on rites of passage, frequent migration of families etc. Woman can play an important role to abolish at least some evil social customs through counseling. Poor economy is the route cause of the Saur which force them to migrate at other placed for livelihood. We need to engage some Developmental agencies and missionaries at Saur dominated areas to improve their socio-economic status with sincere efforts.

From the foregoing discussion it can be concluded that there is need for sponsorship of more purposeful and planned research in the field of tribal problem and development. It would be perhaps wiser to begin with carefully chosen, well-designed, small scale, action-cum research studies.

The essence of this new strategy for research in tribal development should be to initiate task-oriented operational research programmes on areas, which are directly related to the need based area and problems specific to the Saur tribal population.

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