

Review Article

Indigenous Knowledge and Resource Management: Concerns of Indian Scheduled Tribes and Community-centered Initiatives

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A B S T R A C T

Indigenous resources primarily comprise Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous Knowledge is a set of their culture, beliefs and practices. Unfortunately the indigenous resource management in India primarily focuses on management of natural resources- forest produces, mines and minerals, rivers and water bodies to fulfil the need of the 91% non-tribal population and is least concerned about community-grounded practices for holistic development of the Scheduled Tribes in their own cultural ecosystem. Lack of integration of tangible and intangible resources while preserving the cultural heritage of Tribes has led to creation of non-living archives of living Indigenous Peoples. The Intellectual Property Rights of the Indigenous Knowledge is another concern which has largely remained unaddressed. This study brings into account the concerns of the locals who own the Indigenous Knowledge and the global practices of community based preservation of Indigenous. The study concludes that the capacity building of communities for preservation of their own knowledge in their own socio-cultural settings is the most sustainable solution.

Keywords: Digital Archive, Indigenous Knowledge, Indian Tribes, Preservation

Statement of the Problem

Preserving the wisdom and heritage of vanishing tribes is directly associated with protection of land rights and ownership of natural resources. If the protection and safeguarding by the government is really aimed at Scheduled Tribes then despite having the constitutional rights why this community is most displaced, impoverished and neglected. Scheduled Tribes comprise 8.6% of the Indian population as per 2011 census. Majority of this population is underprivileged despite several constitutional protections and provisions of the central as well as state

governments. In the name of tribal development the cultural identities and rights of the tribal people have been compromised. The studies on Scheduled Tribes of India indicate the problems associated with control and access of land and other natural resources, displacement and rehabilitation, education, health, and identity. The practice of Indigenous Resource Management follows certain recommendations of the United Nations declaration on the Rights of indigenous people (UNDRIP) and the provisions of the Indian Constitution in the case of managing resources in the scheduled areas of India. But the fractured mandate by the constitution and intervening laws pertaining to land

acquisition and mining has failed to protect the Indian Tribes from displacement and further impoverishment. The present study inquires the global practices of preserving and safeguarding the indigenous resources and the ownership concerns of the Indian Tribes. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) and World Federation of Friends of Museums (WFFM) though principally advocates for the control and access of cultural heritages by the community, but in practice the museums have not followed these principles and there is hardly any guideline by the state for the community owned preservation and safeguarding of the Indigenous Knowledge.

Evolution of Global Practices of Preserving Indigenous Resources

When the practice of Cultural Heritage Conservation gradually changed to Cultural Heritage Management it had a reflection of including both tangible and intangible resources as part of Cultural Heritage. UNESCO, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and International Council of Museums (ICOM) through several declarations highlighted the importance of Indigenous Knowledge Management. The United States was the first country to use the term Cultural Resource Management instead of Cultural Heritage Management and it acknowledged for the first time in principle that cultural heritage is a resource. Inclusivity was also the major concern behind this thinking. The resource management included folk life, tradition, and cultural use of natural resources. The small settlements were also included as cultural resources as part of Tlaxcala declaration for betterment of local communities and revitalization of these settlements. The charter prepared in the New Zealand clearly mentioned Indigenous issues as part of conservation of places of cultural heritage value. Though a lot of development took place in this direction for preserving and managing the cultural resources but until 1992 there was hardly any holistic notion in place for cultural landscape. The concept of 'originally evolved cultural landscape' was included in the Annex 3 of operational guidelines of the World Heritage Committee.

The Stockholm declaration of ICOM was in line with the International Cultural Tourism Charter of 1999 which clearly mentioned the rights of owners of the naturally evolved cultural sites. The conventions on preservation of intangible cultural resources follow from the declaration of 1971 of the UNESCO, which is considered as fundamental instrument. The concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage emerged in 1997 and a project titled Proclamation of Manuscripts of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity was intended to fill the gap between tangible and intangible heritages. The decision on a convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage could be taken after several

rounds of discussions and deliberations and it could get adopted during the thirty-first session of the UNESCO in 2003. The intangible cultural resources got new dimensions in 2005 during Xian declaration when the current Social, Cultural and Economic knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples were also included in the intangible heritage. ICOMOS also evolved with the declarations of the UNESCO and in the Venice Charter the interdisciplinary and more inclusive management of intangible resources was revamped. It took nearly two decades and several deliberations to arrive at a consensus to include all aspects of intangible resources of the indigenous peoples as cultural heritage.

The Shanghai Charter of 2002 included the concerns of the culturally rich Indigenous communities of Asia Pacific and recommended for interdisciplinary approach to bring together the tangible and intangible heritage. The recommendations also aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the globalization and hence stressed on documenting the inventories and heritage of Indigenous Peoples. Assessing the needs of the local communities and capacity building through training the members of indigenous communities was also recommended. The charter had a mention of making use of all kinds of media-audio, visual, print and film for preservation and safeguarding of heritage and resources. The charter also recommend for promotion and active participation of public and private sectors to maximize the use of local expertise, resources and opportunities to safeguard resources.

Engagement and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

The UNESO guideline on engaging with Indigenous Peoples issued in the year 2018 has three parts; the first part talks about the rights of the indigenous people as defined in the United Nations declaration on the Rights of indigenous people (UNDRIP), the second part consists of application of the UNDRIP in the mandated areas, and the third part is a comprehensive detail of policy prescribed by UNESCO on engagements with Indigenous Peoples. The graphical representation of the prescribe engagement framework as prescribed in UNDRIP comprises of seven components: 1. Cultural Heritage, Knowledge and Languages, 2. Gender Equality, 3. Conservation and Protection of Environment, 4. Education and Development with Culture and Identity, 5. Self-determination, participation, free, prior and informed consent, 6. Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and 7. Equality and Non-discrimination. While mainstreaming the policies on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples there always remains a concern of integration of all the prescribed aspects of the UNDRIP based framework.³ For example the conservation and protection of environment is guided by different agencies and for Indigenous and Metropolitan population uniform policies can't be implemented. Even

the mandate of exploiting the Minor Forest Produces and sending the students to the formal schools are hindrances to the identity and culture of Indigenous Peoples in one or other way. Therefore, there needs to be a separate guideline for all aspects of the lives of Indigenous Peoples based on their needs and choices. The ecosystem development is considered one of the best community-grounded practices in many parts of the world to protect, safeguard and portray the cultural traits of the Indigenous Peoples in original settings. This practice strengthens and protects the cultural and heritage resource, provides relevant infrastructure to the Indigenous Communities for the conservation of the Indigenous Knowledge and also helps in developing a framework for the promotion of the values of conservation by resolving conflicts and maximizing the opportunities for sustainable livelihoods of the communities. The rights of the indigenous communities have been advocated at different levels in India the Scheduled Tribe communities have started exercising the right to information as well for information related to illegal mining and encroachment of scheduled areas.²

Indigenous Resources and Ownership Concerns of Indian Tribes

Indian Scheduled Tribes mostly depend on Non-Timber Forest Produces (NTFP) for their livelihood. Prior to 1950 the scheduled tribes had their own community controlled system of governing the use of common land. Post-independence this system was abolished by the Indian government and all forest lands were vested with the government and are subject to Indian Forest Act of 1927. The customary rights over common property that tribal people enjoyed for generations were not accepted. After several protests in different corners of the country by the tribal groups several legal provisions have been made to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Tribes. The Government of India believes that all its citizens are Indigenous and the preferred term for people with certain characteristics living in specified areas is "Scheduled Tribes". Therefore, in India the term Indigenous Peoples is not limited to Scheduled Tribes. The Indian Constitution in Article 366(25) refers to those communities as Scheduled Tribes who are "scheduled" in accordance with Article 342 through a declaration by the President. The Constitution of India recognizes those specific areas as "Scheduled Areas" where Scheduled Tribes live. A scheme for determining whether an individual belongs to a Scheduled Tribe has been laid down in Annual Report 2006-2007, published by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. The list of Scheduled Tribes is area-specific and therefore a community declared as a Scheduled Tribe in one state need not be so in another state. Majority of the tribal peoples in Central belt of India prefer to identify themselves as "Adivasi" but in the northeastern states indigenous communities prefer to call

themselves indigenous peoples.

Though the government believes that the land is most important resource for the Scheduled Tribes as it is associated with their livelihood, culture, identity and history but despite that the fact is that the Scheduled Tribes have been displaced the most post-independence. Scheduled Tribes are most impoverished in the country and are vulnerable to multiple threats which is resulting in a kind of genocide. The national average of people below poverty line is 33.8% but for the Scheduled Tribes it is more than 47%. The Scheduled Tribes are the only community in India who have got constitutional protection of their rights for the land but despite that the STs are mostly landless communities in India. 9.4% of the STs don't have land ownership. Another alarming fact about the Scheduled Tribes is that their rate of displacement is far more compared to national average. Of the total population which has got displaced post-independence 40% is the tribal population. This has happened because of the constructions of dams and mining activities in the Scheduled areas. As far as rehabilitation of such displaced Scheduled Tribes is concerned only 25% of the total displaced have got rehabilitated. The report of the Centre of Policy Research finds that the depletion of the forest cover is highest in the scheduled areas. About ninety percent of the mineral requirements of the Indian population gets fulfilled from the Scheduled areas.

The Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India have been the most marginalized, isolated and impoverished. Though several constitutional and legal provisions like The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA), Right to fair compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (RFCTLARR Act, 2013) are in place the purpose of bringing these acts is not accomplished. A National Monitoring Committee for Rehabilitation and Resettlement has been constituted for the purpose of reviewing and monitoring the implementation of rehabilitation and resettlement schemes and plans related to land acquisition under the RFCTLARR, 2013 and National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007. As per Section 41 (1), as far as possible, no acquisition of land shall be made in the Scheduled Areas. As per Section 41(2), where such acquisition does take place, it shall be done only as a demonstrable last resort. As per Section 41(3), in case of acquisition or alternation of any land in Scheduled Areas, the prior consent of the concerned Gram Sabha or the Panchayats or the autonomous District Councils, at the appropriate level in Scheduled Areas under the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution, as the case may be, shall be obtained, in all cases of land acquisition in such areas, including acquisition in case of urgency, before issue of a notification under this Act, or any other Central Act or a State Act for the time being in force. The RFCTLARR Act,

2013 also lays down procedure and manner of rehabilitation and resettlement. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Area) Act, 1996, also provides that the Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas or development projects and before resettling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas, the actual planning and implementation of the projects in the Scheduled Areas shall be coordinated at the State Level. Constitutional provision under Schedule-V also provide for safeguards against displacement of tribal population because of land acquisition etc. The Governor of the State which has scheduled Areas is empowered to prohibit or restrict transfer of land from tribals and regulate the allotment of land to members of the Scheduled Tribes in such cases. Land being a State subject, various provisions of rehabilitation and resettlement as per the RFCTLARR Act, 2013 are implemented by the concerned State Governments. The Scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 has been introduced to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, to provide for the trial of such offences and for the relief of rehabilitation of the victims of such offences for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. Wrongfully dispossessing members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes from their land or premises or interfering with the enjoyment of their rights, including forest rights, over any land or premises or water or irrigation facilities or destroying the crops or taking away the produce there from amount to offence of atrocities and are subject to punishment under the said Act. Apart from this a 3 judges' bench of Supreme Court in Orissa Mining Corporation Vs. Ministry of Environment and Forest & Others vide W.P.(c) 180 of 2011, held that forest approval cannot be granted for a development project without the informed consent of the Gram Sabhas, given after proper consideration in a duly convened Gram Sabha and passed by resolution. The Court stated that the Gram Sabha is also free to consider all the community, individual as well as cultural and religious claim. The Ministry of Mines, vide their letter dated 5th January, 2017 sent a letter to all State Governments regarding imposing of conditions in the lease deed in regard to FRA compliance in the cases covered under Section 10(A)(2) (c) of the Mines & Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act, 1957. In the said letter, it has been, inter-alia, mentioned that execution of lease deed shall not be construed to dilute any provision of FRA. Further, the Ministry of Environment and Forests vide their letter dated 03.08.2009 has informed all State Governments regarding diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. This letter includes that a letter from the State Government certifying that proposals for such diversion (with full details

of project and its implication, in vernacular/local languages) have been placed before each concerned Gram Sabha of forest-dwellers, who are eligible under the FRA.

FRA gives forest rights to Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who have been residing in such forests. The recognition and vesting of such forest rights under FRA is subject to the condition that such Scheduled Tribes or tribal communities or other traditional forest dwellers had occupied forest land before the 13th day of December, 2015. The State Governments/UTs have been issued advisories by this Ministry from time to time to carry out the strict and speedy implementation of provisions of the Forest Right Act, 2006 and Rules there under and to ensure that while processing the claims of Forest dwellers under the Act, no eligible claim is rejected. In addition, recently a letter dated 26.03.2019 was also issued to all States/ UTs indicating various directions issued by Ministry of Tribal Affairs regarding the implementation of FRA, 2006 circulated, to facilitate necessary action by the States/UT Governments.

The protection and ownership rights of the Scheduled Tribes in India is fragmented and not absolute. Even in the Samatha Judgment the Supreme Court of India made an exception that public sector units will be excluded from the provisions which prohibits exploitation of minerals and this fragment of verdict has largely been misused by state governments to allow exploitation by corporate mining groups of scheduled areas. At the time of independence and during the adoption of Indian Constitution also the tribal groups were not located at a fixed place and were not part of a geographically identified area which was considered as Scheduled Area. Since the protection as fragmented the non-tribal communities could settle in the scheduled areas and at the same time some of the Scheduled Tribes moved out of the Scheduled Areas. The mining and land acquisition laws of the country are contradictory with the constitutional provision of scheduled areas and hence to much extent the land rights of the Scheduled Tribes has been diluted. During the colonial period also the Scheduled Tribes were exploited and forced to dislocate in the name of integration and mainstreaming. The policy of identifying and recognizing the Scheduled Tribes as isolated groups was the conspiracy of British and the same has policy is being followed post-independence. The tribal communities have their distinct identities and are satisfied with it but in the name of mainstreaming their identity and distinctiveness is being attacked. The indigenous communities want to keep their traditions intact in their original form and develop it according to their own needs but the intervention of the government in the name of economic development is deforming their knowledge, culture, artefacts and rural technologies in order to meet market demands. In the name of green production again the forest resources are being

exploited at mass level and traditional practices of procuring the non-timber forest produces has started depleting. The Scheduled areas are being illegally encroached and the heavy mining is destroying the environment. It is therefore required to develop a cloud based environmental notification system for all the scheduled areas so that the green tribunals can take cognizance of it.⁴

Pre and Post-Independence Approaches of Administering Tribal Areas

The British categorized the Indian people arbitrarily into castes and tribes, apart from groups based on religion.⁶ Isolation, assimilation and integration are three approaches adopted pre and post-independence in the name of welfare of Tribes in India. The isolation approach adopted by British was aimed at keeping the tribal communities isolated and alienated from the mainstream. Though the principle behind isolation was non-interference but the real aim was to curb the protests of the tribes. The autonomy of the tribes was snatched by extending central administration of the British to the tribal areas. The revenues were collected from the tribal settlements. The tribes of Santalpargana and Chhotanagpur continuously revolted against the British administration during nineteenth century. The approach of assimilation was another treat to the cultural identity of the Indigenous communities in India. The third approach is integration adopted by the government of India post-independence. It aims at co-existence and adjustment between the tribes and non tribes leading to a responsible partnership. By adopting the policy of integration or progressive acculturation the Government has laid the foundation for equality, upward mobility, and economic viability and assured proximity to the national mainstream. This approach intends to fulfil the constitutional provisions of giving protection to the distinctive way of life of Scheduled Tribes and protecting them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation and discrimination and bringing them at par with the rest of the nation so that they may be integrated with the national life.

The Van Dhan model of Scheduled Tribe Empowerment

Protecting, promoting and safeguarding the culture of Indigenous Peoples requires a set of rights. Intellectual Property Rights is one among such rights which if exercised in a transparent manner can sustain the Indian Tribes and their livelihood. The Geographical Indicator (GI) tagging of the Tribal Products can add value to their knowledge in terms of sustainability and preservation. The government of India through the Van Dhan Scheme launched in 2018 has tagged some of the tribal products and awareness is being created through Entrepreneurship cum Skill Development Programs (ESDP). The Self Help Groups created with the

support of Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED). Till June 2021 TRIFED has funded projects worth INR 333 Crores under the Van Dhan Scheme. During the same period 2224 Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram (VDVK) have been organized in India's 174 districts with sizeable tribal population. Minor Forest Produce (MFP) development is the main target of the TRIFED under Van Dhan scheme for the economic empowerment of the Tribes. Indian Tribes derive 20 to 40% of their livelihood from Non-Timber Minor Forest Produce.

According to TRIFED the MFPs have a potential of producing 10 million workdays annually in the country and it would benefit particularly the tribal women who are the major gatherers of the MFPs. This is but a single aspect of safeguarding the interests of the Indian tribes. Still the benefits of the MFPs go to the middlemen and the complete potential has not been harnessed. The tools being set to Tribal areas for mass production of MFPs is again a threat to livelihood of the tribal communities as less people get employed in the production process. In the process of making the MFPs cost effective the tribal people have lost employment and middlemen have started earning. As the MFPs are mostly organic products the pricing and marketing should be done in such a way that it helps tribal people sustain and grow.

The Model of Community-Conserved Tribal Areas

Mendha-Lekha Village in Gadchiroli districts of Maharashtra is a living example of community conserved area where the livelihood of the villagers largely depends on non-timber forest produces and the villagers have conserved around eighteen hundred hectare of land where eighty percent of the land is under forest cover and it houses some of the endangered species of plants and animals. Between 1950 and 1980 this village was also at the verge of extinction because of the state-sponsored commercial extraction activities. The government had a plan to create a dam also in the nearby area which was another threat to the tribal communities of the adjoining villages. The anti-dam protests of the 1985 forced the government to shelve the project and this success of the tribal communities motivated them to take decisions and act on it at community level. The three key village level institutions have helped Mendha-Lekha village keep their identity and resources intact- The Gram Sabha, The Mahila Madal and the Abhyas Gats. The Gram Sabha of the Mendha-Lekha village takes several crucial decisions. These decisions include the resolve that all domestic requirements of the village would be met from the surrounding forests without paying any fee to the government. The villagers would follow a set of rule for sustainable extraction of non-timber forest produces. The

villagers also strictly follow the mandate of non-exploitation of forest resources for commercial purposes. Van Suraksha Samiti (Forest Protection Committee) regularly patrols the forest area. This committee has two members each from all households of the village.

The Model of Promoting and Protecting Community-developed Knowledge

The indigenous knowledge can get recognized and sustained at global level by giving proper credit to the actual innovators who have done so through their own genius without any outside help.⁵ The Honey Bee Network which an Indian initiative to recognize and promote the Indigenous Knowledge no has a global network of Indigenous innovators. The network believes in providing proper attribution to the innovators of the knowledge. This practice has protected the Intellectual Property Rights of the owners of the knowledge or innovations as well as it is promoting the innovation of rural technologies for solving the community needs without outside help. Over the past thirty-one years this network has lived its principles and the network has collaborated with like-minded innovators, institutions and organizations. The prime partners of the Honey Bee Network are National Innovation Foundation (NIF), Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network (GIAN), Network of Gram Vidyapeeths, and Society for Research Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions (SRISTI) and many more. The National Innovation Foundation was launched in the year 2000 by the Government of India and is a unit of Department of Science and Technology (DST). The aim of NIF is to strengthen the innovations at grassroots level and mobilizing the intellectual property protection. It also has a national register of innovations to properly record the innovations at grassroots level. The incubators of the NIF help the innovators reach out to the bigger market with their innovations. The Shodh Yatrainsiative of the NIF traces the development of Traditional Knowledge which has enriched the lives of indigenous peoples and has also helped in conservation of the biodiversity. The Honey Bee newsletter published in English and local languages comprises of the Innovations identified, scouted and documented by NIF. The NIF has engaged the students of the local communities in scouting and documenting the traditional knowledge and grassroots innovations. NIF also supports and promotes the traditional food festival organized by SRISTI with the help of GIAN. This food festival is named Sattvik. For all the entries of innovations into the national register, the NIF takes prior informed consent. This initiative has developed trust between the communities owning Indigenous Knowledge and the NIF.

The Model of Protecting and Promoting the Traditional Artisans

Kala Raksha, which is the brainchild of American origin

museologist Judy Frater and Indian museologist Prakash Bhanani, is a perfect model for preserving the traditions of Indigenous communities. Founded in Kutch district of Gujarat in the year 1991 this trust has developed a museum of textiles named Kala Raksha Textile museum which involves the members of the communities owning the textile presenting their own culture. The museum encourages the collection and exhibition of traditional arts, embroideries, costumes and jewelry. In 2005 tis trust founded Kala Raksha Vidyalaya (KRV), the first design school of India for the artisans. The curriculum of this school is designed for traditional artisans. Kala Raksha's educational initiatives are aimed at making artisans capable of earning. The women artisans have formed self-help groups with the help of Kala Raksha and they keep a record of earnings. This self-help group grants loans to its members. This model can be adopted by the government for promoting the art and craft of the Scheduled Tribes in other parts of the country as well.

The Ghosaldanga-Bishnubati Model of Tribal Development

Understanding the paradox of Santal culture and modern development, the educated group of Santals have started a non-formal Santal School, 'Rolf Schoembs Vidyashram', where Santal children receive their education in their mother-tongue and gradually switch over to Bengali as the medium of education.¹ The curriculum exposes the students to their own culture and tradition: to the history, folklore, the festivals, and the music of the Santal tribe. In the first two school years the students are taught in their mother-tongue Santali. Later, the students gradually switch to the mainstream languages and subjects like Bengali, English, Science, and Mathematics. The schools and hostels are built inside the village or within one kilometer radius of the villages so that the students can visit their families to take part in the household work when necessary. This helps them to get exposure to the positive and negative aspects of Santal life besides absorbing modern education. At the end of the village a living museum of Santal Culture has also been established which educates the next generation about the rich culture and tradition that their ancestors have left for them. Dr. Boro Baski who was the first in his village to receive a formal education is making sure that other members of his community also get educated and give back to their community. Dr. Baski says "Right from the early days of schooling, tribal children are made to believe that it is only by abandoning their language and culture that they can be successful in life. Because of such monolithic teaching methods in most schools, it often becomes difficult to convince young Santals that it is indeed important to preserve for posterity our own objects and artifacts, such as the Banam, which is an ancient wooden musical instrument of the community. It is also hard for the youth to recognize,

let alone appreciate, that this instrument carries within itself the legacy of their forefathers' artistic sense and traditional wisdom".

Conclusion

The villages where the indigenous resources are managed and safeguarded by the active participation of the Gram Sabhas are more protected and less exploited as in case of Mendha-Lekha village in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. But the Gram Sabhas are not that active in all the tribal villages of India. The legal provisions of safeguarding the Scheduled areas are fragmented and the exemption granted to public sector units for exploitation of minerals has heavily been misused. The initiatives to safeguard the Indigenous Knowledge by the NIF, Honey Bee Network, SRISTI, Kala-Raksha and Ghosaldanga-Bishnubatitrust are worth appreciating but are limited. Van Dhan model of empowerment initiated in 2018 by the TRIFED though empowers the Scheduled Tribes but the number of beneficiaries is limited and the remuneration they get as gatherers is not enough to sustain. The community-owned initiatives should be promoted to safeguard the scheduled areas and the indigenous knowledge owned by the Scheduled tribes by empowering them through education and training in conservation practices suitable to their resources.

Recommendation

The government should recognize the need to support the livelihoods of the Tribal communities as well as foster the more long term goal of cultural pride and identity building. It should run comprehensive livelihood development program for supplementing their existing resources. The focus should be in assisting local communities in the development and management of community based eco-cultural activities by strengthening the capacity of communities through required training on conservation of indigenous resources. Over past few decades the tribal communities in India have suffered displacements, destruction of their forests and erosion of their culture and identity. The rights of tribal peoples have been largely ignored in the process of development following a top-down approach. The real conservation efforts can work on ground only when the approach is bottom-up. Unless the tribes get the right of self-determination it will be difficult to protect and promote their dialects, knowledge, culture, beliefs, skills and practices. Gram Sabhas in the Scheduled Areas should be made competent enough to prevent alienation of land and to take appropriate actions to restore any unlawful alienation as in the case of Mendha-Lekha village. The Samatha judgment should strictly be followed so that the rights of mines and mineral resources are not transferred to non-tribal, company, corporation-aggregate or any other firm.

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