

## 1.2.2. Situation... We the People

The polity and governance in the post-sovereign state, economic justice is denied as growth never trickles down but gets accumulated among few. Its maximum impact is felt unorganised sector and socially excluded community. As identified in the beginning of perspective plan, Dalits, Tribal, women and children are key focus of SBSS initiatives to enable them speak out and create required conditions.

The development and transformation of the Indian Society for last six decades has been extremely negative to the progress of marginalised in India that it just reflects what Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* had to say about people in poverty. He shares that the dispossessed drift into what he describes 'culture of silence'. He came to realize that "their ignorance and lethargy was the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social and political domination - and of the paternalism - of which they were victims. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were kept 'submerged' in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible."

The marginalized and oppressed communities in India, especially the tribal and women have already been swallowed by abysmal "culture of silence" where by they increasingly accept the ill-effects of development as well as the structural causes of their oppression to which India society and institutions are know for...

### ***Broader economic context***

India continues to be a land of contradictions and complexities. It is the world's fourth largest economy but is ranked 127th in Human Development Index 2005 (UNDP 2005). During the past one and a half decade, the economy in India has grown at an impressive pace in aggregate terms; however, new challenges have cropped up due to the changing role of the State and markets becoming the dominant force in governance as well as social affairs. In favour of corporate commercialisation and liberalization the present government passed the Patents Act, it justifies genetically modified organisms and is ready to privatise almost every public service. On several occasions, the national government has expressed that it is not in need of overseas aid, and has turned down any gesture of international help (e.g. tsunami) but unfortunately has managed to overlook thousands of deaths due to malnutrition and disease and thousands of suicides because of appalling impoverishment due to the rapid neo-liberal restructuring of the economy As per the latest Human Development Report (2004) of the UNDP, India belongs to the category with 'medium' human development. The life expectancy at birth is around 63.7 years, the average adult literacy rate 61 % and the GDP per capita 2,670 US \$ per person. India's position has dropped down to 127 from 115 since India ranks 103 in the Gender Development

### ***The situation of the unorganised sector***

The Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the present Government promised to initiate measures for the welfare of the unorganised workers and the need to "enhance the welfare and well-being of farmers, farm labour and workers, particularly those in the unorganised sector and assure a secure future for their families in every respect." As a follow up to this promise, the Government of India, constituted the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) in 2004. This study highlighted various issues with regard to poverty and the increase in the unemployment among the unorganized sector. Its finding states that over the decades while the percentage of the population below the poverty line has come down, in 2004-2005 77 per cent people, totalling 836 million had an income less than twice the official poverty line or below Rs. 20 per day per capita. These are the poor and vulnerable segment of the Indian population. About 79 per cent of the unorganised workers, 88 per cent of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 80 per cent of the OBC and 84 per cent of the Muslims belong to this category of the poor and vulnerable. Contrary to the trend in the number of people below the official poverty line, the number of people in this segment has steadily increased over the years. Further, the commission has compared the prevailing wages to two norms, viz. Rs. 66 (recommended by the Ministry of Labour) and Rs. 49 in rural areas and Rs. 67 in urban areas (based on NCRL, 1991). Using the lower norm, the Commission found to its dismay that 40 to 50 per cent of men workers and 81 to 87 per cent of women workers get wages below this figure. If we take Rs. 66 as a norm, more than 85 per cent of all rural workers get wages below this standard.

### *Dalits*

As per the 2001 census, Dalits in India constitute of 170 million people i.e. about 16.5 % of the Indian population Most Dalits continue to live in extreme poverty, without land or opportunities for better employment or education. With the exception of a minority who have benefited from India's policy of quotas in education and government jobs, Dalits are relegated to the most menial of tasks, as manual scavengers, removers of human waste and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers, and cobblers. Dalit children make up the majority of those sold into bondage to pay off debts to upper-caste creditors. Of the Indian Poor, 40 % are land less agricultural labourers and out of it most are Dalits. According to the 2001 census, 77 percent of the Dalit workforce is in the primary (agricultural) sector of the economy. Land is the prime asset in rural areas that determines an individual's standard of living and social status. Those who own land often fall into the category of marginal landowners. Lack of access to land makes Dalits economically vulnerable. Issues related to *Gairaan* and *Gaothaan* in Maharashtra are pointers in case. Attack on Dalit community in Vadinge in Kolhapur district is manifestation of discrimination and denial of justice.

The exclusion of the Dalits becomes more problematic when the institutions, which are supposed to be the protectors, become the oppressors. That is why most of the policies launched for their upliftment have been utter failures -whether it is distribution of Patta for land or distribution of food grains from the Public Distribution System shops or construction of houses under Indira *Awas Yojna*. SBSS, through its involvement with the communities has observed that the rural areas where Dalits are living lack drinking water facilities and other basic amenities. Apart from these in several places they are not

allowed to take drinking water from the common taps provided by the government in towns and villages, and they are assaulted and injured when they protest against the denial. These incidents often exacerbate and drift into serious communal violence. Kulwant Masih, a bonded labourer in Amritsar was thrashed and battered by his landlord is case how denial of opportunities and structural support for caste based social and economic hierarchy.

### *Tribals*

Tribal people form over 8% of India's population, ie over 84 million people according to the 2001 census. Despite special protection under the Constitution like the 5th and the 6th Schedules, tribal communities are under great threat. Indigenous groups have little access to public facilities such as health care and education and waves of displacement have been threatening them since the time of independence. For tribal communities any social change derives significant impacts on their identity as a community. Though the tribals inhabit very resource rich areas, yet they are one of the most marginalised of groups without access and control over these resources. The marketisation process has deeply impacted their culture of survival: both from the perspective of their livelihood as well as their cultural heritage and community oriented value systems. Hence in this context the affirmation of tribal identity vis-à-vis social change really constitutes their struggle for survival with dignity: their meaningful participation in decision making processes that affects their livelihood.

### *SBSS involvement with the community exhibit External and Internal Pressures impacting on Identity of the tribal leading to alienation External Forces*

- The major threat is that of displacement: not only project displacement but resource displacement (land alienation, deforestation, depletion of natural resources, etc.). In most tribal areas of India, non-tribal intrusion in the last century has been extremely high. As the commercial interests in land increases so do forces of land transfers, formal and informal.
- Increased exposure to market forces has resulted in these communities becoming more vulnerable and victims of these forces. Policies are governed by these forces and militate against their survival interests Communal forces, which adversely affect the community bond and belief systems of these societies.
- Mainstream ideological forces, which affect the self-image of tribal societies, the needs and aspirations are affected particularly in villages that are exposed to mainstream culture.

### *Internal Forces*

- Cultural erosion is manifested not only in the gradual loss of institutional memory of dance, songs, customs but much more in the loss of traditional knowledge systems and customary law which contributed to the livelihood systems of these communities and safeguarded their 'survival with dignity'.
- Erosion of institutions, which played a role of sustaining the tribal collective identity: customary law, which settled disputes according to norms. These are changing.

- Erosion of those specific norms, which safeguarded the rights of individuals and the collective rights of tribal societies.
- Erosion of those elements, which were humanizing in character: the worldview, which was based on democratic and collective principles of self-reliance.
- The government approach is part of the problem as the national policy framework related to development projects and priorities militates often against the livelihood interest of tribals.