

Industrialization in the Terai and its Impact on the Bhoksas

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The Terai area in Kumaon forms an important part of the Central Himalaya. Known to be a fertile region, Terai along with Bhabhar region stands out as a major area of economic productivity. The present study focuses on the position of a tribe, Bhoksa inhabiting this area alongside the strong and the powerful non Bhoksa who have grown to become powers to reckon with.

Development, welfare (and similar terms), amelioration of problems of a tribe such as the Bhoksa, ensuring quality living for them are issues to be pondered upon and discussed against the backdrop of the whole canvass of the area of their habitat; its ecology, productivity and the "others" living alongside the Bhoksa.

The Area:

The terms Terai and Bhabhar apply to the broad stretch of foothill country at the northern margin of the plains. E.T. Atkinson (1974) mentions that the Terai comprises a long and narrow strip of country stretching up to about 145 km. It is bounded on the north by Bhabhar, on the south by Pilibhit, Bareilly, Moradabad and Rampur districts, on the east by the Sharda River and on the west by the Bijnor district. Bhabhar is the between the Sharda river on the Nepal frontier on the east, and the Baur river and Kaladhungi town on the west.

The Early Inhabitants:

In the era before the independence of India, Terai was a marshy area known for its dense forests. Continuous downpour gave rise to ditches, ponds and swamps here making it a breeding ground for mosquitoes. It was unfit for human habitation on account of Malaria. The presence of wild animals further discouraged its colonization. The tribes – Tharu and Bhoksa were the earliest cultivators who settled in the Terai. The Bhoksa and the Tharus trace their history to a common origin. They both believe that their roots can be traced back to royal family on the female side. The Tharus believe that the ruler of Terai was defeated by some invader in the ancient past. After their defeat the women of the royal family in order to save their honour from the invaders took shelter in the forests. They were accompanied by their attendants who

were 'chamars' and 'sais' (low castes in the Hindu caste hierarchy). Intermarriage with these men gave rise to two distinct groups – Tharus and Bhoksas. The Tharus are the descendents of the 'chamars' and the Bhoksas descended from the 'sais'. The Bhoksas believe that their ancestor was Raja Jagatdeo of Rajasthan. He had two sons – Chittaur and Nandhaur (Hasan 1979.21). Tharus are believed to be the descendents of Chittaur and the Bhoksas the descendents of Nandhaur. The Tharus and the Bhoksa are of the view that Raja Jagatdeo and his followers came to Terai to seek shelter from the Mughals after being defeated by them.

BHOKSA:

Bhoksa, what Niranjana Ghatak calls it as a "Little Known Tribe" (2003) calls for attention of the planners and policy makers as it is a conspicuous example of a community which has not been able to enjoy the fruits of development of the area (Terai) which it inhabits. Bhuksar, the main area of the habitation of the Bhoksas includes the Gadarpur, Bajpur, Kashipur and Ramnagar blocks in Western Terai.

Several events in history on the national and international levels induced changes in the area and life in the Terai. Partition of India brought in the whole issue of the resettlement of the refugees. Further, the Second World War had created an acute shortage of food grains. Amidst this scenario the Central and Provincial Governments had to act immediately and they started taking frantic measures to increase the production of food grains. The Terai, a potential area for immense

agricultural growth was offered to all who could till it and add the gains to the exchequer. It was realized that the tribes living here had neither the means and knowledge nor the temperament to put the fertile land to optimum use. The subsistence practices of the Bhoksa were of little concern to a government that put national interests before local interests.

The Provincial Government invited the industrious outsiders to settle in the Terai. H.S.Saksena writes that in view of high productivity of land in Terai committees were appointed under the chairmanship of K.N.Katju, P.N.Marsh and G.B. Pant which recommended that Terai should be open for colonization... An exodus of enterprising people having the knack for growth and business started entering the Terai. These were hill dwellers of Uttar Pradesh (Paharis), Punjabi refugee settlers, Bengali refugee settlers who came from East Pakistan after 1947 and 1963-64, repatriates from Burma, ex servicemen, agricultural graduates, freedom fighters who were given land by the Government, Jats and Rai Sikhs coming from Punjab. They were allotted land in the Terai and even usurped the Bhoksas' land in great measure. .

Industrial Growth in the Kumaon Terai:

The Terai emerged as a potential area for agricultural growth and industries during the post independence era. This marshy area of dense forests stands transformed into a granary of agricultural produce. It developed at the hands of the migrants mentioned above out of whom those coming from West Pakistan – the Rai Sikhs and the Punjabis who were skilled agriculturists diversified their produce adding cash crops to cereal crops to generate more money. This ushered in a period which saw

the growth of agriculture based industries in the Terai. The natural resources in the environment have been utilized to the fullest. Growth of sugarcane was accelerated and six sugar factories came up in the area. Along with the thriving sugar industry Glycol India Limited Company has come up in a big way at Kashipur which utilizes the by product of the sugar factories. Molasses available in abundance as a by product of sugar factories is used as raw material by India Glycols. Terai also proved to be a fertile ground for setting up of paper mills. These came up at a time when the country was facing a major shortage of printing paper. Endowed with dense forests, the Terai was also capitalized as a storehouse of timber. The SNT Plywood Company at Gaddarpur and furniture industry at Haldwani are examples of business running along the lines of timber. With time, the industrialization in the Terai saw even more diversification. This is mainly attributed to the affluent migrants in Terai who started the non agro based industries in their quest for more lucrative ventures. Their enthusiasm found support in the training facilities provided by the Government.

Bhoksas and Development:

The industrial development in the Kumaon Terai thus discussed, it becomes imperative to see where the Bhoksas are placed amidst this scenario. According to the 2001 census (source: Office of the Registrar General, India) their population is 46,771. A closer study of their lot reveals that they are shrouded by abject poverty, are largely illiterate, ignorant and confined to the world of their own. Large scale usurpation of their land , failure of the law to do justice to them coupled with their own temperament and psyche as well as weak leadership have been the chief factors for the so called

'primitiveness' of the Bhoksas. Robert Goodland discusses at length the phases of integration of tribes into the so called mainstream (1990:53). Bhoksas can be said to come under the semi – isolated tribal groups in intermittent contact category.

In case of the Bhoksas, a gross mistake had been made in the past when the urge to earn revenue from the Terai drove the then Government to not only completely neglect the simple tribes living there but to also regularize the trespass on the land inhabited by the Bhoksas. Land alienation is a major problem of the Bhoksas. The land less Bhoksas earn their living by working as agricultural labourers or by taking land from other Bhoksas on 'theka' or 'batai', i.e. lending out of land on rent or sharing the agricultural yield. The aim of the present paper is not to show the Bhoksas as complete victims or the non Bhoksas and the Government as complete tormentors simply because both the sides eventually represent shades of grey. Injustice and exploitation of the Bhoksas in the past cannot be taken as the only reason for the poor state of the Bhoksas. Rawat (1998) informs that the Bhoksas consider it below their dignity to take up government jobs or work in industries. Addiction to alcohol, a sense of reconciliation with the present state of hand to mouth existence, lack of we feeling to make their voices be heard, are factors responsible for their lagging far behind in the pace of development. Their world revolves around their life cycle rituals, which take them to fraudulent local money lenders. According to Amir Hasan (1979) the incidence of indebtedness among the Bhoksas was as high as 83 per cent. However ignorance is not bliss for the Bhoksas. They come across as a frustrated lot which has lost the will and the courage to make its presence felt in the area of their living. Their lack of confidence in

themselves and a growing feeling of alienation among them is largely due to the way the others treat them. That they are a tribe is automatically taken as a people who are “no good”. The Terai is dominated by the migrants yet even those who are less in number in the Bhoksa dominated villages call the shots. Economic affluence, having the experience of always being a part society (part of the larger whole) which makes them smarter than the Bhoksas and their nexus with the seats of authority and power, have gone a long way in making them masters of the area. However some educated youth and elites among the Bhoksas (although few in number) do show signs of reviving their community and of giving the message that all is not lost. (Ranjan 2008)

The industrial development in the Terai has on the one hand opened up many avenues for employment for all, but it has also given rise to under currents of dissatisfaction growing among the Bhoksas. They feel that they have been left out in the entire process and have been denied new opportunities to grow. A major reason for them harbouring such a notion is that “almost all the industrial units being founded on the authority of the licenses issued by the State and Central Governments, the overwhelming majority of them are owned by outsiders” (Rawat1998:183). Many of the Bhoksas applied for similar licenses but were not obliged. They say that as they are a tribe and have no money to grease the palm of the authorities they were denied the license. They further accuse the migrant entrepreneurs of not employing them in factories and getting their own men to do the factory chores. The industry personnel, on the other hand say that the Bhoksas lack the skills of being employed as skilled labourers.

Several vocational training centers have been opened up in the area to facilitate employment. The Regional Training Center at Kaladhungi imparts training in various

vocations such as spinning , weaving, bee-keeping, poultry keeping, carpentry, fruit preservation etc. Training in spinning, weaving, dyeing and printing of clothes is given by the training centre at Jaspur. The Government Polytechnic at Nainital caters to the training in various industrial activities. The Industrial Training Centre at Haldwani is a centre where one can learn the skills like repairing vehicles and watches, tailoring, carpentry, hosiery making and also gain the expertise of becoming an electrician. Thus there is no dearth of such vocational skills providing centers. Further financial assistance is provided by the Pradeshik Industrial Investment Corporation, Uttar Pradesh (PICUP) and the Uttar Pradesh Finance Corporation (UPFC) at concessional rate of interest varying from 11% to 4%. Unemployed youth between 18 and 35 years of age with minimum education up to the tenth standard with annual family income up to rupees ten thousand are given loans up to rupees thirty five thousand at low interest rates for starting a vocation. (Rawat 1998).

It was observed that the Bhoksas have not been gaining out of the opportunities mentioned above. Belwal Spinning Mill which is less than a kilometer away from the Bhoksa populated villages of Peepalsana, Lalitpur, Lalpuri, Beria and Thari (villages in the Ramnagar block) has no permanent Bhoksa employee. They are employed as temporary unskilled labourers and soon are out of job. Similarly India Glycol Limited – a developed industrial township approximately sixteen kilometers from these villages has some temporary Bhoksa workers working for it. The Bhoksas expressed reluctance to cover long distances to reach the training centers. Their dim enthusiasm can be gauged from the fact that they are not eager to send their children to a school in the neighbouring village if they do not have a school in their own village. The

Primary School building in the village Peepalsana stands only in name. The Government's failure in making the school function coupled with the lack of zeal of the Bhoksas of Peepalsana has resulted in the fact that only two youths of the village were found to be educated. They were undergraduate students studying at Kashipur. Apart from them not a single child of the village was going to school at the time the present research was being conducted (between 1998 and 2002). The Bhoksas have been found to be oblivious of the loan facilities provided by the organizations such as PICUP. Chandan Singh from the village Gularbhoj is one of the very few well informed Bhoksas who admits that Bhoksas themselves are to a very large extent themselves responsible for their poor state. Thus a general conclusion arrived at is that undoubtedly the Bhoksas have been wronged in the past but they themselves are equally responsible for their backwardness. However an objective analysis of industrial development in the area draws home to the researcher that the plight of the Bhoksas cannot be justified by simply stating that they are laid back and unambitious or that they could not keep up with the talent and vigour of the enterprising non Bhoksas in the area. A closer look at the whole scenario reveals that in an area endowed with all the attributes which make a locale economically very fruitful, there lives a community whose study points out why it is a "Primitive Tribal Group" . The Terai area of Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar stands out as an area of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. Despite the words like 'law', 'Justice', 'Protective discrimination', 'democracy', etc. form the basic fabric of the welfare nation which India is upheld to be, the law of the jungle is well at play (in a rather subtle way) in the Terai. Simply put, the overall thriving economy of the Terai puts a blanket on the far from thriving state of the Bhoksas. However the saga doesn't ends

here. One needs to delve deeper into the whole issue and look for the ways and means to bring about a positive change in the lives of a people. Society can never be said to be a healthy one if it sees growth only in terms of numbers and overlooks the smaller groups in the haste of applauding the powerful and affluent ones. It is indeed crucial to identify the causes for the problems and frustrations of the weak, accept that both internal as well as external factors are responsible for the same and then suggest ways to find a way out to end the deadlock and the growing polarity between the haves and the have-nots of the area.

Bhoksa has been categorized as a "Primitive Tribal Group" under the Constitution of India, a term which smacks of ethnocentrism and has invited the wrath of the fraternity of Anthropologists. It is yet another topic of discussion which I would not delve into at present. My concern is the reasons which label a tribe as a PTG. The characteristic features for their identification are, pre agricultural level of technology or rudimentary level of agricultural technology, extremely low levels of literacy and gradual decrease in population. (The first two characteristics are more representative of PTGs). H.S Saksena highlights the significant features of the strategy formulated by the State to provide the PTGs with land and skill so that they can take up agriculture, horticulture, plantations etc. A vital point of this strategy is that "large area multipurpose societies (LAMPS) with suitable adoption have to be set up for catering to the needs of specific PT Groups, rather than an area, so that only those activities which have relevance to the PTG can be taken up. A suitable programme for the advance of consumption credit, linking it up with their economic activities and also supplying them

with their meager household needs to be drawn up by these LAMPS". (Saksena 2006:174). Implementation of this point in letter and spirit in the Bhoksa inhabited area is indispensable as organization like LAMPS is also found to dominate by the interests of non Bhoksa elites.

At the outset the very fact that such a tribe is living in an area of immense agricultural and non agricultural growth makes one accept that the usage of the word "developed" for an area is over simplistic. The present research again reiterates that the terms such as 'development', 'welfare', 'quality living', etc., cannot be defined merely in terms of numbers or statistics or by looking at the elites of the area who take the centre stage and remain in full view. Rather one needs to go backstage, to those in the dark and on the fringe, to know where they stand on the scale of quality of life. This however is seldom taken into consideration. Michael M Cernia calls for attention towards "putting people first" (1990:3) and Perret and Lenthem write, "do not forget that people matter" (1990:41). These have been oft repeated wake up calls to remind the programme formulators and their executioners not to lose sight of the individuals in the quest for achieving national or global goals. Usually the interest of the larger whole shuts off the concern towards the smaller pockets on the periphery, particularly if the group concerned has a low lying attitude. The state of Bhoksa is such that calls for extra thinking, extra implementation of provisions and extra efforts if the word 'primitive' has to be done away with.

Fieldwork among the Bhoksas brought to

the fore that very little has been done in the name of development of the Bhoksas. No NGOs were found to be working there. Selection of the beneficiaries by the Gaon Panchayat was arbitrary in nature and based on appeasement policy. "Out of the total Buksa population the workers constitute 31.90 percent (56.83 percent male and 43 percent female). Out of them 93.35 percent are engaged in primary sector – (62.21 percent as cultivator, 26.14 percent as agricultural labourers, 1.65 percent are engaged in household industry i.e. basketry while the remaining 5 percent are engaged in various occupations"(Bisht 2006:109). There is complete absence of training programmes run by the Government to train the Bhoksas towards learning the use of superior technology for agricultural pursuits. Selling of High Yielding Variety of seeds in black and hoarding the ration to be sold at subsidized rates by the Cooperative Society in the village Peepalsana has been reported by many Bhoksa respondents. Struggle for existence takes precedence over struggle for education. Amidst these colossal challenges Bhoksas find refuge in the world of their own. The youths among them do show spark of psychologically and not just geographically integrating and competing with the non tribal world (Ranjan 2008) but the Bhoksas by and large need to be motivated to shed their feelings of inadequacy and inferiority which they cover up by drawing more and more in their shells, away from the world outside which for them has been exploitative and formidable.

Conclusion:

Anthropologists have often been wrongly accused of perpetuating the researches on the tribes in order to salvage the identity of their discipline. Further they have been blamed of maintaining their hegemony over tribal studies. Economist Arup Maharatna writes that "Indian tribal studies, mostly done by Anthropologists, have remained largely closed to potentially useful influences from other disciplines such as economics and demography, resulting in the predilections, orientations, and methodology adopted by the Indian anthropological discourse on tribes."(2005:43). In an age of interdisciplinary approach to understand the ways of a culture, Anthropology believes in and welcomes the give and take between disciplines, but it's main concern is to draw attention towards the specific than the general as he/she strongly believes that every cultural group has its own exclusive history and tradition, it's specific felt needs and no matter how small it may be in numbers it calls for empirical research in order to understand how far it is in sync with the 'other cultures' around.

Research on the industrial development in the Kumaon Terai and its impact on the Bhoksas brings to the fore the necessity to understand that the root causes of the frustration and dissatisfaction of the tribe in question lie much deeper than a cursory look can assess. It appeals to the planners and those sitting at the helm of affairs having the authority and position to bring about positive change in the life of a people, to take a pause and focus their attention towards quality living of a group rather than quickly walk away, giving their nod of approval and labeling the whole

habitat (Terai in this case) as rich and fertile rendering growth in numbers. The present issue is one of pace. The pace at which the Bhoksas are advancing needs a push to get accelerated and the push has to come from the Government which needs to see how provisions on paper are translated into practice in letter and spirit.

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