

per cent of tribal people were living below the poverty line, almost 20 per cent than the rest of the country. The poverty figures were 37.7 and 60.0 per cent respectively in the year 2004-05. The scenario has been similar in the sphere of education and health. The literacy rate of tribes in 2001 was 47 per cent as compared to 69 per cent for the general population. Moreover, as per the National Family Health Survey, 2005-06, the Infant Mortality rate was 62.1 per 1000 live births among tribes, and Under-five Mortality was as high as 95.7 per 1000 live births.

In acknowledgement of the marginality of tribal communities, a number of Committees and Commissions have been constituted over the years by the government to look into the issues facing tribal communities, apart from numerous other bodies which have examined the status of tribes as part of broader thematic investigations. One of the first committees set up in this regard post-1947 was the Elwin Committee which was to examine the functioning of Multi-Purpose Development Blocks, the basic administrative unit for all tribal development programmes. This was followed by the U.N. Dhebar Commission, constituted in 1960 to address the overall situation of tribal groups, including the issue of land alienation in tribal areas. The Lokur committee, set up in 1965, looked at matters relating to the scheduling of groups as Scheduled Tribes. It was this committee which delineated the criteria for scheduling, which continues to operate to this day. The Shilu Ao committee, 1966, like the Elwin committee, addressed the issue of tribal development and welfare.

The 1970s, too, saw the constitution of several committees to address tribal problems and it was on the basis of the recommendations of some of these committees that the Tribal Sub-Plan approach of the government emerged. The committees constituted in the more recent years have been the Bhuria Committee (1991) and the Bhuria Commission (2002-2004). The Bhuria Committee recommendations paved the way for the enactment of the PESA Act, 1996, while the Bhuria Commission focused on a wide range of issues from the Fifth Schedule to tribal land and forests, health and education, the working of Panchayats and the status of tribal women. The most recent committees have been the Bandopadhyay Committee, which looked at development and governance in Left-Wing Extremist areas, and the Mungekar Committee, which examined issues of administration and governance.

The issues that the above mentioned Committees have dealt with fall broadly into two categories: development and protection. And yet, on both these issues, the outcome for tribal communities has been mixed. Through the last six decades, the State has emphasized development while doing little to enhance the protections provided in the Constitution through the everyday practice of statecraft. Rather, the protective measures have been violated by the very State which is supposed to ensure the enforcement of these protections. It is this which largely explains the marginal status of tribal communities.