

Original Paper

Democracy of the Oppressed: A Perspective from below *Alternative Perspective, Flawed Policies and Perceptions towards Adivasis—Past, Present and Future*

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Received: July 16, 2020

Accepted: July 28, 2020

Online Published: August 5, 2020

doi:10.22158/wjssr.v7n3p68

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjssr.v7n3p68>

Book Review: Rupavath, R. (2020). *Democracy of the Oppressed: Adivasi Poverty and Hunger*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, ISBN-10: 1527548430 and ISBN-13: 978 1527548435.

Dr. Ramdas Rupavath as a Jawaharlal Nehru (JNU) trained Political scientist, and specialist whose work is cited and reviewed by distinguished and renowned academicians from South Asian Laws, School of Law (SOAS), University of London, London, U.K. is acknowledged as an influential academician whose scholarly work has been extremely cited in helping to measure the micro policy performance, Ramdas Rupavath is well placed to comment on the current state of India's public policy issues and their implementations. In "Democracy of the Oppressed: Adivasi, Poverty and Hunger" (Rupavath, 2020), additionally tutors the mantle of a perspective from below as he seeks to lay out his case for what ails the democracy and what needs to be done for the policy issues that have been prevalent there from the very long times while regenerating the tribal communities.

The book consists of more than 300 pages (311 as cited in google e-book) with separate introduction and consists of 9 chapters that through the examination of various policies and tactics try to examine the political-economic approach that mostly looks back at 200 years of the country's political journey since colonial period through 2020, while it is established that colonial period left the marginalised groups in deterioration. This worthy scholarly contribution "Democracy of the Oppressed: Adivasi Poverty and Hunger" published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing and authored by Prof. Ramdas who has been known to the outer world as one of the renowned and distinguished social scientists and

currently is holding a chair of Head at the Centre for Human Rights besides serving as a Professor in the Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad examines and studies the impact of the various centrally sponsored schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the socio-economic status of the deprived tribal communities belonging to Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha that are aimed and targeted at the welfare of the tribal communities, besides fully exploring other initiatives launched by the central government like Public Distribution System (PDS) which in the contemporary era has evolved as a system to manage food scarcity and to distribute food grains at most affordable prices to each and every section in the society irrespective of any discrimination (Rupavath, 2016a, 2020). Most of the essential and significant commodities that are highly crucial for human sustenance include food grains like rice, wheat, maize, sugar and other household items like kerosene etc. are distributed through a managed network of Public Distribution Shops (PDS) or are also tagged as Ration shops that have been there in each and every part of the country. The author states that malnutrition in children always stands a health hazard and may lead to various dysfunctional diseases or weakness that are associated with human development. One of the major arguments of the authors work focusses on the model of a vicious circle, which is the representation of the various circles or phases that are or have become mostly dominant in the tribal communities. The author's designed vicious circle flashes various stages of oppression and targets their various levels of travel from one dimension to another.

Dr. Rupavath asserts that "Democracy against the Oppressed" before independence and after its independence policies set India back to the periods which were similarly less developed. The book foreword was written by Prof. Warner Menski, Emeritus Professor of South Asian Laws, School of Law (SOAS), University of London, London, U.K.

In the Introduction "Poor Adivasis: The Causes of Poverty" the author provides an interesting analysis of the Amartya Sen's "Capability Approach" and corporate class exploitation that took a toll on Indian Adivasis and their natural resources. Now traditional security threats have assumed enormous importance in this contemporary era challenges like environmental degradation, poverty and hunger have become more challenging in the development of tribal communities.

The first chapter "Democracy of the Oppressed: A Perspective from below" stretching for seven decades from 1947 that attracts the most trenchant criticism from the author who states that since independence many developmental schemes and protective measure have been attempted by the central and the State Governments for the tribal welfare and development (Rupavath, 2009, 2016b, 2019). Indian democracy has been interestingly analysed and debated for a long time. While terming the command economy model with its focus on displacement, exploitation, Prof. Rupavath is emphatic that it was this flawed policy approach that caused a 'Democracy against the oppressed.' Democratic decentralisation in India, the dilemma of India's democracy means a liberal government that needs the

economic constituents should be such that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing (Rupavath, 2020; Venkatesu, 2016). India is a federal republic with a reliable centre with regard to policy for successful implementation of poverty programmes in India.

This scholarly contribution examines the historical genesis of democratic decentralisation in India (Rupavath, 2015). It traces out how the dominant issues have been there in most of the societies and in most of the cases rich always have upper hand in dominating most of the social disorders as compared to their other opponents who are very unstable and weak, thus creating a further marginalisation in the society besides being the victims of the social and political mistrusts (Ganaie & Rupavath, 2017). The author maintains that any decentralisation initiative is always aimed at decentring the administrative, political and fiscal power with an aim to improve the status of the ordinary people (Rupavath, 2020); further, the author examines and studies other various centrally sponsored programmes that are aimed at tackling the various social inequalities along with the adoption of poverty alleviation methods and techniques. The author is of the firm view that there is a strong presence of inefficiency in the implementation of the MGNREGA at the grassroots levels besides a considerable presence of corruption at various levels of the scheme implementation.

In this scholarly work, the author claims that the alleviation of the poverty particularly in rural areas has been one of the primary objectives that are significant for the development of the marginalised communities and sections of the society and further the author claims that the major theme of the entire rural poverty alleviation programme is to rejuvenate the economic and social life of rural areas (Rupavath, 2016a, 2016b, 2020). The author praises the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (NREGA) that guarantees 100 days of employment in a financial year to any rural household or worker to work for unskilled manual work. The author claims that majority (64.5%) of the job cards holders see a delay in payment of wages as the primary hindrance compared to work allotment and work timing besides claiming distress migration, a decrease in labour rates, work shortages in the village/Gram Panchayat, no food security, problems in accessing education, a negative impact on savings and a lack of bargaining power.

Key Remedy Measures and Concluding Remarks

The author claims that the majority of respondents, i.e., 89.75 per cent, speak of a decrease in the labour rate, 82 per cent talk about a shortage of work in the village/Gram Panchayat, 76.5 per cent mention distress migration, 60 per cent talk about a lack of bargaining power, 54 per cent mention no food security. In comparison, 27.5 per cent of respondents see a negative impact on savings, and 24.5 per cent see a negative impact on access to education (Rupavath, 2020).

The author in the concluding section states that in the name of development planning, constitutional provision and maintaining national unity and integrity, the centre has become exclusive and the states are becoming increasingly shared. Acts such as the anti-terror act and initiatives in the name of national

security and national development of the centre are indicative of the centre taking action in matters that also lie within the competence of the states. The influence of the centre has been increasing. In this situation, federalism, which is the basic structure of the constitution, is at stake. The author by studying and examining various centrally sponsored schemes besides estimating various poverty alleviation methods and initiatives tries to find the gap in the successful implementation of these developmental schemes and the author tries his best to find the significant loopholes in their successful implementation and besides fully exploring various malpractices in their efficient implementation mostly at the grass-root levels.

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