# Interface between State, Voluntary Organisations and Tribes

## A Perspective towards Tribe-Centred Social Work Practice

**ALEX AKHUP**

This article critically examines the role of the state in facilitating tribal development with a specific focus on the Grant-in-Aid scheme instituted for voluntary organisations (VOs) working for Scheduled Tribes (STs). Based on empirical data drawn from 146 VOs working for the welfare of the STs across 26 states, what is revealed is that there has been a high degree of 'fragmentation of the community' as an outcome of such a 'paradigm of intervention' and strategisation. The author argues that the premise of state–tribal community interface must be revisited and strategically reformulated within the avowed Constitutional vision and commitment to the protection and development of the STs 'along the lines of their own wisdom and genius'. Within these parameters of the debate and in keeping with the state's stated X[th] Five Year Plan's three-pronged approach of social empowerment, economic empowerment and social justice, the author proposes a reformulation of the state's approach leading towards a perspective for tribe-centred social work practice in India.

*Mr. Alex Akhup is Assistant Professor, Centre for Social Justice and Governance, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India.*

## INTRODUCTION

The tribes in India, which are recognised as 'Scheduled Tribes' (STs), are the original and the first settlers of the region which later became India in 1947. Though they are objects of various categorisation processes (Jenkins, 1997) from the perspective of the 'others', they identify themselves as 'adivasis' (Devalle, 1990) or 'indigenous people' (Xaxa, 2003). The tribal social reality is distinguished for a multicultural coexistence (Singh, 1995) in the given historical context. The social structure is primarily segmentary based (Shalins, 1861) and at the same time lends itself to different permutations and heterogeneity. However, the understanding of the reality of tribes in India in present times makes a shift from the 'cultural objective' approach to the 'political'. The understanding of tribes from the cultural and political perspectives defines tribes as 'nationalities' (Roy Burman, 1994) or 'ethnic group' (Doshi, 1990). Within this

given understanding, the articulation of tribes against the external socio-political and economic processes (Devalle, 1992) has manifested in terms of resistance and autonomy movement. This is a socio-political and economic phenomenon that has become an issue which cannot be overlooked.

The tribes in India were among those who came into direct confrontation with colonisation and development processes thereafter. The discourse and process on tribal development in India began as a process of power struggle around safeguarding the resources and political sovereignty. Considered within the historical perspective of coexistence of complete and competent self-rule social entities, the tribes commanded major portion of the regions from time immemorial. Even today, 80% of natural resources of India lie in tribal belts (Roy Burman, cited in Chacko, 2005). Given this context, tribes were the first to fight colonial capitalist endeavours in India. As a society, they were subjected to the political and military man-oeuvres of the colonial rulers for resource expropriation. Tribes could stand against the mighty powers as strong cultural and political entities. However, in the course of time and history, tribes have become weaker and unable to fend off the external fragmentation processes. In fact, the Indian nation–state building process in many and critical ways became a reckoning force against tribes. The debates generated for inclusion and/or exclusion of pro-tribe provisions in the Constitution of India reveals the dynamics and politics that tribes went through in the nation-building process. In fact, tribes today are mere objects of electoral politics (Sharma, 2001), globalisation, and communalisation process (Prasad, 2003). They have become more vulnerable and are easily coopted and displaced in the capitalist paradigm of the development process.

The fact of the matter is that tribes are an 'ethnic minority' (Pathy, 1988) and a strategy of 'protectionism' without empowerment has little sense in the development practice. They cannot fight back the global onslaught with 'traditional' or 'isolated strategy'. Given these circumstances, the state is still a vital change agent for tribes. The Constitution guarantees several welfare provisions for tribal development based on the strategy of protection, development and mobilisation as a national commitment. As an external apparatus, the state can play a crucial role in the operation of the *panchsheel*. It is the only way to help build a perspective for tribe-centred social work practice.

## STATE INITIATIVES

In keeping with the principle and the spirit of the Constitution, the Government of India (GoI) is committed to the welfare and development of STs of the country who have been marginalised and neglected as a group due to economic backwardness and geographical isolation. The government has made consistent efforts to bring to reality the provisions laid down by the Constitution towards development and protection of the STs, ever since the Constitution was enforced. It takes upon itself the responsibility of reaching to the farthest ends and corners of its land surface and people, from the time of its Independence, in order to guarantee its people social justice and development. It stands by the spirit of the Constitution to correct the injustice and neglect meted out to them in the process of the common development paradigm. It takes an uncompromising stand towards protection from every form of exploitation as directed by the Constitution.

During the last six decades, various policies and programmes have emerged. Worth mentioning among them is the 5th Five Year Plan, which recognised context-specific planning and administration (Sharma, 1978). In the 10th Five Year Plan, the three-pronged strategy of social empowerment, economic empowerment and social justice was launched for the upliftment of the STs. It is in this context that the Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Scheme to voluntary organisations (VOs), working for the welfare of STs was established in 1953–1954 under the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare (Thakur, 1997). In 1985, the Ministry was renamed as Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Considering the context and uniqueness of the population in question, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) was established in 1999 as the nodal Ministry for the welfare and development of the STs. Since then, the GIA Scheme under study is within the purview of MoTA.[1]

Not withstanding the efforts made in the last six decades, the reality of tribes in India is still an issue that requires a definitive pro-tribal policy, community empowerment programme, and a consistent system. In fact, the present context of globalisation and liberalisation has thrown up newer challenges rendering the task more difficult. Given this scenario, it becomes critical to engage in understanding the strategy of the government for the welfare and development of the STs viewed from the case of the GIA Scheme. The case highlights the government–VO partnerships and people participation towards welfare and development of the STs. This

case will be discussed in the light of formulating a perspective for a tribe-centred social work practice.

## THE GRANT-IN-AID SCHEME

Following the empirical study conducted on the GIA Scheme, the policy and its implications were assessed. The analysis enquired into the functioning of the system of grant giving and implementing agencies — the ministry, states and VOs. It dwelt on the implementation processes focusing on stakeholders, beneficiary perception and the overall utilisation of the Scheme.

Given the complexity, size and multiplicity of projects in the Scheme, a representative study approach was used. Every attempt was made to cover a maximum number of the universe of the study. The study basically used two methods for data collection: (a) an in-depth interview through field visits, and (b) mailed questionnaire (for those organisations where visits were not carried out).

The GIA Scheme consists of multiple projects which are implemented across 26 states and union territories (UTs). Therefore, multi-stage sampling technique, involving both probability and non-probability sampling methods were used. The states that received grant allocation in 2005–2006 were taken as the universe of the study. These states were listed and selected randomly using the criteria of fund allocation and population. Those states with higher concentration of tribal population and higher grant allocation that is, Rupees 50 lakh and above and comprising over 20% of the tribal population, were taken as one group and remaining states as the second group. The first group of states (70% of the total states and UTs, numbered 18) was visited and the second group (30% that is, eight states) was administered a mailed questionnaire. With the intention of maximum coverage of the universe (146 organisations of the first group), 38% (as against the proposed 40%) of organisations that is, 55 organisations were visited for an in-depth enquiry. Around 246 projects were being funded by the Ministry in 2004–2006 and it was proposed to cover 40% of the 246 projects. However, during and after the data collection process, 281 projects were existing (including centres and units). Out of these, 99 projects (35%) were visited and data of 40 projects (15%) was received through the mailed questionnaire. The overall sample size of the organisations and projects included in the study is 55% and 50% respectively and the overall coverage in the study on total fund sanctioned and released was 62%.

The respondents of the study for interview and focus group discussions (FGDs) were selected from the state offices of tribal development, organisations and villages based on availability, capability and willingness to participate in the study. Considering the massive size and diversity of the universe, different categories of respondents were identified: President/ Secretary of the Organisation (83), Project Staff (98), Beneficiaries (532), Community Leaders (40), and State Officials (14). Around 36 FGDs were also conducted with various community leaders, youth groups, women's groups and parents.

The GoI, under the Department of Social Welfare, instituted the GIA Scheme[2] to VOs working for the welfare of STs in 1953–1954. It was an initiative that partnered with VOs towards working for the upliftment of the STs. The prime objective of the Scheme is to provide for overall improvement and development of the STs through voluntary efforts in the field of education, health and sanitation, and environment, in addition to need-based, socioeconomic upliftment efforts and other relevant activities deemed appropriate and of direct benefit to the target group.

The Scheme has 27 projects/activities around four sectors: education, health, sanitation and training programmes (activities related to socioeconomic upliftment). The education sector has three main projects — residential schools, on-residential schools and hostels. The health sector has covered 10-bed, 20-bed, 50-bed and 60-bed hospitals and mobile dispensaries. The remaining projects are related to training for livelihood enhancement. There are also a few projects on other development-related programmes in the area of sanitation and sustainable development.

Realising the complexity, magnitude and uniqueness of the STs, the government instituted the MoTA to be the nodal Ministry to cater to matters concerning the STs in the country in 1999. The Ministry has been running this Scheme successfully since the 9th Five Year Plan. In order to attain efficacy, the Ministry has undergone a thorough review on the process of the GIA Scheme. It has been felt that there should be a more proactive role of the states and UTs through decentralised procedure for receipt, identification, scrutiny and sanction of proposals of NGOs for the GIA Scheme.

Therefore, in the financial year 2005–2006, a new system was put in place for better implementation of the Scheme. In this new system, the states and UTs have constituted a 'State Committee for Supporting Voluntary Efforts' referred to as 'Committee', chaired by the Principal Secretary/Secretary of the State. There are five others of which three are from

reputed VOs. From 2005–2006, this Committee has started engaging in the process of GIA proposals under the guidelines issued on 2nd June, 2005. Next, the Committee recommends selected proposals — new as well as ongoing — to the Ministry.

## GOVERNMENT–VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION PARTNERSHIP

The role of VOs in the welfare and development of the STs was there from the very beginning (Thakur and Thakur, 1997; Iyengar, 1998). It is observed distinctly that a persistent leaning towards the voluntary sector in the efforts towards the overall development of the STs in the history of the five-year plans had taken place. This has picked up momentum, especially during the last two decades, due to the mushrooming of reputed and well-organised VOs working for the welfare of STs.

The government is making every effort to organise the voluntary sector by entering into a dialogue and sharing responsibilities in working for the welfare and development of the STs. A number of organisations have come forward to participate in the stated task. This can be testified by the increasing number of organisations applying for the GIA Scheme. The government has, in fact, come up with the idea of recognising well-reputed organisations in the field, working for the upliftment of tribals and have identified them as Established Voluntary Agencies (EVA). At present, there are 14 such organisations recorded in the Ministry and, which have been included in its 2005–2006 Annual Report.

Government records acknowledge the catalytic role of VOs in the social and economic development of the country, particularly in the areas of education, health, training, and income generation. Voluntary organisations have also successfully partnered with the government in developing and experimenting alternative project models to match the needs of the local people like 'Reaching the Services to the Un-reached' (10th Plan Approach Paper).[3] In fact, the 'Approach Paper' adds that

> VOs will, therefore, be encouraged to play an effective role in improving the status of tribals in the areas of education, health, nutrition, employment and income-generation, besides sensitising the administrative machinery and conscientising the tribals to realise their rights and potential besides safeguarding them from social and economic exploitation.

### Organisation Profile

Overall, the government recognises two types of organisations: established VOs (38%) and non-established VOs (62%), all working for the upliftment

of the STs. A significant number (53%) are specifically located in tribal habitation areas. Seventy percent of the organisations were registered under the Society Registration Act, 1860; 59% under 80G; and 61% under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976. Around 31% reported that they did not have any capacity-building programme with regard to the implementation of the GIA Scheme and 40% invested efforts in networking activities for the effective implementation of the Scheme. Around 80% mentioned delay as a major impediment for the effective implementation of the Scheme. Most were dependant on the GIA Scheme for funds.

The EVAs enjoyed a better financial status than non-EVAs. The latter are, mostly local-based organisations who consider the GIA Scheme as the only source of funding and have expressed difficulty in implementing the project due to delay. During field visits, investigators have observed problems faced by VOs related to loan recovery and payment from both banks and other lending agencies, including the community. The VOs expressed delay of funds as an impediment to their effective functioning as they are dependent on the MoTA funds. This has created a peculiar situation where they are in perpetual debt, while in the process of sustaining the VOs. This phenomenon was observed throughout the country. While there were many other factors leading to debt and dependency, putting together these factors seems to contain a syndrome and can somewhat be categorised as a 'debt-dependency syndrome' causing great discomfort to many VOs.

## Chief Functionaries

From the five identified regions, 83 VOs were the sample and it was found that 83% were male officials (indicating that most VOs were male-headed) and 17% female officials. A majority of the officials were over 36 years old and a significant number (31%) over 56 years. Most officials have both experience and age, but the same also indicates that an increasingly ageing population is taking up leadership for voluntary work with tribal communities.

Field data reflects that a majority (48%) are headed by individuals and groups from the general category with 83% Hindus, followed by Christians (8.4%), Buddhists (7.2%) and Muslims (1.2%). Only 29% were tribals. Officials who are Hindu by religion, and identified as general caste by the community are the chief functionaries with a minuscule representation of tribal groups in higher levels of authority and decision-making processes.

Of the 83 officials interviewed, only 13 (15.7%) had completed a professional course at either the graduate or post-graduate level in social work, engineering, management studies, medicine or law. Many officials had long years of work experience. While higher education or professional training may not be necessary or important for volunteers, with the growing need of an expert workforce in human service organisations, the same is becoming increasingly imperative for service delivery and policy making.

Many organisations were established as early as 1920s and 1930s and 18% had registered before 1950. Out of the 83 VOs, 59% (49) are registered with 80G of the Income Tax Act 1961 and 61.4% (51) of the VOs possessed FCRA registration.

## Profile of the Staff

Based on fieldwork observation of around 1,782 project personnel across the projects, there is a significant low percentage of distribution among the STs, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) as the amount of salary increases from Rupees 6,001 to Rupees 24,000 per month. In six different salaried categories, there is a complete absence of other groups except for the general category who receive very high salaries.

The overall distribution shows that there are 26.4% STs across different salary groups, 11.1% SCs and 12.7% OBCs. It was noted that almost half (49.7%) of the subjects who belonged to the general category were better placed towards the high salaried group of people under study. The distribution of the tribe/caste status of personnel was established so that a majority (49.7%) of them fell within the general category. The said caste group represents the highest percentage in all the categories of personnel.

## Resource Status and Funding Pattern

Data from 2002–2003 to 2005–2006 shows that the GoI has released Rupees 39.90 crore to VOs under the GIA Scheme. For the year 2002–2003, 2003–2004 and 2004–2005, the government has released Rupees 7–8 crore per year; but in 2005–2006, the amount was doubled to Rupees 15.94 crore.

It was found that VOs have been mobilising resources from both government and non-government sources. Majority of the VOs (57%) have a budget below Rupees 30 lakhs (14.5% below Rupees 10 lakhs, while

32.5% have Rupees 10–30 lakhs within their total budget). Only 10% have a budget of Rupees 1 crore and above.

It was found that most VOs across regions depend on GoI for financial resources, state government funding (24.1%), private funding (26.5%), foreign funding (19.3%), and private donations (36.6%). While 61.4% organisations are registered under FCRA, only 19.3% avail of foreign funds. However, it is encouraging to see that a good percentage of organisations receive private donations and funding.

## Grant Giving System

Prior to 2005–2006, organisations directly applied to the Ministry for the GIA Scheme. However, a need was felt for a viable system, involving state and district officers and the Ministry adopted the principle of federalism to create a three-tier system at the district, state and centre.

### District Level

The district commissioner (DC) plays an important role in the inspection and monitoring of organisations applying/implementing the Scheme for the welfare of the STs. The DC and his/her subordinates are empowered to inspect the ongoing projects and new proposals. He/She prepares an inspection report of all new and ongoing projects of the Scheme.

### State Committee Level

A clear direction was given to all states on the formation of state committee for managing the grant. The committee is empowered with inter-disciplinary/inter-sectoral groups, and meets once or twice a year for project screening on the basis of the DC's inspection report and independent field visits. This committee screens projects and prioritises in order of need (service deficient areas) and then recommends the selected projects to the Ministry for funding. All the states visited had constituted state committees to monitor the Scheme. However, not all were clear about the role of the committee.

### Central Government

The main job of the Ministry was to fund the projects as recommended by the state committee in order of priority and need. Due to the limited funds in the GIA Scheme, only those projects recommended by state committees are funded. In 2005–2006, the Ministry funded only ongoing projects in order of priority.

## Projects

The GIA Scheme consists of 27 different projects grouped under three sectors of development: education, health, and training for livelihood skills. Other development-related projects include sanitation, environment, drinking water and legal redressal services.

In 2005–2006, the Ministry funded 164 organisations and 246 projects across the states. Beginning 2006, in an effort to consolidate the available grant for the said objective, priority has been given only to the ongoing projects. At present, 23 of the 27 projects are implemented by various organisations across states.

Projects in the education sector account for 54% of the total number of projects implemented across the states and comprise residential schools, non-residential schools, and hostels which outnumber the rest of the projects in implementation. A majority of organisations are working in the area of tribal education. The second-most viable projects are on health and are implemented across states and account for 25% of the total number of projects implemented. Projects on skill training and livelihood building range from computer training to weaving. This sector accounts for 20% of the total number of projects implemented across the states.

## Community Participation

It has been observed that over a period of time, a close relationship between the community and VOs has developed and data reveals that members of the community across age groups and regions have invested efforts in creating an awareness about the GIA Scheme, especially on education and increasing the participation of community members for specified projects.

Voluntary organisations have been providing various training programmes to selected community members — especially leaders — and have motivated them towards actively participating in the intervention process for the successful implementation of programmes. Community members have assisted VOs in the selection of beneficiaries, especially those living below the poverty line (BPL) and OBCs. This identification has helped some VOs to focus their resources on special groups that would need the interventions more than others. Field-based reports of investigators corroborate this finding and in consonance with the same, benefits derived by low income groups within the community have been observed.

In the process of association between the community and VOs, it was found that community members have assisted in the selection process of other beneficiaries and have also attended various meetings scheduled for discussing the implementation of the projects. In the area of VOs providing health care services, especially mobile clinics, the community has jointly organised awareness programmes on the same and have actively facilitated the process of creating the environment for community members to access these services.

The community perceives two types of VOs — from within the community and from outside the community. The process of partnership and collaboration between VOs and the community is mutual, cooperative and supportive. Joint meetings are held on issues that concern both participation in awareness-building programmes and identifying families and individuals below the poverty line.

For VOs from within the community, joint collaborations for active participation in the monitoring work, and identifying girl child and facilitating and furthering their educational needs were their main activities. However, some community members have admitted that their role in participation was vague. This has sometimes led to a misunderstanding and even non-cooperation from the community. However, no major conflicts between the two were reported from any of the regions in the country.

While efforts of outside VOs were highly appreciated, it was important to recognise that the process of assisting the community in its voluntary efforts from within and among its own members was crucial in developing the community. Data revealed that giving the community the necessary help to run its own programmes could help reduce their dependency on outside agencies. There were also reports from across the region, especially by youth groups, that some VOs were very arrogant and insensitive towards the community.

## TRIBE-CENTRED SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: LAYING THE CONCEPT AND FRAME

The interface between the state, VOs and tribes in India is embedded in the socio-political environment. It emerges out of a dynamic and complex history of social interaction between various societies and the state that is borne out of a natural necessity for the establishment of a progressive society. The state (nation–state) though formerly given birth by the *Peace of Westphalia* (1648) is believed to be coexistent with every society — including tribal society — as a 'consciously constituted structure for

regulating the behaviour of the relevant population as and when required' (Oommen, 2009). However, the point of contention in the process of inter-action between the state and tribal society is the issue of mutual convergence between them. This understanding takes us to the realm of dynamics of interactions between the state and 'nationalities' — a discourse in the domain of culture and political entities from the perspective of a 'nation–state', 'nationalities' and 'ethnicity' in a multinational context. The basic question is whether the state and nationality's boundary have a point of convergence?

Going by the spirit of the Constitution, India is a nation of cultural diversity. It recognises the coexistence of different cultures, social systems, 'self rule' (Savyasaachi, 1998), and self-determination as articulated in Article 342 (1), the 5th and 6th Schedules, and 73rd and 74th Amendments — devolution of powers to local authorities. The logic of scheduling tribal areas and tribes predominantly highlights the Constitutional provisions of the government with regard to tribes and affirms the space for a tribe-centred or self-rule perspective. In this context, the local authorities (*gram sabha/*village councils) of the tribal village become the highest platform of power and decision-making.

Voluntary action has emerged as a consequence of the solidarity of human society (Darendorf, 1969), individual philanthropy, or religious charity (Iyengar, 1998; Tandon, 2005). The VOs/agencies are the logical end of voluntary action, which could be defined as a structure of agents for voluntary action and change in the given frame and context. They are identified variedly as VOs, voluntary agencies (VAs), community-based organisations (CBOs), self-help groups (SHGs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and non-profit organisations (NPOs) among others. In recent times, there is a trend of understanding VOs as NPOs which are defined as a social organisation entity that meets the five criteria of institutional identity, separate from government, non-profit based, self-governing and voluntarily set up (Tandon, 2005). The point of reference in this context is the emergence of this sector since the 1970s and one that can hardly be neglected, particularly its contribution to tribal development.

In the context of India, a systematic and formal process of interface between the state, VOs and tribes are observed since the post-Independence era (Thakur, 1997). The basic premise of interface/convergence between VOs, tribes and the state is the service, which is welfare-oriented. A meaningful and purposeful interface between the state, VOs and tribes is very

crucial for tribal development. Therefore, it becomes important to engage in understanding and arguing for a tribe-centred paradigm positioned from a perspective that recognises and accepts the tribes' inert and organic capability to develop themselves.

Based on the given frame, an argument is made for a perspective shift through a delineation of the different paradigms in practice as follows:

## Working 'for' Tribes: Service and Coercive Welfare[4]

The approach of 'working for tribes' has emerged from a philanthropist and 'welfarian' understanding of the reality of tribes. The approach that perceives, tribes as 'a stage in an evolutionary phase', is a top-down approach, which considers tribal areas as resource-poor, tribals lacking skills, and with poor access to new production-raising technologies (Visaria and Gumber, 1994). It is motivated by a mission for saving tribes, fired by a missionary zeal of 'working for the tribal community'. Therefore, the focus has been on service delivery, with a high degree of paternalism, which has been more detrimental than empowering.

Therefore, the basic premise of the interface between the state, VOs and community is charity and philanthropy, usually inspired by religious fervour, which has been defined as the 'supply side' approach (Clerk, 1993). The paradigm focused on efficient delivery of inputs that is, implementation of government and other sponsored development programmes (Iyengar, 1998).

## Working 'with' Tribes: Partnership in Development

This approach of interface between the state, VOs and tribes during the seventies and eighties can be described as 'working with the tribal community'. This era spurted the VO towards a professional approach, and technical and technological solutions. The VOs took active part in the process of development with the basic aim of 'working with the tribe' and were seen as an active agent of change with a strong vision for the tribes. In fact, this stage is a reaction to the service interface approach. However, studies (Bhatt, 98) have showed that these organisations could also not successfully interface with tribal communities. The interface of the organisation, state and people were governed by the funding policies from a neo-liberal capitalist interest. In fact, VOs became a mere tool of the neo-colonial state for co-option and expropriation of tribal elites and the community's resources (Davalle, 1992; Prasad, 2003).

## Working 'through' Tribes: A Tribe-Centered Social Work Frame

From the above formulations, it is clear that till date the interface between the government, VOs and tribes has been more of charity, welfare and development based from an etic perspective. This has brought in a lot of contradiction in the process of social work in the context of tribes in India. The state and VOs have — at most times — not understood the reality of the tribes yielding to the development efforts in vain. The situation of tribes in the country is very much the same then and now, if not worse. This given fact makes it imperative to revisit the earlier paradigm and look at the reality of tribes from an emic perspective. The interface should be contextualised consciously to provide a critical space to an organic process of development and empowerment from a tribe-centred paradigm. Within this frame, the state and VOs are outside agents and the principle agent are the tribes themselves. The endogenous process of development — often considered to be primitive or aberrations in society — should become the mainstream.

Tribe-centred practice and processes are very critical to the development and empowerment of tribes. If this realisation comes to bear on various stakeholders that interface — the state, VOs and tribes — then the community takes precedence over VOs as the latter are outside agents that should be accountable to the community within a frame and devolution of power and recognition of local and tribal authority. Thus, it is evident that it is imperative to shift focus from a service approach to a tribe-centric approach that aims at an empowerment process 'from within' the community rather than relying on VOs from outside the community.

## A TRIBE-CENTERED STRATEGY

In this given frame, accountability, transparency and effectiveness of programmes can be realised only if we evoke the Constitutional provision of the Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas (PESA) Act, 1996. The principle of 'all VOs answerable to the *gram sabha*' should be the basic premise of operation for every organisation implementing the empowerment programmes. This principle should also be applied in the 6th Scheduled areas. All organisations should be responsible and answerable to the community that is perceived and respected as being supreme. This approach should be applied by all VOs and states implementing the programme. In principle, there should be the consent of the *gram sabha* to all projects operating in the state.

The conceptual frame (Figure 1) highlights a progressive perspective shift and processes of a strategy of interface between the state, VOs and tribes vis-à-vis tribal development and empowerment. This conceptualisation, as it has emerged from the case cited above, is field and practice based. It is conceptualised from the viewpoint of the tribal community and is a , a tribe-centred frame. As argued in the preceding paragraph, the premise of the paradigm for 'working through tribes' is the recognition of an organic and internal process crucial for the tribe's empowerment. The basic premise of the conceptual frame underlines the development and empowerment of tribes in the first phase of the above-stated perspective shift with a focus on delivery of service from a rights-based perspective within a frame that builds incrementally and progressively.

In the given paradigm frame, the state, VO and tribe interface is mapped out in different phases overtly implicating the intricate and dynamic processes in the progressive formulation of perspective from Shift One, Shift Two to a tribe-centred frame. In Shift One, the state is positioned as the primary stakeholder. It defines and upholds the strategy with an effort to:

- strengthen the state committee's operational framework;
- survey service deficient areas;
- build a database of VOs in tribal areas; and
- establish a point-wise grading system of VOs.

In this given frame, the VOs are positioned as active partners of the state and tribes in reaching out to the STs situated in identified, service-deficient areas. The community participation is in its initial stage.

In the given Shift Two perspective, an argument is furthered towards strengthening tribe-centred practice through devolution of powers to the specific states. The specific states are positioned to play a central role in the implementation of the GIA Scheme in the following aspects:

- Application/screening of proposals
- Monitoring/evaluation of projects
- Inspection
- Prioritising projects
- Rationalisation of sector, project and tribe
- Prioritising and encouraging internal VOs
- Stabilising quality of service and critical infrastructure.

**FIGURE 1:** Conceptualising A Perspective Frame
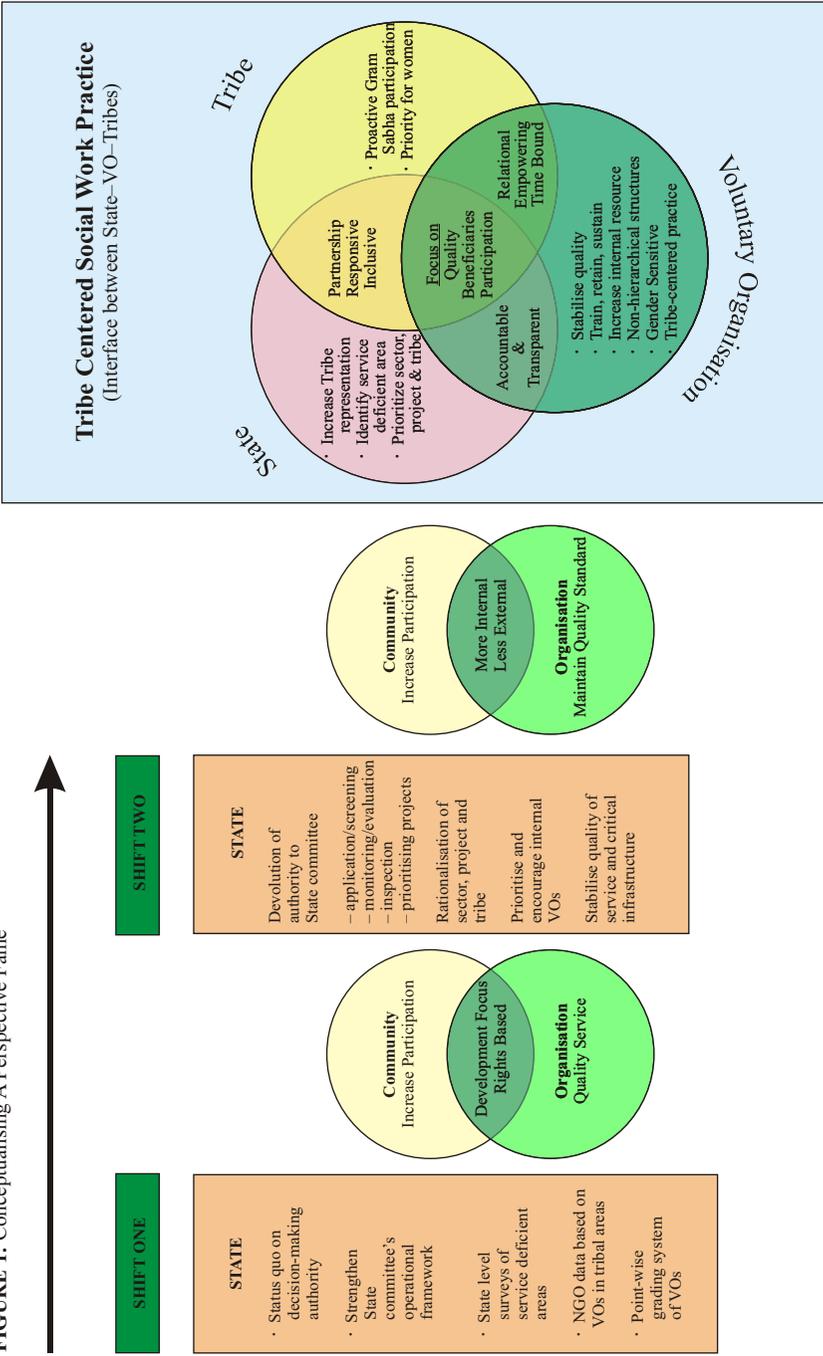
In this paradigm, the tribal community is perceived as a proactive partner to the state and VOs in the empowerment initiative. It is crucial that the states and VOs take cognisance of the ownership and participation of the community.

A tribe-centred social work practice is envisioned as the ultimate paradigm conceptualised in the given framework. This paradigm argues for a mutual strategy of intervention for tribal development and empowerment based on the perspective of a tribe's reality. In this paradigm, an ideal framework for intervention, the state, organisation and tribes are positioned in a mutual coexistence frame. The focus of the interface between these three agents is based on empowerment, quality service and community participation, and ownership of the programme by tribes for upliftment.

The VOs must be accountable and transparent to the state and vice versa. The state must be responsive (as against reactionary), inclusive and a trusted partner (as against mistrust of tribes), and vice versa. The VO–tribe interface must premise its engagement as relational, empowering and time-bound. The imperatives of such a formulation are to achieve the goal of a high degree of quality tribe (beneficiary) participation.

Finally, 'tribe-centred social work' purports that an empowering paradigm of intervention in the context of tribes must take into account (as stated above) the key premises of engagement. Beginning with envisioning tribes themselves as agents of change (new agents of change), the goals of development must shift away from a top-down growth-oriented state-centred formulation and move towards a non-imperial, non-hegemonic and anti-oppressive politics of perception between development actors. While identifying contentious political spaces and basic parameters of convergence and divergence between the three identified political actors, the age-old historical articulations of the tribes of 'difference' need not be perceived as a threat to the state in this age and time.

A sensitive contract between stakeholders would minimise conflicts and fragmentation and maximise justice and respect. While the author is not arguing for a state–VO–tribe enmeshment, the recognition of a tribe-centred social work intervention as formulated above, will entail the acceptance of a new language of relationship and engagement where key stakeholders would be willing to listen and understand each other's historical narratives as they proceed towards a new social work era of anti-oppressive formulation and articulation.

**NOTES**

1. Ministry of Tribal Affairs Annual Report, 2006.

2. Terms and Conditions as formulated within the sole discretion of the Central Government.

3. The Approach Paper to the 10th Plan qualifies this move as one of the major strategies in the Tenth Plan.

4. With the emergence of the welfare state, service to its citizens became a core responsibility and task of the state. As the Indian State was trying to bring its population to 'willingly accept' its authority — especially with the myriad miniscule communities that are identified as 'tribals' — welfare was used as a tool to coopt the elites of these groups into the mainstream rather than as a process of developing the tribes.

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