

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

EPILOGUE

Our Report must be read in the light of the great deal of study and many recommendations made by other bodies. We have frequently referred to the outstanding Reports of the Renuka Ray Committee and the Inaccessible Areas Committee. Elaborate suggestions were made by the Seminars of workers in the Multipurpose Blocks held in Ranchi and Pachmarhi in the middle of 1959. Many recommendations affecting work in the Multipurpose Blocks have been made by the Central Advisory Board for Tribal Welfare and in the Reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This is the reason why our Report may seem rather overloaded on some subjects and rather lightly loaded on others. But this does not mean, of course, that we are in any way indifferent to the subjects we have not treated very fully. We have simply felt that, since there are already before Government and the public so many studies of and recommendations on these subjects, it is unnecessary for us to do it all over again. We have tried rather to fill in certain gaps which have not hitherto been so fully considered. On indebtedness, for example, and Forest Co-operatives, there is now little more to say except to recognize their urgency and to insist that the action already proposed should be implemented as soon as possible.

In the same way we have not attempted a very full evaluation of the success or failure of the Multipurpose Blocks. The time for this will come at the end of the Second Five Year Plan period. At the present moment statistics, which are in any case a little uncertain (we have had, for example, no fewer than four different sets of figures covering the same period for a single Block), are not likely to give an altogether fair picture. We have had to standardize our figures for the period ending on September 30th 1959. During the subsequent five or six months the picture has undoubtedly changed and we have been assured by all the States that it will be entirely changed by the end of the Second Five Year Plan period, even though it may take them another two years to spend all their money. This is to be expected, for the tempo is everywhere, and often rapidly, mounting and already many things have been done, some of them as a result of our own suggestions on the spot, to ensure better progress. We have felt that it is even more important to consider how things should be done than what actually has been done.

A Report like this, which adopts a novel approach to a number of subjects, is liable to be misunderstood by those who may not take the trouble to read it carefully. It will be as well, therefore, to remove any possible misconceptions about our views. The first point that we would like to make clear is that a number of our recommendations have been made in reference to the immediate situation and are not intended to be regarded as a blue-print for all time to come. For example, we have deprecated the introduction of too many elaborate machines or implements in the fields of both agriculture and minor industries. This does not mean that we are unaware of the importance of mechanized farming and, in fact, we look for-

ward to the day when the tribal people can have fully mechanized farms along with other farmers throughout the country. It is obvious, indeed, that there is no other ultimate way of solving the problem of food. But we feel that today, in view of the isolated character of most of the tribal areas, the fact that the peasants are only just beginning to learn new ways of cultivation, in view of the lack of expert technical personnel, it will be wise to go slowly with the introduction of mechanized equipment which will be beyond the means of the tribals to purchase and beyond their skill to repair. We have seen far too many such machines lying unused or fallen into disrepair. In these remote areas it may take six months to a year before a broken machine can be put right. But the day, we hope, will come when even the tribal areas can have the benefits of mechanized agriculture.

In our chapter on Education we have stressed the importance of schools with an agricultural or forestry bias. We must also face the fact that in some areas, as for example, in parts of the Chotanagpur Plateau, many tribals will be swept into the great river of industrialization and a special type of education will have to be devised to prepare them for this drastic change from everything with which they are familiar. Already thousands of tribals are going to the mines or factories as unskilled workers and some of them, as in the TISCO Works at Jamshedpur, are proving successful as skilled workers. This problem is still some years in the future, but we should think about it and be ready to face it to when it comes.

In advocating the establishment of Tribal Councils we are not, of course, thinking in terms of keeping the tribes separate for ever, even in their administrative or judicial institutions, from other people. We advocate them today because we feel that, on the one hand, their development will give a great psychological encouragement to the people and, on the other, that this is the best way of ensuring them a square deal. We look forward to a casteless, classless and triballess society in which every citizen or group of citizens will bring its own special contribution to the common fund, but will not be divided by any artificial distinctions. We look forward to the day when it will be no longer necessary to use the word 'tribal' at all. At present, however, it is necessary to do so in order to ensure that these people get their rights and to build them up into a position of sufficient strength, confidence and knowledge to enable them to stand on equal terms with the rest of the population. We must also hope that in the future, although India will be classless, it will not be uniform, smoothed out into a dull and colourless mediocrity. India's beauty lies in its power to combine unity with difference in a 'rich and varied tapestry'.

In our chapter on Housing we have been critical of the present programmes. This does not mean that we are indifferent to the importance of ensuring that every tribal, and indeed everyone in India, should have adequate and attractive shelter. But we feel that the situation in a village among the hills and forests is rather different from that in a town. The majority of the tribal people, in their physical strength and energy, make fairly good homes. They are not like our homes, but they have been adapted by long experience to the physical conditions of the environment and the people's domestic needs. Provided wood and bamboo is made easily available, there is no reason why any tribal family should not have a fairly good house simply by working hard at it and we feel that by paying these people to build their own houses and specially by employing contractors to build

houses for them, we are putting a premium on laziness. In any tribal village which has not lost its discipline and spirit of co-operation, the villagers join together to help the poorer people to build their cottages. As we have said, improved housing in the tribal areas is more a problem of education than of construction.

We have put forward a rather unusual point of view about shifting cultivation. There is, of course, no idea of sentimentalising about it or of desiring to perpetuate it. We have simply faced the facts. In some areas there is no alternative land. In others the transfer of the tribal people from the hills to the plains will only intensify the land-hunger that exists. Shifting cultivation is a wasteful and harmful practice but it may be possible to reduce its disadvantages and increase its productivity. All we have urged is that we should recognize the reasons why the tribal people have adopted and are still attached to this type of agriculture, which for them represents a considerable advance on the old methods of hunting and food-gathering; that we should be gentle with them and not impose burdens that they cannot bear; that we should take a positive approach, teaching new methods and providing facilities for them rather than forcing them to abandon lands to which they are attached so greatly. We hope that some way will be found whereby the hill people can continue to live in their hills, but more prosperously, and by new and scientific methods of hill cultivation.

In urging that the Tribal Research Institutes should concentrate on practical and immediate problems, we do not of course intend to qualify the importance of the academic aspects of anthropology and sociology. The study of racial characters, the biological nature of Man or the profound and still little-explored depths of his psychology, the complexities of his social organization is of fundamental value and must not be neglected. But we feel that for the next few years, there is an urgent need for all students of the character and life of Man to throw themselves into the human and practical task of helping the Development Officers to solve the immediate problem of tribal progress.

We have already referred to the infantile criticism that any one who shows an interest in tribal culture is trying to preserve the people as museum specimens. Nobody accuses the cultural leaders of India, her artists, poets, musicians and scholars of doing this when their work grows out of the ancient tradition of their country. This particular accusation is a sign of a sub-conscious sense of superiority towards the tribal people. What difference is there between our attitude and that of Gandhiji himself when he wrote about the whole of India ?

'I have pictured to myself an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to her genius. I do not, however, picture it as a third class or even a first class copy of the dying civilization of the West.'

The Need for Action

It is very important that sincere, speedy and generous action should be taken on the many recommendations that have been made not only by us but by the other bodies to which we have referred. It is extraordinary how often such recommendations are ignored in practice. It would not matter so much if a State Government replied that such and such a Committee was talking through its hat and that it was wrong. This, however,

seldom happens. Instead, a recommendation sinks into the soulless obscurity of an official file and is heard of no more. There are excellent suggestions in the Aiyappan Report of 1948 about tribal education, which we have had to repeat here because they have never been implemented. Little notice has been taken of Sir W. V. Grigson's important Report on *The Aboriginal Problem in the Central Provinces and Berar*, published as long ago as 1944. The Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has more than once complained that his recommendations are ignored. Admirable suggestions by the Central Advisory Board for Tribal Welfare have often received only partial implementation or none at all. We earnestly hope that the many suggestions that have been put forward by various Committees of the last year or two will be at least very seriously considered and if not acceptable, may come up for further discussion.

Conclusion

Of the many tribal problems the greatest of all is poverty. There were once tribal Rajas and Zamindars controlling vast estates; there are still powerful Chiefs in the north-eastern hills; but the majority of these people are among the poorest peasants in the world. Some have no land at all and are little better than serfs; some have no rights over the fields they cultivate; many have been robbed of their land; the rest struggle with primitive tools to scratch a living from an unfriendly soil.

They are poor in knowledge and much of their splendid energy is wasted as a result of doing things the wrong way. Many of them are today psychologically poor: they have learnt to despise their own culture; they live under a constant shadow of anxiety and fear; what little they have is taken from them. Some are losing those virtues—truth, honesty, self-reliance, unity—which were formerly their greatest treasures.

Children die young in fear and pain; girls lose their beauty many years before they should; the young men, strong and with a zest for living, grow frustrated and disappointed and premature old age soon breaks their spirit. The harsh struggle to survive becomes too great a strain, and life itself seems nothing much to lose.

And much of this is the fault of us, the 'civilized' people. We have driven them into the hills because we wanted their land and now we blame them for cultivating it in the only way we left to them. We have robbed them of their arts by sending them the cheap and tawdry products of a commercial economy. We have even taken away their food by stopping their hunting or by introducing new taboos which deprive them of the valuable protein elements in meat and fish. We sell them spirits which are far more injurious than the home-made beers and wines which are nourishing and familiar to them, and use the proceeds to uplift them with ideals. We look down on them and rob them of their self-confidence, and take away their freedom by laws which they do not understand.

All this must stop—and soon. Each man is his brother's keeper and we must all atone for our long neglect and our wrong attitude. Mankind is one and the tribes are a very precious part of mankind. We must give our best administrators, our keenest doctors, our expert technicians, our scholars and inspire them with a sense of the tragedy and the opportunity that faces them in tribal India.

Mere money cannot solve anything. It is because of this that we have only asked for a trivial thirty crores of rupees which, spread over difficult and widespread areas, is actually a very modest sum. The fear has been expressed that this will involve too rapid a progress, too complicated a programme, the employment of inferior men. This need not be so. We agree that we should 'hasten slowly', advance with caution, give the tribes a breathing-space to adapt themselves to the new world. Whatever we do, that world will come upon them and they must be ready for it. Hunger, disease, exploitation, ignorance, isolation are evils whose cure cannot be delayed; they must be treated rapidly and efficiently.

We believe that in the programme of the Special Tribal Blocks, if it is planned wisely and implemented sincerely, India has an effective instrument to save her tribal people from poverty and fear, and develop them along the lines of their own genius.

Take physic, Pomp.

Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,

That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,

And show the heavens more just.