

A STUDY ON THE PROBLEMS OF INDEBTEDNESS AND SHIFTING CULTIVATION WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE INDIAN SCHEDULED TRIBES

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Abstract

The scheduled tribes (STs) are among the most disadvantaged groups in India. They have been dealing with problems for years. The primary issues facing tribes today include forest rights, land alienation, money-lender exploitation, mining, and tribal displacement. The construction of dams, motorways, mines, power plants, new cities, and industrial developments are all examples of development projects. According to the census of 2011, there were 10.43 crore individuals who identified as tribal, making up 8.6% of the population. 89.97% of people live in rural areas, while just 10.03% live in urban areas. Between the years covered by the Censuses of 2001 and 2011, the total population increased by 17.69%, while the tribal population increased by 23.66%. The population's ratio of females to males is 940 per 1000, but it is 990 for the Scheduled Tribes. A significant number of Indian communities have been agriculturally based ever since ancient times. In the hilly regions of the North Eastern states, it requires competence. Even though it is widely practised, it has been recognized for a long time as one of India's most significant issues with the development of its tribal communities. As a result, state governments have devised programs to wean people off of shifting agriculture. The degree to which their living conditions have improved due to the shift from nomadic to stationary agriculture is a significant query that has yet to be satisfactorily answered. A topic connected to this one is how the agrarian structure of the indigenous communities shifted when farming was settled. There have been two categories created for loans: hereditary and contracted. A loan that is inherited is called a hereditary loan. In other words, the present household members do not benefit from this debt, yet they are still required to pay it off. The present study is based on secondary data collected from various sources, including journals, periodicals, books, and websites.

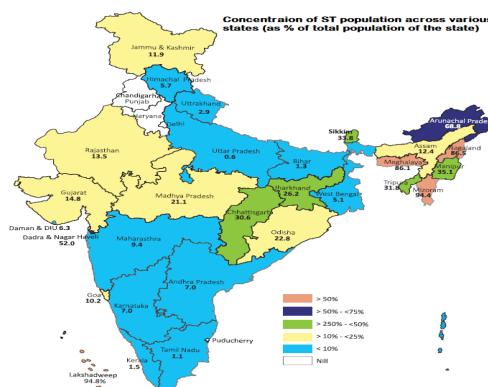
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Introduction

The tribal community of India is plagued by a plethora of socio-economic issues, including but not limited to high unemployment and poverty rates, illiteracy, and excessive levels of personal debt. In addition to these issues, their level of debt is one of the primary factors that lead to their exploitation. The amount of the outstanding debt, including the principal and the interest that has accrued on it, is the definition of the obligation. One of the most important aspects contributing to indigenous peoples' impoverishment is their high

level of debt. The majority of the tribe families are “born in debt, live in debt, and die in debt” Agriculture of the subsistence type is primarily dependent on the unpredictability of rainfall, the poor conditions of the soil, and the use of antiquated methods, which results in an economy that is perpetually in the red. Their lavish wedding, funeral, and religious rites significantly contribute to their country's persistent budget deficit, forcing them to seek financial assistance from outside sources. When paying their debts and getting loans, the tribal members put their whole trust in the moneylenders. It isn't easy to fathom the depth of their trust and faith in them. One of the reasons is that the lender effortlessly extends credit at the most crucial time. The tribal members do not appear to believe in the statute of limitations nor seem to distrust the financier's word. The fact that moneylenders, traders, and other individuals readily offer them financial assistance at times of need, albeit at extremely high-interest rates, contributes only to the worsening of the problem. Small sums of money borrowed at various times at excessively high rates of interest accumulate into a sum that is beyond their capacity as well as the capacity of their successors to repay, and this ultimately results in the loss of lands, even cattle, and other minor assets of tribal people to moneylenders.

Distribution of Tribes



The Scheduled Tribes are notified in 30 states/UTs, with 705 ethnic groupings, etc. The 2011 census reported 10.43 crore tribal people, 8.6% of the overall population. 89.97% reside in rural areas and 10.03% in urban. From Census 2001 to 2011, indigenous populations grew by 23.66%, compared to 17.69% for the overall population. Scheduled Tribes have 990 females per thousand males, while the general population has 940.

Central India and the North-Eastern Region are where STs live. Madhya Pradesh (14.69%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), Jharkhand (8.29%), Andhra Pradesh (5.7%), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Gujarat (8.55%), and Rajasthan (8.86%) have more than half of the Scheduled Tribe population. The North East (Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh) is also unique.

Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh have more than two-thirds of the ST population. No Scheduled Tribes are notified in 3 States (Delhi NCR, Punjab, and Haryana) and 2 UTs (Puducherry and Chandigarh).

Literacy rate

The progress over the years on the literacy front may be seen from the following:

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total literate population	24 %	29.4 %	36.2 %	52.2 %	64.84%	73.00 %
Scheduled Tribes (STs) population	8.5 %	11.3 %	16.3 %	29.6 %	47.10%	59.00%
Total female population	12.9 %	18.6 %	29.8 %	39.3 %	53.67%	64.60%
Total Scheduled Tribes (STs) female population	3.2 %	4.8 %	8.0 %	18.2 %	34.76%	49.40 %

(Vikaspedia Domains, n.d.)

Hereditary loans and contracted loans are the two primary classifications that make up the whole concept of loan or debt. A loan that is considered to be hereditary is one that is passed on from one generation to the next. To put it another way, the current members of the household are the ones who are responsible for repaying the debt, despite the fact that it was not incurred by them personally when they were the ones living in the property. The second kind of loan or debt is known as a “contracted loan,” and it is one that the current member(s) of the household have directly contracted for themselves. The funds for this kind of loan can be raised in one of three different ways: i) in cash, ii) in kind, or iii) in a combination of both cash and kind.

Form of Debt

Poor tribal households take out loans to make up the difference between income and expenditure. Due to their inadequate repaying abilities, they go into debt. The purpose for which a borrower takes out a loan determines how much they pay back. Borrowers can repay more when they use loans for productive purposes. However, loans for non-productive uses do not generate income and increase debt.

Causes of Debt

Productive loans are used to buy or improve land, buy improved seeds, fertilizers, agricultural implements, dig wells, build minor canals for irrigation, fence fields, or start a small business like dairy farming, livestock raising, horticulture, poultry farming, bee-keeping, basket or rope making, etc. Non-productive loans are used for home spending, religious and social functions like marriages, births, and deaths, meeting responsibilities like litigation or settling disputes, buying jewellery, etc. Debt serves the following purposes. Household consumption, marriages and other ceremonial expenses, land and building purchases, productive reasons, debt repayment, and other uses.

Tribal debt causes must be examined. Since borrowing for productive purposes would lower their debt. However, borrowing for unproductive uses including family spending, medical, and ward education was prominent among sample respondents. Over 6% of tribes take out new loans to pay off old ones.

Source of Debt

The nature, extent, and purpose of a borrower's debt and the source of the loan define the extent of exploitation. Thus, to understand rural indebtedness, one must analyse debt origins, nature, and aims. Debt has two main sources. i) Institutional Sources: Banks and government credit agencies prevent borrowers from taking out unproductive loans, therefore their debt is usually productive. These institutions also charge concessional rates to the poor for productive loan investments. Institutional loans come in two varieties: (a) Banking Institutions: Loans from commercial banks, co-operative organisations, usually for productive purposes; (a) Government **Agencies:** i) Rural development loans from LAMPS, PACBs, etc. ii) Non-Institutional or Private **Sources:** Households with significant hereditary debt from non-institutional sources for unproductive uses are in dire straits. Poor borrowers cannot afford high borrowing rates from non-institutional sources. Unproductive loans also fail to create money to repay them. Poor borrowers' issues and indebtedness escalate with such loans. Private loans come from professional money lenders, shops, employers, friends, and family for profitable and unproductive uses. 81% of Scheduled Tribe Rural Labour Households Census (2004-2005) debt was paid by non-institutional sources. Money lenders provided 48.6% of the debt.

Traditional money lending exposes practically the whole tribe population to chronic indebtedness, which is the most challenging problem they face. In most Indian tribes, indebtedness is crushing, save in the north-eastern region, which was closed to intermediaries and contractors during British administration.

Poverty and a deficit economy have caused tribal debts. Ethnographic research shows that tribal people were not hindered in their quest for a carefree life in remote and contractor-free communities. They were self-sufficient. Forest richness sustained them. Unfortunately, economic development opened their homes, destroying all development. Outsiders, administration indifference. Over time, their situation deteriorated to where it is today. Though we have little scientific evidence on their indebtedness, the problem is huge. They are also socially and psychologically indebted. Many lose happiness and tranquility, while

others lose hope in the system. Due to debt passed down from father to son and generation to generation, it bonds many people. Indebtedness is natural for many indigenous groups. Most impacted groups share the following debt reasons: Loss of tribal rights over land and woods; Poor and primitive agriculture resulting in food grain shortages; Ignorance; Excessive marriage spending. Deaths, fairs, and celebrations; Fatalism and locally-oriented worldview; and Panchayat fine decisions for fear of excommunication.

Because of all of these factors, the tribe is constantly in need of financial assistance, and as a result, it is an ideal target for those who engage in unethical moneylending and who act as middlemen. Small amounts borrowed at exorbitant rates of interest from time to time accumulate into a total that is beyond his capacity to repay, and the moneylender takes what little he has in the form of land possessions. "No economic development programme is likely to have any impact on the plight of the tribal people as they struggle to escape the grip of the moneylender." (The Planning Commission's Report of the Study of Team on Tribal Development Programmes, 1969).

Apart from deriving in cash, a practice of borrowing in kind is also commonplace in several parts of the country, particularly in the states of Maharashtra and Tripura. *Palem* is the name given to this system in the Indian state of Maharashtra. As a result of this arrangement, needy tribal members can borrow kernels at the time of planting, and the resulting crop has a quality that is three or even four times higher than the initial crop. Ounces taken during this time of year or at any other point throughout the year for consumption are likewise subject to this rate of return. Consequently, during the harvesting season, the bankroller is entitled to a significant share of the produce, and in some cases, the entire harvest. In a manner analogous to this, the practice of 'dadan' is common in Tripura. The creditor will buy the produce in advance at significantly reduced prices.

Objectives of the study

- I. To study the problems faced by Scheduled Tribes in particular reference to indebtedness and shifting cultivation
- II. To illustrate the suitable measures to overcome the problem faced by Scheduled Tribes

Role of Moneylender

To understand why government and semi-government credit organisations failed to wean tribals from traditional moneylenders, one must investigate their role. Traditional moneylenders are straightforward and convenient for tribal debtors. They are always there. Tribal members must trek a few furlongs to the moneylender's house to borrow money. The moneylender lends him money without sureties, guarantees, or guarantors. Since the average tribal has little property, all he has is his honest intention to repay his loans with his earnings and any land he may own. The moneylender accepts these as good security, but he may need mortgaging the tribal's land as a formality. The debtor merely has to put his thumbprint on a blank piece of paper or under a draught he cannot read.

Compare this method to state-run cooperative credit societies. Most are far from tribal habitats. He must complete several credit disbursement requirements and provide a guarantor. There is usually a two-loan delay. Then corrupt authorities take their cut. These loans are only for productive uses like improving cultivation, buying implements, soil protection, etc., to complete social and religious obligations. Moneylenders lend without restrictions.

A separate but equally important consideration is the intimate human interaction that the moneylender maintains with his debtor. He is fluent in the language of the tribe, and he is familiar with the entire family's history, as well as the background and events that led to the debtor's need for money. It is important to note that he is willing to take repayment of the loan in any form, whether cash or goods.

Consequences of Indebtedness

Due to the fact that the most of the people in the tribe are illiterate, they are unaware of what is being recorded in the account books of the moneylender. They place their thumb impression very submissively wherever the moneylender desires, and thus effectively binds their fate for all time. They are unable to go to court to seek redress because the majority of their dealings are conducted verbally, and they do not have the financial means to do so. But even those transactions that are recorded in the account books are nothing but legal fiction because of the erroneous entries of inflated sums and the most that the poor tribal can do is contact the Village panchayat, which typically serves the interests of the moneylender. Studies carried out in several different indigenous communities provide witness to the fact that, in the vast majority of instances, indebtedness results in bondedness and the loss of land. On the other hand, the complete picture of this predicament suggests that any one or more of the following may result from being in debt. Loss of freedom and the subsequent utilisation of their labour force by the creditor; Alienation of land and its purchase by the creditor; Sale of girls and prostitution; and Chronic venereal illnesses.

The extremely indebted who are “acquired” by moneylenders-landlords as enslaved labourers cannot break the cycle of debt. They accept their fate and have no interest in life. Economic ideals, crucial to their independence, are gone. The koftas of Jaunsar-Bawar (U.P.) are a great example of the worst repercussions of indebtedness.

Legislation and Remedial Steps

People who lend money to members of Scheduled Tribes in Scheduled Areas are subject to the regulations laid forth in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, which gives the governor of each state the authority to control how people carry on their business as moneylenders in certain areas. To comply with this condition, several state governments have issued promulgations and passed legislation in the form of various laws and acts. The following is a list of some of the significant laws that have been passed by a variety of states to control the lending of money, the redemption of debt, and the eradication of debt bondage:

- The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Moneylenders Regulation, 1963
- The Agency Debt Bondage Abolition, 1964.
- The Assam Moneylenders Regulation, 1968
- The Bihar Moneylenders(Regulations of Transaction) Act, 1939
- The Bombay Agriculture Debtors Relief Act,1947
- The Kerala Moneylending Act, 1958

- The M.P Anusuchit Jan JatiRiniSahayata Act, 1966
- The Madras Indebted Agriculturists(Repayment of Debt) Act, 1955
- The Mysore Pawn Brokers Act,1961
- The Orissa Money lenders (Application of Certain Provisions) Regulations, 1950
- The Rajasthan Sagri System Abolition Act,1961

Despite rules, tribal people are exploited, according to several agencies. Moneylenders ignore laws and rules. The Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission Report and Planning Commission Study Team Report on Tribal Development Programmes confirm such conclusions. Reasons why this continues:

- a) State governments have not adequately protected tribals from bonded labour by using Fifth Schedule laws.
- b) State governments have failed to enforce moneylender evasion laws.
- c) Greedy moneylenders abuse tribals most since they lack will and commitment.

The Planning Commission's Study Team on Tribal Development Programmes Report explains the problem. To be effective and long-lasting, the battle on tribal indebtedness should be two-pronged. To break free from usurious moneylenders, the tribe needs receive long-term credit and improve his economic situation. Cooperative credit should be available in sufficient amounts and the process simplified to encourage tribal to take up the problem, which still requires political will. Tribal interests' protectors' commitment, honesty, and integrity. The approaching regulations, provisions, and schemes will remain paper without these.

Land Alienation

The most recent statistics indicate that close to 88 percent of the scheduled tribes are involved in some aspect of agriculture. The indigenous people feel a profound sense of emotional connection to their homelands. Agriculture is the only source of income that the vast majority of people have ever known, and they have relied on it for ages. The issue is laid forth in the clearest clearness in the Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, which was published in 1961. According to what it states, "just like his brother in the plains, the tribal is hungry for land." There are many different explanations for this. In addition to the widespread aspiration to own land. The number of people who live in tribal communities and engage in shifting cultivation is increasing, yet the jhum cycle is getting shorter in most areas, which is a cause for anxiety. In a similar vein, the number of indigenous people who have adopted the practise of settled agriculture is on the rise. It is becoming increasingly clear that a constantly expanding population exerts a significant amount of pressure on the land.

A farmer in India owns 1.6 acres, compared to 7.5 in the US and 4.5 in the USSR. Regional variance is shown below:

- Northern Region -1.01 Acres
- Eastern Region -1.25 Acres
- Southern Region -1.17 Acres
- Western Region -2.29 Acres
- Central Region -2.57 Acres
- North-Western Region -2.59 Acres

The extent of tribal holdings in each location cannot be accurately assessed due to a lack of data, but certain instances from a handful of states may provide a solution. According to the 1961 Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission Report, Gujarat Vidyapeeth performed a socio-economic survey of Khedbrahama tribal Development Block in Sabarkanthad District in 1959. It shows that 12 of 459 families examined were landless and possessed an average of 5.32 acres. In selected tribal development block villages, the Madhya Pradesh Government undertook an economic survey. It reveals 15.59 acres was the average holding size. The average holding size in Scheduled Areas Dungapur and Banswara was 4.40 and 5.95 acres, respectively, according to Rajasthan's socio-economic surveys. Manipur's average holdings were 2.80 acres, according to a comparable census. The foregoing instances demonstrate that tribal land situations vary, although most tribal farming has uneconomic holdings. Their larger holdings are negated by bad soil, farming methods, and rising debt. Before discussing land alienation, the situation should be described. Due to massive connectivity expansion, practically all tribal areas were opened to non-tribal individuals with various objectives. For tribals, land-grabbers were a nightmare.

Causes

Since the first of interaction of tribes with the civilized world and its monetary systems, chronic cash shortage has been the poor tribal's biggest enemy and a main cause of land loss. The indigenous people require money for weddings, fairs, festivals, clothing, alcohol, and other essentials. Due of low output and ineffective agriculture, they must additionally buy food. Thus, land alienation is driven by their persistent debt to surrounding merchants and moneylenders. The tribals' benefactor and saviour, the ubiquitous moneylender, lends money without collateral for whatever purpose. A tribal member need merely place his thumbprint on a blank piece of paper or against a draught written in a language he cannot read. Oral commitments can lead to total slavery or land forfeiture, although they can be used to extend loans.

Tribes have recently approached state-sponsored cooperative credit societies, but their experiences have been poor. The cooperative societies only provide short-term loans for productive purposes, while most tribals need loans for consumption and subsistence, which violates government policies. Even for those who borrowed from cooperative societies, the experience was nerve-wracking. They won't be imprisoned or lose their belongings if they can't return these debts. Thus, most choose to borrow from familiar sources even at exorbitant rates.

Shifting Cultivation

Shifting cultivation is an Indian Tribe tradition. Cultivating a patch of land for a short time and then letting it fallow is the idea. Cleaning the forest slopes, burning the fallen trees and bushes, and spreading seed on the ash-covered soil are the steps. The rest is nature. The trees and bushes are felled before summer and allowed to dry in the blazing sun. In the second half, they are burned to ashes. After rains, seeds are sown on these trees and shrubs' ashes. The plot can only be sown for one or two seasons. After that, the plot is fallow.

Cleared ground is used for agriculture. The original plot grows trees and bushes and regains some of its former appearance over time.

Shifting agriculture began 8000-10000 years ago in Neolithic times. Its origin has been debated. Primitive man would have had to switch from hunting to farming to get more food as the population grew in the comparatively mild post-Pleistocene environment. Considering the vast amount of land available and man's nomadic nature, the only solution would have been to spread a handful of seeds, preferably cereals, small millets, paddy, or barley, on a suitable patch of land, let it grow through the rainy season, and harvest it. After repeating the process twice or thrice and the yield grew thin, it would have been appropriate to change this method to another patch of land and so the cycle of shifting agriculture.

According to Leach (1949), shifting field cultivation can be found coexisting with agriculture in large parts of the tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, Asia, and the newly discovered world. It was found in isolated hill areas of Assam, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and other states. Though illegal in most places, it nonetheless exists on a smaller scale.

Different Indian regions call this sort of farming by different names. Jhum in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh; Bewar or Dahya in Madhya Pradesh; Podu in Andhra Pradesh; and Koman or Bringa in north Orissa. Shifting cultivation is a major issue in Andhra Pradesh, the North-east, Bihar, and Orissa. Though shifting farming is common in the above regions and a way of life for its practitioners, Baigas of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Bhagwan ordered this form of farming, according to their mythology. Mother Earth should not be mistreated by the plough, hence this legend arose. Shifting cultivation doesn't require ploughing, thus mother earth blesses the baiga for respecting her. Plough cropping will also bring misery, they believe.

Factual Situation and Pragmatic Aspect

All things considered, nearly 10% of the Indian tribal population depends on shifting cultivation and cannot be deprived of their land, livelihood, and way of life for a theoretical opinion on which not all experts agree. In Madhya Pradesh and the north-eastern region, shifting farming is allowed with permission. Madhya Pradesh allows it reluctantly in Baigachak (Mandala) and Abhujmar (Bastar) and a few other Baiga Tribal areas. Verrier Elwin and the late Prime Minister Nehru worked to exempt several north-eastern regions from this limitation. The rest of the world punishes rule breakers in humming areas. If the "culprit" is caught, he is fined and prosecuted; otherwise, all residents are fined.

Terracing or other cultivation methods should be used whenever possible. Some tribal cause sympathisers think this cultivation style promotes lethargy and passivity. The folks who actually do it each have their own interpretation of it. The Korku, Baiga, Korwa, and Maria tribal people of Madhya Pradesh, as well as the Nagas of Assam and the territories neighbouring it, claim that shifting cultivation is accomplished using straightforward tools such as an axe, hoe, digging stick, sickle, etc., all of which are affordable to them and easy to

repair. Plough agriculture, on the other hand, requires a variety of expensive instruments, strict time rules, and routine work in the field, money, and dedication. As a result of their sedentary, carefree, and routine way of life, their cultural practises are well suited to this method of agricultural production. It is impossible to put an end to shifting cultivation in one fell swoop since it has become ingrained in the culture of the tribal peoples who have been engaged in the practise for many generations. Despite the evident drawbacks, shifting cultivation is still practised. Tolerating shifting agriculture is necessary across large portions of the interior since there is insufficient land available for terracing in those regions. However, every effort should be taken to manage this technique of farming along scientific lines in order to lessen the impact that it has on the surrounding environment and contribute to the revitalisation of the fertile jhumed areas.

Remedial Steps for Problems Facing by Scheduled Tribes

The 1916 Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission Report offers crucial implementation suggestions. Major suggestions include:

- If it happens, replacing this system will take time. In the interim, manage it, experiment with it, develop it, and attempt other workable options. Shifting cultivation is tied to tribal life and is more than a technical problem related to improved farming and agriculture techniques. It is a mix of land conditions and societal norms, traditions, and beliefs. Hurried departures may cause issues.
- This offers out enormous possibilities for improvement, and in many locations throughout the tribal territories, it has already been taken up with enthusiasm. Shifting agriculture can be converted into terraced cultivation wherever the hill slopes permit and the soil is suitably deep.
- The establishment of agricultural colonies may also be an efficient answer to the problem of transitioning tribal people from nomadic farming to permanent agriculture. Each tribal family was provided with some cultivable waste land, financial assistance for the construction of houses and for the reclamation of the land, bullocks, drinking water, irrigation, medical, and other services were also proposed in some of the agricultural colonies that have already been established in parts of Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh. These areas are located in India. But the outcome has not been very positive, which is partially down to poor administration of the entire project and partly attributable to the unwillingness of the tribal psychology to adjust to life in lower plains and foreign nations.
- The Planning Commission's Report of the Study Team on the Tribal Development Programme, 1969 immediately proposes that actions should be taken to make agriculture more profitable by encouraging the tribal agriculture to take on new ways of agriculture. The report was published in 1969. To achieve this goal, the following actions may be taken: a) The establishment of demonstration farms. b) The distribution of improved agricultural instruments, manures and fertilizers, and high yielding types of seed. c) Making available various loan options

Conclusion

Regarding the aforementioned, thousands of individuals are unable to secure ownership of property, and they are living in cities, towns, and forests. They do not have any territory of their own to call their own. They are tenants working for the landlords. There are relatively few people who only have a little portion of land. Even Nevertheless, there are some people in urban areas who choose to reside in rented homes. There are still some people who are being forced to work as slaves. They are unaware of what the Indian constitution has allowed for the community to expand in all different directions, despite the fact that it has made all of the necessary provisions for the community's growth and flourishing. Therefore, the government needs to make the correct choice in order to promote the health and economic growth of the scheduled tribes in this country. This applies not just to the state of Karnataka, but to every state in India. The Indian government needs to make the right choice in order to solve all of the issues of the nation.

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