

Tribal Studies: Decolonizing the Mind

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Abstract:

Tribal studies in recent times have been a popular field of Investigation throughout the world. But the attitude with which tribal studies are carried out seems to be a biased one. If we are proud of being responsible and sensible citizens of democracy, it is high time we revisited our approach to tribal issues.

Key words- **Colonization, Tribe, Culture, Development**

“I WOULD PREFER EVEN TO FAIL WITH HONOR THAN WIN BY CHEATING.”

-----SOPHOCLES

Introduction:

In tribal studies, there is a tension between personal experience and social reality. Very often when a phenomenon is taken out of its natural setting, it changes. It may have been the result of colonial mindset. It bears no relation to the real world. It lacks ecological validity because of colonialism. This paper makes an attempt to analyze the consequences of colonial mind. Tribal culture and Tribal life is very much discussed and wrongly interpreted and looked as a backward way of life and continuing efforts are made to bring it into mainstream society but the people of the caste society have inadequate understanding of the indigenous culture that bears enormous contemporary relevance. The crux of the colonial mindset can be traced in such an attitude.

Background of the Thought:

Britishers ruled us for more than two centuries and handed down to us a mindset which is termed as colonial mindset. Colonial mindset necessitates an assumption that others are inferior to you in every respect. Our mind has been affected by colonialism. Colonialism has different manifestation like political power, language power, money power, scientific power, discourse power etc. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), traces the etymology of the word COLONY to the Latin word for 'farmer', 'cultivator', 'planter', or 'settler' in a new country (colon-us). 'Colonia' means 'farm,' 'landed estate,' 'settlement.' The related term 'colonial' is explained by the OED as of belonging to, or relating to a colony. Colonization in general is defined as the physical occupation of a land and domination of its people. The colonial system or principle is frequently used in a derogatory sense, as a policy of exploitation of backward or weak people by a dominant power. The native people are colonized physically and mentally. Physical aspects of colonization include biological factors while mental aspects include religious indoctrination, cultural, social and economic assimilation. Colonization is thus an overpowering act and leaves the colonized people inert and powerless. Power has its roots in human psychology and power grows within social relationships. Even the commonly experienced social relationship of love has this quality of power. The colonized internalize their powerlessness and deprivations. They become inept and lack the power to act. They are unable to make others to do what they desire. This apart, the colonized people are depersonalized and they lose control over their own lives. Though India was decolonized politically at the mid night on 15th August, 1947, has the Indian colonial mind become independent, creative and really cross-cultural in expressing its experience?

We find instances of such colonial gaze galore even today in our way of looking at different issues. Tribal study as an issue is no exception to colonialism. Therefore, Balwant Jain very rightly asserts that; “A

decolonized mind is open to alternatives and is therefore truly representative. The greatness of a decolonized mind lies in the acceptance of an alien language; its dynamism lies in reshaping it; its vivacity lies in producing literatures in it; its superiority lies in being able to represent the other of a heterogeneous group.

Objectives:

To decolonize our mind while looking at tribal issues

To comprehend the social reality

To touch the tribal truth

Decolonization & context of justification:

On the banner of National mainstream, most of the tribal studies are carried out on the assumption that the tribal people are not developed. We are living in democracies now-a-days. So there should be no inequality between the people of the mainstream and tribes as human beings. If so, who are we, the people of caste society to judge them whether they are developed or not? In what capacity do we judge them?

Secondly, the term ‘development’ is very problematic. The term ‘development’ may mean different to different persons. Is it necessary or imperative on the part of the tribal people to understand the term ‘development’ the way we understand it? The term ‘development’ very often has an economic connotation in the caste society while it should actually mean holistic growth. Economic growth at the cost of enormous socio-environmental cost may not mean real development. The tribal people may not be economically sound, but their socio-cultural status may be more developed than that of us. In such a scenario, who is more developed, the tribal people or the caste people?

In spite of having big concrete houses, faster means of communication, capital and technology, most of us are not happy. We do not laugh to our heart’s content for year together. The existence of old homes, laughing clubs in the caste society speak volume about the development we have achieved. We have lost childhood forever. Children of working parents as most of us, are not only deprived of parental care, they are also sandwiched between the commercialization of education and parental expectations. Hence, development that cannot give happiness which is, no doubt everybody’s aspiration, is no development at all.

On the other hand, the tribal people, even today, enjoy their life singing and dancing all night after hand toil of the day. Their integration with nature is certainly better than that of us. They cannot even think of destroying their environment. They have no temple. The forest they live in is their temple. N.A. Ramachandra Pai rightly observes “The distinctness of the tribes lies in their rituals, cultures, beliefs and above all the harmony in which they survive in unison with nature. Their living perfectly depicts a well-balanced give and take procedure that in no way disrupts the ecological balance.” (<https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/tribal-cultures-of-India>) Their socio-cultural practices should be the envy of any human society. They still live in community and are far from the self-centered orientation of the caste people. Their socio-cultural practice of bride’s price makes a lot of sense in contrast to the unhealthy tradition of dowry prevalent in the mainstream. Laxman Kisan Writes “Bride price is widely prevalent in Kisan Society and it is paid by the groom’s father to settle the marriage. The bride price is called “Kania muli Hessu” which may be ten Khani (one quintal rice), Odisha Review,2016.They do not have the concept of private property, which is a real bone of contention for the people of caste society. They may not have money, but they have happiness. We may have money but happiness eternally eludes us. Hence it is high time we revisited our orientation towards tribal studies.

Process of Decolonization:

- ❖ Eradicating errors and myths about tribes and tribal cultures, and by discerning tribal people's empirical realities.
- ❖ Analyzing socially structured institutions like family, education, welfare, politics, culture, custom, tradition and leisure, which are closely related to tribal culture.

- ❖ Decolonization is empowering the well-being of tribal people and enabling them to regain their lost self – esteem and cultural integrity.
- ❖ The major target is to understand and avoid the oppressive social practices and to think innovatively about tribal culture's possibilities.
- ❖ We should realize their public role and establish their right to define themselves as autonomous beings. It is only when tribal people reach this status, the process of de-colonization culminates.

Conclusion:

Such a perspective naturally leads us to conclude that the tribal people are more developed than us. Assuming them to be underdeveloped and imposing on them our model of development on them is completely unjust. Then what is the way out?

We cannot leave them to live in isolation too. There are health issues in tribal society which definitely call for humanistic intervention of the caste people. Instead of inclusion and assimilation, integration is a better option. But it must be an integration of the caste society with the tribal people and not the vice versa. Let us provide them medical education as real friends and in turn learn from them how to save our society which is heading fast forward to a tragic catastrophe.

“IF YOU SHUT UP THE TRUTH AND BURY IT UNDERGROUND, IT WILL GROW AND GATHER TO ITSELF SUCH EXPLOSIVE POWER THAT THE DAY IT BURSTS THROUGH, IT WILL BLOW UP EVERYTHING IN ITS WAY”-----EMILY ZOLA

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