



Tribal Discrimination: a Moral Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Tribal people have always been there in our country (India) yet most of the people are unaware of their existence or are simply ignorant towards their existence and their rich cultural customs. Even before the British took over India, the tribal populations were looked upon as wild, barbaric and unruly. Then they were treated as untouchables and this practice still exists in many parts of our country. Indian Independence in 1947 did not bring about any difference in their lives. It can easily be seen that in our country the tribal are discriminated against their will, but we forget that by doing this we not only lose rich heritage and skills that have no parallel in the world but also the knowledge of how to live peacefully with nature, the way tribal people have been living for many centuries.

Keywords : Discrimination, Tribal Languages, Tribal Religion

INTRODUCTION

Our understanding and knowledge of the world owes a lot to man's ability to see differences or to discriminate. To many people there is a nasty ring to the word 'discrimination'. The context to which we most frequently encounter is that of racial discrimination, and "racial discrimination" is generally taken to mean something like 'treating people differently simply on the grounds of their racial differences.' As such, it is generally and quite rightly regarded as objectionable. But what is wrong here is the particular practice of excluding a group of people from various advantages simply because of their race. (Robin Barrow, 1982, p. 1)

We can critically examine and see a clear picture from the discriminations that are happening in India for decades, since independence till date.

The Controversy

During the last years of British rule in India, there raged a passionate controversy about the policy to be adopted vis-à-vis the aboriginal tribes. While anthropologically minded administrators advocated a policy of protection, which in specific cases involved even a measure of seclusion, Indian politicians attacked the idea of segregation and seclusion on the grounds that it threatened to deepen and perpetuate divisions within the Indian nation, and delayed the aboriginals' integration into the rest of the population. Today this controversy, though occasionally revived in newspaper articles and political speeches, has largely abated. It has become obvious that, on the one hand, a measure of integration is coming about automatically even in protected regions such as Arunachal Pradesh, but that, on the other hand, compulsory integration, even if rapidly progressing, has rarely benefited the tribals in the sense of assuring them a satisfactory place in the wider Indian society.

The protagonists of integration usually ignore the fact that there exists no homogeneous Indian society with which tribal groups could merge by adopting a standard cultural pattern. The so-called advanced Indian society, with its linguistic, religious, and caste divisions, is far from uniform, and it has never been specified into which of the numerous divisions any particular tribal group could be integrated. India's tribal popu-

lation is equally divided, for its heterogeneity extends to race, language, and cultural levels, quite apart from its scattered distribution over numerous disparate environments. *Tribes of India* (1982-2004)

Tribals Then and Now

Looking back to when the British took over our land, the tribal community was looked upon as wild, barbaric and unruly. Then they were treated as untouchables. India's Independence in 1947 did not bring about any change in their lives. They are still treated the same. In fact, the country's independence only led to the loss of their rich heritage as they had to abandon their native places to search for work due to lack of any monetary funds. Many of these places today are converted into holiday destinations and resorts by contractors who are driving out the tribals and taking away their resources. Those people that have escaped such fates and still continue to make artifacts, like masks, paintings, wood cutting, get meager prices for their products even though the artifacts are generally sold for large sums of money as most of it is pocketed by the middle-men. The state of the tribal people in the city is even worse; they live as daily-wage earners and endure hardships all their lives. This neglect on the part of the nation for a fraction of its population is the reason of uprisings such as Naxalism.

A recent incident in this light took place in Maharashtra, when nearly 1,960 tribals were imprisoned for demanding ration cards. They had been asking for a ration card and the implementation of the Forest Rights Act to help them claim the land they had been tilling. People from 28 villages from the Nandurbar district had gone to the collector's office on December 13 and submitted a charter of demands. But they failed to get an assurance from the authorities; hence they staged a demonstration outside the collector's office for two days. The tribals were protesting peacefully till the collector called up the police and got the whole group arrested. They were then produced before the court where all of them were sent to judicial custody for 7 days despite the fact that many of them were women. (Vineeta Chawla, 2011)

Even when it comes to the need for considering the usage of tribal language as a medium in educational institutions by the

tribal masses the attitude of the Government of India and the various state governments to the tribal languages is ambivalent. *Tribes of India* (1982-2004)

In Andhra Pradesh, the use of Gondi as the medium of instruction in primary schools for Gond children was abandoned, and since the breakup of Hyderabad State no more books in Gondi have been printed. The Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission set up by the Government of India in 1960 under Article 339 of the Constitution severely criticized the reluctance of state governments to satisfy the tribals' demand for primary education in their own languages. Under Article 350A of the Constitution, every state must endeavor to provide children of minority groups with adequate facilities for instruction in their mother tongue at the primary stage of education, but the commission pointed out that some of the states had taken this matter very casually, and failed to provide textbooks in even the major tribal languages. p. 136

The voluminous publications issued by the office of the commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other agencies concerned with tribal welfare contain very little information on the problem of tribal languages, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that politicians and officials alike regard their ultimate disappearance as inevitable and even desirable in the interest of the integration of the tribes with the majority communities.

Even considering tribal religion; Tribes of India (1982)

For many years the factor of religion was a criterion by which the tribes were distinguished from such communities as Hin-

dus, Muslims, Buddhists, or Christians. Until 1931 millions of aboriginals were returned in the census reports as adherents of tribal religions, but in more recent census reports tribal religions were not separately listed but were included under the head "Others." p. 317

The Religion of the tribal communities is clearly not as easily definable as Islam or Buddhism, and whereas no doubt usually exists whether a person is a Muslim or an adherent of a tribal religion, it is not so easy to distinguish between some tribal cults and certain types of popular Hinduism.

Conclusion

Tribal people have always been there in our country yet most of the people here are unaware of their existence or are simply ignorant towards their existence and their customs. The surprising thing is that Indian tribals are not backward — as many of us might assume; instead their beliefs and thinking resembles the city people. There is no system of dowry, no caste division, even divorce and widow remarriage are socially accepted among them. They are an exemplary society when it comes to social practices yet they live a life of poverty and discrimination.

It can easily be seen that in our country the tribal are discriminated against their will, but we forget that by doing this we not only lose rich heritage and skills that have no parallel in the world but also the knowledge of how to live peacefully with nature, the way tribal people have been living for many centuries.

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