

Educational Practices And Marginalization Of Indigenous Population In Tripura Region Of India.

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Abstract-

Will and aspiration of majority have profound influence on the government policies and practices. This is visible in the educational policies and practices followed in Tripura. Following of Bengali, as a medium of instruction and neglect of certain subjects like tribal studies which are relevant to the life of the tribal had intensified the dichotomy that exist between the class room teaching and the life outside the class room. The paper is an attempt of exploring certain educational policies and practices that are followed in Tripura, which are further intensifying the chasm between the privileged and the marginalized.

Key words- acculturation, migration, displaced, jhoom, monetization.

Introduction-

To understand present in a better light, we may have to go considerably in the past. There are many reasons that led to the situation when certain groups of people feel marginalized in Tripura.

Most of the tribe of Tripura was practicing *Jhoom* (shifting) cultivation on the past. As the population was less and land was abundant, it did not create much difficulty. However the kings of Tripura since medieval period encouraged the Bengali speaking population to settle down in Tripura for different reasons;

One important reason for the king to encourage the migration of the Bengalis was to increase the revenue. The tribals practicing *Jhoom* cultivation were constantly on move from place to place. It is difficult to tax the shifting population. Similarly in *Jhoom* cultivation, there was hardly any surplus, which can be taxed. The migrant Bengali population practiced plough cultivation and remained settled at one place. It was easier to keep record of the people and land under cultivation and realize the tax. Similarly, the surplus in plough cultivation is also more, part of which can be collected in the form of tax. Due to this the revenue of the state increased substantially.

The *Jhoom* practicing tribals were not familiar with the practice of individual ownership of land. The land for *Jhoom* cultivation was parceled out to the family for specific period. It was considered as a community land and was redistributed again after few years. The migrant Bengali population practiced settled cultivation, and land became individual property. The land available for *Jhoom* was reduced considerably. The problem became more acute after 1947 and 1971 with mass migration of the Bengalis across the border. This alienated the tribals and became one of the important causes of conflict later.

In post independence period after 1947 government encouraged the tribal to take to the plough cultivation. But many of them could not adapt to the changes. The plough cultivation needs more intense input in the beginning and subsequently, in case of crop failure, the loss is more. As the tribal were not trained in the plough cultivation and settled life, many of them failed in the beginning. At the same time, as they had a habit of moving from place to place, they had no habit of

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saving for future. The intense investment in the plough cultivation and crop failure pushed many of the tribal in the debt trap of the moneylenders leading to the loss of land.

Molding of administration on the pattern of Bengal- Second reason for the king to encourage the Bengali immigrant was that he wanted to mould the administration of the state on the pattern of the Sultans of Bengal and was in need of the trained accountants and administrators from Bengal.

Desire of getting connected with Sanskrit- Aryan culture- Third reason for patronizing Bengalis was the desire of the royalty to be accepted as a part of Sanskrit-Aryan India. Though ethnically related to the Mongoloid tribes of Tripura, the king claimed to be belonging to the lineage of ancient *Chandravanshi* kings of Aryavarta. The Bengali Brahmins who were obliged to the king for jobs and patronage also supported this claim. These kind of attempts of getting connection with the ancient ruling family and earning respectability in the caste and '*Varna*' conscious Indian society are numerous. The general orientation of the India culture and society is towards North India. As it was a cradle of Aryan civilization, anything related to Aryan tradition gets respectability. It also generates desire in the mind of others to be acknowledged as a part of Sanskrit Aryan tradition.

Rich literary tradition of Bengali language- Bengali is a language, which is having a rich literary tradition, it is no wonder that the king and ruling establishment of Tripura during medieval period felt attracted towards it and adopted it as a court language. The Bengalis who were patronized by the king took this opportunity to spread their culture and language in the state. *Rajmala*, the chronicle of the king of Tripura was written in Bengali.

However this patronization and encouragement to Bengali language and culture had adversely affected the growth of the tribal languages in Tripura. Adoption of Bengali and neglect of Tribal language oriented the royalty towards Bengal. Bengal became a corridor through which they connected to the Pan-Indian Sanskrit tradition of the so called 'Indian mainland'.

Chandrakanta Murasingh writes,

“ Since the near naked hill people of the princely state, who practiced jumming, and the poor subjects of the state spoke in Kokborok language, the Maharajas of the state, sitting on the octangular throne held up by a lion, felt ashamed of speaking in the same language” (Murasingh, iv)

The attitude of the King of Tripura towards the educational development of the tribe even in the 20th century gives an indication of how the royalty had been exploiting the masses and taking advantage of their ignorance. The king reported to have said,

“If I endeavour to educate the hill people, they will soon dethrone me. They will not address me '*Dharma Abatar*' (Your Highness). If I bring officials from outside, they will protect my interest. It will be congenial to keep the hill tribes ignorant and illiterate for the interest of the feudalism” (Jamatia, 149)

Mass migration- However, during medieval period, the migration of Bengali people was very slow. Their establishments by and large remained confined to the area surroundings of capital of the state. They served the royalty as soldiers and administrators. It did not create much conflict with the tribals of the state. But mass migration after 1947 and 1971 had altered the demographic situation and land holding pattern in Tripura. Compelled by the communal persecution in East Pakistan earlier and Bangladesh later, the Hindus from that area took shelter in Tripura in large numbers, reducing the tribals to minority. Will and aspirations of the majority dominates the political, economical and socio-cultural space, no wonder that the welfare and concern of majority gets proper articulation.

Monetization of economy- Earlier the tribal mainly subsisted on the barter economy. With the monetization of economy during the Modern period and reduced land due to mass immigration, the tribal also slowly changed their agriculture practices. Many of them left *Jhoom* cultivation and

settled down to plough cultivation. But many of them could not acclimatize to the new method of cultivation. Monetization of economy also compelled the tribal to depend more on the moneylenders. This had further led to the loss of land. As the debt went on increasing the tribal were left with no option but to sell their land which was allotted to them by the government.

All these factors; migration of Bengali speaking population and their outnumbering the tribals had led to the domination of Bengalis in the socio-economic, cultural and political life of Tripura. And same domination of majority and neglect of the minority is reflected in the educational policies and practices followed in Tripura.

Educational policies and practices in Tripura leading to marginalization of the tribes- Education cannot fulfill its purpose of all round development if it is not related to the real life outside the classroom. The dichotomy that exist in class room situation and life outside is prevalent everywhere, but appears to be more pronounced in Tripura.

Medium of instruction and marginalization.- With Bengali firmly established as a court language and having a rich literature, it was a obvious choice as a medium of instruction when education started in Tripura. It continues to be the medium of instruction still, further marginalizing the tribal. A tribal child speaks different language at home like Kok-Borok or Darlong, but in school he is exposed to Bengali, aggravating disharmony between life inside the class room and outside. However, deciding about the medium of instruction in a multi-lingual society is a great challenge. If Bengali is accepted, the tribals feel discriminated. If Kok-Borok is accepted, the Bengalis will feel discriminated. If English is accepted, it will have another difficulty, i.e. we will be depriving the generation of their right of acquiring education in their mother tongue.

In some of the tribal areas, the Christian missionaries had their English medium schools. Many tribal students study in those schools. As they complete their schooling in English medium, they do not feel comfortable in the colleges in Tripura, as the lectures are mostly delivered in Bengali. Though officially, the students can opt for Bengali or English medium. But English medium students are very few. The tribal students, who study in the English medium schools, usually tend to go out of state to Shillong or Mizoram for further study. But obviously all cannot afford it and for many, class 12th is an end of the education. As a result we find percentage of tribal student less than the percentage in the population, in spite of the different encouragements like stipend given by the government.

ST students in the Colleges-

College	Total Students	ST Students	%
MBB, Agartala	4307	998	23.17
GDC, Dharmanagar	2934	241	8.21
N.S. College, Udaipur	1033	171	16.55
Kamalpur college	865	184	21.27

(Source- website of Directorate of higher education, Govt. of Tripura) (2013 data)

The issue is very complicated and one cannot find a simple solution, but it needs to be debated in an academic circle.

Neglect of certain subjects and marginalization- Formal education and real life should be related to each others. In spite of having 32% tribal population, with nineteen different tribes, Tripura university, only one university giving formal education in the state do not have department of Tribal study or anthropology. With the wave of Aryanization through Bengali language and culture and overwhelming winds of globalization, many of the tribes are losing their distinct identity. Under the broad umbrella of Tribal studies, different areas like translation studies, migration studies can be explored.

As there are many languages in Tripura, linguistics can be another area deserved to be explored. In multi-lingual society, translation studies play an important role in bringing different communities together. After all it is literature, which gives us an insight in the hearts and minds of the people. The folk songs and stories can be translated in Bengali, English and other modern Indian languages, which will give the plain people insight into the hopes and aspiration of the tribal people. Similarly, major literary works of Bengali, English and other can also be translated in Kok-Borok or other tribal languages. The translated literature also provokes creativity in different languages. Mahabharata, the great Sanskrit Indian epic had provoked creativity in many Indian languages and Kok-borok is also not untouched. Modern Kok-Borok poet, Vijay Debbarma takes Eklayva, the tribal hero from the Mahabharata as representative of the oppressed. He writes,

“Dronacharya owes a mountain of debts to you Ekalabha,
The days of *gurudakshina* are over.
Now, its time for you to ask back your thumb.
The breeze that spread the fragrance of your blood, now return as a song.
The grass that felt the touch of your blood, is now reciting your poem.”

(Gupta, 34)

This is just one example how people identify themselves with characters in the Epic and literature which is originally written in another language can provoke creativity in different languages.

The process of Aryan, Non-Aryan interaction and growth of composite culture had taken place in North Indian plains centuries before can be witnessed in Tripura. Invasion of the Aryan culture through Bengali language and its impact on the Non-Aryan tribes can also be interesting area of study. However, when we use the term Aryan culture, we should be also conscious that, what we generally refer as Aryan culture, have many Non-Aryan elements in it.

The subjects like handicraft productions; especially professional training in making handicraft of bamboo is neglected. Tourism sector is having lot of growth potential in Tripura, so Tourism studies are another area which can be explored.

Inclusion of all these subjects in the curriculum will give a proper sense of identity to the indigenous people and subjects like handicraft training will also contribute to economic development.

Educational policies in Tripura and Marginalization—If the educational policies are formulated without due considerations to the geographical factors, it also causes or aggravates the marginalization.

If a person staying at Jampui Hills in North Tripura had to come to Tripura University for some small work, he had to spend minimum five days. This acts as a deterrent to study. The policymakers in Education should seriously think about having two extended campus of the university, one in north and one in south. Calculating the requirements of the number of universities solely on the basis of the population is not suitable for a state like Tripura, where population is scattered in the far flung areas. We should not have the same parameters for thickly populated state like West Bengal and thinly populated state like Tripura.

Government of Tripura is planning to start one more university at Agartala. This will further intensify the regional disparities within the state. The opportunities in Agartala will multiply as it already has one central university, an NIT and medical college, but the far flung area will continue to remain backward. Presently due to this disparities and lack of amenities at other places many government servants keep their families at Agartala even if they are posted to other places. They usually rush to Agartala during weekends and come back on Monday. Many times the period of absence overlaps into Friday on the one side and Monday on the other side. This leads to considerable loss of working days. It will be better if a new university is developed at a place other than Agartala. This will contribute towards the balanced regional growth and provide more opportunities to those, who had so far remained outside the parameters of development.

A residential university established in a remote area will better serve the deprived section of the tribal in Tripura.

Conclusion-

Greater tradition absorbing and overwhelming the lesser traditions is continuous historical process. The logic of history does not give any sympathetic consideration to anyone. It works in a similar fashion everywhere and all the time. Bengali culture had overwhelmed the indigenous tribal culture of Tripura. The global culture that is led by Europe and America is slowly overwhelming the Bengali and Hindi culture both. One should not be surprised if some futuristic prediction says that five hundred years from now most of the people will be speaking English in India and the speakers of Bengali and Hindi will be reduced to minority. The language and culture is a dynamic concept and are under constant change. The succeeding generation always speak a language that is little different than their immediate predecessor.

The process of assimilation of different culture traits and growth of new culture is a continuous process. Sometimes we develop an attitude of preserving whatever is handed down to us by our ancestors. In the process we sometimes also develop a tendency of rejecting the good things from others. Impractical adherence to tradition is detrimental to the progress of the society. Understanding the process of change should not be an emotional attempt of preserving the past tradition. But it should liberate us from the segregating mentality. Probably our ancestors had realized long back that the segregation and divisive attitude are harmful for the society and developed a concept of '*Vasudhev Kutumbkam*' (The whole earth is my family).

So the study of diversity and assimilation need to be based on the objectivity. The useful concepts and practices even from outside should be welcomed. as *Rigveda* says,

"Let the noble thoughts come to us from all the directions."

Many times the academicians, who are mostly plain people, show a kind of pampering attitude towards the tribal culture and language. Probably they remain conscious that it is they, the plain people, who had displaced the indigenous tribal and established their domination and out of this feeling of guilt, tries to undo the mistake of the past generation by showering praise on everything in the tribal culture. This approach can do lot of harm to the objectivity and may also led to the development of an unhealthy attitude among the tribal who are still untouched by the modern education. They may develop an attitude that it is our culture that is the best and we should maintain its purity and resist all the attempt of assimilating new ideas. These resistances to the assimilation of new ideas are harmful to the progress. After all, the knowledge grows with the free exchange of the ideas. We need to borrow the ideas and making it as a base, need to construct a new knowledge.

Human being as '*Homo Sapiens*' had developed nearly five lack years ago. But out of this nearly four lac and ninety thousand years man lived very primitive lives, when development was very slow. One of the causes of the lack of development was that the people lived in a small isolated group without any interaction among them.

The cultural and linguistic differences need not to be necessarily competitive; they can be complimentary as well.

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