

Contributions of Anthropology in Central India

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ABSTRACT In the State of Madhya Pradesh the bureaucratic structure is so strong that there is hardly any scope for human consideration. Politicians and administrators in most cases, cannot be expected to have patience for experiments or time for research. Two years back an UNESCO Sponsored Programme "Education For All" started at Bhopal and suddenly collapsed. The reason is not known to me. Another reason for the present status of applied anthropology in central India is that the publications of this region remain unknown and unobtainable. Partly responsible is the paucity of anthropological literature/text book due to the lack of library facilities and lack of knowledge in English language. This gives me an impression that the region has not been able to establish the discipline of applied anthropology inspite of the fact that Madhya Pradesh by virtue of its tribal concentration and problems deserves immediate attention of applied anthropologists.

The present paper is an attempt to discuss about the relevant anthropological studies which directly or indirectly promote application of anthropology in middle India. Also the applied anthropological efforts and activities would be examined in terms of protection and development of the tribal communities on the one hand and perpetuation of cultural behaviour on the other. Central India covering the entire state of Madhya Pradesh, adjacent areas of Gujrat, Bihar, Orissa and Maharashtra have been taken for consideration. Census of India 1961 and 1991 listed 58 and 46 tribes respectively in Madhya Pradesh. But there are about 70 tribes in total because some 20 tribal groups due to various reasons have been left out. Unfortunately very little anthropological research has been conducted. Some monographs have been published between 1939 and 1963. A good number of classical monographic studies by Elwin (1963: Baiga), (1942: Agaria), (1943: Maria), (1947: Muria), Naik (1956: Bhil), Nag (1958: Baiga), Fuchs (1960: Gond and Bhumia), Nath (1960: Bhils of adjacent state), Naik (1963: Abu jhmarhias). A Socio-economic report on the condition of primitive tribes in Madhya Pradesh was published in 1963 by the National Council of Applied Economic Research. W. Kopper's many articles on the Bhils published in various journals in German language and these were later translated into English (1948). Leela Dube's 'The Gond Woman' is worth mentioning. On some other tribes in the adjacent states were covered by Elwin (1950: Bondo Highlander), Griffiths (1946: Kol), Mc Dougal (1963: Hill Juang), Pfeffer (1982) published two important articles

and a book on the middle India tribes. South Bihar, adjacent to Madhya Pradesh also have attracted many anthropologists to work on tribal society and culture between 1912 and 1993. Important monographic studies were published by Roy (1912: Munda), (1915: Oraon), (1925: Birhor), (1928: Oraon religion and customs) (1953: Hill Bhuinya), (1937: Kharia). Majumdar in 1937 studied on social change among the santal tribe. Jay, Edward published three important articles on tribal polity and religion in Madhya Pradesh.

Anthropological studies on scheduled castes and higher castes were also made by Robertson (1938: Mahar). Two important contributions on castes of M.P. by Mayer (1960) and Mathur (1964) on the higher castes of M.P. by Mayer (1960) and Mathur (1964) on the higher castes of Middle India must be mentioned here. Government of India after having realised the urgency of anthropological studies established Tribal Research Institute in Chhindwara (M.P.) and then it was shifted in the capital at Bhopal. Anthropology Departments were opened in Sagar and Raipur universities and later in 1989 at Bilaspur University. Another Department was set up at Jabalpur University in the name of Tribal Studies. A good number of research institutes in the State of Madhya Pradesh came into being that started conducting researches on various problems of tribal and scheduled caste groups. Government of Madhya Pradesh set up a separate Ministry of Tribal Development for giving proper attention to the tribals. As many as six development authorities were set up for the protection and development of seven primitive

tribes, namely, Abujhmaria, Baiga, Bharia, Hill Korwa, Kamar, Birhor and Saharia. It was also felt necessary to establish museum in Bhopal in a big way which is known as Indira Gandhi National Museum of Man with a view to work for documentation and Preservation of tribal culture of India in general and Madhya Pradesh in particular. Regional centre of the office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes started in Bhopal for providing protection and remedy to those categories. In the recent years a large number of Government schemes under different programmes were thrown open for these people. Anthropological Survey of India, Govt. of India is having one regional centre at Sagar to conduct researches on the tribes and castes of Madhya Pradesh in addition to the activities of its central Region at Nagpur. During the last decade a good number of NGOs have started functioning for the upliftment of those backward and downtrodden communities. An effort was made by the Govt. of Madhya Pradesh towards development of these communities. An effort was made by the Govt. of Madhya Pradesh towards codification of tribal customary laws in M.P. from 1992 to 1997. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in May, 1998 launched a programme to promote a replicable model of self reliant development of tribal communities based on the exercise of their rights over the management of their natural resources. From time to time the Tribal Research and Development Institute, Bhopal and the Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi have brought out their respective bulletins provide materials of substantive nature on the tribes inhabiting the respective areas. Those publications contain materials on economic, socio-cultural, educational, religious beliefs and practices, linguistic, demographic and health and hygienic conditions of the tribals. Quite a good number of articles and books may be found on tribal problems, welfare evaluation and development. In these papers focus has been given on retaining the tribal culture, customary law, least interference in the implementation of welfare and development schemes. Some publications by academic anthropologists have also indicated the problems and prospects of tribal development, self management and joint forest management.

Late Prof. L.P. Vidyarthi produced a number of books dealing with the methods, general

principles of applied and action anthropology. T.B. Naik's and Fuchs' writings have bearing upon the tribal problems of various communities and also S.C. Dube has dealt with general problems of tribes and their development approach. There are a few papers dealing with forest, craft and development programmes in tribal areas published by Roy Burman (1964). Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal has also done some work on forest based economy and tribal development potential. A few forest officials belonging to the government Department made efforts in improving the forest village inhabited by the tribals. Those officials were having anthropological orientation. In spite of all these efforts there exist a lack of base line socio-economic and cultural data on most of the tribal groups of Madhya Pradesh. We find barely a dozen of ethnographic monographs on tribal communities of Madhya Pradesh and two or three ethnographic films. These books have little relevance at present as most of the tribal society and culture have undergone significant changes. Hence, very few scientific studies have been conducted. Three anthropology departments in the Universities of this State are having far less number of faculties required to run a department. It is unfortunate that academic departments of anthropology are being continuously neglected both by the State Government and the University Grants Commission, New Delhi. Most of the time vacant faculty positions are filled up by adhoc recruitment of persons not having adequate qualifications and experience. In the Universities there is rat race for producing so-called higher educated persons and opening of catchy titled subjects. Higher education is being treated as a commodity and mushrooming like industry not to talk of its quality. Under this competitive situation, anthropology is receding to the background. Sociologists in this region are trying to replace anthropology by producing sketchy and brief articles on tribal problems and development. In the research institutes and other organizations there is a scarcity of trained anthropologists. No efforts are being made by the concerned departments of Anthropology to search for competent persons. The University Departments of Anthropology have been maintaining a poor show as the number of teachers are much below the minimum requirement. The adhoc teacher's remuneration is at par with unskilled workers which deters competent anthropologists from

joining the Universities. Applied researches in the tribal belts are sometimes carried out. But owing to the lack of theoretical base some of the institutes, N.G.Os and Government departments are unable to achieve desired results. The outlook of the Government, administrators and the social workers is required to be changed. They think that theoretical and applied studies can be put into mutually exclusive categories. At the analytical stage theoretical and applied aspects of anthropology will strengthen each other. My own work on displacement and rehabilitation during the last five years indicated that rehabilitation either in agricultural land or in self-employment schemes must relate to the facts of habitate and culture of tribals. The outcome of such programmes will take a very long time and therefore alternative livelihood avenues must also be made available to them. Some sociologists and social workers have also attempted to conduct applied research on the so-called messianic movement of Bastar (M.P.) But results are of no use as they lack theoretical back up of various political systems and economy. A doctoral dissertation of my scholar (1998: F Mollick) has brought out the following findings:

1. With open and hidden opposition, the members of the non-tribal society are living with the tribal communities in close symbiosis. The later are being exploited and dominated over the years by the former. Those non-tribals settled long back as large landholders, traders, business people, money-lenders and are enjoying political patronage. Even the officials posted in tribal areas, take undue advantage.
2. Such people have formed a class in opposition to the small-scale society.
3. They have a strong political network to maintain their traditional privileged status and dominate over the under-privileged, i.e. tribals both socially and economically.
4. They have command to control to a great extent local, state and national politics as observed by Fuchs (1969).
5. That is, more or less, the condition prevailing throughout the entire state.
6. Democratic means to improve their social and economic condition has failed.
7. No anthropological studies on political systems of the tribals have been conducted. Hence with the sudden change from traditional political autonomy to state

- organisation, the relations have deteriorated.
8. There is clash between primitive and wider superior cultures.
9. External provocations for sparking an explosion are very frequent.
10. The tribals have indulged in killing of exploiters and authorities, which has led to destruction.
11. There is an urgent need of "theoretical study of the tribes so far ignored by anthropological enquiry" (Fuchs: 1969).
12. A study will be necessary about the origin of the main tribes, such as Oraon, Munda, Gond and Bhil which might have political significance.

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