

Race, Ethnicity and History- The Voices From Below

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-----ABSTRACT-----

The title of my paper is influenced by the edited work by Stefan Berger and others 'Writing History Theory and Practice.' This work includes two articles 'Race Ethnicity and History' by Miles Rosenberg and 'The voices from below- doing peoples history in Cardiff docklands' by Glenn Jordan. The theme of my research paper centers around and is a case study of the tribal community of Canacona. This paper tries to highlight the emerging voices of the folk, though silent, resonating their tribal identity, about their race and pride, their ethnicity, their history, culture and tradition. 'Identity centricism', 'Identity consciousness' in search of our past to define our present identity has become the crux of our existence. This is idealized by the concept of 'Goenchi asmitai', or 'Goenkarponn' i.e. the Goan identity and the emerging heritage festivals like ' Ramponkaranche fest' (fisherman's heritage festival) or the 'patoli fest'(thanksgiving harvest festival) all flaunting our Goan heritage past.

The core stress of this paper is to highlight the corresponding emerging voices from below, of the subaltern tribal community, asserting their tribal identity within their geographical and cultural setup. The cultural uniqueness, the marketability value and research value realization has led to a firm rooting of the concept of tribal identity and a move to conserve, preserve, showcase and document the history and tradition of the tribal's by the tribal community themselves. The process of acculturation has set in with the winds of change operating from within and external to the tribal setup. The term 'voices from below' represents the voices of the subaltern which is represented by the tribes of Canacona in context with this paper.

Keywords - Subaltern, Tribal identity, Tribal history, Tribal ethnicity, Oral history.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human community has generated, refined and passed knowledge orally from generation to generations. This traditional knowledge is a part of the cultural identities. Traditional knowledge plays a vital role in people's life. These traditional knowledge form the 'lesser tradition' and are basically oral, unsystematic, undocumented and under danger of lost due to onslaught of forces of modernization. As a heritage this knowledge needs to be preserved, documented for benefit of local possessors and humanity at large. Any efforts in this direction needs applauses, encouragement and a lending hand.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a paucity of information in terms of scholarly works about the tribes of Goa in its written form. However one cannot deny the accessibility of literature on the subject in the vernacular language. The reference list highlights the support material used for writing this paper. Nonetheless mention can be made of Dr. Pandurang Phaldesai (2004). One can find some aspects of the tribal cultural life in his work. Dhume (1986) provides information on the tribes and their origin. Singh (1993) attributes each chapter to highlight the lifestyle of the tribal clans. Bandhari (1999) devotes a chapter to the tribes of Goa. Jha (2009) throws light on 'Little Traditions' and 'Greater tradition'. Berger (2017) an article in this work titled "Voices from Below" has inspired this research paper. Phaldesai (2011) throws light on some of the cultural aspects related to the community

under study in this paper. Khedekar (2013) provides info into the eco-cultural traditions of Goa. I have highlighted the relevant information from these works in context of this paper. There is immense literature availability for studying the tribes in the Indian context.

III. RESERCH METHODOLOGY

Indian Historiography has evolved from the 'elitism' of the colonialists and 'bourgeois-nationalist elitism' to 'Marxist historiography' gaining popularity and still being popular. Subaltern studies with its focus on 'writing history from below', received status of global academic institution due to its popularization by Ranajit Guha. This paper is in conformity with the discipline of subaltern studies historiography, as it is a study of the tribal community who in a generic sense are the marginalized section of our society. The subject had to be dealt with an Oral history approach. Observation method along with interviews techniques has been useful to elicit the necessary information. It is a qualitative research; a case study technique has been employed.

Oral history has 'democratized the story of the past by recording the experience of people hidden from history'. The Subaltern studies adopt the paradigm 'history from below' adding a new dimension to historical narrative from subaltern perspective. The challenge here is to work devoid of any written records and to discern the authenticated voices and to arrive at a factual historical narrative. While attempting to form a historical narrative from the subaltern paradigm the pre-disposition towards conformity with the patriarchy while neglecting the 'small

voices' within the 'voices from below' that could be of women participation needs alteration by willfully attempting by and large a comprehensive narrative.

IV. PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

'Goa has been described as a tropical paradise ensconced in the Western Ghats, a part of the Konkan belt reclaimed from the sea by the legendary Parashuram.i The early Pastoral communities have lent their name to Goa. The Portuguese rule of 451 years apart ...the exposure to Latin influences has enriched Goan identity..... Goa has been acclaimed as a model of sustainable development, of balance between ecology and population...' befittingly describes the State of Goa the 25th State of the Union of India.

Canacona is the southernmost taluka (administrative unit) of the State of Goa, set amidst the hills and forest resided by the tribal population. Canacona seem to have derived its name from mythological sage 'Kanvarishi' and his abode 'Kanvapuram' which suggest an Aryan angle to the place name. Reference is also made to its name derivation from Kanada language. 'Kan' meaning jungle and 'Kon' means a lake, so a 'lake in the jungle'. 'Kon' also means a buffalo so a place where wild buffaloes abound. The original inhabitants of the land are claimed to be the tribes the Gaudas and the Kunbis. These tribes live in segregated parts of the villages of Patnem, Poinguinim, Loliem, Agonda, Gaondongiri, Cotigao, Chapoli, and Kola all in the taluka of Canacona.

V. RACE AND ETHNICITY

The Mahars, Kunbis, Velips, Gaudas, Dhangars and the Pagis form the tribal population of Canacona. The Pagis/Pagui has settled around the coast side of Canacona and probably has received the name after the occupation they profess i.e. fishing. The name seems to have originated from the word 'pag' meaning fish or 'paguir' the fishing net. Their craft revolves around fishing. They are endogamous population with exogamous clans (kul) like Parshuram Nirakar Mallikarjun, Guru Pradesh, Betal, Mahamaya named after their family deity.ii The Gaudas also practice 'kul' clan exogamy, their clans names Betal, Naguesh, Mallikarjun, Kedar also named after their family deities.

The Kunbis have two subgroups Gaunkars and Velips. The Velips consider them as separate endogamous groups from the kunbis. The Kunbis engage in agriculture and the Velips are assigned priestly role.iii These tribes seem to belong to proto-australoid group. In the absence of archeological, anthropological, epigraphic and literary evidences it is difficult to comment with authority. The advent of the Aryan, exemplified by the Shree Parshurama legend is dated between 2550 and 2350 BCE iv The Mahars the pastoral tribe arrived in 4000 BCE. The Kol arrived around 3000 BCE and Mundari came later. The original place of the Kol and the Mundas is said to be Chota Nagpur. v Similarities have been established

between the tribes of Goa and those from the region of Chota Nagpur.

VI. ASPECT OF THE TRIBAL IDENTITY

These tribes have a rich and vibrant culture. Each tribe has their unique rituals and ways of celebrating life. They live at a subsistence level, by large a marginalized community. They allied with the other clans to meet their economic needs and this inter- dependency in the economic sphere was translated into inter- dependence in their religious rituals which can be witnessed till date. This inter- dependence was wisely woven in through their ritualistic practice by assigning specific role to each tribe making them a one unit. The leadership of the 'Budhavant' also knit them together as a unit. The ethnicity and the common shared history form an identity in itself. Their common shared festivals like the 'Zagor', 'Shigmo', 'Fugdi', 'Dhalo' 'Gudulea Parab', 'Nave Parab, 'Asadi Parab' are a joyous experience. The tribal dance forms 'Tonya' 'Fugdi', 'Goff', 'Talgadi' are intricate. Their local musical instruments like the 'Kansalem', 'Taso', 'Dhol', 'Zanz', 'Ghant', 'Ghumat' lend vivacity to their festive mood. Their traditional songs 'Ovis' or 'Hovis' 'Dhantaveleo ovi', 'Lagnageet' (marriage songs), 'Gudulea Gane' (Gudulea parab is the tribal festival in reverence to mother earth), arath (Paryer), 'Chaurang, Shigmo' songs, 'Fugdi' songs while performing chores at home or the fields are unique and forms an interesting aspect of life which are gradually withering and vanishing in the obscurity of time. Their unique style in dress, mannerism, eating of betel leaf, attachment to land, and relationship with nature makes it an exclusive experience from the view point of the spectator.

VII. VOICES FROM BELOW

From the realm of the 'voices from below' which are expressions of the subaltern, the pioneers in the field from amongst the ethnic community, have entrusted upon themselves the responsibility of protecting their tribal cultural heritage, reviving the dying arts forms, safeguarding it from acculturation and also have taken up the task of documentation as well as promoting tribal knowledge by writing in the press. I have made an attempt to discern some of these voices.

An exemplar is Mr. Devendra Tawadkar who is identified with tribal research on themes such as 'eco-cultural tradition amongst the tribes', 'the tribal indigenous techniques and tools of fish catching', on the 'davarne' or the (megaliths), sati stones and also attempting to sustain the art forms like the 'talgadi' (tribal dance form) by inspiring the older generation to train the youth. Mr. Tawadkar is a teacher by profession in the rural school and promotes the interest amongst the young of the community in the tribal history and artifacts by organizing hikes and field visits, as well as serves as resource person in the field of tribal history and culture. His quest for the 'relics and antiquities' of the past makes him a 'voice' much sought after.

Another pioneer is Mr. Devidas Gaonkar who has penned a work 'Goveatil Adivasi- Rachna ani Jivansheli' (The Tribes of Goa- their origin and lifestyle). He is a journalist by profession and is engaged with the task of writing a column in the local newspaper regarding the tribal history and culture. One finds interesting and original information on the tribes in his work on the subject of the origin of the tribes, their lifestyle, livelihood system, traditional agrarian practices, and the system of economic exchange, food preservative techniques and interestingly the tribal networking system, lifestyle of living in harmony between different groups which in local terminology is the 'Gaunki' system. 'Gaunki' is a tribal lifestyle system of cooperation, empathy, sympathy, self-sufficiency, 'one village one family' ideal. This tribal trait of being a 'Gaunki' is sometimes fostered through the ritualistic practices and set religious norms ascribing specific religious roles to every clan and practicing an inclusive policy. The reverence to the ritualistic set norms and the reverence to the tribal leadership who is termed as 'Gaonkar' (Tribal head) and his set norms, kept the tribal society an integral unit through generations. Interestingly the people are still rooted in their traditional ethos, while changes are happening some at a speed pace while others at leisurely pace but change is the 'order of life' undeniably. Modernization and its 'spillover effects' like materialism, individualism and assertiveness have eroded the traditional value system of synchronistic lifestyle resultant is the slowly crumbling of the cohesiveness and the dependent and trust relation which has been an integral component of the tribal society.

The pioneers in the 'voices from below' have initiated a 'Tribal Research Center' Presided by Mr. Devidas Gaonkar which is a progressive step in pooling in the local human resources towards a joint collaborative research and documentation on tribal history and culture. Individual efforts are never adequate when the mission is enormous. It involves wisdom to pull in like-minded persons to accomplish the task. The grand task before the group is to document the history of their land, their traditional knowledge system, oral traditions, performing arts, the techniques of production, their art and crafts which are issues forming just the 'tip of the iceberg'. This task they believe is of immediate concern as the forces of acculturation, neglect of the traditional practices as well as the wearing away of the older generations who are the custodian of the traditional knowledge system would create a void in the process of historical and social construct of this community. Ramita Gaonkar a lady research member has been entrusted with the task of documenting the feminist culture. Their culture is rich and varies between clans. 'Shigmo' is a popular festival and the manner of celebrating differs within clans. The Shigmo celebrated by the inhabitant's of Avali, Bardem, Kuskem is unique, termed as "Dandavelo Shigmo" (Shigmo celebrated atop the hill). Interestingly the inhabitants of these places recreate and set up a settlement atop a hill, which have been their original residing place and the

celebration continues for 15 days, is a spectacle and a statement on the diverse and an exciting cultural traits.

The objective behind the research center is to preserve their tradition by documentation in its indigenous form. On 'identity' issue the respondent felt that identity is the crux for living and loss of an identity would result in a loss of culture which would further result in a loss of the 'astitva' (life's meaning) itself. Thus preserving, promoting and protection thus becomes of vital significance.

The significance of the research group is that it constitutes 'voices from within' an indigenous or subaltern voice with a base and understanding of the tribal ethos and culture. Documentations of the tribal art forms are attempted by those alien to this community which is the 'outsider' voice' who are at times alien to indigenous knowledge field, resulting in distortion, ascribing terminologies which are nonexistent within tribal vocabulary and in the process of conceptualizing tribal knowledge has resorted to borrowing of theories and knowledge from other tribal studies or tribal groups resulting in artificial interpretation of their cultural ethos. Also the 'reflective few' from outside the tribal set up (termed according to Redfield's theory) gets acclaimed as 'folk artist' without the practical knowledge of the art forms only on the basis of the documented knowledge, is felt as misappropriation of the acclaim which is due to the performers of this art forms.

A measure on a larger scale to promote and showcase the tribal culture and heritage is the 'Lokutsav'. 'Lokutsav' means 'Lok' denoting people and the terminology could be used to signify subaltern group or an indigenous people and 'utsav' meaning celebration or festivity. Thus 'Lokutsav' is the celebration of the people; their heritage, culture, the lifestyle, the traditional knowledge system, art, their crafts, livelihood system, folklore of the ethnic group.

The persona behind the conceptualizing of the 'Lokutsav' is Mr. Ramesh Tawadkar who has served as member of the Legislative assembly. Under the banner of the 'Adarsh Yuva Sangh' and the 'Balam education Society' Mashifond in the village of Painguinim this event is organized. It is a much awaited annual event where an entire tribal village set up is created, giving a glimpse of the tribal 'jivansheli' or the lifestyle within the typical tribal setup. One can glimpse into the items of daily use by the folks which finds exhibited at the 'lokutsav'. Amongst the prominent exhibits besides the household utility items, are also the terracotta pottery of various designs and form. Baskets woven from the grass and cane used for agricultural purpose and storage, the eco-friendly mats, the measuring system, artifacts made of coconut shells are some profound interest. One also gets a peep into the livelihood system, showcasing how pottery is made, woodcutting, pounding, grinding, and weaving the coconut fronds, while the traditional songs are sung while performing the household chores gives a complete view of subaltern lifestyle. Agricultural equipments and tools on display give knowledge of the processes in the traditional agricultural operation. Another exhibit of interest is the

ethno- medicine- herbs and barks used as medicine to cure the common illnesses. One can also be a witness the folk dances enacted. Competitions are organized in order to promote the culture amongst the schools, college students and cultural clubs who wonderfully perform to the tribal tunes. Traditional games and adventure activities, one can engage in as adventure is the part and parcel of the tribal lifestyle. One finds tribal food to relish significant for being cooked devoid of oil and a specialty being the 'pollia bakri' which can be enjoyed while experiencing being in a tribal set up house of thatched roof. Their dress style, ornaments, musical instruments are amongst the other exhibits. 'Lokutsav' is subaltern expression of subaltern culture and lifestyle.

A deep study of the exhibits at this temporary created museum would assist in the historical and the social construct of the bygone eras serving as the source material for building past history. The 'Lokutsav' holds a composite research value enabling readings into the history and ethnicity of the community. Interestingly one does not find 'copper' amongst the display or the 'huge pottery', as they were not a subaltern expression they do not represent the subaltern. The 'Lokutsav' attracts interest from people across the State, the college students, history lovers, foreign tourist even people specially visiting the place from around the neighboring States.

Here the 'past is constructed and placed within the present'. The display represent the achievements of the subaltern while comprehending the complexities of life, acquiring capability for survival often in unfriendly environment, imbibing ecological knowledge and a truly participatory approach to development fostered by a way of life.

The Lokutsav displays the traditional knowledge system which is ancient and has origin in the remote past. The knowledge system like medicine is a 'little tradition' and its systematization and canonization by the elite gave rise to 'greater tradition' sciences. The importance of this ancient knowledge and technology shows the wisdom distilled through millennia of experimentation and trial an error. 'Bhoomipurush' is a souvenir on the 'Lokutsav' which contains the compilation of information with respect to this tribe.

Cultures can be deliberated upon by using the concepts of 'Little Tradition' and 'Great Tradition.' These concepts are credited to Robert Redfield in his study on Mexican society. He stipulates that the tradition does not remain inert or stable. It grows continually in two forms or patterns. One pattern is termed as the 'orthogenetic evolution' where the internal or the indigenous factors are accountable for the changes. The other is termed as 'Heterogenetic contact' where changes happen due to external contact or intervention of outside forces. The social structure of the culture or civilization functions at two levels, one at the level of 'folk' and the other at the level of 'elite' or 'reflective few'. The Folk are

categorized under 'little tradition' and the elite or 'the reflective few' under the 'Greater tradition'. Both these traditions interrelate with each other. These interrelated forces cause the growth and change in the constitution of the tradition.

Following the model of Robert Redfield; Mckim Marriot and Milton Singer has applied this theory to study Indian culture. He believes there is a continuous interaction between 'little tradition' and the 'greater tradition'. Little tradition constitutes the custom, rites, rituals and dialect, while the 'Greater tradition' constitutes the legitimate forms of these things. The meeting point of these tradition results in the 'upward and downward movement'. When little tradition progress upward it is called as 'universalization' while elements of greater tradition travel downward it is called 'parochialisation'

Applying this theory to our field based study, in the process of propagation and promotion of the culture the 'orthogenetic evolution' is in occurrence and the culture is in the process of evolution and change due to the indigenous factor. Tribal cultural performances hold tourist attraction and the tribal troupe are invited to showcase their performing, art forms for the tourist in hotels as Goa is the tourist destination. In order to make the art forms appealing with increased marketability value, creativity and glamour is introduced in the tribal folk art leading to 'orthogenetic evolution' and loss of originality and acculturation. This is change occurrence from within. At the same time 'Heterogenetic contact' is influencing its evolution and change. The 'Heterogenetic contacts' is facilitated through their enhanced contact with the dominant culture. This contact with the dominant cultures is established facilitated by the development in transport communication, influence of education and media, and the forces of modernization and globalization. Literacy, urbanism, connectivity participation in national political process are indicators of tribal development. Both the movements in 'Redfield's theory' are discernable in the study area. The movement towards 'Universalization' is evident as tribal culture moves to the hotels and catches the fancy of the dominant culture and also helps in the process of 'democratization of culture'. The movement of 'Parochialisation' is seen as the dominant cultural ritualistic style and patterns and lifestyle is adopted by the subaltern in the marriage customs, birthday celebrations, dress style and general lifestyle.

Another aspect of tribal expression is the 'Balgram' or the eco-tourism center' to display the traditional knowledge system which is in its formative phase.

Shree Mallikarjun College of Arts and Commerce an institution of higher learning caters to education of the youth from amongst the tribes. The Department of History encourages 'village studies' 'writing their own history' as projects and assignment thus laying the foundation for 'democratization of culture'. Many cultures co- exist in society none of these allowed to dominate, each gets fair

share in recognition and acceptance forms the basis of cultural democracy.

VIII. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This paper has brought to light the interesting aspects of the collective consciousness of the few educated, committed to the work of documentation, showcasing and strengthening of their past. It is a collective work and shared responsibility. These maybe the voices of defiant subalternity committed to the writing of its own history. A few themes for further research are the patriarchy as reflected in the 'Budhavant' system, their historical past, migrational history, their social experiences, experiences of the women, their custom and tradition, their role in freedom struggle, the dying skills, eco-cultural traditions, religious beliefs, their feast and festivity, ethnicity, food culture, past times and games .

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