Interculturality for Diversity and Global Learning Brunel University research group

Negotiating difference, contesting temporalities: Education as a site of struggle in Adivasi identities in India

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The Indian Context

- Struggles for independence from British Raj
- 'Became' a nation out of partition
- Histories of internal conflict and resistance movements pre and post independence
- One of the highest youth populations
- Resurgence of (Hindu) nationalism in electoral politics
- Gender inequalities

Research Context & Methods

- Village with indigenous Adivasi community
- Context of violence, Maoist movement
- Empirical data collection for 7 months
- Policy review and analysis
- FGDs with community elders and young people
- Semi-structured in-depth interviews with elders from both Adivasi and non-Adivasi communities
- Observations and Researcher diary
- Poststructural, Postcolonial, Feminist analyses

Naming as exclusion:

The Scheduled Tribes of India

- Low level of literacy, pre-agricultural level of technology and economically backward…

- One of the most vulnerable sections of our society, have not attained economic development, and require protection (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013, p. 13)

- Indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact, backwardness (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2017)

- *If the law recognises you as member of an ethnicity, and state institutions treat you as member of that particular ethnicity, then you become an ethnic being legally…* (Mamdani, 2001, p. 663)

- *…minorities are no different from majorities, also a historically constituted group. Because minorities are defined as minorities only in hierarchical structures of power* (Asad, 2003, p. 175)

Education as regulation:

Ideas of time, progress, change

mobility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power… the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people. Differential mobility can weaken the leverage of the already weak. (Massey, 1994, p. 150)

- *The parents here have only ever gone to the forests; they have never been to school themselves. That is the main problem in our villages. The people here belong to another time and age. They are (pichde, purane) older, different people, they are slowly changing.*

(Nand, 40, Male, Adivasi, Sarpanch, Focus Group with Panchayat)

- *People here do not understand at once… it takes a while…They are another generation …You should not expect them to respond. They are like that only… It will take time (for things to change).*

(Rajesh, 35, Male, non-Adivasi, NGO worker, Focus group with NGO staff)

Interpellation and Improvement

The processes of identity-construction produce 'points of temporary attachment to the subject positions' (Hall, 1996, p. 19).

- *…it is a backward area because it is Tribal; it has a Tribal population, so it is backward and illiterate. Anyone can make fools out of us (Adivasis).*

(Abhay, 23, Male, Adivasi youth, Interview)

- *I am trying to improve myself as much as I can. We (young Adivasis) are backward because we get distracted easily. We fall in love; we consume alcohol, and chew tobacco. I am trying not to (drink, smoke, fall in love).*

- *If Ambedkar could work for 18 hours in a day, why can't we? I do not want two months of summer holidays as I will lose touch with studies. I have started fasting once a week now so I can focus more…*

(Nam, 15, Male, Adivasi, Focus Group with young people in 15-18 age-group)

(En)Gendering temporality: Work, mobility, education

Time is dense, uneven, complex (Bhabha, 2004)

- *I studied till class 7 and then had to leave. It was an early morning school when most of the work needed to be done. How could I have gone? We were two sisters and three brothers. The brothers studied till class 10 but all of us (sisters) had to dropout to work.*

(Alpa Bai, 30, Adivasi, Parent, Interview)

- *My elder sister dropped out after class 5 to help our father after our mother died; and some years later my brother and I dropped out too because the ashram school we were in was not good. Now we are going to re-join school with the help of the NGO...my sister was married and could not finish her school.*

(Sag, 15, Focus group with young Adivasi men in 15-18 age-groups)

Education as a site of struggle and inclusion

while these norms structure our responses, our modes of embodiment can be ways of contesting those norms, even breaking with the norm (Butler, 2015, p. 29).

- *I want to be in Section A with Science and not in Arts because there are not many jobs after doing Arts. But even if I do Arts, I feel like I can do anything when I study.*

(Nam, 15, Male, Adivasi, Focus Group with young people in 15-18 age-group)

- *I want to continue working and studying, become something, take care of my parents and then get married... Girls here, we want to study... But we want semi-English or English (medium of instruction) education... Our parents might be a different and older generation, but they give us the strength to work and study.*

(Neh, 19, female, Adivasi, Focus group with girls in 18-21 years age groups)

Conclusion and Implications

The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully…when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves' (Bhabha, 1990, p. 4)

- Temporally framed understandings of development risk inscribing tradition/ modernity binary
- Render Adivasi women doubly disadvantaged due to their ethnic and gender positionings
- Negatively impact struggles and demands for social justice, equity, and inclusion

- Contingencies of context significant in understanding complex assertions of power and identity
- Facilitating social justice involves paying attention to local contexts and gendered intersections of nation, religion, caste, ethnicity, tribe, location

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