Engaged Anthropology and an Ethnographic Approach to Community Development: A Case Study from Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the literature on engaged or public anthropology. Moreover, definitions of engagement have opened up to include a multiple number of ways and forms that anthropological work can be engage in community development—ranging from direct activism and critical deconstructions of dominant categories, to teaching. The scope of engagement in socio-cultural, economic and political issues dealt with by anthropologists has increased relatively in pluralistic societies such as India. The extent of what counts as engaged scholarship, moving towards an epistemic understanding that leads to relationships between subject knowledge and action/application, could be inherently politico-legal most of the time.

In India, attention is drawn to such engaged scholarship of cultural anthropologists. They contribute through their ethnographic writings about the communities and their contemporary changing identities. Such alternative realities, open-ended epistemology and theoretical practical interpretation of ethnographies about marginalized communities, social identities and the claims made by those realities were jeopardizing Indian hierarchical society. The communities and their self-organizations protested against the government and sought privileges that could be provided constitutionally. Most of the time, the issue revolved around their claim about the 'community name' and nomenclature. The requests submitted to the authorities were negotiated, contested and ultimately required legal interventions. Since the issue is all about culture and social identity, the court regularly seeks anthropological inputs such as theoretical practices, reflexive discourse and more subtle or virtual form of intervention.

This article attempts to shed light on the need for rejuvenating our understanding of the concept *engaged or public anthropology*, application of the basic ethnographic approach at the empirical level and other related concepts. The analytical interpretations were arrived at by taking the cases brought to the District Vigilance Committee and State Level Scrutiny Committee of Tamil Nadu constituted by the appellant judiciary intervention at the national level.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the literature on engaged or public anthropology; moreover, definitions of engagement have been opened up to include a multiplicity of ways and forms that anthropological work can be seen to be engaged in, ranging from direct activism, to critical deconstructions of dominant categories and teaching (Checker et al., 2010; Brondo, 2010; Mullins, 2011; Lamphere, 2004; Lassiter et al., 2005; Peacock, 1997; Hale, 2008; Speed, 2008).

Anthropology of Development is a broader category than the applied term Development Anthropology. It includes work on the ethnography of developmental organizations and institutions, as well as critical work on development as a system of ideas. Most importantly, the new anthropology of development needs to move beyond narrow definitions of development and its specialized institutions to encompass a new vision of development as the wider struggle by people and governments to combat poverty and inequality (Gardner and Lewis, 2015).

The stronghold of this universal statement and its acknowledgement by many theoreticians means that the scope of engagement in socio-cultural, economic and political issues dealt with by anthropologist has increased in pluralistic societies such as India. The scope of what counts as engaged scholarship, moving towards an epistemic understanding that leads to a relationship between subject knowledge and action/application, could be inherently politico-legal most of the time. This definition means moving beyond an intellectual recognition of the political nature of the relationship between knowledge and action to a more thorough and practical understanding of the ways in which critical, intellectual and theoretical work, including analysis, deconstruction and critique, are themselves material and potentially politico-legal practices.

The contribution of cultural anthropologists through ethnographic writings about the communities and their contemporary changing identities draws attention to such engaged scholarship in India. Such ethnographic output should be perceived beyond intellectual understanding. The empirical understanding reflected in Michal Osterweil's article (2013) published in the journal *The Society for Cultural Anthropology* made an argument drawing on ethnographic research with activist networks of the Italian alterglobalization movement with the 300,000-person strong 2001 protest against the G8 in Genoa, often known as 'Movimento die Movimenti' (MoM). Central to this movement were a series of material practices involving analysis, deliberation, research, investigation, questioning, thinking and theorizing what Osterweil called "theoretical practices" done through the production of texts, reflexive discourse and more subtle or virtual forms of intervention. A great deal of contemporary activism is constituted by experimental, reflexive and critical knowledge practices, all of which are meant to reflexively, and even recursively, develop better or more effective politics. This development is achieved largely through producing subjectivities that know, think and do differently (Osterweil, 2013; Casas-Cortés et al., 2008), often through what might be thought of as a non-dual or open-ended epistemology in which process and resonance are as important as, if not more important than, truth, objectivity and end-points.

Such alternative realities, open-ended epistemology and theoretical practical interpretations of ethnographies about marginalized communities' social identities and

their claims were jeopardizing traditional Indian hierarchical society. The communities and their self-organizations protested against the government and sought privileges provided for them constitutionally. Most of the time, the issue revolved around their claim about a community name and its nomenclature. The current nomenclature used for tribals in India is either Scheduled Caste (SC)[1] or Scheduled Tribe (ST)[2]. Sometimes people are placed in one category when they, according to their traditions and social identity, belong in another category. Since government-provided aid is dependent on nomenclature, correct identity is essential.

The requests submitted to the authorities for proper identification were negotiated, contested and ultimately required legal interventions. Since the issue is all about culture and social identity, the court sought anthropological inputs such as theoretical practices, reflexive discourse, and more subtle or virtual forms of intervention. Such engaged activities of anthropology are becoming more crucial and recursively developing 'better' or 'just' society.

Such community studies often follow a stereotypic review of literature. More specifically the monographs, gazetteers, ethnographic profile of the marginalized communities and their identities as understood by academicians have been put into reflexive discourses in contemporarily changing societies, and more so in developing countries. There is an increasing recognition of the need to understand systems of oppression and colonization that were unintentionally harming the marginalized communities' within which anthropologists are working (Hale, 2006, 2008; Speed, 2008a, 2008b; Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Ethnography matters for contemporary societies; it matters for democracy. Such a claim derives from the very activity of the ethnographer—a presence both involved and detached, inscribed in the instant and over time, allowing precise descriptions and multiple perspectives, thus providing a distinctive understanding of the world that deserves to be shared (Fassin, 2013: 462-63). Such ethnographic studies about the vulnerable communities were periodically conducted and published in India. These documents were used by the researchers and administrators for references, and their interpretations about the community identity where applied according to the professional perception. Variations in such interpretation based on theoretical practice sometimes led to confrontation not only at the academic level but also at the politico-legal level, although an anthropologist's role in engagement demanded objectivism. The call for engagement has enlisted anthropologists with varied understandings: from those arguing that anthropology requires a rethinking of its methods and modes of writing to create a postcolonial relationship to its subject, to those committed to finding a non-imperialist political stance and, even further to those working to formulate a new way to work collaboratively rather than hierarchically with communities. All of these forms of engagement contribute to a rich panorama of anthropological work in the public. Today, as anthropologists are still engaged in justifying the centrality of locally detailed

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1   Scheduled Caste (SC) – The untouchables who constitute the lowest segment of Hindu social hierarchy have been grouped as 'Schedule Caste' in caste-based Indian society.

2   Scheduled Tribe (ST) – A different India term for Tribes (Aadivasi, Vana-jati, Primitive Society, Simple Society, Indigenous People etc.). The term Tribe is commonly used as an administrative term in India.

ethnography, and even in debating the legitimacy of the discipline itself, ethnography's exact definition and its relationship to the history of colonial power and its contemporary permutations remain unresolved (Clarke, 2013).

The present article attempts to shed light on the need for rejuvenating our understanding of the concept engaged or public anthropology and how applying the basic ethnographic approach and other related methods has led to some positive outcomes and some outright errors in the process of identifying the community. The analytical interpretation is based on the empirical understanding of the anthropologists (member) of the District Vigilance Committee and State Level Scrutiny Committee constituted by the Government of Tamil Nadu with the result of appellant judiciary intervention, in a specific judgment (Kumari Madhuri Patil Vs-Additional Commissioner, Tribal Welfare Department, Maharashtra Government).

The role of anthropologists and their expertise in the scientific understanding of culture and contemporary community identity has become recognized by the administrative, legal and applied development field. The anthropologist's intervention and knowledge have been considered crucial in interpreting community identity, more specifically for the SC and ST who had obtained or possessed the community certificates and were claiming their 'genuine' identity status. The basic theoretical understanding is challenged by the variation in empirical understanding, by different anthropologists providing an ethnographic detail about the same community and the same cultural pattern and by variation in interpretation. These differences allowed for mistakes in proper community identification. Hence, an open healthy debate on these issues for specific practical/epistemic purposes is required. Our major concern in this paper is to point out what we take to be some of the insights and errors, and to me, most of the errors resulted from some crucial ambiguities in ethnography and interpretation; until these are distinguished, it is impossible to its evaluate intellectual recognition or move on.

Theoretical and Methodological Impression of Anthropology

Anthropology is a relative late-comer in the process of growth as a scientific discipline. When anthropologists started studying people using qualitative tools, they were looking for patterns in the day-to-day life and way of living of those they were studying. The emphasis was on the enormity of cultural variability while at the same time looking at universal similarities among the cultures of the world. This research resulted in anthropological theories. While analyzing the anthropological theory, Manners and Kaplan (1968) confirmed that anthropologists use the term theory in a variety of ways almost whimsically—as a synonym for a concept, or as a synonym for inductive generalization or as one for a model (often itself a term used in a number of different ways) and sometimes merely to lend tone or dignity to the obvious.

Anthropologists also believed that part of the reason for this widely different usage was paucity of 'authentic' anthropological theory, as well as the uncertainties about the use and meaning of the term itself. These came about, ironically enough, from the discipline's emphasis on field work. Field work is not only the device used by anthropologists to provide the discipline with its empirical materials; it has become much more than

that. It is a kind of touchstone of adequacy, a *rite de passage* prerequisite to membership in the profession. Thus, fieldwork has become a slogan, and the focus of anthropological research is to rush to relatively isolated communities and start applying the anthropological tools in an attempt to understand the culture of simple communities, following an ethnographic approach. The tribe or relatively isolated communities and the related writing ethnographies have been the special interest of anthropology right from the beginning.

Contemporary anthropology explores the interface of anthropology and development with a particular focus on how anthropologists working in the field use, apply and merge theory and practice. With the recent transformations of development cooperation in line with the Paris Declaration and anthropology's decreasing influence within the development sector, it has become particularly important to describe, analyze and reflect upon anthropologists' experiences of being practically involved in development work; anthropological knowledge and perspectives continue to be critical in improved development practice (Hagberg and Quattara 2012). The fact remains that the fluidity of the anthropological concepts is justified as we are dealing with the dynamic aspects of culture.

Anthropology of South-East Asian communities addresses the issues of social and cultural life, and the change in development more in regional terms, and, like Burling's *Hill Farms and Paddy Fields: Life in Mainland South-East Asia* (1995), has claimed that South-East Asian communities demonstrate certain region-wide cultural themes and have adopted regional parameters in drawing ethnographies (King and Wilder, 2003).

While setting out the agenda for Public Anthropology, (Griffith et al., 2013: 125-31) said that "it moves beyond the proliferation of terms (applied, activist, feminist, engaged, critical medical, community archaeology) to lift up the best of each, dealing with social problems and issues of interest to a broader public or non-academic collaborators yet still relevant to academic discourses and debate". Anthropologists have been involved in public affairs and development co-operation using anthropological theories, methods and ethnography. They have extensively taken part as major stakeholders in mega development projects. Their major contribution was more that of contributing qualitative data in understanding the local people, their cognitive perspectives and their culture as a whole or of involving themselves using participatory approaches in social-assessment studies. At the same time, the basic anthropological concepts, particularly the ethnographic approach that has been taken as a basic premise by contemporary practicing/applying anthropologist, require both a certain consensus in application and regional variations. As a result, such engagement by the anthropologist may not reflect paradoxical viewpoints.

Ethnographic Practice in the Development Process

The major contribution of an anthropologist is in providing an ethnographic description of various tribes/simple communities of the world. Geertz's (1973) characterization of "inscription" as the core of ethnographic "thick description" and Gusfield's (1976) dissection of the rhetorical underpinning of science provided seminal statements in the

1970s. Subsequently, Clifford and Marcus's edited collection, *Writing Culture: The poetic and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), Van Mannen's *'Tale of the Field'* (1988) and Atkinson's *The Ethnographic Imagination* (1990) have advanced the considerations of ethnographic writings.

Further work has been influential in this area. While exploring the issues related to ethnography, Hammersly (1992) suggested that social and cultural anthropology of the Chicago School follows the predominant model of ethnography and treats it as a pure rather than an applied research area. As result, the impression was created, and it was taken for granted, that there could be variations in ethnographic results. Anthropology went to the extent of not claiming to produce an objective or fruitful account of reality but aiming to offer versions of an ethnographer's/ practitioner's experience of reality through ethnography. Sarana (1989) used the term 'reinterpretation' instead of 'restudy' and clarified the rules of ethnography. He further emphasized that, in ethnographic reinterpretation, the anthropologist does not deal with the items of a living culture directly but is concerned with searching for and assigning new meanings to cultural data recorded in particular ethnographies. Geertz (1973) also maintains that the aim of 'interpretivism' is consistent with science—to understand the function of meaning in human culture in a systematic manner based on particular ethnographic experiences. As anthropology became more enamoured of postmodern literary approaches to analyzing ethnographies and cultures, the text became the sole focus of its work. Since all text is conceived and written and therefore made up by someone, reality has become more and more tenuous because anything can be written (Kuznar, 1997). In light of these theoretical understandings, it is clear that there is nothing called 'the ethnography'; it is only possible to be ethnography'.

Understanding the interface between the three components, namely theory, method and ethnography, in the context of applied anthropological experience in contemporary development practice is crucial. The problematic relationship between academia and applied anthropology has been debated for a long time (Pink, 2006), and the status of applied anthropology seems to vary in different national contexts (Baba and Hill, 2008). Evans' Pritchard (1946) had labelled such anthropological contributions as "the non-scientific field of administration". But still the conventional classifications of 'anthropology of development' and 'development anthropology' have given certain theoretical clarification to all the stakeholders involved in the process of development.

The idea that applied research is atheoretical – either does not use theory or does not lead to theory-weakens the discipline of anthropology. Yet the infertile dichotomy remains of an anthropology of development that aims at understanding development as a set of power principles and practices to be subjected to anthropological scrutiny on the one hand and 'development anthropology' that aims at applying theoretical and methodological concepts and tools to actively promote social change on the other (Hagberg and Quattara, 2012).

The pristine region-specific, socio-cultural and legal issues require scientific anthropological contributions in a more holistic, comprehensive and multifaceted perspective in a bridge between the dichotomy of anthropology of development and development anthropology. As Jean-Pierre Oliver de Sardan (2005) diagnosed, certainly the anthropologists are expected to deliver report and recommendations in a much more rapid

and accessible manner. Furthermore, that manner can be scientific but still simple and communicable. Hence the purpose of anthropological intervention would be more relevant, problem solving and less criticized.

Charles Hale's (2006) term 'activist research' perceived anthropological research as a method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organized group of people in struggle and allow dialogue with them to shape each phase of the process and dissemination of the result (2006: 97). To explicate these points, Osterweil (2013) further discussed the "activist research vs. cultural critique" debate on engagement. He says a good deal of work done by social movements can be considered theoretical, analytical and critical—mirroring many academic practices and values—and the divide between academia and activism blurs, creating a novel space for rethinking the boundaries of engaged or political or public anthropology, in turn broadening our views of efficacious political action.

Plurality of Culture and Ethnography

The most legendary Indian historian Romila Thapar (2014), while exploring the society in ancient India during the formative period, identified two sets of concrete evidence, namely archaeological and literary. She mentions Pre-Harappan cultures, Harappan cultures, Post-Harappan cultures, Sothi culture, Gandhara Grave culture, Banas culture, Copper Hoard culture, Northern Black Polished Ware culture and so on. While understanding the variation in culture, she further analyzes the Indian social structure and postulates the importance of redefining the existing social relationships among the communities and the need for alternative interpretations. She rightly perceived,

> "[t]o see caste only in terms of the four-fold *varna* does not take us very far. One would like to know how tribes and social groups were adjusted into the caste hierarchy and assigned a caste status. The theory that the caste structure was initially flexible, but gradually become rigid and allowed little mobility, is now open to question. There is enough evidence to suggest that, in all periods, there have been deviations from the theoretical concept of caste. We also know there was a continual emergence of new castes for a variety of reasons" (Thapar 2014).

These historical realities prove the cultural variability and the emergence of various communities in India and caste/tribe predicament in India. It has been estimated that there are over five thousand different cultures in the world today. The Anthropological Survey of India has identified 4635 communities and documented their brief ethnography in India. With such enormous cultural variability in the world, particularly in India, understanding culture using a holistic, ethnographic and anthropological approach has been severely criticized and underestimated particularly in the fields of development anthropology, anthropology of development and public anthropology. Redefining and rethinking the existing ethnographic profile of communities has become much needed in the process of public anthropology as it has a direct impact on the community identity in the process of utilizing the benefits of the Positive Discrimination Policy in India.

Ethnography is an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society. It has been practiced for a long time by anthropologists. Many ethnographers have emphasized the central place of writing ethnography in recent times too. The major contribution of anthropologists in India is in providing ethnographical descriptions about various communities. As a result, the variations in ethnographic results have been accepted as pure and less pure. There is no claim to produce an objective or fruitful account of reality but instead an attempt to offer versions of ethnographers'/practitioners' experiences of reality through ethnography. The more recent trend in engaged anthropology also requires sufficient investigation of the alternative narratives and such thinking may bring more information about the spiritual characteristics of Indian communities.

Clarification of the Term Tribe/Community

Anthropologists have been studying the concept of race since the beginning of the field back in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, a focus began on evolutionary theory and looking for the origin of the species. In the twentieth century, the focus changed to debunking racial heritability theory (that is biological) and promoting population genetics, clines and genetics. The most significant accomplishment of anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century as Kroeber has said, "has been the extension and clarification of the concept of culture" (Manners and Kaplan, 1968).

The evolutionary school of thought looked for cultural survival in these primitive societies, which helps them understand their own society, defined by territorial state, monogamous family and private property. It was the discipline's main subject matter until 1956 when Redfield broke this monotony by studying peasant societies. The term tribe has been defined by many anthropologists and contested by even more. They have been referred to by different names by different people – autochthons, indigenous people/communities, tribes, aboriginals and Adivasis – these communities, which practiced and are still trying to practice an alternate way of life and had, and still have a different and distinct world view, are under serious threat to their identity/survival.

In 1998, the World Bank decided to re-examine its policy on indigenous peoples issued in 1991 as Operational Directive (OD 4.20). One of the objectives of this process of revisiting the policy was to gather a much wider set of views from governments, civil society, academics and indigenous people themselves about what should be the rules of the game for interaction between indigenous groups and the World Bank's assisted development interventions.

In India, the study of tribes began with the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1874. From then on, scholar-administrators wrote general works on the land and people of different regions, in which references were made to caste and tribes (Xaxa, 2003). Various criteria have been taken into consideration namely, racial, language, ecological habitat, size, mode of livelihood, degree of incorporation into Hindu society and many combinations of one and all of the above criteria (Xaxa, 2003). These variations emphasized diversity within these groups and also the cultural understanding and interpretations by the anthropologist.

India has the second largest concentration of tribal populations, after the continent of Africa. The Anthropological Survey of India has enumerated 461 tribal communities, of which 174 have been identified as subgroups (Singh, 1994). The ST population in India stated in the 2001 Census was about 8.08% of the total population of 1,028,610,328 in the country. "Etymologically, the term tribe derives its origin from the word 'tribes' meaning three divisions" (Verma, 1996). For Romans, the tribe was a political division. In the western world, as in India, the term tribe had totally different connotations than what is prevalent now (Verma, 1996). In India, the term has been used in day-to-day life, and special privileges have been given to them in the name of 'Positive Discrimination Privileges'. The beneficiaries were issued ST caste certificates to show their identity and gain benefits in education, employment and political participation. Still the term tribe has not been defined anywhere in the Indian constitution. That constitution states in Article 342 that the ST is tribes or the tribal communities or part of the groups within tribes or tribal communities, which the President may specify from time to time by public notification. As these communities are presumed to constitute the oldest ethnological segment of Indian society, the term 'Adivasi' is used to designate them. The International Labor Organization Convention 107, held at Geneva on 5th June 1957, classified them as indigenous. The term "indigenous" is a misnomer and bound to be problematic in India if attempts are made at defining it. This debate or terminology is not necessary as the Indian constitution has already scheduled communities/groups of people as ST. However, the constitution gives no clear definition of a tribe. Although certain criteria are prescribed for communities to categorize them as "tribes", the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of such a group have not been prescribed. Moreover, the term has evolved over time from animist religion to forest dwellers to tribe to ST. It is recognized that some tribal groups/communities in all Indian states have not been included in the list of ST categories, while some non-tribal groups have made it into the ST category. In spite of these anomalies, the term tribe (ST) is appropriate in the Indian context for the application of Positive Discrimination Policy. However, application in any given context should involve local consultation and expert assessment, with importance given to the criterion of self-identification.

Each state in India has its own ST list besides the central list, and the states issue ST certificates to these people. There is inconsistency between both lists. In addition, the civil society of India have comforting and amazing myths about the tribes such as the tribes being primitive, simple, cheerful, colorful, having exotic dance, music, free sex and youth dormitories. Heart-breaking poverty, ignorance, disease, exploitation, land alienation identity crisis etc. are the bitter realities that stand silently behind these myths.

Community is the term which is more familiar in the development discourse. With the growth of participatory research approaches, the effect of participation on community members and the involvement of community members in the ongoing development project or action-oriented project becomes a subject of theoretical and of empirical importance as it gives space for testing and helping the stakeholders to move into reality. According to Govinda and Diwan (2003), community is obviously not a homogenous notion. It is either various communities unequally and differently placed within a society or various groups in a community unequally placed. Community could be viewed in two

different perspectives: (1) local class-caste composition and (2) elected representatives, where their class composition influences the nature of involvement as well as the nature of conflict arising from such involvement. By implication, community participation has also to be viewed in a localized manner (2003, 14). It is acutely important to note that often what is considered a community is composed of hierarchically placed unequal groups. Special provisions and safeguards for SCs and STs have been guaranteed constitutionally using the word community liberally in all the constitution's articles. The certificate issued to the individuals who belong to these communities is also known as the community certificate in administrative records. These certificates are important to avail of government programmes and benefits.

Community Nomenclature and Legal Implications

Attempts were made over a period of time by certain persons belonging to nontribal communities to claim tribal status, on the assertion that their community is synonymous with a tribal group specified in the notification or that their tribe is subsumed in a tribe specifically notified. The nomenclatures of the communities of such applicants were similar to those of designated STs, often with a tribal prefix or suffix. Decisions of the Supreme Court, in this regard, laid down that the entries contained in the SC or the ST order have to be taken as they stand and no evidence can be put forward either to interpret or to explain those entries.

A community not specifically listed as an ST cannot lay claim to inclusion, either on the basis of a similarity of nomenclature or by contending that the tribe in question is subsumed within a designated ST. In the State of Maharashtra, the State Legislature enacted the Maharashtra Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Denotified Tribes, (VimuktaJatis), Nomadic Tribes, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Special Backward Category (Regulation of Issuance and Verification of) Caste Certificate Act, 2000. The act has now made statutory provisions for the verification and scrutiny of caste claims by competent authorities and subsequently by Caste Scrutiny Committees. It creates offences and provides for disqualifications and for the withdrawal of benefits granted on the basis of false caste certificates.

The Supreme Court issued directions in Madhuri Patil's case, laying down the procedure that must be followed for the issuance of caste certificates for their scrutiny and approval. The Supreme Court directed the constitution of a committee and included an anthropologist who has an intimate knowledge in identifying tribes and tribal communities. The Supreme Court further provided for the constitution of a Vigilance Cell. The vigilance inquiry entails a visit by the Inspector of Police attached to the Cell to the original place from which the candidate hails for the collection of all relevant data along with the anthropologist. When a section of the society has started asserting themselves as tribes and tried to earn the concession and facilities reserved for the STs, the tricks are common, and inclusion, therefore, must be judged on a legal and ethnological basis. Spurious tribes have become a threat to the genuine tribes.

The Cell should also examine the parent, guardian or the candidate in relation to their caste etc. or such other persons who have knowledge of the social status of the

candidate and then submit a report to the Directorate together with all particulars as envisaged in the pro forma, in particular, of the STs relating to anthropological and ethnological traits, kinship structure, deity, rituals, customs, mode of marriage, life cycle ceremonies, method of burial of dead bodies etc. by the castes or tribes or tribal communities concerned etc. These directions clearly establish that the nature of the inquiry in regard to the claim of a candidate to belong to a ST is not merely to be confined to an examination of the birth and the school records and of documentary evidence but would involve an investigation of the affinity of the candidate with a tribe, or as the case may be, tribal community.

Thus, the process of verification of caste and tribe claims governed by the judgment of the Supreme Court in Madhuri Patil involved an inquiry not merely into the documentary materials on the basis of which the caste claim is founded but equally on verifying the claim with reference to the affinity of the candidate with a designated ST. The inquiry would comprehend within its purview anthropological and ethnological traits. The Committee would be entitled to inquire into whether the applicant has established an affinity with the tribe. The affinity test that comprehends all these aspects is, therefore, not extraneous to the process of identifying whether the applicant is a genuine member of a tribe or an impostor fraudulently claiming the benefits of a reservation to which s/he is not entitled. Benefits secured on the basis of a false Caste Certificate are to be withdrawn.

The Caste Scrutiny Committee is a quasi-judicial body. It has been set up for a specific purpose. It serves a social and constitutional purpose. It is constituted to prevent fraud on the constitution. It may not be bound by the provisions of Indian Evidence Act, but it would not be correct for the Superior Court to issue directions as to how it should appreciate evidence. Evidence to be adduced in a matter before a quasi-judicial body cannot be restricted to admission of documentary evidence only. It may be necessary to take oral evidence. Moreover, the nature of evidence to be adduced would vary from case to case. The right of a party to adduce evidence cannot be curtailed. It is one thing to say how a quasi-judicial body should appreciate evidence adduced before it in law but it is another thing to say that it must not allow adduction of oral evidence at all.

In the compilation that has been placed on record by the state government, reliance is placed on the written work of anthropologists in support of the submission that the application of the affinity test is an invaluable aid in determining whether an applicant belongs to a ST. A monograph by Prof. R. K. Mutatkar (2019), Honorary Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pune, entitled '*Tribal Identity: Policy Issues*' is instructive. The monograph states that government of India has recommended that the following broad parameters be applied in determining tribal characteristics:

I.   Primitive traits;
II.   Distinct culture;
III. Geographical isolation;
IV.   Distinct dialect;
V.   Animism;
VI.   Clan systems;
VII. Shyness of nature; and

VIII. Backwardness. In socio-economic terms. This is defined by poverty, social status and access to resources.

The monograph notes that due to contact with the outside world and the effort to draw tribal communities into the democratic political process, movements towards acculturations have been taking place. However, the author states that "acculturation does not destroy the hard core of culture which is manifested in their rituals, beliefs, ceremonies and festivals, in the dialect, and in music and dance." Prof. Mutatkar says,

> "When a nontribal group or a caste group with similar nomenclature or with tribal suffix or prefix to their name claim tribal status, they are not only harming the interest of a tribal group with whom they are trying to identify by putting up a tribal claim, but they are also harming the interest of all tribes in the State and the country, since the benefits of Scheduled Tribe are bestowed according to the generic category of Scheduled Tribe and not according to a specific tribal group. The pseudo tribal group, therefore, nullifies the constitutional guarantees of all the Scheduled Tribes in a State and the country."

Though the legal intervention proposed theoretical practices done through the production of texts and reflexive discourse, a great deal of contemporary activism is constituted by experimental, reflexive, critical knowledge practices, but application at the ground level has not percolated in this direction. Monotony has set in, keeping the above traditional anthropological approach. The contemporary tribal issues need application done largely through producing subjectivities that know, think and do differently.

State Level Scrutiny Committee and District Vigilance Committee in Tamil Nadu: A Case Study

Pursuant to the orders issued in Civil Appeal No.5854/94 dated 2.9.94 of the Supreme Court of India in Kumari Madhuri Patil and another –Vs- Additional Commissioner, Tribal development and others, all the State Governments have constituted District Level Vigilance Committees and State Level Scrutiny Committees to verify the genuineness of the Community Certificates issued to SC/ST and Other Backward Class and issued guidelines for the functioning of those committees.

In order to protect the welfare of the genuine SC/ST people from the false claimants, the governments have been examining the matter to frame suitable guidelines based on the guidelines issued by Supreme Court of India to suit the conditions prevailing in Tamil Nadu, so that it could work in a systematic manner without facing any difficulty in its implementation. In supersession of the orders and guidelines issued on the subject, the government decided and ordered a modification the constitution of the above two committees as well as their functions periodically through many Government Orders (G.O.s).

Keeping the Supreme Court direction, the state government coordinated with the then Head of the Department of Anthropology, University of Madras and requested it nominate an anthropologist to function as a member in the committees. Expertise in

the subject and the anthropologist residing within the state were taken as major criteria, and names were recommended to the government. To begin with, it was considered a great privilege for the anthropologist, and it was considered an honour to the subject as a whole, but the amount of work or pending cases was underestimated by the academician. No doubt it provided great space for engaged anthropology by providing theoretical practical knowledge.

Anthropologists were using their understanding about the culture of various communities of Tamil Nadu and played a crucial role in determining the community identity. The entire process of work also required some strong basic knowledge on Positive Discrimination Policy, caste structure and stratification principles, constitutional categorization of communities and cultural understanding of the local people.

The chairman of the committee mostly depended on anthropologists and provided a great space to them in the process of identifying genuine beneficiary. However, at the same time, the traditional anthropologist who believed in intensive field work objected to the process and wanted to convert the work to project mode. The enormity of the pending files in all the districts and cases before the court of law for its final judgments, caste politics and ultimately the administrative pressure forced the authorities to clear the files at a maximum speed.

To begin with, the District Vigilance Committee (DVC), consisting of the District Collector as a Chairman, the Adi-Dravidar Welfare Officer as a member secretary, and the anthropologist as a member, was authorized to take up both SC and ST cases at the district level. The State Level Scrutiny Committee (SLSC) has been kept as the appellant committee and given some space for the aggrieved and those classified as not genuine members to lean to before seeking legal help. Later, due to intervention of Madras High Court, the G.O. was modified and laid down new classifications to avoid certain problems. All the SC cases were dealt with by the DVC), but court cases coming to government before the 9th month, 2007 were asked to clear by the DVC. The G.O. has been interpreted differently and created some confusion at the district level. Once again, new G.O.s clarified everything, and this clarification activated the DVC to finish all the pending cases. These two committees created greater impact in state affairs and discussed its modalities with high level administrative committees all the time. Importance was raised, and the state government wanted to update the process and constantly assess it. This pressure ultimately led to more opportunity for anthropologists to intervene in the process of identity through culture patterns.

The Supreme Court of India found in Kumari MadhuriPatil and another –Vs- Additional Commissioner case that there were no guidelines for issuance and verification of community certificates. The Supreme Court has therefore given 15 guidelines for issuance and verification of community certificates. In those guidelines, all the state governments should formulate State Level Scrutiny Committee (SLSC) and District Vigilance Level Cell (DVLC). The government of Tamil Nadu formulated SLSC to verify the genuineness of issued community certificates from the revenue authorities to the ST community. Similarly, DVLCs in all districts should verify the genuineness of issued community certificates from the revenue authorities to the SC and OBC communities. In both committees, the chairman and the member secretary verify the documents and the anthropologist verifies the cultural aspect of the community claim.

Anthropologists were nominated by the then professor and head of the Department of Anthropology, University of Madras, in 2005, as a member to DVC. Later during 2008, I was nominated to the SLSC as a member by the state government and a government order was passed. Participating in the committee and interviewing the respondent had given me a great understanding about existing community problems, their cognitive perception about identity and the attitude of our administrators, particularly the community certificate issuing authorities in Tamil Nadu. The total SC cases so far handled by the committee throughout the districts of Tamil Nadu were nearly 3000 from its inception in the year 2005. Similarly, the total ST cases would be not less than 2500. The qualitative data received from the interviewees helped me to draw some broad interpretations.

The major complaints or complications for the SC communities were conversion and inter caste marriages. In Tamil Nadu, Dalit convert to Christianity or Muslims are treated only as Backward Class (BC) and are not allowed to enjoy the reservation benefits assigned to Hindu SCs. Coming to the most crucial aspect of the paper was the problem of STs. The Tamil Nadu government has identified some of the ST communities as 'Controversial Communities' as their cultural identity has not been justified with the existing documental evidence. On the other hand, their identities have hardly been documented either administratively or academically. The nomenclatures were wrongly documented in the administrative records. The anthropological interventions were given at two levels. One is at the individual level where the anthropologist sits in the committee and facilitates the committee in supplementing cultural factors in identifying the person as 'genuine'. The second one is asking the anthropologist to do a spot enquiry after receiving an ethnographic profile of a community. Such reports played a major role at both the administrative level and the legal level. At the same time, slowly, they were subject to criticisms due to variations in writing and the final decisions.

Case

The community by the name "Kurumans" and the association fought for about two decades to prove their identity. The name is included in the state list of STs. The task has been assigned to many anthropologists who were playing a role as a member in DVC and SLSC. Some categorised them as a tribe and some as a caste. Different interpretations reflected an impact on the community and forced the people to seek legal and administrative intervention. Finally, the following empirical interpretations substantiated the argument to prove the community as an ST.

- It is to be noted that a community KURUMBA is included in the list of Backward Class (BC) throughout the state of Tamil Nadu and KURUMBAR in the list of Most Backward Classes (MBC) throughout the state of Tamil Nadu and the KURUMANS in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tamil Nadu are one and the same.
- Again, it is also to be noted that popular ethnographer Thurston and Rangachari (1909) stated that advanced KURUMBAS are usually shepherds and weavers of coarse woolen blankets (from the hair of sheep). Further, E. Thurston also

mentioned that the KURUMANS were originally identical with the shepherds KURUMBAS and their present separation is merely the result of their isolation in the vastnesses of the Western Ghats, to which their ancestors fled, or gradually retreated after the downfall of the KURUMBA dynasty.

- The above-mentioned statements and arguments reveal the truth that KURUMBA or KURUMBAR are the synonym names of the KURUMANS. Throughout Tamilnadu, as Dr. Jakka Parthasarathy, Director Tribal Research Centre, Government of Tamil Nadu (31st December, 2001) observed, there are no separate communities in the names of KURUMBAR or KURUMBA. He further stressed the important observation that the KURUMBAS/KURUMBA (S) of Nilgiris District are ethnographically different from KURUMBA, KURUMBAR and KURUMANS.

- Some of the male members of the KURUMANS in the districts of Vellore, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Salem and also in the taluk of Thirupattur had the habit of suffixing the title, GOUNDER to their names. K. S. Singh (1994: 662) has aptly mentioned that 'the term KURUMAN means one who tends sheep. Gounder is an honorific title which they have adapted in recent years'. For this reason, the Kurumans are also referred to by others as KURUMAN GOUNDER.

- KURUMBA GOUNDERS are different when compared with KURUMAN GOUNDER. KURUMBA GOUNDERS are Tamil speaking cultivators, usually found in the Kongu Nadu districts of Tamil Nadu such as Erode, Coimbatore, Karur and Tirupur in Tamil Nadu. They do not have any marital relationship with KURUMANS of Tamil Nadu. KURUMBA GOUNDARS have affiliation with KONGU VELLALAR Community, categorized in 'OTHER BACKWARD CLASS (OBC)' of Tamil Nadu State.

- The ethnographic study on the community names such as KURUMBAN and KURUMBAR cannot do separately because they are synonym names to KURUMANS. Hence that KURUMA, KURUMBA, KURUMBAR, KURUMAN GOUNDAR are the synonym names of KURUMAN or KURUMANS (No. 18 of ST list of Tamil Nadu) a Scheduled Tribe in Tamil Nadu.

The following anthropological interpretations were accepted by the SLSC and the process of identity took place accordingly. The Kurumbar and Kurumanare one and the same and their culture is very much tribal in nature. The above experience is evidence that anthropologists are involved in different forms of engagements. They seek to play a normative role by following basic anthropological thinking and not crossing basic boundaries that understands the culture holistically, using the appropriate methodological tools and analytical approaches.

Thus, what we see is the expansiveness of these processes of reclassification becoming increasingly aligned with new domains of neoliberal power, requiring us to develop innovative approaches towards understanding the complexities through which various modalities continue to be negotiated within domains of personhood (academician) and power (administrators). Anthropologists are expected to deliver reports and recommendations in a much more rapid and accessible manner. Furthermore, those could be scientific but still simple and communicable. As a result, anthropological intervention could be more relevant, problem solving and receive less criticism. Such engaged anthropology creates an obligation of a particularly pressing sort of on the spot decisi-

ons and could be termed as beyond an intellectual recognition in the process of identity claim. The process expects to deliver the outcome on a genuine or not genuine claim and is of open-ended epistemology.

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