

## Aspects of Researches on Tribes of Central India: Past and Present

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### Abstract

*Since the time of colonization of India there has been a trend of various kinds of tribal researches to know their ethnicity, language, traditions, morals and myths prevailed among them. Instead of these traditional modes of researches there were also some anthropological and scientific aptitudes which were basically to measure the phenotype of tribes so that they could categorise the various tribal groups at same place.*

*As we know that these kinds of researches are still in practice at various parts of the country and as we are living in a globalized world we cannot put a tab on the intentions and implications of these kinds of researches.*

*The main objective of this paper is to observe 1) the changing trends of tribal research among the anthropologists and scientists, 2) impact of these researches at the psychological level among the tribes, 3) understanding of the notion of ethical and unethical scientific approaches towards tribes and their habitats.*

*There is no doubt that the early scientific enquiries among the tribes were unethical at many levels and it was a rampant practice. But what and how much change we have implanted towards the human social responsibility for the respect of human dignity at present, since science does not follow any rules of morality and its responsibility due to its material origin, then is it justified to have unethical trends on the ground of study and research?*

**Keywords-** Tribes, Technology, Ethics, Scientific Research

### INTRODUCTION

Ethics is the term which has been formulated and defined by the various generations and societies in human history. Most of the people think about ethics in the terms of morality or they think of rules for distinguishing between right and wrong. In very simple terms ethics is the norms for the conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Most people acquire their sense of right and wrong during childhood, moral development occurs throughout life and human beings pass through different stages of growth as they mature. But basically “ethics is a branch of learning, concerned with the principle of good conduct. It inquires in to the foundations of our moral beliefs and rules about right and wrong. This term is used as a synonym of moral philosophy as well as a set of principles of good conduct concerning a particular profession such as ‘medical ethics’, business ethics or research ethics”<sup>1</sup>.

When we talk particularly about the research ethics it is very serious matter in the field of learning and production of knowledge because it directs our means and objective for which we are making efforts. Now when we see specifically about the various kinds of researches which has been done and still in practice over the tribes of central India is a serious concern. To understand the pattern of changes which has come in the kinds of researches among the central Indian tribes, firstly we have to look back over the history of colonial India and then at some extant we would be able to understand the same thing in the present context.

Early eighteenth century was the time of colonial expansion in the map of the world history, along with the administrators and traders various groups of scientists, anthropologists of the western world spread over the world for their scientific experimental expedition. And they carried out with

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<sup>1</sup> Gauba, O.P., ‘Western Political thought’, Macmillan Publishers India Ltd. New Delhi, 2011, p. 91

various kinds of researches of different tribal communities at that time. Xenophobia, or the fear of stranger and of the unknown, is a common feature in human society. When strangers are associated together as a group it is also perhaps natural to assume that any individual will have all the characteristics imputed to that group. People often associate themselves together for reasons of culture, appearance, religion or belief. Some may believe that they are chosen people and superior to other groups of people. These views are all 'racism' of a sort and are to be found in places at all times in history<sup>2</sup>.

For the colonial rulers the tribes were 'others' on which they were implanting their colonial ideas which suites for their imperial pursuits. The earliest use of caste as a basis for interpreting social and demographic data arose from British officials, later on the use of caste at all India scale to categorize the population according to occupation and social structure formed a more sophisticated basis for British attempts at social engineering. The criminalization of certain tribes, provided a means of controlling turbulent population in a more inaccessible or 'lawless' parts of subcontinent. According to these law (criminal tribes Act 1871) tribes such as the *Maghyar Doms* in Bihar, the *Khangras* in Bundelkhand and the *Ramosi, Mang, Kaikari* tribes in Narmada valley were described as habitually criminals.

One of the first to exercise a interest in measuring skull as a means of ethnic categorization within India was William Sleeman in 1820's. His interest in skulls was not unusual as the study of phrenology was becoming increasingly popular at this time, with phrenological societies and museums being funded in number of European cities like Edinburgh. One of the most famous was founded by George Combe, who published his influential *Essays on Phrenology* in 1819. In 1822 Raja Ram Mohan Roy sent a selection of twelve 'Hindu Crania' to be examined by Dr. George Paterson.

The problems of tribal population in India have been dealt with by missionaries, administrators and pioneers who were themselves not social scientists. If we talk about some particular tribes, the study of the Gonds was pioneered by Rev. Hislop in the middle of the last century. Captain Forsythe, who is perhaps as important to the study of the Gonds as Captain Tod and Forbes are for the study of Bhils

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<sup>2</sup> Bates, Crispin, 'Race Caste and Tribe in Central India : the early origins of Indian anthropometry, OUP, Delhi, 1995, p.03

of Rajasthan. Grison's study of *the Gonds of Bastar* was a remarkable work on anthropological basis.<sup>3</sup>

There were also scholars and researchers who believe that the early anthropological researches particularly on tribes of central India has contributed to national development, because it studied primitive tribes was seeking to understand the past in order to analyze and interpret the present. The Gond's have been studied as mentioned earlier by anthropologists, administrators and missionaries but their purpose was not like the purpose of the present study. Beyond the purposes of anthropology which is to study and understand the past is the important need for the state and society to deal with the future of India's tribal population.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of these there were also some biological experiments by the colonial anthropologists on the aboriginal tribes like sampling of bloods, measurements of their skull, nose, cranial and other body parts in order to make a difference on the basis of physical characters which ultimately enhances the racial difference between the Europeans and Indians.

If we analyze the changes which have come in the field of researches on the tribes, actually have not changed much today. Now if we try to place all the researches over time in a proper pattern then we will find that in the early period the researches over tribes were basically related to their phenotypic characteristics and biological samplings, then researchers like Elvin, Risley, Mandelbaum, Majumdar, G.S. Ghurye and Surajit Sinha on their researches have tried to understand the tribal society on material point of view to understand their culture, society and religion.

In modern times tribes are under the critical condition because present day they are being used as a people who are open for all times of clinical trials and researches. As an impact of globalization the pharmaceutical giants are always in the search of living experimental fields and it the bitter truth that tribes are the easy prey for that. Clinical trials on the tribes are a serious matter of discussion because maximum times they are unaware that they are under clinical trial and it may have some lethal consequences of it.

Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh are the states which are dominated by the

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<sup>3</sup> Mehta, B.H., 'Gonds of The Central Indian Highlands: A study of the Dynamics of Gond Society', Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1984, p. 02

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 03

numerous tribal groups, and these tribes are mainly under the clinical trials through the local medical representatives under the large network of pharmaceutical drug trials.

Due to these unlawful activities on the tribes there have been various kinds of physiological and psychological impacts appeared on these communities. And since these tribes are largely uneducated and backwards on sociopolitical hierarchy in our social structure, the negative impacts of trials newer appears on national arena. Pumping of large amount of money for drug trails is not something which is new information, multinational companies and their labs are mostly engaged in these unethical unlawful means of malpractices.

If we try to see these clinical trials or drug trails these pharmaceutical companies, their prime responsibility to respect and consider the welfare and human rights of all categories of people affected by the decisions, programs or research in which they take part. It is also our responsibility to assure, to the extent possible that the views of group affected are made clear and give full and serious consideration by decision makers and planners to preserve options and choices for affected groups<sup>5</sup>.

Now when we see all these tribal researches from colonial period to the present day on the basis of ethical ground we would find that already there are various norms and regulations related to ethics of human subjects for example the 'Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth' is among the earliest ones for the proper 'ethical guidelines for good research practice'. They have divided under the various themes and subthemes for better research ethics.

- 1) Relations with and responsibilities towards research participants
  - Protecting research participants and honoring trust
  - Anticipating harm
  - Avoiding undue intrusion
  - Negotiating informed consent
  - Rights to confidentiality anonymity
  - Fair returns for assistance
  - Participants intellectual property right
  - Participants involvement in research

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<sup>5</sup> Marshall A. Patricia, 'Research Ethics in Applied Anthropology', *IRB: Ethics and Human Research*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1992), pp. 1-5

- 2) Relations with and responsibilities towards Sponsors, Founders and Employer
- 3) Relations with and responsibilities towards Discipline
- 4) Responsibilities to the wider society

At the same time there are scholars, scientists, and anthropologists who argue that why we should adopt the western model for ethical understanding, for example applying western standards of research ethics to medical and social studies conducted in developing countries with different cultural norms may be constructed as a form of ethical imperialism.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of debate over ethical imperialism various theoretical rationales can be given for risk-benefit assessment in research. It may be understood as an application of the basic ethical principles of the beneficence as a form of justified paternalism, on the assumption that research subjects are not positioned to adequately protect their interests by means of consent. Here we presume the silence of risk-benefit assessment without endorsing any particular theoretical rationale. The key question for this inquiry is this: is there a maximum level of net risks to consenting research subjects that can be justified by the potential social benefits from a particular scientific investigation?<sup>7</sup>

Understanding of the notion of ethics for science and social science research is should be the same or there may difference because of their different genesis on human consciousness. It is believed that science is discipline which has emerged from the material understanding of the world and social science is the study of various human relations with various space and time. And that is why ethics is the product of social responsibility which governs over the conduct of human behavior.

Trends of researches on Indian tribes particularly the central Indian Tribes have changed with the duration of time. The modern understanding of the term 'development' is the main challenge among the scientists and social scientists and particularly for the human right activists. Because from early colonial researchers to the present day drug trials among the tribes which actually cannot be check by the rules of law until the culture of human ethics will not develop among the every strata of society.

### References

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<sup>6</sup> M. Angell: Ethical Imperialism: Ethics in international collaborative clinical research. *NEJM*, 1988, p. 319

<sup>7</sup> Miller F.G., and S. Joffe, 'Limits to Research Risks', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 35, (Jul., 2009), p. 445

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