

Chapter 15

Exclusion and Inclusion of Tribes in Satyajit Ray's Cinema

Susmita Poddar

Independent Researcher, India

ABSTRACT

The Adivasis or original inhabitants of India occupy more than 8% of India's total population and contribute a rich cultural inheritance in the Indian cultural milieu. In large part of Central, East-Central, and North-Eastern India, the so-called mainstream people have intensive contact with the tribal people. They keep feelings of hatred in their mind about these tribes. This hateful and annoying attitude of the larger society towards tribal people has been inevitably reflected in the literature, art, and other expressive media of the so-called higher community. Film media also, though in a limited range, evidently reflects such feelings, such attitudes. Parallel cinema sometimes brings up the life of the forest dwellers and Dalits. Such movies mainly focus on backward peoples' struggle for survival and unbearable exploitation of their life. However, tribal people are rarely portrayed accurately, and whenever it happens, the view of the upper-class people towards the backward tribes become prominent.

INTRODUCTION

The Adivasis or original inhabitants of India occupy more than 8% of India's total population (People's Archive of Rural India, 2019) and contribute a rich cultural inheritance in the Indian cultural milieu. In large part of Central, East-Central and North-Eastern India, the so-called mainstream people have intensive contact with the tribal people. Instead of that over and above, they keep feelings of hatred in their mind about these tribes. This hateful and annoying attitude of the larger society towards tribal people has inevitably reflected in the literature, art and other expressive media of the so-called higher community.

Film as a medium, though in a limited range, evidently reflects such feelings, such attitudes. Parallel Cinema sometimes brings up the life of the forest dwellers and Dalits. Such movies mainly focus backward peoples' struggle for survival and unbearable exploitations of their life. But correctly, tribal people are rarely portrayed and whenever it happens, the view of the upper-class people towards the backward tribes appear prominently (Srinivasan, 2016; SJ., 2017). In this context, Kusuma (2018) studies

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social media in the light of tribal rights movements. Like tribal, other marginalised sections like women, disabled, LGBT have not been correctly represented in cinema. Biswal (2017 & 2019) asserts that the representation of the disabled is not politically corrected.

Further, Kusuma (2018) underlines that the women characters got marginalised in the South Indian cinema. The characters are often gender-stereotyped. However, the film, like *Nemesis*, exposes the incident of a tribal servant's revenge to a Thakur's family and also simultaneously mirrors the exploitative and hateful feelings of the upper class towards the backward tribes. Such a documentary, *The Red Data Book - An appendix*, focuses the increasing infant mortality in the tribal communities of Attappady in Kerala. In other ways, also the life of the tribal communities, their anxiety, their humiliation and their oppression become the focal themes of many local issue-based films. Bengali films, mainly feature films rarely bother about the life of the tribal people. Among the notable Bengali films, Satyajit Ray's *Aranyer Din Ratri* (1970) should be mentioned as only where the renowned director dexterously laid bare the situation of tribal territory and the relation as well as the conflict of tribal and non-tribal people in that situation. It will be the main focus of this discussion.

Bengal is the neighbouring land of the tribal territory of Chhotanagpur. In its northern part also, migrant Chhotanagpur tribes have been living in Dooars tea gardens since more than a century. Its northern hills and neighbouring north-eastern states are the habitats of many Tibeto-Burman and Sino-Tibetan tribal communities. Naturally, in large part of Bengal, Bengalese are living in close contact with the tribal people. They have exchanged significant numbers of cultural components with these tribes, especially in western frontier and northern parts of Bengal. Despite having a close connection to these ethnic groups, Bengali people, irrespective of the rural and urban, illiterate and literate, cultivators and workers and job holders, cherish a disgusting attitude towards these people. Mentioned the two tribal communities Lodha and Kharia of western frontier Bengal, who were notified by the British Government as 'Criminal Tribes' in 1871, are still branded as 'criminals' by the people of the neighbouring villages. After the notification in 1952, yet they are socially outcast and live in utter poverty.

Once a researcher said – "...the important aspects of Kharia children's socialisation is learning to live with hunger" (Mukhopadhyay, 1998, p. 19). As may be expected, sometimes they snatch or steal some food or other items from the neighbouring communities to quench hunger. Ordinary people are indifferent about their survival crisis; rather people stigmatise the poor tribal people unaccountably, and despite contributing unique tradition in country's art and culture, tribes do not get proper representation in our media art. In an interview, veteran anthropologist B K Roy Burmantruly said – "non-tribals need to be educated about the tribals first, made more aware of tribal history and their position in the present world."

DISRUPTED ETHNIC IDENTITY IN FILMS

Film media visually depicts the story of real-life, woven through the imagination of the director. India is a large multi-racial and multi-lingual country having considerable numbers of indigenous ethnic communities called *Adivasi*. Surprisingly Indiancinemapays very little attention to this vast *Adivasi* population. They are discarded or neglected or avoided by the socio-economically recognised 'upper classes'. In cinema, the characterisation of tribal people always determines the position of the tribe as the servant of the main characters or the beggar-like wretched person. Conscious and educated tribal people ever express their grievance against such characterisation. They do not want to see the portrayal of their community as the subordinate. The root cause of suchlike representations hidden in the power

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