

Tribe, State and Identity: Some Reflections on the Ho Tribe of Odisha

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Abstract

Tribes in Odisha live mostly in gadajat area or the region earlier ruled by the princely states. Their political affiliation kept on changing though, most often, they continued to live in the same place. However, the British era and the post-independent India have witnessed many remarkable changes in their territorial boundary as well as political affiliation. This, in many cases, led to changes in identity of tribes. The present paper examines the changes in Ho identity due to State policies and the ongoing industrialization in the Sukinda region of Odisha. British approach to the Ho tribe has been summarily discussed to create the required backdrop of this paper. Merger of the Sukinda princely state with the State of Odisha has changed the territorial demarcation and identity of the Ho tribe. The post-independent state policies based on industrialization too have serious impact on their identity. Based on oral history and ethnography as methods of data collection the paper examines the role of the State in shaping the Ho identity in Sukinda region.

Keywords: Tribe, State, Identity, Migration, Industrialisation

Background

A recurring theme in the debate surrounding tribal issues in India today is the tension between maintenance of tribal identity and State policies. Today we can see many tribes of India at crossroads between the urge for “self-determination” and facing the juggernaut of assimilation propelled by various state policies. The transformation of tribes in India has been argued to be towards merging with the larger Hindu society (Ghurye 1963; Bose 1941). Various classifications (Vidyathi 1977; Roy Burman 1972; Elwin 1944) of tribes in India reflect the concerned scholars’ emphasis on assimilation or absorption of tribes with Hindu society. Roy Burman (1972) classified the tribes in India on the basis of their level of assimilation with Hinduism. Elwin (1944) too

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