UNIT 4 IDENTITY CRISIS AND SOLUTION

Contents

4.0   OBJECTIVES

This Unit attempts to define identity as a concept and also look at some of the characteristic features of identity in the context of tribals in India. At the end of the lesson the students are expected to have:

- A basic understanding of the what identity is about;

- An understanding of the constituent elements of tribal identity;

- Some knowledge of the problems/threats to their identity; and

- Recommendations for solution to their problem of identity crisis.

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity is perhaps the most misused concepts in the contemporary times. There has been a complex trajectory of the identity studies from psychology to anthropology, from individual to collective, and from self to communal. In common parlance and everyday life the term 'identity' is conveniently used without often being aware of its nuances and implications. Reflecting on the concept of identity Karina V. Korostelina agrees with the argument of Brubaker and Cooper's that the term identity "tends to mean too much (then understood in a strong sense), too little (then understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)". Our concern here is 'social identity', which is one of the most popular and controversial concepts in social sciences (Korostelina, 2007:15).

There are three important elements that need to be kept in mind in the identity discourse: formation of identity, agency of identity articulation, and dynamics of identity assertion. First, identity is relational. Identity is always organised around

relationships. Identity is a question of perception as to how one group perceives itself and others in relation to oneself and others. It is through interactions between people that identity formation takes place. These are at the personal and social levels. The social aspects of identity include the social structures around which our identities are organized. Thus, there is a role of social structures, values and meaning systems in shaping of our identities.

Second, Woodward (2000:1) is of the opinion that "identity necessarily involves an interrelationship between the personal and the social which can also be expressed as a tension between structure and agency". The structural changes take place in terms of socio-economic organization, religious organization, scientific and technological advancement, through migration, ethnic diversity, organization of domestic and gender roles. These structures shape, construct and reconstruct their own identities. The construction of identities is also in terms of influencing social structures and using them to create collective identities. Third, identities are fluid in many ways. In today's changing times when the process of globalisation is impacting different spheres of life of different individuals and groups, nation-states are faced with diverse cultures, religions, and different forms of identities. Thus, diversity is created by the fluidity of the changing identities. With the coming of globalisation and breaking down of national, cultural and social barriers there is a danger of homogenisation and therefore, in the present scenario identity has become important.

4.2 DEFINITION OF IDENTITY

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, the word "identity" originated in the late sixteenth century from the Latin word "idem" which means "same." The term states the "fact of being who or what a person or thing is," and it also stands for "a close similarity or affinity" (Sriratana, 2008).

Identity is a collective aspect of a set of characteristics that define a person or a thing. It is a term which is both inclusive and exclusive because on the basis of ones identity one can get included or excluded in a group. No one can have a singular identity because one gains various identities on the basis of ones nationality, gender, region, ethnicity, language, caste, class, etc. One can be identified on the basis of his political, social, economic and ideological beliefs, too. A person can have multiple identities depending on his association or affiliation with various groups.

Identity is changeable and fluid. One can project a particular identity of his at one time and another one at another time or a collective of identities depending on the factor(s) that might motivate one to do so or put him in advantageous position as compared to the others. Identity is a process, as Robbins said, that "have to do with those aspects of culture that directly relate to the formation and maintenance of identities" (Robbins, 1973: 1208).

Social Identity

Korostelina defines social identity as "a feeling of belonging to a social group, as a strong connection with social category, and as an important part of our mind that affects our social perceptions and behavior" (2007: 15). Korostelina views social identity as a space for protection of individuals from 'solitude', which it does by creating "boundaries and a sense of a common space within

a group." She views identity as a tool of social analysis with all its limitations and is aware of the findings of the researches which show social identity as "socially constructed and influenced by the processes of existing social structures" rather than being "primordially intrinsic and inherent" (*Ibid*.).

Korostelina is of the opinion that despite their changing nature "social identities can be characterized as relatively stable and fixed" (ibid.). This argument seems to be more convincing than that of those who do not recognize the attempts of boundary creation, preservation and maintenance. These are the daily human actions and no mere imagination. It is a different matter whether we call these boundaries a mental construct or something else. Social identity, as Korostelina says, serves as "a link between an individual's psychology and the structures and processes of large social groups" (*Ibid.*: 17).

The concept of identity is multi-disciplinary. Korostelina tries to show how various disciplines have their specific focus on the question of identity. The psychoanalytic studies, for instance, focus on the role of social identity in ethnic conflicts and cycles of violence as in Volkan (1997, 2004). Anthropological research shows the manifestation of social identity in culture, its meaning, and impact on group boundaries as in Barth (1969) and Cohen (1986). Social psychologists analyze social identity in terms of intergroup relations, prejudice, and group conflicts as in Tajfel and Turner (1986) and Turner *et al.* (1987). Moreover, sociologists evaluate identity to analyze the interrelations between personality and society as in Giddens (1991) and Jenkins (1996). Moreover, political scientists explore the role of identity in domestic and international conflicts as in Brubaker (1996), Fisher (1997), Gellner (1994), and Gurr (1970). These approaches analyze social identity as 'a dynamic construct' determining interrelations between individual behavior and social reality (as in Korostelina, 2007: 17-18).

Korostelina (2007:18-19) observes that identification is a process, which is determined by culture and social reality with two components—emotional and cognitive. The emotional component develops as a result of positive feelings. The cognitive component develops on emotional connections that lead to an acceptance of values, beliefs, attitudes and worldviews. She claims that there are two main functions of identification—first, a realization of the need of the individual's belonging to a group for protection and confidence; and second, a person's inclusion into a system of social relationships. She identifies some of the types of groups which serve as objects of identification as—primary groups (family, friends); primordial groups (ethnic, religious); socially constructed groups (nation, political, party); contact groups (colleagues, mates, associates); and symbolic groups (generation).

Korostelina (2007: 61) defines identity as "a system that involves core identities, short-term identities, and situational identities". Core identities, she argues, are fairly stable and dominant and they exist for a relatively long time and change only in situations of considerable social shifting. She holds that some core identities remain through an individual's entire lifetime. Short-term identities, she claims, are not constant and reflect temporary in-group and intergroup relations. Further, situational identities, she says, are connected with, and depend on, concrete situations.

Korostelina (2007: 75-76) is of the view that social identity contains the following components:

1) In-group traditions and values (culture): This component is a reflection of the specificity of interrelations within in-groups, cultural characteristics, values and beliefs, holidays and customs, ways of life, and worldviews.

2) In-group language: It connects the native language(s) of in-group, other common spoken languages, and the influence of worldview and perception on individuals and groups through specific grammatical orders and linguistic structures.

3) Characteristics of in-group members: This component includes in-group prototypes as well as stereotypes, valued individual features, and characteristics of the most prominent in-group members.

4) In-group history: This element contains historical events, names and situations that are important in-groups and that assist in defining their development, such as fairy tales, legends and heroes.

5) In-group ideology: This component reflects the main ideas, goals, aspirations and aims of an in-group.

6) Interrelations with out-groups: This element contains the norms and traditions of interconnections between in-groups and out-groups, such as the history of relationships, gains and loses resulting from the interrelations.

7) Reverberated identity: This refers to an in-group's identity resulting from comparisons with out-groups. It includes all in-group characteristics that develop in opposition to out-group characteristics.

8) Out-group image: This component reflects stereotypes, attitudes toward out-groups, and the perceived characteristics, culture, and history of out-groups that help define intergroup borders and stress differences between in-group and out-group.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is your understanding of identity?

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2) Why do you understand by social identity?

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4.3   WHO ARE THE TRIBALS?

The term 'Tribe' in Anthropology as defined by Wikipedia is a notional form of human social organization based on a set of smaller groups, having temporary or permanent political integration, and is defined by traditions of common descent, language, culture, and ideology. In different countries they are know by different names. In India the tribals are known as the *Adivasis*. The term *Adivasi* literally means 'original inhabitants'. It is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups believed to be the aboriginal inhabitants of India, although terms such as *atavika* (a Sanskrit word for forest dwellers), *vanvasi* or *girijan* (hill people) are also used for the tribes of India. The term *adivasi* carries the specific meaning of being the original and autochthonous inhabitants of a given region, and was specifically coined for that purpose in the 1930s. The ILO convention 107 describes the tribals as those people "who are at a less advanced stage of development than those reached by the other sections of national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs and traditions" (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

Over a period of time, unlike the terms 'aborigines', 'indigenous peoples' or 'tribes', the word *adivasi* has also developed a connotation of past autonomy which was disrupted during the British colonial period in India and has not been restored ever since. Opposition to the usage of this term is varied, and it has been argued that the original inhabitant contention is based on dubious claims and that the adivasi-non adivasi divide that is created, is artificial (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

The adivasis comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India. They are present in Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram and other north-eastern states, Paschim Banga, Andhra Pradesh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They are officially recognized by the Government of India as "Scheduled Tribes" in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India. There is a list of Scheduled Tribes recognized as tribal under the Constitution of India. Tribal people constitute 8.2 percent of the nation's total population, over 84 million people according to the 2001 census (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240). In India there are more than 400 officially recognized tribes in India (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240). Among the tribals:

'All tribal communities are not alike, that they are products of different historical and social conditions and that they belong to four different language families and several different racial stocks and animistic moulds. Some of them belong to the primitive stock with a continuous cultural history, others have been pushed out of the mainstream and have been "drop-outs" of our main history, yet others are created by various legal and economic interventions in society."(Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

Thus, each tribe is distinct from the other and can be identified on the basis of their practices, myths, culture, language, and so on.

In India, tribals are one of the most backward people. Even after decades of Independence and several government aids, the condition of the tribals has not changed much. As compared to them, the other backward groups have progressed, and to a certain extent, have overcome their backwardness. This is a daunting question as to why the tribals have remained where they were

decades ago. The tribals have been exploited and subjugated ever since. Jaganath Pathy says that the tribals have been victims of conquest and colonization. As a result of which they lost control over customary territorial resources, faced cultural annihilation and turned powerless (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240). Virginius Xaxa says that the tribals in India faced *double colonization* (by 'double colonization' is meant that the tribals were colonized both by the Britishers and the dominant Indians). He further elaborates: "The colonialism in the context of tribes was external (British) as well as internal (dominant Indian population). There was control by the colonial state as well as by the dominant Indian population. The dominant Indian population in collusion with the state embarked on alienating tribal people from their control over land, forest and other resources. In the course of this process there was also settler colonization of the regions inhabited by the tribal people. Colonization of tribal regions has gone on unabated in post-independent India" (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

Tribals faced suppression and oppression from various groups at various times in history. The extent and degree of colonization has been different for different regions and it has continued even after the independence of the country. In other words, the domination and the subjugation of the tribal people have resulted in the increased marginalization and pauperization of the tribal people (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

Owing to their primitiveness, they are seen as opposed to modernity and change. Such aversion to change or modernity is accounted for the pitiable state of the tribals perpetrated by others. The life-style and culture of the tribals demands the preservation of their surroundings as it is without affecting it. The tribals share a symbiotic life with forest, land and water. Take any one of it away from them and there will be a death knell for them. They do not depend on forest, land and water just to sustain themselves but their life revolves around them. Their life is intertwined with nature. Thus, a lot of their cultural activities are dependent on nature. If we separate them from nature, they will not die but their culture and the tradition revolving around the nature will die. Thus, their identities are intrinsically and symbiotically related to nature. All these constitute the identity of a tribal.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What do you understand by tribals?

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2) What are the issues of tribals?

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4.4 FACTORS THAT CONSTITUTE TRIBAL IDENTITY

There are various factors that constitute one's identity; for example nationality, origin, gender, religion, culture, caste, class, and so on. These factors define the various categories that one can fall into. Among others, some tribal anthropologists and thinkers like Ram Dayal Munda, John Lakra, Agapit Tirkey, Boniface Tirkey, Virginius Xaxa, to name a few, have defined the identity of Adivasis in different facts of their life. Here, we present a synthesis of those ideas and factors that define tribal identity:

First, Geographical Territory: This refers to the territorial and physical aspect of the tribal identity, which in common parlance is known in the slogan of *Jal-Jungle-Zamin* (water-forest-land) symbiosis. *Jal*, *Jungle* and *Zamin* are central to tribal identity. They are important factors in ascertaining and defining their identity. They are more than mere natural resources to them. Their whole existence and livelihood is centred on it. All the three are in one. One cannot be separated from the other. Of all the three 'land' is the most important because their whole life is centred on it. Their rituals and cultural practices are related to season, crops, plantation, trees and activities related to farming. Forest and water, too, are sources of livelihood for them. They do not see them as mere sources of sustenance but share a unique bond with it. In other terms, what sea is to a fisherman, land is to a tribal.

Second, Social Organization: The tribal social organization in general is characterized by egalitarianism. In the villages tribals are still governed by the s*ahiyaro* and *madait* concept. These concepts mean 'friends' and 'help'. The villagers are friends of one another. They are in solidarity with one another and with the entire village in their joys and sorrows. In moments of need of one another, each family shows its solidarity with the other in terms of ploughing the fields, sowing seeds, transplanting and harvesting. There are many other economic and social activities in which there help out each other free of cost. This is an important aspect of tribal identity. Adivasis have a strong sense of community. Community is the centre of their life and activities. This sense of collectivity helps them rise above the narrow walls of individualism and have respect for diversity, in order to counter divisive tendencies, hatred and conflict. Community life is the foundation of their democratic system. According to S.M. Michael, "The tribal society is not organized along the hierarchical line of class. It is not based on the basis of occupation by birth. The tribal society is organized on kinship basis." (Michael, 1992: 23)

Third, Economic Organization: There is a tremendous collectively in the economic organisation of the tribals which is not found in other communities. Rather than having individualistic approach in their economic enterprises, tribals have a sense of social responsibility and co-operation. Their orientation is towards mutual sharing rather than hoarding.

Fourth, Collective History: The history of tribals is characterised by hospitality and accommodation even of outsiders. The identity of the tribals is incomplete without taking into account their collective memories, which are necessarily inclusive of their origin, struggles, happiness and glorious past. Their oral tales, songs, folk tales, idioms, rituals are the medium through which their collective history is stored. The collective history gives them a sense of belonging and be a part of their ancestral glory.

Fifth, Political Structure: Tribals have their own system of governance, which is characterised by self-rule and decentralisation of power. In this type of governance decision is taken by consensus and not by election or majority-minority votes. For instance, among the Oraons of Jharkhand, there is the system of traditional village Panchayat, which is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the village. It takes care of the disputes taking place in the village. The system of *Parha* (confederation of villages) comes into the picture when the nature of dispute is inter-village. When there are disputes there are also socio-cultural mechanisms to resolve them. Often reconciliation takes place over a leaf-cup of rice beer. This is the traditional identity of the tribal community.

Sixth, Religious Organisation: tribal religion is characterised by harmony with nature. There is a symbiotic relationship of the tribals with nature, which is reflected in all their agricultural activities, hunting expeditions and rites and rituals. The Tribals have their own religion and follow their own religious practices. For example, the Oraons who are the indigenous people of Jharkhand have their own *pahan* (religious priest) and God addressed as *Dharmes*. Each tribe has their own God and has distinct practices which identifies or distinguishes them from other tribes. As a result of coming into contact with other cultural groups and due to the processes of Sanskritization and Hinduisation, the tribals have incorporated or adopted some of the practices of other cultural groups. Consequently, they are viewed by some as 'Hindus' which is wrong. Mere adoption of some of the alien cultural practices does not make them Hindus.

Seventh, Adivasi Worldview: like any other cultural and religious groups tribals too, have their own philosophy of life which is distinct from those of the others. Their way of life, values and ethos are different. They have their own worldview about the origin of cosmos and human beings. They have their own notion about the present life and the life after death. They have their own view about the Supreme Being and other beings existent in this world. They have their own myth and other legends which form the basis of their faith system and worldview.

Eighth, Art and Literature: life for tribals is a celebration even if the things do not go the way they would have liked it to go. Literature, art and music are people's artistic expression of life which are characterised by collectivity, cooperation and participation. Their art is for arts sake which cannot be commodified. It is a different matter that things are now changing due to the processes of change. Literature and art also enforces ones identity because it not only showcases their artistic genius but also projects their culture.

Ninth, Linguistic Identity: language is one of the main identity markers. It clearly distinguishes one from the other because language is not just a means of communication but an important aspect of culture and identity. Through language and words stories of human values, practices, songs, idioms are stored or conveyed. Tribals are of the oral tradition unlike other cultural groups who follow the written tradition. So, language becomes very important for the tribals because it is the only means through which they pass on their traditional knowledge from one generation to another generation. If their language gets lost, it is not a mere loss of language but a loss of ones history, traditional thought-pattern, oral literature and rich indigenous knowledge which has been collected over the centuries. Loss of language can be a death knell for a community.

Tenth, Constitutional Recognition: the constitutional recognition for the tribals as 'Scheduled tribes' under Article 342 of the Constitution, has a special significance. Before the independence of India they were identified or constructed during the colonial regime as 'tribes', but now they are given a Constitutional and legal status, which makes them eligible to benefit from certain provisions meant for their educational and economic empowerment. In absence of this status, the tribals would have no identity as a Scheduled Tribe, even if they considered themselves to be so. There are more than 600 Scheduled Tribes in India but only certain tribes have been included in the Scheduled Tribes list in the Constitution of India. And the main criteria for including them in the scheduled tribes' list as given by Verma (1990:11) are: "Traditional occupation of a definite geographical area, (ii) distinctive culture which includes whole spectrum of tribal way of life, i.e., language, customs, traditional, religious beliefs, arts and crafts, etc., (iii) primitive traits depicting occupational pattern, economy, etc., and (iv) lack of educational and techno-economic development." Jaipal Singh Munda, in the Constituent Assembly debates, had preferred the use of the term Adivasi instead of Scheduled Tribe. It was, however, not acceptable to Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, who explained that "the word Adivasi is really a general term which has no specific legal *dejure* connotation". On the other hand, the term "Scheduled tribe" has a fixed meaning because it "enumerates the tribes". He further said that "in the event of the matter being taken to a court of law, there should be a precise definition as to who these Adivasis are." It was under these conditions that the adivasis are presently called "Scheduled Tribes" of India. (Verma, 1990:11).

The above points have tried to list and elaborate on some of the factors that constitute and define tribal identity.

4.5 CRISIS OF IDENTITY

A crisis in identity takes place when the projected identity fails to get one identified by the other or when multiple identities creates confusion and fails to project a coherent picture of a person. The expression 'identity struggles' was used by Wallace to state the tension created by those interactions which led to a discrepancy between an individual's claimed identity and the identity attributed to him by the others. The term "Identity diffusion" introduced by Eric Erikson is used to denote a splitting of the self into multiple images which leads to a loss of centre, or a dispersion of identity. Identity diffusion connotes a psychopathic state in which the individual suffers from a lack of identity confirmation and alienation. Both states are the processes of facilitating identity formation or change.

These definitions of identity crisis fit in very well in the context of the tribals. From the colonial times onwards we discover that rather than identifying tribes by their ethnic names, they have been given some other names. Thus, identity from outside has been imposed upon them. In this process they have gone through crisis. The imposed identity was quite different from what they thought themselves to be or derived from within.

The following are some of the factors that have threatened and are still threatening tribal identity:

1. A Total Breakdown of Tribal Social Institutions during Colonial Period

With the coming of the British, new and alien systems of governance and jurisprudence were introduced. Major structural changes took place. The *Khuntkatti/Bhuinhari* lands, which were sacred to the tribals and which could not be bought or sold, were introduced to the notion of private ownership. All this damaged the psyche of the tribal societies.

2. Developmental Processes

With globalisation and economic liberalisation came various changes in the economic policies of the country. To meet the needs of the nation and the need to increase the economic resources of the country, natural resources were and are still being tapped and exploited. Since, most of the mineral and natural resources are concentrated in the tribal areas. Their lands have been taken away for various developmental purposes because of which they have lost all their means of livelihood and the traditional way of living. The Constitution of India provides measures to protect the tribal rights, land and culture. Their areas have been designated as Fifth Scheduled Areas which enjoy certain special rights to protect the tribals from invasion of their land, culture and way of life. Unfortunately, those very rights are being violated and manipulated for economic gains by various forces.

3. Loss of Cultural Practices/Ritual

There is loss of tribal cultural practices. With the loss of land and its natural surroundings, there has been a breakdown in their traditional form of living and practices. As a result of which, some of their cultural practices are gradually getting lost; for example *jani shikar* (hunting by women), which is a cultural practice/ritual whereby the women folk dress up like men and go hunting in the forest. This is done by women once every twelve years in remembrance of Oraon woman, who along with other women fought with the Turks and chased them away from Rohtasgarh. These practices cannot be preformed these days because most of the forest areas are restricted for public use and is no longer accessible to them. As a consequence, they are not able to perform those practices and hence, they are losing them gradually but speedily.

4. Breakdown of Community and Traditional form of Governance in Contemporary Times

There has been a breakdown of the traditional form of organisation of the tribal villages because their land has been taken away from them which were their main source of livelihood. As a result of which the villages are disintegrating as people are either moving out of the villages for better opportunities and survival purposes. The ones who are rehabilitated by the government, too, cannot setup the old system of community because the new surrounding may not have the same natural surrounding which is essential for organising and conducting it. Hence, there is a breakdown of the traditional community and organisation. Their traditional practices are thus getting lost and hence, rendering them as people with no culture (not cultureless or uncultured).

5. Impoverishment and Unemployment

Most of the developmental activities are taking place in the tribal areas but unfortunately the tribals have remained backward as compared to the other

communities of India. Owing to the loss of lands, inaccessibility to forest and poor status of agriculture, and lack of access to modern technology of farming due to lack of financial assistance, they have been forced to work as bonded labourers or migrants in the mega cities of India. This condition of tribals is not a state of poverty; this is impoverishment because the once land-rich tribals have now become migrant labourers and rickshaw pullers due to the wrong model of development. Life is thus a constant struggle for survival.

6. Distortion of Identity

Tribals are a distinct category of people. They have their own ethnic identity. Still, some right wing people claim that Tribals are Hindus which is a distortion of their identity. It should be noted that tribes do not fall within the framework of the caste system of the Hindus. Tribals are sometimes equated with Dalits, which is also not correct, because Dalit is a caste category whereas Tribal is an ethnic category. The tribal converting to other religions is wrongly alleged to have lost his/her identity, but the fact of the matter is that in a religious conversion one adopts another religion and not another ethnic identity. Again, while they came to terms with the term 'tribe', which is basically a colonial construct, some forces in India tried to label them as 'Hindus'. This was another point of crisis in history.

7. No Constitutional Recognition for Some Tribes

There are some tribes that have not been listed in the Scheduled Tribes' list notified by the President of India; for instance the Denotified tribes, also known as criminal tribes. Similarly, the tribals who have moved away from their states of origin to other states for economic reasons are considered as non-tribals. For instance, some tribes who have migrated more than 150 years ago to the Assam tea gardens or to the Andaman islands, are not recognised by the State as Scheduled Tribes. The same is the case with those tribals who have migrated to cities like Delhi for better prospects. In their new destinations they are not recognised as Scheduled Tribes as a result of which they lose all the benefits and facilities that to which a Scheduled Tribe is entitled. Hence, some of the protective measures adopted by the government to uplift the Scheduled Tribes are failing because of this crisis.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are the constituent elements of tribal identity?

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2) What have you learnt about the crisis of tribal identity?

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4.6 SOLUTION

The solution to Tribal identity crisis lies in the understanding of the worldview of the tribals and respecting their cultural difference. Since, land is central to their identity steps should be taken so that their land remains with them and the scheduled area laws and other tribal rights laws are seriously implemented. Care should be taken so that their languages are promoted and measures be adopted to create opportunities for them.

One of the ways in which development and empowerment of the tribal areas and scheduled areas can take place is to give leadership of development in the hands of the tribals themselves. In fact, as Nirmal Minz (2007) says, "The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, No. 40 of 1996 (24th Dec. 1996), makes space for tribals' participation in governance. This Act which is also known as PESA 1996, provides for the extension of the provisions of part IX of the constitution relating to the Panchayats to the Scheduled Areas". Further, No. 4 Exceptions and modification to part IX of the Constitution is the main body of this Act that provides Gram Sabha as key place. (a) Every village shall have a Gram Sabha consisting of persons whose names are included in the electoral rolls of the Panchayat at the village level. (b) Every Gram Sabha shall be empowered to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and customary laws of dispute resolution. (c) Gives the detailed power and functions of the Gram Sabha. It is hoped that self-rule alone will preserve and promote their identities through Gram Sabha, a constitutional instrument in future. The Adivasi identity across the country will be preserved in future. For Minz, this is the ray of hope for the Adivasis.

Tribal communities are going through a process of crisis due to various economic and historical processes. However, due to the indiscreet and rampant exploitation of resources not only the tribals but the entire universe is in danger of extinction. Hence, tribals have some important lesson for the world. Minz (1994) portrays this very well in his paper. He observes that industries and mining are necessary, but they cannot go on for 24 hours a day without any rest for this earth. Balance in industry and mining is necessary if humans are to live on this earth. The greed of the modern industrialists and miners will ultimately bring self destruction of the earth and all that is in it, including the human beings.

Minz further observes that this earth, the environment and eco-system have been misunderstood as a machine, which functions by itself. That Man could manoeuvre it as he liked. He claims that now we have accepted the Organismic view of the earth and the nature. That, there is a living organic relationship between human beings, trees, animals, insects, water, air, sun shine and the soil of this earth. The Adivasi have been holding these views from time immemorial and they have understood human beings as an integral part of this macro-organism. It is precisely this value of the tribals that is pro-life and pro-humanity. This is the contribution the tribal culture and spirituality make to the humanity at large. This is the only solution to the survival of the tribals and also the world.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

This Unit has tried to understand the complex concept of identity. There has been a rich trajectory of the identity studies from psychology to anthropology, from individual to collective, and from self to communal. The identity concept has been understood not as rigid but as fluid and porous. While some aspects of identity seem to be flexible, the core values are relatively more stable than the others. Identity is shaped around relationships and interactions. It is a process and not an end product. In the context of tribals the concept of identity becomes extremely engaging as they have been going through a process of crisis ever since the advent of the British who were instrumental in the break down of their social institutions. Even after the independence, the tribals continue going through this crisis as their land, which is central to their identity, is being alienated rampantly. Identity of the 'tribe' was imposed on them from outside. Once they are comfortable with that identity, there is a threat even to that identity. Ironically, the term tribe which was once looked down upon has now become a symbol of identity assertion. Self-rule or participation in the decision making process is the only solution to safeguard tribal identity and culture. In fact, tribal societies have a larger contribution to make to the survival not only of their societies but also of the entire universe. Their worldview of symbiosis with nature teaches other cultures and faiths and especially the modern industrialists to make use of all that is created in so far as it facilitates a peaceful co-existence.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Adivasis : Original inhabitants; living from ancient times.

Identity : Characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others.

Social identity : A feeling of belonging to a social group.

Sanskritization : the process of social change in India by which lower castes seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or the dominant caste.

4.9 FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES

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