

CHAPTER NINETEEN

RESEARCH

There is a very general agreement about the importance of research to provide a sound basis for programmes in the tribal areas. If this is done properly, it should not only help the local officials to understand their people better but should also inspire them with a proper respect for them and for their civilization which is sometimes regrettably lacking.

The Cultural Research Institutes

Cultural Research Institutes have been set up in Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal. The Department of Anthropology of the Government of India and the Anthropological Departments of some of the Universities have also undertaken practical surveys or academic research in a few of the Multipurpose Block areas. A full account of the work of these institutions is given in the latest Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

In his Report for 1956-57, the Commissioner has some admirable paragraphs on the functions of the special Research Institutes,

'The Cultural Research Institutes have a great task to perform in the gradual adjustment of the tribes to the changes taking place all over the country. They should collaborate with the State Governments, in an advisory capacity, in all matters relating to the welfare of backward communities. Their role at the planning stage is extremely vital. All well-planned schemes require a certain amount of factual and statistical information and the Cultural Research Institutes should chalk out their programme in such a way so as to furnish the necessary data. My intention is not to limit the scope of researches at the Cultural Research Institutes but to suggest that they should be of a selective and intensive type motivated to purposive action. It is noticed that some research bodies receiving grants-in-aid from the Government of India are conducting anthropometric surveys and collecting serological data for the purpose of tracing the history of the tribals, their origin and migrations and their racial affinities. This type of study may be important from an academic point of view, but has no objective value in the tribal welfare programme. I would, however, have no objection if studies are undertaken regarding the conditions of the health and vitality of the tribals, the effect of nutrition on their pattern of growth and resistance to diseases etc.

'Each Cultural Research Institute should have an evaluation section to assess the effect on the personality structure of the people as a result of changes in their cultural pattern and the impact of economic development. While conducting such enquiries, the Institute should proceed with a truly independent and unbiased outlook, which is characteristic of all scientific investigations. These enquiries will also throw light on the shortcomings of the present welfare schemes and afford rich experience for all future programmes.'

It cannot be said, however, that these institutions have so far had any very great impact on plans for development or have done much to guide their progress. In Ranchi, however, the Tribal Research Institute has pre-

pared a number of important notes and has conducted training courses for V.L.Ws. The Tribal Research Institute in Chindwara has done some useful work and in particular has recently produced a Bulletin called 'The Changing Tribes of Madhya Pradesh' which contains some interesting information. But in the main these potentially valuable institutions have had very little influence in helping Development officials to adapt their programmes to the social and psychological needs of the people. This is not altogether the fault of the research people. There seems to be insufficient co-ordination between the Development Departments and the Research Institutes, and the latter sometimes complain that they are not kept properly in the picture.

It is important to bear in mind that research in the tribal areas should not be confined to anthropology. In a number of Blocks where the people are comparatively advanced, the need is for sociological rather than anthropological research. One of the most important subjects, which is greatly neglected, is research in economics. Agricultural schemes, especially those concerning the promotion of cash crops, are started without any proper investigation into the possibility of finding markets and selling the crops on a commercial basis. Proposals, such as to start small factories for the bottling of fruit-juice, to take another example, are being made in quite a number of places without any thought as to whether the markets for such a product might not be over-stocked. In the field of cottage industries, research in economics is of particular importance. In industries for which raw materials are not at hand, large numbers of trainees are enlisted without any consideration whether the area will be able to absorb them, and particular crafts are started without any idea as to the possibility of marketing the finished goods.

It is equally important to arrange for research surveys to discover and study the possibilities of developing the local arts and designs, of which there is sometimes a rich stock, but of which the Block officials sometimes have no idea. There is need also of a proper study of children's recreations, a matter which is generally rather neglected by the Extension Officers. At present there is practically no attempt at all, except in Tamia, to discover what the local children's games are and to introduce and encourage them in the schools.

Above all, the most important subject for research concerns the problems of change, and the tensions that may arise as a result. At this juncture elaborate academic enquiries or research into the racial characteristics of a tribe, important as these are, may be postponed. We need to know what is actually happening to the people as a result of development; what are their psychological reactions; whether they are developing a separatist mentality and, if so, why; whether they are suffering any moral decline; whether individualism is replacing the old co-operative spirit; whether their self-reliance is weakening; whether they are beginning to suffer an inferiority complex in face of the technological skill of their instructors; whether change is coming too rapidly for them to support the many alterations in their circumstances and environment.

We recommend, therefore, that the work of the Tribal or Cultural Research Institutes should be greatly intensified in a practical direction; that the publication of material should be accelerated; that the Development Departments should keep the research officers fully in the picture, consult them more frequently and at least consider what they say; and that they

should be given their proper status as scientific bodies with freedom to express their views freely and dispassionately.

We suggest that every State with a large tribal population should have a Tribal Research Institute which should deal both with cultural and linguistic matters. These institutes might later be used, as in Ranchi, for giving orientation courses to development workers which should be very practical and to the point. Long-drawn schemes of academic research should not be taken up at the moment.

There is also need for some co-ordinating body, perhaps a cell in the Home Ministry, to give these institutes advice, generally supervise their work, and ensure proper co-ordination. This would also serve as a clearing-house for information at the national level.

Publications

The recent Seminars of field workers in the Multipurpose Blocks held at Ranchi and Pachmarhi, suggested the production of short booklets (of not more than 150 pages) on the different tribes. There are already a good number of monographs on the tribes of India and a large number of articles and papers in learned journals. Most of these are heavy and complicated, are out of print or were written very long ago and, even where they can be obtained, the ordinary field-worker may find them difficult to understand. There is a good deal of useful material in Census Reports and District Gazetteers but these are virtually inaccessible to officials in the interior. There is a need of well-printed and well-illustrated, but simply written and very on-the-spot booklets about the tribes which can be of really practical use to officials.

Such booklets and other research material might be prepared by the following agencies—

- (1) The Indian Universities which have interested themselves in research of this kind, as for example, Saugar, Lucknow, Patna, Baroda, Gauhati and Delhi.
- (2) The Tribal Research Institutes, the Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal, the Rural Higher Education Institutes of Sriniketan, Udaipur, the Rajasthan Department of Research and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Bombay.
- (3) Individual research scholars, whether from India or abroad, who are interested in cultural change.

There should be no lack of funds for this purpose, which might be obtained from the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Publications Division), the Ministry of Community Development, which has its own budget for booklets of this kind, the States budgets or, in certain cases, the budgets of the Multipurpose Blocks.

The booklets might be prepared originally in English and then (if they are good enough) should be translated into Hindi, the regional language and, in some cases, into the tribal languages.

It has been suggested that these booklets should be divided into two parts. Part I might contain factual information dealing with the historical background, the environment (physical and economic), social relations, social customs and institutions, religious beliefs and practices, tribal law, systems of land tenure and so on, and Part II might deal with social, cultural and

economic practices which could be related to the Community Development Programme with suggestions for suitable priorities, and a description of the results of contact with the outside world.

It is not only important to prepare new books; it is equally important to obtain existing books and to ensure that they are read. There is a very large body of literature about the Indian tribes but since, as we said, it is nearly all out of print, we suggest that it would be quicker and more practical to reprint some of the existing books and make them available to all officials dealing with the tribal areas which they describe than to depend on the production of new books which, to be quite realistic, may take several years to publish. Although some of these books are now not only out of print but out of date, the best of them could still prove of value even today. For example, the pioneer works of S. C. Roy on the Uraons, Birhors, Mundas and other tribes in Bihar would still be of considerable help in giving officials a background for their work and inspiring them to make their own enquiries. Even where customs and ideas have changed it will be an exciting and interesting task to compare the situation as outlined in the older books with what is happening now. There has been for some time past a proposal to reprint some of the older books on the tribes of Assam. There is a work by Playfair on the Garos which could surely be financed from the Dambuk-Aga Block budget. The same thing could be done for Stack's book on the Mikirs from the Rongkhong budget and Gurdon's book on the Khasis out of the Mairang and Saipung-Darrang funds allotted for the purpose of research which so far have not been touched. There are similar books, parts of which at least might be reprinted, for most of the tribal people.

That this is necessary may be seen from the fact that not a single Extension officer in the Mokhada-Talasari Block had read the useful book on the Warlis by Shri K. J. Save and no one in the Aheri Block was even aware of the existence of the late Sir W. V. Grigson's accounts of the Chanda tribals in the second edition of his *Maria Gonds of Bastar* and his *Report on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces*.

Many of these older books fall into three sections, one dealing with the anthropological and social aspects of the tribe, one with linguistics and the third containing a collection of folktales. It might simplify matters if, in reprinting, the section on folktales was omitted and printed as a separate book, which could be used as supplementary reading material for schools. In addition, there are a very large number of tribal folktales already published in separate volumes. Most of these were recorded some time ago and many of them are probably now forgotten. They could be translated back into the local languages and would be greatly appreciated by the people. Selections from them could also be republished as books in English for the use of more advanced students.

Philology

Another very important subject of research is philology. Every State with a large tribal population, and especially where Multipurpose Blocks have been started, should have a trained linguist attached to it to study and encourage the local languages. Scholars in the Universities might be asked to 'adopt' a Block for this purpose and be paid an honorarium for doing so.

It will of course, be impossible to preserve every little dialect and a beginning should be made with the most important tribal languages. Khasi, which was formerly divided into a number of mutually almost unintelligible dialects, has now been unified as a result of the translation of the Bible at Cherrapunji. The local dialect of that place has now become the literary language of all the Khasis and Jaintias, and today, in spite of small varieties of dialect, they can all understand one another. The same thing has happened among the Lushais, and the Nagas of Kohima. If the tribal languages are to survive at all we will have to persuade the people of a dialect-group to agree to one fundamental dialect, at least for literary purposes. In the case of very small tribes—and there are some of only 1500 to 3000 individuals—it may not be possible to do anything officially to encourage their languages. In some cases their dialects are very close to those of more substantial neighbouring tribes, and for literary purposes the language of the smaller will, on purely practical grounds, have to be assimilated with that of the larger group.

The work of the philologists would be mainly of two kinds—first, the building up of a people's literature and secondly, the encouragement of officials in learning the tribal languages.

There is still a very wide field of collection and research in the oral literature of the tribal people. Nearly all of them have a rich store of songs, myths and folktales. There are already substantial collections from such groups as the Santhals, Baigas, Murias and the Orissa tribes. Some of these are in English but can quite easily be retranslated into the local languages. The heroic epics of the Pradhans need collection as early as possible, for it is reported that they are being rapidly forgotten. The *Jadu Patua* stories, so popular in the Santhal Parganas, also need collection and attractive booklets could be made if the *Patua* scroll-paintings were used to illustrate them. The ancient *Adi* epics, the folk literature of Manipur and Tripura and indeed, the traditional stories and songs of the whole of tribal India need to be recorded quickly or an aspect of culture, at once fascinating to the scholar and of value for the morale of the people themselves, will be lost for ever.

It will be obviously impossible for one or two philologists to undertake this enormous labour but, beginning with the Multipurpose Blocks, from the budgets of which funds might be made available and gradually extending to all the Blocks in a State, the collection of songs and stories by educated tribesmen or by the local officers who might undertake the work in their spare time could be organized. Neither trained anthropologists or philologists are necessary for this, though they may be required to supervise it. It has often been found, however, that unless an official has a very high devotion to tribal culture he is not likely to do such work without some incentive and we suggest that some bonus or reward of at least Rs. 250 should be given to everyone who produces a collection of a reasonable size and standard and a proportionate reward to those who produce smaller collections. In this way a peoples' literature may be created which will preserve their historical traditions, their religious myths and their fairy stories and will stimulate a pride in themselves, their culture and their past.

Learning the Tribal Languages

The Estimates Committee for 1958-59 of the Ministry of Home Affairs

has recommended as follows—

'In order to understand the tribal problems in their proper perspective, the Committee consider it desirable that non-tribal officers and staff working in the Scheduled and Tribal Areas should learn the tribal languages. They suggest that Government may evolve a suitable scheme to encourage non-tribal officers and staff to learn the tribal languages.'

Yet although this matter has been emphasized over and over again at Conferences and in reports and directives, both from the Centre and the State Governments, it cannot be said that progress has been very encouraging. A great deal of fuss has been made about the difficulty of learning the tribal languages, but we should remember that the missionaries seem to have overcome the difficulty satisfactorily and it is indeed owing to their enthusiasm that many of these languages were first put down in writing through translations of the Bible, prayer-books and hymn-books. Even merchants have gone ahead of officials in learning these languages, for they know that by doing so they have a much better chance of extending their trade. In Margherita, for example, on the borders of the Tirap Frontier Division of NEFA, there are merchants who know two or three different tribal dialects; the result is that when the people come down from the hills to trade they automatically go to the shops owned by those merchants with whom they can talk and bargain freely. If missionaries and even merchants are able to overcome their difficulties, officials should be able to do so too.

It is no excuse to say that the tribal languages have no script. They can be written down in Devanagri or in the regional or even roman script if necessary.

In places, where Hindi or some regional language has become widely known, there is a particular danger in neglecting the tribal languages. There is an impression in such areas that there is no need for officials to learn them because they are able to carry on some sort of conversation with the people in the local lingua franca. But it would be well to remember what Mr C. G. C. Trench said in his *Grammar of Gondi*, which refers specially to the Betul District, where we have a Multipurpose Block.

'It is true that every Gond, as far as I am aware, can speak Hindi, or Marathi, and many of them both. But allow him to transact business of whatever kind, from a tiger-beat to a revenue case, in his own tongue, and he will at once show not at a disadvantage as struggling to express himself in what he calls (pathetic and pregnant term!) "Mahajani Parsi," but at his best. He becomes confidential, communicative, more truthful and more open to reason. To work or play, for him or with him, is a pleasure. Even his frequent lapses rather amuse than irritate.

'Hindus resident in Betul District have grasped this principle most thoroughly. Thousands of them, from wealthy money-lenders to humble Kotwars, are fluent speakers of Gondi. As a Teli owner of a large estate put it, "It pays me to know their language." District officers, for higher reasons than the Teli's, will find that it will pay them too.'

And very often, even where the men understand the regional language, the women do not, and women's programmes, of such vital importance, will not make real progress unless they are conducted in the tribal dialects.

But officials need a good deal of encouragement. They need guide-

books of the same general kind as Victor Hugo's 'French Self-taught' or other 'Easy Ways' of learning the European languages, which have been of help to generations of tourists. Such Phrase-books, which could contain a skeleton grammar, a list of useful words and a number of phrases in common use arranged under suitable headings, would be of immense value to officials and social workers. At a later stage regular Grammars and Dictionaries should be prepared.

There are in fact a large number of books published during the last few decades on the various tribal languages. Many of these have been produced by missionaries and are practical hand-books to help their workers to learn the local language quickly. One such book is Canon G. S. Patwardhan's *Manual of the Gondi Language* as spoken in the Chanda district. There is another valuable book on Gondi as spoken in the Betul area by C. G. C. Trench and yet another on the Gondi of Bastar by A. N. Mitchell. Thus for one tribal language we have practical manuals available for three of its most important dialects, and the task of reprinting them might be taken up immediately. Problems of copyright would, of course, have to be solved but if the matter is pressed forward urgently, this should not take too long. We should not grudge the expense if we have to pay a certain amount of money for the purchase of copyright. But this does need to be done soon.

Money should also be made available for the starting of classes or to pay instructors who will coach officials both in Block headquarters and in isolated villages.

The System of Rewards

The giving of rewards to officials who can pass an examination in languages other than their own goes back to British times, the rewards being usually adjusted to the pay of the officer concerned. Proposals for the extending of such rewards in modern days have been made again and again but either nothing has been done or, where the rewards are given, they are, when applicable to the lower staff, so small as to give little encouragement.

At present there is great variety in the attitude of the different States to this subject.

In Assam, Rs. 500 is given to officers belonging to the All India and Provincial Services who are under the employment of the State Government, if they pass a test and it is proposed to enhance this reward to Rs. 1,000. This scheme needs to be extended generously to all categories of official. In Bihar there is a scheme of compulsory examinations in the principal tribal languages which Government servants of certain categories posted in the main tribal areas have to pass within eighteen months of joining their duties. If they fail to do so, their increments are liable to be stopped. Provision has also been made for suitable rewards varying from Rs. 50 to Rs. 1,000 to Government servants who pass a tribal language examination, the approximate annual expenditure involved being Rs. 45,000. In Bombay, there is no scheme for rewarding officers for passing a language examination, but as much as a lakh of rupees has been proposed for the printing of general literature and text-books in the tribal dialects for inclusion in the Third Five Year Plan. These books will be printed in Devanagiri script and it is expected that they will materially assist the learning of the language by members of the staff. In Madhya Pradesh it has been decided to reprint useful older books, to prepare simple guide-books or text-books, and to

train a few instructors. In August 1959 a scheme of rewards was started, but this applies only to the staff working in the ten Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks in the State. Officials have to pass a test in Gondi, Halbi, Korku, Bhili or Uraon and if they do so within a year of their posting to the Block they will receive a reward of Rs. 100. This is hardly sufficient. In Orissa, examinations are conducted in Kui, Santhali, Uraon, Mundari and Saora and awards are made of Rs. 600 to Class I, Rs. 400 to Class II Gazetted Officers and Rs. 300 to Class III non-gazetted officers. The State Government is considering the question of including some other tribal languages in the scheme. Government has further laid down that employees of the Tribal Welfare and Research Department must have a certificate of proficiency in a tribal language before they cross the efficiency bar and are confirmed. In Tripura the Administration has two schemes—one which was implemented in the first year of the Second Five Year Plan to give grants to non-tribal teachers in primary schools to help them to learn a tribal language, and the other, which is being implemented from this year, to officers generally to acquire proficiency in more than one tribal language. We understand that there is to be some scheme of rewards.

No special scheme for encouraging the learning of the tribal languages or for rewarding those who do learn them exists in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan or Manipur. In Manipur the reason given is that there are as many as twenty-nine dialects in the hill areas and that the Meithei language of the valley is a general medium of communication. But many of these dialects are used by the various sub-clans of Kukis and we suggest that at least the main Naga dialects spoken in the Ukhrul and Tamenglong areas should receive encouragement.

The North-East Frontier Agency has laid down that there will be two exams, one a preliminary and the second of a higher standard which requires proficiency equal to that of an interpreter. The rewards for passing these examinations are as follows :

	For passing a preliminary Examination	For attaining Interpreter's standard
Class I Officers	Rs. 500	Rs. 1,000
Class II Officers	Rs. 350	Rs. 650
Class III Officers	Rs. 200	Rs. 300

This system of rewards should be standardised throughout the country and should be particularly generous to Grade III officials. For it is the V.L.W., the Social Educational Organiser, as well as the doctors or the P.E.O. himself, none of whom are very highly paid and who thus can claim only a modest reward (in relation to their pay) when they pass an examination, who really matter from this point of view. They are the officials who are in real touch with the people and if they cannot express themselves freely it is impossible for them to get their message across. An Agriculture Officer confessed that owing to his lack of knowledge of the language he had inadvertently given the people completely wrong instructions about the use of chemical fertilisers, with the result that a crop was destroyed instead of being improved. We suggest that, in the first place, wherever rewards are not given for passing an examination in the tribal languages, these should be instituted without any further delay. We further suggest that these rewards should not be linked to pay as hitherto but that they

should be sufficiently substantial to encourage officials, even at the V.L.W. level, to take the matter up with enthusiasm. After all a Development Commissioner, who under the old scheme would earn a substantial reward, does not really need a tribal language nearly as much as a V.L.W. or S.E.O.

One of the greatest barriers to the learning of the tribal languages is not laziness or lack of interest, but is the sense of uncertainty that exists among all officers due to the constant transfers that are made. It is obviously unlikely that an officer will go to the trouble of learning a difficult language if he expects to be transferred elsewhere within six months or a year, and this seems to be perhaps the fundamental reason why so little progress has been made in this direction. We recommend elsewhere that the present habit of constant transfers should come to an end, for once an officer knows that he has three or even five years to look forward to in any one language area, he then has a real inducement, which is far more powerful than any monetary consideration, to study the local language.

Text-books for Schools

Another very important matter is to prepare text-books in the local languages for schools. It has been laid down by Government of India that the mother tongue should be the medium of instruction in the primary stage. This will be impossible unless text-books are available. Such text-books generally exist in Assam (except in the Mikir Hills), where education is almost entirely in the hands of the tribal people and where there has been nearly a century in which to produce them. But in other States the production of text-books is still lagging far behind and every effort should be made to get them prepared quickly. The text-books should also be illustrated by pictures which will be familiar to the tribal children. It is no good in books for the very young, for example, putting in a picture of a horse or elephant for an area where the children have never seen one. Similarly special school text-books at the primary stage should be prepared so that the words used and stories told should be familiar to the children. At present text-books prepared for urban children are being imported into the remotest tribal areas. Local folktales should be used instead of stories from the European or classical Indian tradition and these books should be brought into harmony with the rural and tribal scene. Within a few years over a hundred text-books in thirteen different tribal languages have been produced by the NEFA Administration with a small staff, and if this is possible in NEFA it should be possible anywhere.