



Decolonizing Knowledge: Tribal Epistemology and Ontological Pluralism in India

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Abstract

This article explores how colonial and postcolonial regimes of knowledge production in India have methodically invalidated the epistemological traditions that tribal communities hold. What has been forfeited here is not a tidy set of utilitarian information, but an entire architecture of knowing, for example: the scaffolding behind how people make sense of the world. If we incorporate Santos's concept of epistemicide, Mignolo's coloniality of knowledge, Quijano's coloniality of power, and Smith's decolonizing methodologies, together, it becomes possible to place the Indian situation within broader-global debates on decoloniality, while also insisting on its own historical specificity. Central to the article, there is a sustained engagement with the work of Bodhi S. R., whose theorization of tribal knowledge as ability-based, practice-centred, and relationally embedded, and whose conceptual triad of epistemological stability, distortion, and disintegration, offers a more analytically precise vocabulary for theorizing tribal epistemologies



than the anthropological frameworks, historically dominated the field. The article discusses the contours of tribal epistemic life through cosmovision, oral tradition, sacred ecology, thereby demonstrating how these dimensions simultaneously constitute ways of knowing. Structural threats, displacement, assimilationist education, biopiracy, and digital-cultural penetration are shown to continue the epistemicidal project through ostensibly developmental means. The article concludes by arguing that the recognition of tribal epistemologies is not a matter of cultural accommodation, rather it should be viewed as cognitive justice - a prerequisite for the pluriversal reorganization of knowledge.

Keywords: Tribal epistemologies; Coloniality of knowledge; Epistemic justice; pluriversality, Decolonial theory; Ontological pluralism

Introduction

In India, with over 700 communities constitutionally marked as Scheduled Tribes, and roughly 8.6 % of the population (Census of India, 2011), the issue of epistemic recognition is not separable from the day-to-day realities of more than 100 million people. Their ways of knowing have, for the better part of two centuries, been sorted, categorised, and treated as something other than knowledge. What is at stake in this classification requires precise formulation, because imprecision has often been the means by which the issue has been contained. The marginalization of tribal



knowledge is persistently framed as a problem of resource access, as though the issue was simply that tribal communities possess useful ecological or medicinal information that the state and market have failed adequately to value or compensate. This article has three interlocking objectives. First, drawing on the coloniality of power and knowledge (Mignolo, 2000, 2009; Quijano, 2000), epistemicide and the ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2014), and decolonizing methodology (Smith, 1999), it develops a theoretical vocabulary, adequate to naming the specific character of epistemic violence directed at tribal communities in India, while remaining alert to the limits of frameworks, developed primarily with reference to Latin American and Pacific contexts. Second, and central to this article, this vocabulary is engaged with sustained conversation with the work of Bodhi S.R. (2022; Bodhi & Jojo, 2019), who proposed the tribal knowledge, as ability knowledge, practice-centred, as organized around interconnectedness and cosmovision, and subject to identifiable trajectories of epistemological stability, distortion, and disintegration, represents the most analytically precise account of tribal epistemology to emerge from within Indian tribal studies, and one that has not received the theoretical attention, and it warrants in the broader decolonial literature. Third, the article looks at how tribal communities in India practice epistemic pushback, through oral tradition, sacred ecology, customary governance, and language revitalization, and it also weighs the ongoing structural threats that keep weakening these knowledge set-ups under the banner of development.



Knowledge, Power, and the Coloniality of Knowledge

Since Michel Foucault's (1980) analysis of the power–knowledge nexus appears as, knowledge cannot really be treated as some neutral realm, cut off from the social relations where it is made and then authorized. The role of power is not merely to repress knowledge, but also to compose it, while shaping what counts as a legitimate statement, who is qualified as a subject to produce it, and which institutions are permitted to settle or adjudicate its truth, where Quijano's (2000) coloniality of power provides the first move in this reconceptualization. The racial classification of the world's population, set in place through European colonization in the Americas, becomes constitutive of modernity rather than just something that happened alongside it. In that sense, modernity and coloniality are not sequential, and they do not follow each other in order, they are co-constitutive, two faces of one historical formation. Mignolo (2000, 2009) develops the concept of coloniality of knowledge as the formation of epistemological dimension, processed through a particular geo-historically situated body of knowledge, produced in and authorized by Western Europe from roughly the sixteenth century onward, comes to present itself as knowledge per se, the unmarked standard against which all other epistemic traditions are measured and, in being measured, found wanting. Other traditions are not really refuted; they get moved around, redescribed as folklore, custom, belief or culture. And even if those terms are validated, they're still basically set up as definitionally distinct from knowledge, and subordinate to it.

Santos (2014) gives this dynamic its most exact formulation through the concept of



epistemicide and the figure of the “abyssal line.” For Santos, Western modernity is sort of organized by a mental thread, like a cognitive line, that splits the world into two zones: in one zone, the main tension is between rival but mutually intelligible knowledge claims, and in the other zone, over there on the flip side of the line, it does not really count as knowledge at all, not even as something that registers. Epistemicide is the process by which entire epistemological traditions are pushed across this line and, in being pushed across it, cease to be recognizable as traditions of knowledge in any sense that would make their destruction intelligible as a loss. This is the conceptual core of what is at stake in the Indian tribal case; the colonial and postcolonial treatment of tribal communities has not generally proceeded by way of argument but by way of a prior reclassification that removes tribal knowledge from the field within which such arguments could even be adjudicated. Santos’s proposed alternative, the “ecology of knowledges,” asks for a reciprocal yet non-hierarchical engagement between diverse epistemic traditions, based on the idea that no single tradition fully, or really ever, exhausts the cognitive possibilities we might draw on to make sense of a heterogeneous world that is historically sedimented. Said’s demonstration in “Orientalism” (1978) that knowledge about the “Orient” functioned as a constitutive practice, producing its object as knowable and governable while constituting the European observer as the position from which knowing occurs, has an obvious analogue in the colonial ethnography of Indian tribal communities. Spivak in her (1988) question, “Can the subaltern speak?” sharpens it in a way that points attention toward the internal, structural



conditions of utterance itself; not so much whether tribal communities have something to say but rather whether the institutional architecture of knowledge production has particular positions, from which those utterances end up being recognized as knowledge claims instead of just sitting there as raw data or testimony to be interpreted by others. Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878, in colonial era, did not only limit tribal access to forest resources, but also criminalized the ecological knowledge and customary management that tribal communities had sustained, kept, and practiced for generations, just as they were always there (Gadgil & Guha, 1992; Guha, 1989). Then the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 went further, it basically pathologized entire communities and, by extension, the habitual practices and the knowledge frameworks through which those communities arranged their collective life.

Theorizing Tribal Epistemologies: From Anthropological Description to Epistemic Architecture

What would be more appropriate to speak of a tribal epistemology, rather than tribal knowledge? The existing literature has tended to occupy one of two positions, neither adequate. The first, dominant in much anthropological and developmental writing, treats tribal communities as possessors of “traditional knowledge”; a body of empirically grounded, locally validated information about plants and animals. The constitutional recognition of tribal rights in post colonial India, in the 5th and 6th Schedules and, the Forest Rights Act of 2006, locks in an



ambivalence rather than flipping the whole structure, and tribal communities are treated as rights-bearing subjects but mostly inside a developmental frame that keeps viewing their knowledge as, a cultural attribute to be respected, or, a barrier that slows modernization, soils, and seasons, documentable, translatable, and incorporable into scientific or policy frameworks (as in India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library). Both these positions share a common limitation, and both treat tribal knowledge as a content to be related to dominant knowledge, either assimilated into it or held apart from it, rather than as an epistemology, a framework with its own internal logics of justification, validation, and transmission whose relation to other epistemologies is itself a question to be theorized rather than presupposed.

Smith's (1999) Decolonizing Methodologies remains foundational here, and his more radical claim is that the apparatus of research, its questions, its methods, and its criteria of validity, is itself a colonial technology, such that indigenous communities cannot be adequately included within existing research frameworks but require those frameworks to be fundamentally reconstituted. Escobar's (1995) account of place-based epistemologies goes further, in a way that matters a lot for the Indian case, and the local territorial specificity of indigenous knowledge isn't simply some limit we have to push past via generalization, as a constitutive feature of how the knowledge works as valid. And then Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) introduces another angle by reading language as the carrier of a community's conceptual universe, or at least that's the idea. In that view, the suppression of tribal languages isn't incidental to the suppression of tribal



knowledge. More or less, it is one of its primary mechanisms too, because it severs communities from the categories through which their knowledge has been organized, and also transmitted over time. And Vandana Shiva (1989) critiques the universalizing pretensions of reductionist science, and her argument that claims universality itself to be a situated claim, providing the clearest statement of why treating tribal knowledge as “traditional knowledge” awaiting scientific validation is not a neutral gesture but itself an exercise of epistemic power.

It is at this juncture that the work of Bodhi S.R. enters with most force, because it is here that his contribution is most distinctive and appropriate. Research on Indian tribal studies rather than from the vantage point of Latin American or Pacific decolonial theory, Bodhi (2022) proposes a periodization of the field itself, distinguishing a “Pre-Xaxa” episteme, in which tribal studies remained largely within colonial and developmental frameworks that treated tribal communities as objects of administration, welfare, or anthropological curiosity, from a “Post-Xaxa” episteme, oriented toward the epistemological self-determination of tribal communities and the development of research approaches generated from within tribal frames of reference rather than applied to them from outside. This periodization does not simply mention, in general terms, for “indigenous methodologies”; it identifies a specific historical and institutional shift within Indian tribal studies, anchored in what Bodhi and Jojo (2019) describe as a decolonial-historical approach to the study of tribal communities’ political and epistemic life. The substantive core of Bodhi’s contribution lies in his characterization of tribal knowledge as fundamentally ability-based and practice-centred



rather than primarily propositional. This distinction, broadly analogous to Gilbert Ryle's distinction between "knowing how" and "knowing that", matters not for the distinction itself but for its application; tribal epistemological traditions are organized predominantly around ability-based knowledge constituted in and through skilled practice, embodied engagement with land, water, and forest, ceremonial performance, and the intergenerational transmission of capacities rather than statements. This explains something the "traditional knowledge" framework cannot; why tribal knowledge so often resists the extraction of propositional content for incorporation into external knowledge systems. Which is precisely why tools like the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library can proliferate without truly making any contact with the epistemic dispossession that Bodhi's framework identifies. Equally significant is Bodhi's emphasis on interconnectedness as an epistemological, not merely cosmological or ethical, principle, and his development of cosmovision as the framework within which tribal communities' land-water-forest relations, ancestral relationships, and conceptions of collective life are integrated into a single, internally coherent orientation toward the world. This is not a claim about tribal communities' beliefs in some separable "spiritual" domain that coexists alongside their "real" practical knowledge of the environment; it is a claim that the practical and the cosmological are not separable in the first place. What registers, from within a propositional and dualist epistemology, as a "belief" about ancestral spirits inhabiting a forest is, from within the tribal epistemological framework itself, part of the same cognitive architecture that generates sophisticated ecological observation and



management. In other words, there's this recognition that what counts as an entity to be known in the first place is itself something that varies, across traditions, and not just in terms of information. Where Bodhi's analysis makes its sharpest analytical contribution is in his account of the trajectories along which tribal epistemological frameworks move under conditions of colonial and postcolonial pressure. Bodhi and Jojo (2019) distinguish epistemological stability, in which a community retains a coherent ontology, a stable relationship to land and language, and the institutional means to negotiate its position with external forces from a position of relative epistemic strength, from epistemological distortion, in which epistemic frameworks of a community come under sustained pressure while not yet collapsing, and manifesting in tensions over self-naming and the partial absorption of external categories. Finally from epistemological disintegration, in which the cumulative effects of dispossession, linguistic loss, and institutional pressure produce a fragmentation of the epistemic frameworks themselves, but not merely a loss of resources or autonomy, rather it is also a loss of the categories through which the community had previously understood its world. Meanwhile this paper on tribal studies in India, does not deliver any detailed empirical evidence but institutional sketches, and it tends to engage less with decolonial theory, like the vocabulary itself. Bodhi's (2022; Bodhi & Jojo, 2019) theorization, that offers the conceptual resources to bridge these literatures through its ability-based account of tribal epistemology, its concept of cosmovision, and its typology of epistemological trajectories, has not been brought into sustained theoretical conversation with the broader decolonial canon.



Cosmovision, Land, and the Architecture of Collective Knowledge

Marked by enormous diversity of language, ecology, and history, Tribal communities in India constitute a large plurality of peoples. The first such feature is the constitutive relationship between community and territory. Land, water, and forest aren't, inside the epistemological frameworks that we're looking at, really "outside" things that a community just happens to occupy. In Bodhi's (2022) way of putting it, they're part and parcel of the community's cosmovision. That is the lens or framework through which origin stories, ancestral ties, sacred landscapes, and moral obligation get woven into one single orientation toward the world. This is why, the displacement of tribal communities from their territories is experienced and should be theorized as more than economic dispossession; it is the severing of the material substrate of an epistemological framework. The second structural feature concerns the collective and intergenerational character of tribal knowledge. Knowledge is held collectively and transmitted across generations through oral narration, ceremony, embodied practice, and visual and material culture, instead of generated by individual knowers and validating by reference to individual observation or experiment. As Bodhi (2022) describes, ability-based knowledge is continuously tested and refined by way of practice; the community's grasp of seed varieties, water management, or forest ecology is open to revision, depending on what happens next, in a way that feels clearly similar to empirical inquiry. The third feature concerns the relationship between knowledge and governance. Customary institutions, the



gram sabha, pre-colonial forms of the panchayat, the clan councils of the northeast, are not merely political institutions that coexist with separate epistemic traditions, rather these are epistemic institutions, where collective knowledge is brought to bear on collective problems, where the specialized knowledge of elders and ritual specialists is formally recognized and deployed, and where disputes are adjudicated by reference to frameworks simultaneously legal, ethical, and cosmological. This is what Bodhi's (2022) concept of engaged governance captures, and governance itself as an epistemic practice internal to tribal frameworks, where marginalization by colonial and postcolonial state structures has therefore been, as Xaxa (1999) and Sundar (1997) have documented in different registers, simultaneously a political and an epistemic dispossession.

Interconnectedness, Ecological Knowledge, and the Technology of Oral Transmission

The institution of sacred groves, sarnas, deosais, kovils, and their regional equivalents, across tribal India provides the clearest illustration of what the inseparability of the cosmological and the practical means in practice. Gadgil and Vartak's (1976) pioneering documentation said that India has thousands of sacred groves, mostly in tribal regions, and they work as refugia for biodiversity, also as watershed protectors areas, and in general as places where medicinal plant knowledge is stored. The cosmological framework is the mechanism, surrounding which the grove is constituted, within the community's cosmovision, as a site of ancestral or spiritual presence, not merely as an area subject to a use-restriction, that the prohibition on exploitation is sustained across generations without the enforcement infrastructure that secular conservation areas require.



In Bodhi's (2022) terms, these systems represent the institutionalization of land-water relations as practical and simultaneously normative, where the principles governing the distribution of water are not separable from the principles governing social relations more broadly, such that what an external observer might code as "irrigation engineering" and "customary social organization" are, from within the framework, a single domain of knowledge and practice. The case of seed sovereignty and agricultural biodiversity makes the stakes of this argument especially clear, because it is here that the displacement of tribal epistemological frameworks by what Shiva (1989) calls the monoculture logic of the Green Revolution has been most thoroughly documented. This includes knowledge of how seed behavior changes with different rainfall, soil, and temperature regimes, plus know-how about inter-cropping relationships, pest management, and ways to maintain soil fertility. So, when Shiva argues in 1989 that losing this knowledge is an epistemic loss, not just an agricultural one. The epistemological framework that generated and verified those varieties, and that could, keep doing so as conditions change. Oral tradition constitutes the dimension of tribal epistemology most persistently misrecognized, even by sympathetic observers, as a deficient substitute for textual knowledge, a knowledge in-waiting pending documentation. And the origin narratives don't only tell you what happened in the cosmos. They also hide ecological orientations, ethical frameworks, and social norms inside memory structures that can actually be passed on, questioned and adjusted from one generation to the next. Documentation could remove them, but it can't really strip them away, because that is part of how the knowledge



itself is validated and then used. This is why the loss of a language is never merely the loss of a vocabulary for expressing knowledge that could in principle be expressed otherwise. When the last speaker of Bo, one of the Great Andamanese languages, died in 2010, what was lost was not a set of words for which English or Hindi equivalents could be found but the oral-mnemonic architecture within which an entire epistemological framework had been encoded and transmitted, an instance, in the starkest possible terms, of epistemological disintegration.

Cultural Resistance as Epistemic Practice

The cultural pushback that Adivasi history is famous for, the Santhal Hul of 1855, through the Birsa Munda movement, the Bastar uprisings, and then the current struggles against forced displacement in Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, should be read as more than political resistance, they're also epistemic resistance, and the ongoing refusal of the labeling scheme that put tribal ways of knowing way out past Santos's (2014) abyssal line. Cultural practice in the narrower sense, song, dance, festival, ceremony is too often treated, even in sympathetic accounts as expressive rather than epistemic. But these practices are epistemological in the full sense developed above, and they act as mechanisms for knowledge transmission, social validation, and shared remembrance, and when they keep going under external pressure it's basically keeping the conditions in place so a community's epistemological framework is still working properly. And language revitalization movements make the epistemological stakes even more obvious, at least if



one looks closely. If we think of the Gondi language movement and the long struggle to standardize and script Santali, now recognized in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, is not reducible to just a request for cultural dignity, though, it includes that. There is an epistemological claim in a precise sense, developed in Section 5: the oral-mnemonic and conceptual architecture where tribal knowledge is organized can't be carried adequately by languages whose grammar and conceptual structures are tuned to different ontological commitments. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) analysis of linguistic decolonization in the African context provides a directly applicable framework here. Linguistic decolonization is not a precondition for epistemological sovereignty in some merely instrumental sense, as though the language were a vessel and the knowledge could in principle be poured into another, but is itself a dimension of epistemological sovereignty. An irreducibly epistemological dimension carried away as a result of political mobilization of tribal communities around land, forest, and resource rights, often lost in accounts that frame such mobilization primarily in terms of rights and livelihoods. This should be considered as the assertion of a genuine epistemological alternative to the resource-extractive framework of the developmental state, rather than a strategic rhetorical move, a way of making a livelihood claim more compelling by dressing it in cultural language. Padel and Das's (2010) documentation of the resistance of Dongria Kondh communities to bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri hills illustrates this with particular clarity; the assertion that the Niyamgiri hills constitute a sacred geography whose integrity is a condition of the community's collective



existence as a knowing and being community is simultaneously a political claim and what Mignolo (2009) calls an act of epistemic disobedience, a refusal of the framework within which the hills can only appear as a deposit of bauxite to be weighed against the economic value of its extraction.

Epistemological Disintegration

Contemporary Threats to Tribal Knowledge Displacement and dispossession remain the most fundamental of these threats, most directly destructive of epistemological stability. As a result of the expansion of extractive procedure, infrastructure development, conservation projects, and Special Economic Zones, tribal communities continually, sever from the territorial bases that, as argued in Section 4, are not merely the location of their knowledge but constitutive of its cosmovision. Padel (2010) estimates that between 40% and 50% of those displaced by development projects in India since independence have been Adivasis, despite constituting roughly 8% of the population, a disproportion that is itself evidence of the structural continuity between colonial and postcolonial treatments of tribal territory as available for appropriation in the service of projects defined from outside. The interruption of generations of accumulated, practice-driven know-how that, just as discussed in Section 5, cannot be kept on its own, separate from the doing that produced it. In spite of the existing constitutional provision for instructing the practice of mother-tongue, the educational system in functions as a vehicle for what Bodhi and Jojo (2019)



would describe as epistemological distortion shading into disintegration; tribal children are typically required to learn through regional or national languages unrecognized to their own, within curricula, treating knowledge frameworks of their communities as either nonexistent or irrelevant to a modernity defined entirely in terms external to those frameworks (Roy Burman, 1992; Xaxa, 1999). The ability-based, collective framework described in Section 3, that the categories through which their communities' knowledge is organized become progressively less available to them as cognitive resources, epistemological distortion in precisely Bodhi and Jojo's (2019) sense. Biopiracy, just as taking tribal medicinal and agricultural know-how by means of intellectual property instruments, ends up being that third dimension, often misunderstood as just a matter of not enough payment, instead of seeing it as epistemic violence all by itself. In this frame India's Biological Diversity Act of 2002, and the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, show real institutional effort, but they work inside the same deeper imbalance that is actually at stake; tribal knowledge gets "recognized" instrumentally, mainly for its usefulness to dominant science and capital, and on terms that are set by frameworks, patent law, biodiversity registers, that are propositionally framed and also rather individualist in exactly the way laid out in Section 3. What these tools end up drawing out is the propositional residue, that is, the ability based knowledge after it has been translated into a database entry; what they cannot pull out, and honestly do not try to pull out, is the epistemological framework itself. So the architecture just keeps expanding, at least in principle, without ever really touching the epistemic dispossession this article



is trying to theorize, and as Shiva (1989, 1997) has said with steady, almost relentless clarity.

In practice, digital technologies allow new formats for documenting and circulating tribal knowledge, and then tribal activists and scholars have turned to digital platforms, to push epistemic statements and create solidarity networks, in a way that was previously almost not possible. At the same time, the conceptual frameworks carried by global digital media exert powerful assimilationist pressure on younger generations in ways best described, again drawing on Bodhi and Jojo's (2019) typology; as a tendency toward epistemological distortion: a progressive, generationally uneven detachment from coherent frameworks of meaning, occurring contestably, with tribal communities acting as agents of selective appropriation rather than passive recipients.

Toward Cognitive Justice: Pluriversal Futures and the Ecology of Knowledges

The analysis developed across this article points at once toward a theoretically demanded and practically specific conclusion, which claims that the recognition of tribal epistemologies in India cannot be adequately addressed through the addition of tribal content to existing frameworks, more curricula, more databases, more legal recognition of customary rights, valuable as each of these may be, but requires what Santos (2014) calls an ecology of knowledges; a structural transformation in the framework within which knowledge claims are assessed, such that the propositional, individualist, and universalizing framework that has functioned as the unmarked standard since the colonial period ceases to occupy that position. If tribal epistemologies are



organized around ability-based and practice-centred knowledge, then educational reform that adds tribal content to a curriculum organized around propositional knowledge, however well intentioned, does not address what is at stake; what would be required is a transformation of pedagogy itself, toward forms of teaching and assessment that can recognize ability-based knowledge as knowledge, of the kind gestured toward but inconsistently implemented in the National Curriculum Framework (2005). These transformations matter past the communities most directly affected, for sure. The reductionist, extractive way of looking at the nonhuman world that Shiva (1989) flagged as a constitutive feature of dominant scientific epistemology, is also, according to a growing body of analysis, tied up with the climate and biodiversity crises. And that framework seems to be pretty poorly built to cope with those issues, just on its own terms, even if that was the intent. Escobar's (1995) post-development vision was about, a plurality of communities pursuing their own conceptions of flourishing in dialogue rather than subsumed under a single developmental trajectory, finds its epistemological correlate in the ecology of knowledges, not a world in which tribal epistemologies are preserved as alternatives held in reserve against the failure of dominant frameworks, but one in which the relational ontologies discussed in Sections 4 and 5, premised on interconnectedness rather than on the separability of knower and known, are recognized as offering cognitive resources that the crises of the present make newly, and urgently, relevant.

Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, the wrong done to persons specifically



in their capacity as knowers, ties these threads together through normative vocabulary. Tribal communities in India have been subjected to epistemic injustice; closer to its paradigmatic form and their knowledge has been dismissed, appropriated, and allowed to disintegrate; their members have been denied recognition as knowers in the institutions, educational, legal, scientific, that determine what counts as knowledge; and the frameworks through which their lives have been studied have been organized in ways that structurally exclude their epistemological traditions from the position of subject rather than object of inquiry. To redress this injustice is not a matter of cultural sensitivity, nor even, primarily, of equity in the distribution of resources or recognition, though it is also that. It is a matter of cognitive justice, in the strongest sense, like a recognition that the epistemic architectures this article has described are really understanding the world that the dominant framework cannot make on its own, not by itself. And their continued marginalization, it's not just an injustice to the communities concerned, it also makes what we can collectively know feel smaller, and more impoverished.

Conclusion

The frameworks unable to register what is most distinctive about tribal epistemologies; the fact that they really constitute coherent architectures of knowing, organized around ability based and practice centred knowledge, around cosmovision and the interconnectedness of human, nonhuman, and ancestral relations, and around collective and intergenerational rather than individual modes of validation. Their marginalization is therefore a question of epistemicide



(Santos, 2014) and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), not just cultural disrespect or resource inequity. The decolonial vocabulary of epistemicide is provided an analytical precision, a capacity to describe differentiated trajectories through this typology, rather than a single, undifferentiated condition of epistemic loss, that it has not generally possessed in its application to the Indian case, while the decolonial vocabulary situates Bodhi's framework within global debates on cognitive justice and pluriversality where it has a substantial and underrecognized contribution to make. What would be required instead, genuinely decolonial research practice along the lines Bodhi and Jojo (2019) and Smith (1999) describe, educational transformation that recognizes ability based knowledge as knowledge, and governance arrangements that restore epistemic authority to the institutions in which tribal knowledge is practiced, is considerably more demanding, because it requires the dominant framework to relinquish its position as the unmarked standard of evaluation. What India's tribal communities demonstrate is not that there are other ways of knowing, for several centuries, presented itself as knowledge; it is that these architectures know a world of interconnection, of obligation between human and nonhuman, of knowledge as collective and intergenerational practice, may constitute a more adequate description of the world we collectively inhabit than the world the dominant framework has taught us to see. If it is so, then decolonization of knowledge is not a project of inclusion, but correction, and the epistemic traditions this article has examined are not survival to just be protected, but resources whose recognition the present moment requires.



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