

## BOOK REVIEW / SURING BASA

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### INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING IN ASIA, PACIFIC AND AFRICA: PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Dip Kapoor and Edward Shiza (Editors), 2010.  
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 274 pp.

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Amidst the context of globalization, modernity, neoliberalism among other 21<sup>st</sup> century constructs, critical ramification on IK (Indigenous Knowledge), i.e. the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture, as the cliché goes, is long overdue.

In the very words of its editors, "There is an attempt here to learn *from and with*, to *politicize* and *amplify* rather than to anthropologize and to *stifle/objectify* in yet another act of colonial representation ... through praxiological engagements, the political and cultural projects of indigeniety ..."

Collectively, the compendium of researches/studies points to a common strand-the location and contemporary experience with colonization as a category of human experience (p. 2). Notably, the definition of *indigenous* told from different perspectives is rendered ambiguous, if not problematic, since it depends on the context/scenario notwithstanding the extent of decolonization each region experienced.

To aid the reader in grasping the multi-thronged questions/issues the book attempts to address: the context of indigeniety in the Asia, Pacific and African regions; the 'essentialist' dimensions of IK and Learning; tensions/politics between indigenous configurations and modernizing/colonizing compulsions; how the indigenous peoples address these historical and contemporary colonizations; in what

geo-temporal arrangements are such politicized engagements evident; and how and what is being learned in these encounters.

As such, to address aforecited questions/issues, the book is divided into five broad thematic areas, namely; Development, Formal Education, Learning and Communicative Mediums, Gender, Indigenous Knowledge and Learning; and Health Knowledge and Learning.

The studies done dwell on the *Adivas* (original dwellers) of India and the land encroachment of (their) land and is echoed in the role of the TNCs (Transnational Corporations said to be the “new colonial forces” according to the Maori of Aoteron/New Zealand against colonialism and neoliberalization personified by the WTO (World Trade Organization), MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment). The *adivasis* (of Southern Bangladesh) have suffered the same plight as regards the detribalization of the ancestral lands and forests encroachment of their own terrains giving way to rubber plantations resulting in deforestation and displacement in particular of the Marma and Chakma communities. In the same vein, the *Turuku* hunters of Taiwan regard hunting as central to their identity. Similarly, the *Dayak* and *Moi* communities in West Papua lament that they are being dispossessed of their traditional lands facing challenges to their identity, culture and livelihood.

Expectedly, since some of the writers are themselves of indigenous origins, Shiza and Shakyn, in particular call on the academicians to “decolonize or liberate their western assimilated perspectives on knowledge production and dissemination to address the issues of racism and imperialism (as in the case of Zimbabweans) and on the other, of the *Newars* of Nepal for them to” come forward for collective action to voice the need for intergrating their rich heritage into the educational curricula, media and developed programs.

The privileging of text and the simultaneous deprivileging of oralities is underscored in the colonial experience in Sub-Saharan Africa which again is articulated as the Western imposition (of textualities) over oral traditions, such as proverbs, poetry (of oralities). The same

contest holds true with the survival of indigenous media (*ashar* or *soiree* or program; *jatra* (folk theatre); *Baul Gaan* (Song of Baul), Baul Music; *Lalon Shah* (Bengali language) in Bengal vis-à-vis the socio-cultural context of colonization and modern globalization. All these indigenous media have been utilized as a voice against hegemony in establishing their (Bengali) identity.

Interestingly, the women in Dalit Bahujan from India, given their marginalized position, are starting to flex their muscles, so to speak, in protesting against caste discrimination by creating their autonomous media cooperative to bridge traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge. The *Haya* women of Tanzania (Africa) continue to struggle against colonization in relation to their access and control of their land similar to what the Pastoral *Fulani* women of Northern Nigeria have done by ensuring that the cultural heritage of the tribe is continued and practiced by the new generation of *Fulani* women.

The traditional healing practices of herbalists in Kenya attest to the survival of indigenous healing practices, despite the popular Western medical practices distinctly “emphasize the reestablishment of individual harmony with the environment and the relationship with the natural cycle to which all life is subject” (p. 232).

Still in the context of the indigenous peoples in Ghana the role of traditional and alternative medicine is highlighted since 70% of their population resort to using them. In short, despite again western orientation, the existing practices of the people is justified.

This book on IK studies and its related disciplines (post-colonial studies, cultural studies, Asian studies, Anthropology) has achieved its goal of addressing the many and dialectical issues between the colonizer and the colonized; the subject and the object; the interrogators as the voiced, the hegemony and the subaltern, the once voiceless indigenous peoples through the various interrogations from within and without on almost all issues related to the needs and issues at present.

It may be overdue but it is certainly worth all the wait. Perhaps in

future issues, our very own indigenous people can have their own stories told and heard by readers withheld breath and willing suspension of disbelief.