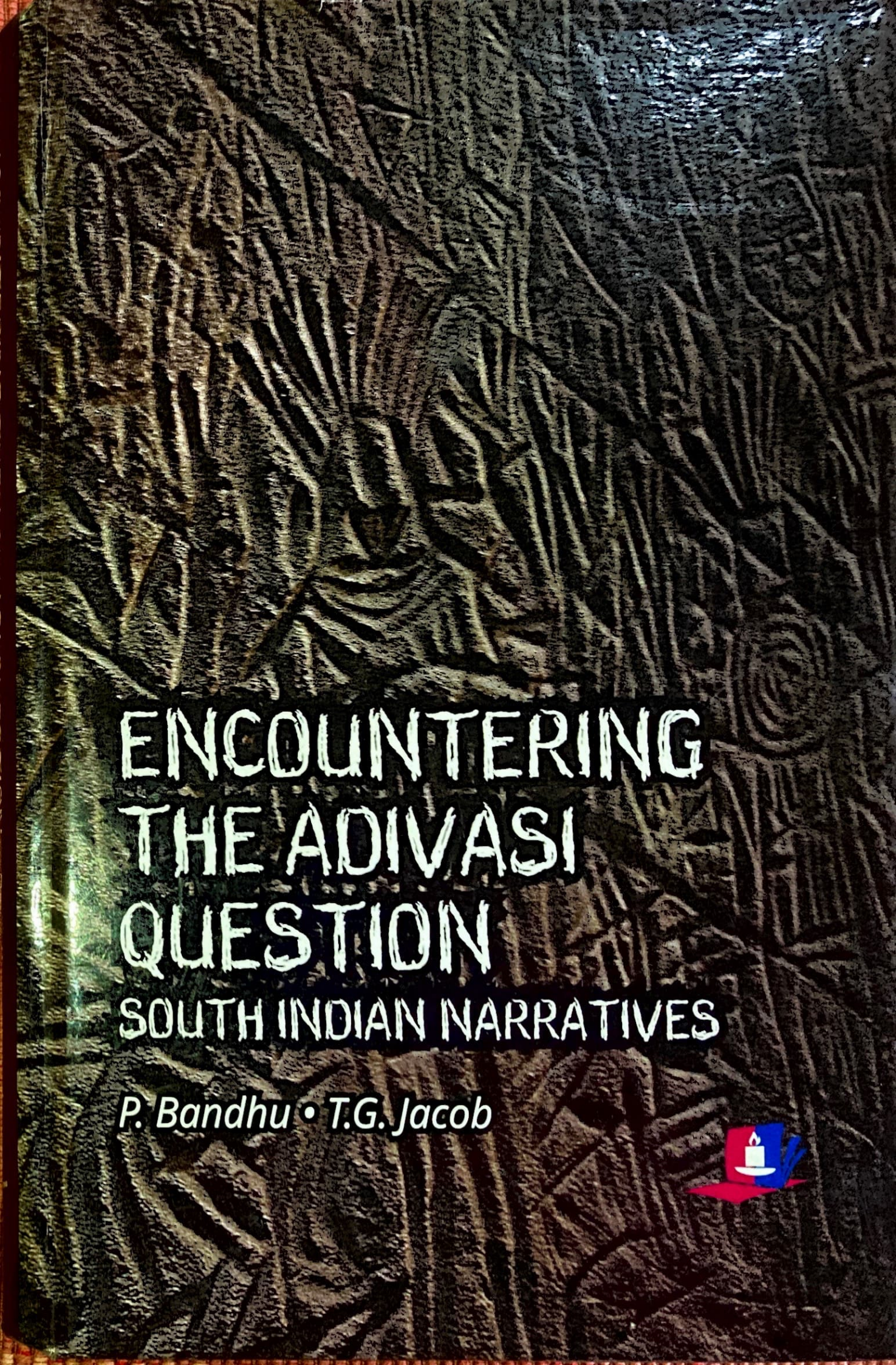
ENCOUNTERING
THE ADIVASI
QUESTION
SOUTH INDIAN NARRATIVES
P. Bandhu • T.G. Jacob

Front Cover

Edakkal cave art belongs to the Paleolithic Age. The engravers are in all probability the ancestors of the contemporary Adivasis of Wayanad. As substantiated by later Stone Age archaeological relics in the same region, these cave engravings represent the striving for language script too.

Courtesy Saji P. Mathew

Back Cover

Kurinji flowers in bloom

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South Indian Narratives

P. Bandhu

T.G. Jacob

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May 2019 **Authors**

A time will come when there will be no caste on the earth, none will be regarded as high, low or untouchable, and all men will eat together.

—Singpho Myth

Preface

The condition of Adivasis in the country is very complex and daunting. This book with a focus on the political, economic and social position of the Adivasis in the peninsular states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana can be taken as a sequel to our earlier book on the caste question, *Reflections on the Caste Question: The Dalit Situation in South India*. It also touches upon the lifestyle of Adivasis in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which geographically fall in the southern zone of the subcontinent. The book is exploratory in nature and even as different and distinct aspects are attempted to be projected in the book, interlocking streams are identified and united into a holistic perspective.

It is estimated that there are at least 5000 indigenous and tribal groups of people worldwide numbering more than 370 million and constituting around 4% of the global population.[1] Outside Africa India has the largest concentration of Adivasis. Since Independence (1947) the dispossession and impoverishment of Adivasis has increased. At least this is what is proved by sensitised studies on the question. Currently forming 8.6% of the total population, it is estimated that 40% of them are internally displaced due to development projects. At the same time, these populations have undergone a limited sort of stratification and class differentiation internally over the past several decades.

In terms of the sheer quantity of materials and studies on them the Adivasis are fairly well looked after. Right from the beginning of the colonial period studies have been undertaken uninterruptedly. These studies and reports cover the

fields of sociology, social anthropology, crisis management, ethnography, political science, economics, history, ecology and environmental science, and the latest is biotechnology. Though there are many lacunae in such studies, and the disciplines of sociology and law certainly do need to study Adivasi societies and their 'laws' of social and political organisation in greater detail, the doubt naturally arises: will there be anything new in yet another book when already so much has been written and published, mostly in non-Adivasi languages, without having any tangible and positive impact on the conditions of the subjects of all these studies and reports? There is more than enough room for this cynicism due to the sordid objective state of affairs. At the same time, we have to firmly keep in mind that history is not at all unconditionally averse to radical constructive changes.

In Chapters 1 and 2 we take a critical look at the colonial and post-colonial policies and their impact on the Adivasi situation. We also look into discourses concerning the Adivasi question. These include those in the ancient written literature of the land, such as the *Ramayana*, *Manusmriti*, *Arthasastra* and so on, in the context of the institutionalisation of the *varna-jati* system—the Indian variant of racism. Modern discourses started with the attempts by the colonial forces—anthropologists, administrators and Christian missionaries—to comprehend the exact social and ideological location of the Adivasis. The continuous large and small revolts by the Adivasis made it mandatory for the colonialists to understand their culture and history better in the efforts to find out how best to control, contain and neutralise them. A new discipline of study and research, social anthropology, entered the Indian subcontinent. Numerous studies and reports were published from London on this count and it was even included as a subject for the civil services examination. This heralded what is now known as 'tribal studies' in India.

During the colonial period counter discourses to the colonial ones were propounded by nationalist, communist and liberal thinkers and ideologues, among whom Verrier Elwin stands out. The post-colonial phase of discourses on the Adivasi question is centred in the universities and research institutions. Defining Adivasis, formulating policy prescriptions for them, debates between the integrationists and non-integrationists have ruled sociology and social anthropology for several decades and are an ongoing academic exercise. These discourses and interrogations are mostly conducted by non-Adivasi academics, whereby the influence of British and then American anthropologists and their concerns at various historical stages has been prominent. For example, the government tribal and rural community development programmes gave a fillip to the study and evaluation of the processes of change among the tribes (see Vidyarthi and Rai).

Despite the existence of a large number of studies on the Adivasis in the country, there is still vagueness concerning fundamental definitional concepts as the status, culture and identity of these ancient peoples are very much in flux. Can we regard them as the indigenous peoples of India together with the Dalits and those listed as Backward Communities constituting the so-called Bahujan Samaj (the majority society)? Or, as there have been successive waves of immigration and much intermixing from time immemorial, should we call them the original or first settlers? This is essentially a political question and that is why academics are floundering on this count. We propose to intervene in this debate even if it is sometimes just to raise further questions and not in any definitive way.

The current phase of discourses on the Adivasi question is marked by the entry of committed social and political activists—Adivasis and non-Adivasis—into the field looking at the issues in a more down to earth manner; in this phase Adivasis themselves are directly involved in the discussions and debates. Various revolts and armed rebellions from their side since the post-1960s period have encouraged this theoretical intervention. The political voice of Adivasis all over India has certainly become more distinct and erudite after it broke the frontiers of academia.

Chapter 3 looks at the way various censuses have approached and categorised the Adivasi population. Population distribution and human development indices on an all-India level are looked at and the macro data concerning the tribal population are presented. The main sources for culling this information are the various census reports, especially the 2011 Census report. Data on Adivasis, who carry the stigma of being labelled criminals, the so-called denotified tribes, is particularly revealing.

This general macro data analysis throws up generalised conclusions about the gender-wise socio-economic status of Adivasis in terms of assets, conditions of living, occupation, education, and health standards. It brings out the physical quality of life of the Adivasis in South India too. Indications of class differentiation among the Adivasis as a result of the welfare measures launched by the Central and State governments as well as NGOs are there, which in turn indicate how far the Adivasis have been integrated into the 'mainstream,' and the nature of this integration.

Chapters 4-7 take up case studies in select regions of South India and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The issues that led to various movements and struggles are located in the socio-economic background. The major movements include the Telangana armed struggle of the 1940s, the Srikakulam uprising of the late 1960s; the ongoing movements led by the CPI (Maoist) in Central India, which

include parts of northern Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the Nagarhole National Park struggle in Karnataka, and the more recent Adivasi upsurge in Kerala.

These struggles belong to two categories. One is the strictly localised variety like the struggle in the Nagarhole National Park. The other categories of the struggles are those that originated out of the local issues but developed into a broader ideologically motivated framework of capturing political power. It should be noted, however, that as all these struggles—whether explicitly politically oriented or predominantly economic and rights focused—are based on control over resources, ideology does matter in the long run.

In this context, it is necessary to state that during discussions concerning the reorganisation of States in the immediate post-independence period, the policy of the Central government was that the Adivasi areas should be split up into different States, though they may be contiguous areas. All the prominent Adivasi groups in western, central and eastern India (the hub of Adivasi populations and historically the most volatile regions) were cut up in this fashion into different administrative and linguistic formations in 1956. Although regional and sub-regional affiliations of diverse tribal groups are a reality, such a dividing up eroded their autonomy, distinct cultural identity and economy, and it has proved very debilitating for the prominent Adivasi communities. Due to this division among different linguistic groups their languages were relegated to the background adding to their identity crisis.

To overcome this handicap on the theoretical level our case studies are mostly selected on the basis of regions rather than States as they currently exist in peninsular India.

The Nilgiri Biosphere This biosphere is a highly unique geographical and ecological formation and is the home of numerous ancient Adivasi communities. When the States were reorganised in 1956 this mountainous area was divided into the three States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, which has resulted in severe disruption of the Adivasi lives. They are now swamped by hordes of settlers and turned into pitiable minorities in their homeland. Land alienation in this rich area is also probably one of the highest in the whole country. Wayanad in Kerala, Kodagu in Karnataka and the Nilgiri district in Tamil Nadu constitute actually one unit for study purposes, though we have dealt with the Adivasi situation in Wayanad in a separate Kerala chapter due to some very specific features. The goal is to hit at the exact state of being of the Adivasis in this biosphere and throw light on how and why this marginalisation and deprivation occurred through a historical analysis.

North-Western Andhra Pradesh/Telangana This is an area having Scheduled Areas, but here too the Adivasis were divided into the States of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh. The demarcation of these areas was often not done properly so as to include all tribal majority villages in them. In Adivasi history this whole area is highly significant politically, and continues to be so. In terms of political history we will examine the entire region across the various States, though the present status of Adivasis will be touched upon only in the case of the Andhra/Telangana region.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands These Islands present the most glaring illustration of how the intervention of *dikkus*[2] (outsiders) can destroy entire indigenous populations. Starting with the British colonialists, outside interventions have resulted in the extinction of several tribes, and those remaining are mostly on a declining path towards the same fate. The history of this destruction and the present status of whatever is remaining of the indigenous people are narrated simply in this case study.

In Chapters 8 and 9 we have discussed in greater detail the impacts of government policies, globalisation, NGO interventions and current Left approaches to Adivasi issues in general. Finally, Chapters 10 and 11 round off the book with notes on Adivasi economies and modes of production, religion, art, culture, languages and value systems and their relevance in the contemporary world. Together with the destruction of the Adivasi habitat much of this is getting irretrievably lost and there is an urgent need to address this challenge.

With this kind of genocidal/ethnocidal policy in place the future looks bleak for the endangered indigenous communities, their cultural identity and basic value systems; but resistance is also very much there. Adivasi struggles of varied hues against their multifaceted exploitation and oppression are becoming everyday news. Contradictions are maturing with speed because of the fast developing objective conditions. These developing objective conditions are to be understood clearly and comprehensively for salvaging the situation. We believe that our study will be an attempt in this direction apart from being an appraisal of the present status of some Adivasi areas in South India.

In the Appendix we have listed major uprisings involving Adivasis in the colonial and neo-colonial periods. Many such local rebellions and uprisings may yet not have come to our collective notice. It is to be noted that Adivasi struggles such as the Santhal uprising also included non-Adivasi oppressed caste subalterns. This list is by no means exhaustive or detailed. It rarely includes peasant struggles in which Adivasis also participated, sometimes in a minor way, such as the so-called

Chuar[3] armed peasant rebellion in Bengal and parts of eastern Bihar (1765-1799) against the exploitative revenue policy of the British, the 1817 anti-British Paika rebellion in Odisha, or the long-drawn ongoing anti-dam struggle in the Narmada Valley, and labour strikes and upsurges, such as by the coal mining workers of Dhanbad. In addition to political and economic struggles cultural resurgence is a continuing trend in terms of socio-cultural reform movements, evolving scripts for Adivasi languages, and emergence of written literature.

The Adivasi revolts have taken place from essentially similar causes. Initially many movements were led by the dispossessed and pauperised chiefs and *rajas*. Later struggles took place due to the loss of rights over forest produce, for land rights against its loss to outsiders, against the taxation policies of the colonial government, the exploitation by merchants, moneylenders and contractors, and against forced and indentured labour. Additional causes have been the excise policy, use of force to cultivate cash crops, and the loss of culture and religion; in more recent times the fight targets 'development' induced displacement and subsequent material and cultural impoverishment. In sum, the resistance marks the inability to survive due to the destruction of their earlier means of sustenance. *Jal, Jangal, Zameen hamara hai* and *Jal, Jangal, Zameen azad hai* (Water, forest and land are ours and they are free, not to be paid for) have been their slogans. In brief, it is a resistance to ethnocide. The post-1947 Indian state takes struggles as a law and order problem and react accordingly. The Indian government declares the area to be a disturbed one and sends in battalions of reserved police, who let loose a reign of terror, in the process killing and maiming innumerable numbers of Adivasis.

Our attempt through this book is not to provide a repeat of repetitive academic exercises, but to present the issues from an organic intellectual-activist angle. At the same time, we are not aiming at producing a manual or guide for activists. We conceive this attempt as complementary to the evolving practice of Adivasi intellectual activism, which necessarily has to be part of actual movements and struggles. Antonio Gramsci's concept of organic intellectual is more akin to our approach; but we have to keep in mind that this country's specificities and complexities are so enormous that we can never afford to repeat the mistake of the Leftists who imported their theories and mechanically applied them to their activism. Gramsci's model of an organic intellectual is necessarily abstract and gives only the broad contours of what organic intellectuals are in the European background. While it cannot be taken as it is, it is also not necessary to discard all the theoretical aspects involved. Frantz Fanon is another source of serious theoretical insights.

In general, pre-Partition history is dealt with under the rubric of Indian history comprising the subcontinent. The tribal heart of the Indian subcontinent and outlying islands is being 'othered' or being partially integrated into the 'Hindu heart', at times and in places, forcibly. This needs to be recognised, acknowledged and resisted.

Notes

1. See Factsheet of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and ILO: 3.
2. *Dikku* means 'outsider-exploiter' among the different Adivasi communities of Chhotanagpur and adjacent areas. It is an onomatopoeic word indicating a faster beating of the heart in the face of outsiders, who are feared, perceived as threatening and from whom they would like to run away. For Munda, Ho and Oraons "dik dik karna" means to trouble or vex. Initially, the outsider-exploiters were the zamindars and their lackeys. Later, it was used to identify the moneylenders, usurers, profiteers and corrupt officials, who were all 'outsiders,' and were targeted in struggles. Destitute migrant 'outsiders' and other long-settled people with whom there had been interaction and a development of relationships were usually not included within this terminology, although the Jharkhand political parties may use this term in a purely xenophobic, non-class sense.
3. The word *Chuar* in Bengali is a derogatory word meaning 'uncivilised,' 'barbarian', 'wicked,' etc., and was deliberately used by the colonial administrators to denigrate the participating peasantry. Some think it is a corruption of the word *chor* meaning thief.

Abbreviations

AIIMS	All India Institute of Medical Sciences
BC	Backward Class
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMFL	Indian Made Foreign Liquor
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
JBIC	Japan Bank for International Collaboration
JICA	Japan International Co-operation Agency
KIRTADS	Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
LPG	Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation

MBC	Most Backward Class
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MoEF & CC	Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change
NACDIP	National Advocacy Council for Development of Indigenous People
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NIT	National Institute of Technology
NTFP	Non-timber Forest Produce
OBC	Other Backward Class
OEECD	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation and Development
PESA	Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act
PREM	People's Rural Education Movement
PUCL	People's Union for Civil Liberties
PVTG	Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group
RGI	Registrar General of India
SICHREM	South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SRUTI	Society for Rural Urban and Tribal Initiative
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

About the Authors

Pranjali Bandhu and T.G. Jacob are activist researchers and co-founders of South Asia Study Centre (SASC) based in the Nilgiris. The Centre has the objective of executing research programmes focusing on national, ethnic, religious and minority questions in South Asia and related issues of caste, gender and the rights of the indigenous peoples.

Pranjali Bandhu has taught at universities like JNU, IIT Madras and Visva Bharati. Her articles and reviews on varied themes of media, rights of women, Dalits and Adivasis, education and environment, the nationality and cross culture issues have been published in newspapers, journals and academic edited volumes. Her books include *Black and White of Cinema in India, Dancing to Global Capital: Media in India, The Tibetan Saga for National Liberation* and the edited volume *Back to Basics: A J.C. Kumarappa Reader.*

T.G. Jacob is an experienced journalist writing in Malayalam and English newspapers and journals. Political economy with an interdisciplinary approach is his area of specialisation. He is author of: *India: Development and Deprivation, Chaos in Nation Formation: Case of Punjab, Tales of Tourism from Kovalam, Reflections on the Caste Question: The Dalit Situation in South India* (with Pranjali Bandhu), *Wayanad: Misery in an Emerald Bowl, Left to Right: Decline of Communism in India* and has edited the volumes *National Question in India: CPI Documents 1942–47* and *War and National Liberation: CPI Documents 1939–45* (with P. Bandhu).

1

ADIVASIS IN PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL INDIA

Pre-Colonial Status

The present-day Adivasis are largely the descendants of migrating tribes coming into India prior to the so-called Aryan tribes from Central Asia. These early tribal communities are divided into the Veddoids having a similarity with the Australian aborigines; the Caucasoids who spread across Gujarat, Rajasthan and Pakistan from Central Asia and the Negrito group in the Andaman Islands. Then there are the various Dravidian tribes such as the Gonds of Central India. The archaeological evidences found in the Indus Valley Civilisation sites clearly point to this civilisation as having originally been a Dravidian one. Most of the Adivasis living in Andhra today belong to the group of pre-Dravidian tribes and to some extent share Negroid features. The Adivasis by and large predate the Dravidian culture and civilisation as is shown by the case of the Mundas, Veddahs, Onges and many other aboriginal groups in South India, who are considered as belonging to the Austric or Proto-Austroloid group.[1] In fact, in some areas they were pushed into nearby hills by incoming Dravidians retreating from the Aryan incursions. Some indigenous groups displaced other indigenous groups. Racial and cultural intermixing of all groups also happened.

The indigenous peoples of the North-East—the Nagas, Khasis, Lepchas, Bodos and others—show Mongoloid features and are matrilineally organised. A substratum of matrilineality is found in many south Indian tribes too. Whatever the semantic confusions created about the Adivasis, they are certainly the oldest or first settlers in this subcontinent even if not of the particular place they happen to inhabit at present as they have migrated, been displaced and rehabilitated throughout Indian history, more so in the present era, and even if as ethnic groups they are quite diverse. It has also been noted that they tend to be concentrated at regional boundary areas. In the present context this means at inter-State and international boundaries, which is a sure indication of push or withdrawal factors involving migration. There was also in some cases a pull factor involving them in whatsoever manner in regional economy and politics, even as they usually maintained their social and cultural identities. Such border communities have acted as a 'bridge' in exchanging relations between communities or have served as a 'buffer' between organised feudal states. In this sense they were hardly completely isolated from the mainstream.

As such, the most realistic and apt term to characterise them is by using the term Adivasi which simply means original inhabitant from the point of view of those who came later. Their subjugators themselves referred to them as the original inhabitants. This is clear from the fact that the term Adivasi is a Sanskrit word. The word 'tribe' to designate some ethnic groups came into usage under colonialism. In ancient Indian literature we find the use of the term "Janah" which denoted a community of common ancestry living in a definite territory and sharing a common culture (Pathy 1984: 2). As already mentioned, it must, however, be kept in mind that the Adivasis so-called are not the original or indigenous inhabitants of every region they presently inhabit. Moreover, such a nomenclature can be misleading in the context of the North-East; there as well as in north Bengal and the Sundarbans the connotation of the word Adivasi becomes a little different referring as it does to tea plantation workers, agricultural labourers and small peasants displaced from Central India. In the north-eastern States it has to be carefully understood which ethnic groups constitute the original ones in a particular area in order to avoid undue conflicts (Roy Burman 2009).

The Adivasis and their religions predated Brahminical Hinduism. Many of their gods and goddesses, such as Siva, Parvati, Kali, Sita (the Earth goddess) and the various other forms of the mother goddess, cultural practices, medical and other in-depth knowledge of plants and trees, arts and crafts and so on, were absorbed and assimilated in the non-tribal caste-based Hindu society. Their accumulated knowledge about the forest flora and fauna was recognised and made use of and

there were trade relations between the forest and hill tribes and the plains people over the ages. The nomadic and pastoral tribes had greater economic interaction with the sedentary cultivators. However, by no means neither a fusion of tribes took place as in Europe or China, nor were they eliminated as in the Americas by colonising West Europeans. Many of these indigenous groups retained their socio-religious and cultural practices as well as their languages to a large extent. These were largely pre-class/caste formations with minimum occupational differentiation and social hierarchy and with conscious non-acquisitive and non-accumulative, environment-friendly attitudes and behaviour.

The incoming pastoral Central Asian tribes variously called the forest dwelling tribes as *Rakshasas* (demons, ogres, derived from the word *rakshak* meaning protector), *Vanaras* (monkeys), *Jambuvan* (king of the bears), *Nagas* (serpents), *Garuda* (king of eagles) and so on. Some of these epithets seem to have totemic origins. Semantically, Adivasis are known under various labels. Moreover, their identification names, mostly awarded by non-Adivasis, are ever shifting. Some of the names assigned to them referred to their mountain or hill abode, with a connotation of being savages or barbarians (such as Savaras, Paharias, Khonds, and Kiratas). Other names acknowledge that some of these indigenous peoples already had their own kingdoms (such as the Garudas and the Parajas). Some of them, such as the Kaka Bhusundi (crow) got woven into Hindu mythology as being especially enlightened people. From *Asuras*/demons to the more recent constitutional label of Scheduled Tribes (*Anusuchit Janjati* in Hindi) many different names have been awarded to them by non-Adivasis.[2] Usually, in their own languages, they call themselves simply man or human or people vis-à-vis others/outsiders. In the course of labelling them for census operations sometimes their own nomenclatures are not taken into account, but those given to them by others.

In the ancient written literature of the land, especially in the epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—and in the *Puranas*, there are many references to interactions and wars between the forest and hill tribes and these pastoral agrarian tribes. Rama, the epic's hero, is known for slaughtering *Rakshasas* and *Asuras* (demons) in the forests. But there are examples of alliances in war and through marriages with tribal chieftains as well in both the epics. Bheema, the second Pandava prince, for example, marries the 'demoness' Hidimbi from the Himalayan forests. Hanuman, who aids Rama in his war against Ravana, is believed to belong to the *Vanara* tribe. In the Brahminical Hindu tellings of the story by Valmiki (in Sanskrit) and Tulsidas (in Hindi) the valour, righteousness and knowledge of those chiefs and peoples who allied with the Aryan migrants and accepted Rama as the avatar of Vishnu, the supreme warrior and supreme deity of the invaders,

were eulogised, while those who resisted were characterised as demons or *Asuras* who were to be fought, subjugated, annihilated or isolated. In fact, the whole epic is the recital of numerous such battles for subjugating the indigenous peoples, the climax of which is the battle with Ravana, in which Rama and his indigenous allies are victorious.

The entire historical period covered in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* is an intense period of flux marked by numerous battles, victories and defeats. It is also the period of the clash between and overthrow of matriarchy by patriarchy, of basically food-gathering societies by food-producing societies using the iron plough in the process destroying many of the forests on the plains to carry out an agrarian pastoral mode of production. Societies in which matriarchal elements are still strong, such as in South India, have a different approach to Sita, and non-Brahminical traditions such as that of the Jains do not demonise Ravana, but consider him a noble, learned person who fell due to uncontrollable passion and hence as being a tragic figure rather than a villain. Different nationalities and tribes such as the Bhils have their own versions of the *Ramayana*. There are Adivasi communities who worship Ravana, as they do Kumbhakarana and Mahishasura (the buffalo-demon killed by goddess Durga) as their ancestors (see George 2017). Precisely because of this characteristic it is very difficult to conceive that the original narrative or narratives of the epics or other such literature have remained intact over the several centuries that enabled the consolidation of Brahmin domination. *Ramayana*, as well as the other major epic *Mahabharata*, and the various *Vedas* (1700-1100 BCE) certainly underwent numerous adaptations, permutations and distortions to enable this domination to come into operation.

Despite the social distance and the attempts to subjugate them there was also fear, awe and respect towards the forest dwellers with their vast knowledge base of the forest and its secrets and their ability to live in and with it. The forest also had spiritual significance for those who lived outside it. For thousands of years tribal communities have been eliminated, assimilated or pushed steadily away from fertile river basins, alluvial plains and foothills deeper into the hinterland of remote hills, forests and dry-land plateau areas by settled agriculture-based kingdoms. Vast areas of land were lost to them. But the rule of these expansionist kingdoms did not and could not factually encroach upon the territories in remote mountains and forests left to them, where they for all practical purposes governed themselves and enjoyed a largely autonomous existence. They were thus able to preserve their way of life, diverse modes of livelihood and their languages up to the qualitatively different types of encroachment into their preserves that took place under colonial rule. They were able to escape the fate of those who were subjugated and incorporated

into the agriculture-based society as its menial slaves and outcastes, compelled to carry out the meanest and lowest of tasks and not accorded dignity or respect. These people have to be recognised as the ones who gave the subcontinent its first civilisation.

Co-option of previously existing divinities formed very much a part of this subjugation process. At a later stage, Vaishnavism assimilated other cults, particularly tribal and folk cults and their heroes. It also assimilated Buddhism by including Buddha as one of the *avataras* or incarnations of Vishnu. This co-option process is still an ongoing and a two-way process. We must keep in mind that there were invasions prior to European colonialism too and they belong to medieval and ancient history. It is relevant to note that these invasions have also left their impact on the present condition of the original inhabitants. In fact, it was during the protracted period of Aryan incursions that the foundations for the marginalisation of the original inhabitants were laid apart from providing the ideological apologies for the same process.

The various *Vedas* and legal codifications like *Manusmriti* (first century BCE) and political, economic treatises like the *Arthasastra* (third century BCE) symbolise the consolidation of Brahminism by putting in place an elaborate system of ritual and social stratification, which certainly also meant economic and political stratification.[3] In this stratification the Adivasis, strictly speaking, did not find a defined place. They were considered to inhabit spaces outside the society or societies, while Dalits and Shudras and all women were regarded as people whose only function was to serve the others placed above them. To keep these social categories in a position of abject servitude the *varna* system was put in place and this millennia old system still remains strong. Untouchability, unhearability and complete ostracism and dispossession of the deprived classes and communities, who were at the same time very much needed for production and service functions, were the principal characteristics of the caste system, and it continues to be so with degrees of variation from the original edition.

It is only logical to conjecture that the present-day Dalits or untouchables were once different tribes who were made into slaves by invaders and who suffered to become slaves. The main distinction between Dalits and Adivasis is that the Dalits or enslaved people were absorbed within the caste system, but on the periphery only, as untouchables who will do all menial and degrading works. That is, they were integrated into the caste system as slaves, while the Adivasis remained outside the caste system. In a general sense we can safely assert that the Adivasis are those communities that refused to accept slavery and hence preferred to flee to more

interior, inaccessible, inhospitable jungles, which were abundant during the earlier periods, or to the hilly areas, though they are found in the plains areas also. Oral traditions of some of these communities give us a clue in this regard. The Hill Marias in Bastar say that their ancestors fled into the forest to escape the wrath of the Raja of Bastar and that the Raja came from Warangal, now in Telangana State.

In this process an interesting point to be noted is that, though some of them had been forced into servitude in the early centuries of our common era, even as late as the tenth to twelfth centuries there were still Adivasi kingdoms in operation in the central Indian regions. Some of these kingdoms were extensive territories that were contiguous in nature. The kingdoms of the Bhils and Gonds in Central India, the Koraga kingdom in South Canara, the Kurumba-Pallava kingdom in the Tamil land, that of the Vedans in Malabar, of the Satavahanas in Andhra, and the innumerable autonomous Adivasi republics that existed till as late as the sixteenth century everywhere including in the North-East are historical facts. This history cannot be traced for those who were enslaved. This is a very crucial difference between these two broad sections of the dispossessed.

After this dichotomy was institutionalised in ancient times or even before that during the consolidation process of Brahminism itself, the Adivasis were not left totally undisturbed in the forests. From the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and various *Sutras* and *Shastras* it is very clear that the Brahminical conception of state encompassed the forests also. Periodic raids into the forests are mentioned in numerous places in the entire ancient written literature. The same is graphically described in the oral literature of the Adivasis too. The Brahmins and their allies certainly needed forest products and therefore considered them as coming within their orbit of territorial jurisdiction; for this purpose they designed various forest-based rituals. While virgin forests were cut down for the purpose of settled agriculture the value of retaining some amount of wild pristine forests was realised and sacred groves (as protected forests) were promoted. The state narrowed down village boundaries and made valiant attempts to encroach on land, water, pasture land and forests for its own use. It obtained rights over forest dwellers; it reserved forests for elephants and sometimes had its own supervisors organising the collection of forest produce and selling it to villagers.

When the original inhabitants resisted alien encroachments into their habitats through raiding and warfare there was recurring tension. When the *Arthasastra* was codified, forests were being used for the raw materials they provided such as timber, for hunting (pleasure or need-based) of wild game; for providing useful animals such as elephants, for the mining of minerals and metals, and as a source of

semi-precious stones. They were considered essential for the security of villages and towns as well. For this security to be concrete their inhabitants were required to be subjugated or eliminated. Because it was difficult to uproot forest-dwelling tribes in this manner, who defended their territories ferociously, the *Arthasastra* advised the king not to trust forest chiefs, but at the same time to treat them tactfully and appease them. Later, for the consolidation of kingdoms, encroachments on these territories increased; forests were cleared and routes cut through them. Forest-living tribes who were subjugated were used as forest watchers, not against payment but as a tribute.

This was the policy followed by the Mauryan Empire (322-187 BCE). King Asoka's (268-232) numerous wars, including the Kalinga War fought in present-day Odisha, were the result of embracing this statecraft. Even after he repented the cruelty of the Kalinga War and converted to Buddhism the mainstay of his statecraft was not abandoned, that is, violence was not completely avoided, particularly in the case of troublesome forest dwellers. Rock Edict 13 explicitly states this position. This edict, promulgated after the Kalinga War, clearly stated that all recalcitrant tribes would be mercilessly suppressed if they did not voluntarily submit and enter into a relationship with the imperial powers for procuring raw materials and safeguarding forest fauna from poachers.[4]

It was not only that Asoka threatened and subjugated the indigenous populations and kingdoms (*vanarajyas*, *vanarashtras*) within the ambit of his conquering wars. Later, after he consolidated his empire through vanquishing the indigenous peoples, edicts were issued to the effect that the forest dwellers, whom he had already vanquished, by no chance should hunt and gather food that they were accustomed to. Four-legged and two-legged creatures of the forests as well as a large variety of winged creatures, the traditional hunting preys of the Adivasis, were prohibited from being hunted by the people. Land clearing by fire was also prohibited. This was, in effect, a strategy to drastically deprive the Adivasis of their food sources and a crude but effective method to create food insecurity among them and thereby to bring down their population and health standards. Any breach of the regulation (Edict 5) commanded further annihilation campaigns. Moreover, this edict came after he had become a Buddhist!

There is a vague impression sought to be perpetuated by influential historians (historians to date remain overwhelmingly oppressor caste) that it was the colonialists who first understood the economic potential of forests and hence enacted forest laws. This is certainly an oversimplification, if not an outright falsehood. The truth is that all the major empires and kingdoms in the pre-colonial

period were well aware of the resource richness of forests. And these resources were very much needed for the maintenance and promotion of their state structures. Elephants were needed for war purposes and hard timber for building towns, forts, temples, ships and palaces; honey and a variety of forest produce as healthy food are required even for ritual reasons. The forests are extremely rich in resources for human beings. It certainly did not need the white man to discover this visible truism. The emperors from Asoka onwards knew this very well. In the South also the Pallava and Vijaynagara kings are eminent illustrations. Pallava sources refer to subordinate rulers, Udayana and Prithvi-Vyagraha, as chiefs of the Savara and Nishadas, the latter being almost generic names for hunter-gatherers and shifting cultivators living in the forest.

The Travancore, Kochi and Mysore kings earned enormous state/personal income through the cutting down of teak, sandalwood and rosewood forests and selling the wood locally as well as internationally. All these kings sought to subjugate the Adivasis and gain control over the forest resources. In this process it is only natural to assume that many Adivasi communities were totally annihilated and many more got scattered from their traditional habitats. Forest contractors were not invented by the British. There is abundant proof for this forest economy playing a prominent role in the process of dispossession of the Adivasis during the pre-colonial periods too. We do not have any accurate data on how much of the forests were destroyed through the depredations of the rulers during the pre-colonial days; hence no realistic estimates can be made. But the phenomenal growth of cities and towns is enough evidence.

The most remarkable achievements of the numerous medieval, feudal kingdoms in the whole subcontinent are enumerated in terms of the architectural marvels that they created. These are scattered all over the subcontinent and they cover diverse terrains. But the fact is that all these till today remain within the corridors between forests in spite of the tremendous deforestation that has happened. The forests provided the materials for the perpetuation of the glory of the invaders of the forests and forest peoples, and this phenomenon has continued to date. The contention of a section of environmentalists and anthropologists that it is with the colonial rulers that systematic deforestation began is, to say the least, only a half-truth. Deforestation started much before the colonialists came on the scene.

Colonial Policy

The intrusion of colonialism and imperialism into the tribal domains began in

the late nineteenth century when the British colonial power brought the tribal peoples together under a centralised politico-administrative system; collected taxes from them, often in cash; compelled them to produce cash crops (like cotton, opium, turmeric, indigo, etc.) and to collect forest produce which was used as raw material in industries; recruited them as wage-earners in tea and coffee plantations producing for the international market, in industries, and as soldiers in the British Army; introduced individual rights in land; created zamindars from among them; allied with the chieftains and so on (Pathy 1982: 29). The resistance to these policies was violent and was bloodily crushed. Villages and fields were burned down; indiscriminate arrests and intimidation were there as well as murders and executions.

In the following sections, we will deal with the various facets of colonial rule with relation to the original inhabitants.

Formation of a Social Base

The process of colonial plunder could not proceed on its own momentum without a social base for its smooth functioning. The colonialists created this social base through the enactment of the Permanent Settlement, Abkari laws and Forest Acts, which helped to establish a loyal force comprising feudal elements and their private militias, moneylenders, opium traders, liquor and timber contractors to act as their henchmen. These elements were given a free hand to squeeze the people dry and the Adivasis were the worst victims of this policy of extraction. The economics of the whole exercise was simple enough. The colonialists wanted the maximum revenue from the land and huge areas were the habitats of the original inhabitants. The way to create revenue out of these vast stretches was to privatise the land and create as well as strengthen a class of oppressors who will serve the colonial purpose. This was what they did by the Permanent Settlement Act, 1793. The colonial Acts and Regulations on Adivasis and forests released the original inhabitants from their natural self-reliant situation to be at the mercy of rapacious blood suckers, who formed the social base of the colonial overlords. This was a necessary precondition for the development of infrastructure and the plantation economy, and for the maximisation of revenue farming done on an extremely ruthless scale, out of which a good enough share was used to maintain and further their social base of the feudal-moneylender nexus.

Being basically peace-loving, in the face of these new intruders, the original inhabitants would no doubt have abandoned their lands to them and gone in search of new forests to make new fields and new homes, that is, resorted to exodus as they

had done at former epochs in their history rather than give up their way of life; but now there were no longer any such forests. The only alternative for these freedom-loving people was to die of hunger or undergo the cruel injustice of becoming serfs, rather slaves, and live constantly on the verge of starvation. The new world that had come upon them did not allow them to live or die in peace.

That is why the history of colonial India is also the history of numerous small and big Adivasi uprisings, many of them lasting years, before they could be suppressed with unprecedented ferocity. These uprisings were invariably against the colonialists and their social support base of moneylenders and feudals. And the question at the centre was control over land. The colonial attempts to impose taxes, grab their land and the intolerable feudal and moneylender exploitation with colonial administration backing drove the Adivasis to bloody rebellions. The Paharia Revolt of 1772, Tamar and Munda Revolts 1795-1800, the Kurichiar uprising in Wayanad in the early nineteenth century, Kol uprisings of 1832, Kherwar and Bhumij uprisings of 1832-34, the Santhal uprising of 1855-56, the large-scale participation of Adivasis in the First War of Independence of 1857 are all examples of anti-colonial and anti-feudal fights of the Adivasis. Each of these uprisings is worthy of separate intensive studies with regard to the issues and perspectives involved. In fact, it is absolutely correct to assert that the Adivasis paid the maximum price for the political freedom of India. The uprisings enumerated above are only the bigger ones; innumerable smaller uprisings also occurred, and all of them were put down with the utmost ferociousness (see Appendix).

Forest Acts

The colonial administration formulated rules and regulations regarding forest resources and conducted deforestation in a more organised manner and on a much larger scale than in pre-colonial times. It is also important to note that it did not have a uniform set of laws regarding forests throughout its rule. At least three distinct phases can be observed in colonial forest policy. And these policies were implemented not only in directly administered areas, but also in the Princely States like Mysore and Travancore through the Residents and chief officers administering forests. In Travancore, Mysore and Kochi it was invariably the Resident's candidates who were appointed as the main forest administrators.

The colonial forest policy was very pragmatic in the sense that each stage in the exploitation of the forest wealth was dictated by their economic and political needs. They had a fundamental distrust towards the hunter-gatherer and nomadic peoples and considered them to be a danger to their political security. This was in

line with utilitarian philosophy developed in England, according to which only settled people could be termed as productive; unsettled peoples were regarded as wastrels and vagabonds and as presenting a serious threat to social and political security. The settled peasant was desirable because he produced for the market and paid taxes, besides he was victim of numerous other extortions. The colonial policy of maximising revenue from all possible sources needed settled agriculture as a precondition. It was their policy to make the colonised pay for the costs of colonisation apart from the primitive accumulation process of outright plunder of the natural resources, which enabled them to build up industrial capitalism in their own metropolises. Famines or no famines, the colonial economic extraction continued uninterrupted throughout its reign. Millions of people died due to starvation during colonial rule, but the economic drain only increased manifold. Famines did not at all deter the colonialists from enforcing peasants to cultivate raw materials for their industries. Destruction of domestic manufacturing was corollary to this policy.

Productivity in terms of the ethos of creation of surplus for others is the hallmark of both primitive and mature capitalism and the Adivasis did not subscribe to or understand this utilitarian philosophy. Their life was originally in tune with their environment and they had their own systems of beliefs and etiquettes. It was a nature-friendly approach to life diametrically opposite to the colonial policy and ideology of rape. This latter approach ruled out heterogeneity as unproductive and hence irrational/archaic; Adivasis roaming around the place and challenging their oppressors were an obvious threat. People are to be compartmentalised and be ever under observation. The aboriginals ought to be located within defined geographical, economic and cultural boundaries so that the security of the state and the process of accumulation will not be jeopardised. This was what the colonial administration did, and it absolutely synchronised with the interests of the feudal-cum-money lending class. The threat obviously did not come from those Indians who were in Oxford and Cambridge, who would not have been there but for the largesse of the colonialists and mutuality of interests and common ideological affinities.

The political reason behind the enactment of the Indian Forest Acts, the first of which was enacted in 1865, was undoubtedly the ever-rebellious attitude of the Adivasis towards their oppressors. It asserted the right of the state over forest resources, and the Forest Department with military personnel at its command was created to manage those resources. Its successor Acts in 1878 and then in 1927 provided for complete state control over the forests. The Forest Acts as a form of enclosure vested all rights with the government. With their severe restrictions on shifting cultivation, hunting and food gathering and with little attempt to

compensate rights holders they were a clear move to curtail the livelihood means of the forest inhabitants, while the British, and following them the princes, indulged themselves prodigiously with trophy hunting leading to the decimation of large wild fauna populations and widespread forest degradation. From custodians of the forests the Adivasis became labourers and 'thieves'. The Forest Department came to be called the department of 'zulum' (atrocities) as more and more forest dependants were convicted for forest-related 'crimes,' that is, for using their ancestral lands and forest resources in customary ways.

The 1878 Act had divided forests into three categories: reserved, protected and village forests. The 'reserved' forests were completely out of bounds for villagers and exclusively reserved for use by the colonial government for commercial monocultural 'scientifically' managed forests that were well connected to urban areas. In the protected forests the villagers were given some 'privileges,' but these could be taken away any time. Their rights were recorded but not settled. Commercially valuable trees were reserved for the government. The extraction and transit of forest produce were closely regulated. Such forests were often converted into reserved ones. All these moves strangulated the Adivasi communities driving them more than ever into the clutches of moneylenders and feudal lords.

In economic terms colonial interest in the forests started with the extraction of teak for the British Navy, later extending to timber for India's rapidly expanding rail network, as fuel for industries such as the iron-making and tea production, and for ship building. It should be noted that even in the case of railway sleepers timber was first shipped to the home country, cut into the required measurements, and then exported to India by British railway industries at prices arbitrarily fixed by them. This was considered necessary to make the British railway industry the world's number one. Rosewood and sandalwood were also extensively exploited commercially. After providing some compensation customary rights of existing forest dwellers could be extinguished by the Forest Department following the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894—which allowed the state to acquire large tracts of land as government property in "public interest"—and then they would be evicted from the forest. Without any notion of legal ownership and written record of rights, these communities were at the mercy of the Forest Department, which would decide whether they had rights or just label them as 'encroachers.' By 1939, in undivided India, 188,500 sq km of land had been notified as 'reserve forest.'[5] From the mid-nineteenth century onward, starting in Assam (and Sri Lanka), Wasteland Rules were also enacted in various parts of the country for creating tea plantations. By these Rules so-called uncultivated lands

and forests were taken over and given to select individuals for revenue settlement. More often than not such lands were actually common property resources in use by pastoralists for grazing, collection of firewood and other purposes, who suffered heavily due to this loss.

Adivasis were hired by the Forest Department to unsustainably cut trees such as sal for making railway sleepers, at the same time not permitting them to sustainably use and cut trees for building their own houses. Many forest dwellers were evicted and the land brought under commercial forestry operations, mostly monocultures of species considered commercially valuable such as conifers, eucalyptus and teak. From 1890 onwards some sections of the displaced forest dwellers were housed in new forest villages and allowed to cultivate small patches of land and in exchange supply free labour to the Forest Department in activities such as logging, labour in commercial plantations, fire fighting, domestication, care and use of animals such as elephants.

A certain minimum of infrastructural facilities had to be built up for facilitating colonial plunder and developing the markets for colonial manufactured products. Ships had to be built, ports had to be developed and a road and rail network established. The colonial administration undertook these tasks in good earnest from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, and the later two world wars gave tremendous momentum to this infrastructure development. When we say that infrastructure building was meant for plunder of resources we also have to take into account that this plunder was a complex process. The raw materials like timber, minerals, etc., were exported under truncated currency values and imported as finished products for infrastructure building, again under manipulated currency values. This process built up the transport industry and heavy industries at home, which led to the full-blooded industrial revolution. And this infrastructure was further used for accelerating resource plunder. In this entire process deliberate undervaluing and overvaluing was the rule. Nationalist economists like J.C. Kumarappa had studied this outright shameless mechanism very well.

This process of building infrastructure and the production of war materials gave rise to an urban-centred comprador business class of the contractor variety who, like the feudals, remained loyal to the colonial overlords. Forests, of course, became an invaluable source for building ships, expanding the railway network and for the construction of other infrastructure as bridges, piers, and wharves. Entire hard wood forest stretches were denuded of valuable hard timber. Timber resources were also exported to support overseas imperial interests of the British. Dominance over the Adivasis and full monopoly rights over the forests became mandatory for

this extensive deforestation that was done not only in the directly ruled areas but also in the Princely States. The colonialists were certainly not the pioneers of this process, but it can rightly be said that it was under their dispensation that denuding the forests assumed systematic, well organised and unprecedented proportions.

Criminal Tribes Act

The Forest Act of 1878 was predated by another Act called The Criminal Tribes Act 1871, no. XXVII. It decreed all Adivasis not practising sedentary cultivation as born criminals. Originally enacted in the provinces of Sindh, Punjab, Awadh, United Provinces and NWFP (North-West Frontier Province) it was extended to the Bengal Province in 1876, which at that time included Assam, Bihar and Odisha too. By the amendment of 1911 the whole of colonial British India was brought under this Act and it culminated with the Criminal Tribes (Consolidation) Act (VI of 1924). Many of those Adivasi communities who had fought armed battles against British incursion into their lands became listed as criminal tribes.

Through the exercise of this obnoxious Act close to 200 Adivasi groups in their millions were confined to certain areas, which they could not leave except with the written permission of district authorities. After dusk they were confined to their homes and had to attend a regular daily roll-call. Children in the age group of 6-18 were separated from their parents and put in reformatory schools. Some of the communities labelled criminals were used by landed dominant caste communities in reformatory farming and agricultural settlements where they had to do low-paid work after the passing of the Criminal Tribes Settlement Act in 1908. These were actually the first labour camps, even before those set up by the Nazis and later the Soviets. They could be jailed and perpetually harassed in numerous ways or even lynched in public for those crimes which they hardly committed. It was also very common that crimes committed by non-Adivasis were ascribed to the Adivasis and punishments meted out accordingly. Being poor and marginalised they are used by others for criminal activities till today. Such an Act was implemented even when various official reports, especially about the Bengal Province, concerning the incidence of crime clearly indicated that crimes committed by Adivasis were much lower than those committed by other communities.

By this Act many communities of craftsmen, traders, transporters, pastoralists, fakirs, wandering minstrels and the like were classified as Criminal Tribes. Even the Bhils who had fought the British in Khandesh and on the banks of the Narmada were categorised as criminals. Others so classified included the Chharas of Gujarat (called Sansis in the Punjab and Kanjars in Rajasthan), the Chenchus and the

Yenadis of Andhra Pradesh, the Banjaras, the Gadiya Lohars, and the Nats. Much of the earlier trade in forest produce from forest-dwelling Adivasis, such as hides, horns, silk cocoons, ivory, bamboo, spices, fibres, grasses, gums and resins, passed through nomadic communities like the Banjaras, who also exchanged their dairy produce. Pastoral nomadic tribes had also developed symbiotic relationships with farmers whereby their animals were allowed to feed on the stubble in the fields post-harvest and the return was the animal droppings that made for good fertiliser. The British government was suspicious of these groups believing they acted as communicators to rebels. They also wanted to completely regulate trade and take it over wherever possible. In some areas the sole right to trade in forest products was given to large European trading firms. In the process many communities like the Korava, Karacha and Yerukula of the Madras Presidency lost their livelihoods. Some of them began to be called 'criminal tribes' and were forced to work instead in factories, mines and plantations under government supervision.

In fact, after the enactment of the Criminal Tribes Act, there was a great spurt in the crime rate in colonial India because the non-Adivasis could safely commit crimes and hold the Adivasis responsible and thus easily escape punishment. Even today non-Adivasi criminals use the Adivasis for their own criminal operations. In short: this Act made the original inhabitants scapegoats for the crimes of the non-Adivasi settlers-cum-land grabbers. And once the Adivasis were put in jail for genuine or non-genuine reasons, it was very difficult for them to come out because of their non-familiarity with the colonial legal system and the forbidding costs of fighting cases. This latter reason further pushed them into incorrigible indebtedness. The viciousness of the whole set-up was unprecedented.

This was a very convenient arrangement for their local social base too. After all, labour power is the essential basis for creating surplus value. If the self-reliant and self-sufficient Adivasis could be driven to the ranks of destitute labour power suppliers, the colonialists as well as the feudal-cum-moneylender nexus stood to gain. The colonial policy towards the Adivasis and their habitats was absolutely in tandem with the casteist bigotry that was already well entrenched. The Dalits were already subjugated, only the Adivasis remained to be fully subjugated. The Forest Act and Criminal Notification regulation facilitated this trick.

Creation of Agency Areas

Another Act to deal with the insurgent Adivasi groups was the India Act XIV of 1874, which created "scheduled districts" covering about half of the Adivasi population in the country. This was the continuation of the policy of introducing

two types of administrative arrangements—regulated and non-regulated—in 'tribal' areas where the British had encountered upsurges and revolts. In 1833 Chhotanagpur was declared a non-regulated area after the Great Kol Rising. Other areas followed. This was a means of isolating the people there all the better to suppress their protest movements. It was also a means to separate these rebellious peoples from the upcoming freedom movement among the rest of the subcontinental population. The non-regulated areas were under military control and the regulated ones were under civil administration. The administration of these areas was specially autocratic because they were directly ruled by the Governor and Governor-General and were subject to special laws and administrative procedures secured either by enactments for individual tracts or by notifications under All-India statutes. No constitutional changes such as the Government of India Act of 1919 were applicable to these "Backward Tracts," as they were characterised under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms or Agency Areas as they were called later. The Governor-General could declare any area as a "Backward Tract." In the Princely States the British Resident kept a watch on the tribal situation and even acted as their Agent undermining their own autonomous political systems and chiefs.

The 1935 Government of India Act also enforced a sort of isolation of Adivasis by classifying areas inhabited by them as "excluded or partially excluded."[6] The ostensible aim of removing these areas from the system of administration prevailing in the other parts of the country was to protect the Adivasis from the depredations of moneylenders/usurers and other exploitative elements from the plains and from the diseases brought by outsiders, which could again cause conflicts and conflagrations, or their decimation. At the same time, having taken over the forests, the enactment of special forest laws and excise laws and the opening up of lines of communication hit at the very root of the economic life of these people reducing them into slaves of big landowners and planters. Intermediaries to collect land revenue also extorted the maximum possible from these erstwhile relatively free and self-sufficient people.

The Act of 1874 together with the Forest Act in combination with the Criminal Tribes Act effectively dispossessed the original inhabitants and at the same time ostracised and stigmatised them. The stigmatisation was not confined to British India alone. This was the colonial revenge for the numerous Adivasi uprisings. The colonialists understood early enough that the Adivasis, while fighting for their freedom and territorial control, lacked an overall perspective on expelling the colonialists. Actually they were fighting for their own survival, which was under constant threat. The issues the rebellions took up could thus be localised. The idea of anti-colonial national liberation as an intrinsic and inalienable component of

democratic revolution (as the Chinese nationalists and communists visualised) was conspicuously lacking in most Adivasi struggles against colonialism in India. To a lesser degree this perspective was lacking in mainstream nationalism too.

The colonial policy towards the Adivasis had both carrot and stick components to it. Any Adivasi uprising was put down brutally; but once an uprising was put down a few concessions like rotational shifting cultivation on a limited scale were allowed by the administration. These were meant as measures of containment. In South India such measures were adopted in Malabar, in the Agency Areas of Andhra, and Mysore. But they were undertaken without disturbing in any way the proclaimed social base of feudal elements, moneylenders, opium traders, and timber, construction and liquor contractors. The colonial policy of 'concessions' did not significantly alter the difficult living conditions of the original inhabitants; rather, their conditions worsened. As the tax demands of the administration went on escalating, the demands of the feudals on the toilers also increased because the established practice was to transfer the entire increased tax burden on to the shoulders of the actual producers. This process went on unceasingly, and the colonial administration was well aware of the ground situation.

Plantations and Mining

Another significant intervention by the colonialists affecting the Adivasis and forests was the extensive development of a monoculture plantation economy in select pockets, which were identified as suitable for the cultivation of products like tea, coffee, cardamom and rubber with a high value in the international market. The initial move towards this sort of industrial agriculture commenced even before crown rule was established during the mid-nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century plantations-based agriculture had spread in hundreds of thousands of hectares in high productivity highlands in various parts of the country. Tea and coffee occupied the prime position. North Bengal and Assam as well as the Nilgiris became prominent tea cultivation areas. Wayanad, Idukki in Malabar, Marthandam in Kanyakumari, and Kodagu in the erstwhile Mysore State also became plantation areas. Cotton, sugarcane and tobacco were promoted in Andhra Pradesh. This development seriously impacted on the Adivasis, as most of these areas were Adivasi concentrated areas.

Firstly, development of industrial agriculture came up along with the severe restrictions in the accessibility of Adivasis to their traditional sources of livelihood through the forest laws promulgated. This meant that their labour power could be channelled into the category of low cost or no cost labour power. The plantation

economy was developed by the colonial bourgeoisie while denying the Adivasis their traditional right to livelihood, thus converting them into destitute labour power totally at the mercy of labour contractors and moneylenders, who were quick to make their presence felt. In North Bengal and Assam the contractors supplied the labourers (bonded) from the rest of Bengal and Bihar and the vast majority of them were Adivasis. Often the methods used for recruiting the requisite numbers required by the tea gardens were inexcusable.[7] Such wage labour was actually unfree wage labour because of the lack of freedom of choice as far as employment was concerned. The labour contractors/middlemen saw to it that the plantation labour did not receive even the most miserable low wages. They or their agents were always ready on the spot to grab from the meagre wages that the workers received. This meant the further growth of indebtedness, which had already become an extensive bonded labour system in the plains where the feudals were firmly in control.

In this way the colonial planters obtained coolie labour at almost no wages. In the same way the feudals obtained bonded labour on the same terms. The labour power of Dalits and Adivasis powered the greed of accumulation. This was in spite of the fact that the colonial state had outlawed slavery in 1834. But in 1859 the Workman's Breach of Contract Act was introduced to protect the interests of the British tea planters. It gave them power to arrest absconding labourers. Thus, though slavery and serfdom had been abolished, they continued to be practised in one way or other over vast areas of the subcontinent. Both in the plantations and feudal domains, bondage, which was nothing but slavery, also merrily continued and in many vast areas this bondage slavery survived colonialism. In fact, bondage continues to date in both urban and rural areas. What the colonial administration did was simply to close its eyes to such illegalities while trumpeting abroad about the progressive steps taken in their 'barbarian' colonies. In other words, they were gloating over an absolutely sham 'civilising role'.

In addition to plantations and mines within the country the Adivasis and Dalits were also recruited to work in overseas European sugar colonies in Trinidad, Jamaica, Natal, Guyana, Mauritius, Fiji, West Indies and Ceylon. Malay's rubber estates and mines, the rice fields of Burma also utilised indentured labour from India. With the passage of time indentured labour was replaced by contract labour. Some of the tribes, like the Bhils, were recruited to the police and military in a large number. Nagas were recruited for war service overseas during the First World War. *Begar* (forced free labour) was extracted for the construction of roads, bridges, railway tracks, schools, and so on.

Many Adivasi groups were uprooted from their traditional habitats, and Adivasis who were originally from the plantation areas became literally homeless and resourceless. This degeneration in their living conditions became much worse during the subsequent period when large-scale migrations took place from the plains as in the case of Wayanad, Idukki, the Nilgiris, Kodagu and the Adivasi areas of Andhra Pradesh. It was the lure of high monetary returns from commercial crops that attracted these hundreds of thousands of migrants. In the absence of land ownership documents the Adivasis could easily be brushed aside by the migrants, and their expropriation increased hugely. Ownership of land was anathema to the Adivasis and the land revenue system was totally alien to them. It was the colonial planters who paved the way for this trend. They were the ones who introduced high value cash crops into the agricultural sector and this in turn promoted migration from the plains, which reduced the Adivasis into minority populations in their own areas. The period during and after the Second World War saw this migration at its peak. Thus we see that the move of the colonial planters had a far-reaching impact on the Adivasis.

Coffee, tea, rubber and spices plantations all need a certain elevation and temperate climatic conditions. These areas were invariably dense evergreen forests, the periphery of which was inhabited by the Adivasis who had a symbiotic relationship with them. They were, in fact, the protectors of the forests for the basic reason that these were the source of their livelihood. Opening up of extensive plantations and the subsequent migrations that such an economy triggered had a devastating impact on the forest cover of all these areas. This certainly produced long-term negative ecological effects which we are experiencing now. Places like the Nilgiris, Idukki, and Assam suffered the most. The neo-colonial period has seen an immense strengthening of this trend, with even more disastrous consequences. We shall be dealing with this question in more detail in the case study of the Nilgiris.

In addition to developing large plantations the colonialists also pioneered the large-scale mining of coal, iron ore and other minerals. These minerals and fossil fuels are mainly concentrated in the central Indian Adivasi belt including parts of Andhra Pradesh. Needless to say, the commencement of mining also uprooted a large number of Adivasis and made them utterly destitute, again totally at the mercy of mine contractors, moneylenders and labour contractors. In the initial period a good section of the miners, in the Jharia (now in Jhrkhand) and Raniganj coal mines in West Bengal were the local Adivasis. Underground deaths were common and, in the 1920s, were estimated at 2000 per year. The great natural wealth in the bowels of the earth was sought to be systematically exploited by the colonial mining companies. Likewise, oil and natural gas exploration and exploitation were

systematically pioneered in eastern India. The gold deposits in Karnataka known to the local people for several hundreds of years were exploited on a war footing; so much so that by 1947 these rich deposits were almost fully exhausted. It was rapacious greed all the way.

All these colonial mining activities and the construction of big dams resulted in a tremendous displacement of people, much of which occurred in relation to the Adivasis making them into development refugees. And as in the case of plantations impacting on the Adivasis and their habitats the trend only became stronger during the neo-colonial period. Mining, factories, big dams, infrastructure such as highways and railways, administrative and industrial townships, military installations, national parks and sanctuaries with their tourism-based economies, Special Economic Zones (SEZ) – all have uprooted, alienated, marginalised and converted millions of Adivasis into a traumatised migrant underclass of the rural and industrial semi-proletariat. Many of them have been uprooted multiple times. Multitudes are rendered homeless sleeping on the roadsides, under bridges or in whatever flimsy shelters they can find in the urban and rural spaces. This trend is continuing without let-up.

Proselytisation

Another aspect of the colonial policy towards Adivasis was the intense proselytisation activity carried out by Western Christian missionaries. The colonialists while enforcing a sort of isolation of Adivasis allowed free accessibility to West European and North American missionaries. Their activities saw a fair amount of success in the North-Eastern region, parts of Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, in the Nilgiris and the Nicobar Islands. One reason for conversion may have been that in the new situation the indigenous peoples found themselves the foreign god seemed more powerful than their own priests and beliefs. Their traditional world view no longer seemed adequate and they felt the need for devising or finding a more satisfactory one to deal with new crises, particularly those of famine and disease epidemics caused by new settlers coming in the wake of the introduction of a cash crop economy. Although the civilisation of the missionaries was solely responsible for frequent calamities facing the people, they were the ones who stepped in with ameliorative measures and won the hearts of some of the Adivasis and Dalits, who found dignity in the new religion rather than in Hinduism. The missionaries also projected Hinduism as a backward and oppressive religion and the Hindus as exploiters in contrast to benevolent Christians and Christianity with their gospel of "love thy neighbour." In the North-East natural calamities such as earthquakes and famines combined with the failure of political rebellions induced the indigenous

peoples there to undertake mass conversion to Christianity. The crises facing the people due to the colonial onslaught on the economy were thus cleverly utilised by missionaries to add to their flock.

Christian missions were at times forced into taking up cudgels in a limited way against Adivasi exploitation, if they wished to gain converts – in the Chhotanagpur Plateau for example. In such areas they worked more as social welfare agencies carrying out ameliorative measures in the fields of education, health and medicine, providing free legal aid, extending credit for agriculture and other familial needs, etc., in the face of utter dispossession of the indigenous people. On the other hand, the missionary activity sometimes acted as a divisive force within the communities and as a barrier to radical modes of protest on agrarian issues and the attainment of genuine economic and political power. Its educational activities among the Adivasis helped in the coming up of a literate middle class who gained upward mobility as clerks, officers, teachers and so on in the colonial administration.

The proselytisation activities did not end with the departure of the colonialists; they are still in practice in post-1947 India but with less intensity. Of late, with the resurgence of Hindutva forces throughout the country and their aggressive *ghar wapasi* (reconversion) and *shuddhi* (purification) agenda, the Christian proselytisation activities have received a setback. But even during the heydays of conversion it did not seriously affect vast areas of the central Indian Adivasi belt and other Adivasi areas due to a number of reasons. An important reason was the sheer inaccessibility of large Adivasi areas. Yet another significant reason was the resilience of Adivasi community organisations, beliefs and lifestyle. They also resist becoming a part of the hierarchical and discriminatory Hindu social system. When Adivasis do convert to any other religion, and mostly it is not on the level of an individual change of faith, it is meant for coming out of oppressive and marginalised social and economic conditions and attaining self-respect and upward social mobility.

A counter current among Adivasis to the efforts of Christian missionaries to convert them is the process of Hinduisation. This was proceeding over a long period of time through overt and covert means. Hinduisation of Adivasi deities and seeping in of mainstream Hindu deities into Adivasi culture and religion is very important in this context. This emulation of oppressor caste values is an ongoing process, and some sociologists such as M.N. Srinivas call it Sanskritisation, which is applicable not only to Adivasis, but also other marginalised communities. Apart from emulating dominant caste cultural mores to gain greater acceptance and respect, the engagement of Brahmin priests for the performance of marriage

rites, etc., the attempt at upward social mobility is visible when they try to get recognition as being an upper caste group. The Bhumij of Purulia and Singhbhum, for example, have tried to get recognition as Kshatriya Rajputs. This kind of upward mobility is by no means a recent phenomenon. Rajputs even married into the Bhil tribe of which union the Bhilala tribe was born. Economically, this process is aided by tribal groups taking up settled agriculture, working in the informal sector as migrant and casual workers, and in certain cases through the stratification and segmentation among the Adivasis themselves and the emergence of antagonistic, exploitative elements in their societies and with relation to Nature.

This is an extremely complex phenomenon and is a vast topic, which is beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, the trend is an important one deserving serious attention both at the analytical and policy levels. In this context it must be noted that those Adivasis who have converted or are getting Hinduised combine Christian or Hindu elements with those of their own religions. There is now even a de-sanskritisation process at work, for example, in the Manipur Valley to go back to the pre-Vaishnava, earlier pre-Hindu forms of Meitei culture against the forcible imposition of Brahminical culture.

In fact, the Adivasis had mostly resisted this process of integration throughout history because it was totally antithetical to their culture which valued freedom, egalitarianism and a nature-friendly approach. In the colonial period the trend of *shuddhi* (purification) in relation to the Muslims came up under the aegis of the Arya Samaj in the background of the communalisation of politics and society. It was assumed that the Muslims in the country were earlier all Hindus and had been forcibly converted (contaminated) by the Islamic rulers. For conservative Hindu and Muslim elites and indeed even for the Church in India it became a question of numbers within a framework of communally separated electoral politics. Each community tried to add to its numbers in its own way and this is a continuing trend. Majority and minority communalisms and fundamentalisms feed off each other. The attempt at a reform of Hindu society by ridding it of its excrescences and reinterpretation of its religion in a universalistic way by M.K. Gandhi and Tagore along the lines of the Bengal Renaissance failed. Finally, Gandhi was assassinated by hard core fanatic Brahminical Hindu elements.

Muslim leadership would like Dalits and Adivasis to convert to Islam or remain independent entities rather than get incorporated into the Hindu fold and consolidating it because this further weakens their own precarious and marginal position. Dr. Ambedkar chose to lead Dalits into Neo-Buddhism because of its anti-caste universalistic world view, but this world view has not yet really caught

on among the oppressed. Islam and much more so Christianity—because of the latter's strong support of modernisation and upward mobility—act as stronger magnets for a section of the Dalit and Adivasi masses.

Hinduisation and the proselytising activities of social service Christian and Hindu organisations have to be questioned in terms of their inroads into the unique Adivasi culture and their assimilative and mainstreaming tendencies.

Adivasis in the Nationalist Movement

There was more than one stream with various undercurrents in the nationalist movement regarding the Adivasi question. There was the Gandhian radical reformist, anti-imperialist stream striving for changes in the Hindu religion and in society. Right-wing Hindu organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha also took an interest in the question and carried out interventions. The Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission too got involved in Adivasi uplift work. All of them were opposed to the isolationalism policy being carried out by the British colonialists and strove for the integration of these marginalised peoples into the mainstream of society.

Then there were those who were oblivious of the significance of the Adivasi question in the movement for national freedom. The mainstream nationalist movement and its historians seldom took into account the anti-colonial uprisings of Adivasis as battles against imperialism; in fact, some of the top-ranking leaders of the mainstream anti-colonial struggle, namely Jawaharlal Nehru were even sublimely ignorant about the problems of the original inhabitants until European anthropologists like Verrier Elwin sensitised them to the seriousness of the Adivasi question in the country during the post-1947 period. This is certainly shameful on the part of a leading nationalist freedom fighter; but more than that the ethnic and caste bias of the upper caste freedom fighters in general is vivisected through this illustration. Nehru's *Discovery of India* is an excellent illustration of ignorance about the real India and her past. It is only a partisan Aryan-biased historiography that, unsurprisingly, is devoid of India's actual history. Even a clearly defined anti-colonial and anti-feudal uprising over vast stretches of land that happened over a hundred and fifty years ago (such as the Santhal rebellion) was never seriously taken into account by mainstream historians and politicians. It is only lately that the names of the brave Adivasi heroes of anti-colonial struggles as Birsa Munda, Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu, Tantya Bhil, Lakshman Naik, or Alluri Sreerama Raju find mention in nationalist historiography; but they are remembered and revered

in their regions and in the songs and stories of their respective communities since long.

M.K. Gandhi understood the need for special organisations to tackle the problems of marginalised social groups as the 'untouchables', the Adivasis and women. Rendering service to the Adivasis (and they were properly called as such by him) was included as the fourteenth point of his Constructive Programme in 1942. Nationalists in Gujarat had started working among the Adivasi people during the non-co-operation movement of 1920-22 itself. Pioneers in carrying out work among the Adivasis in the country were A.V. Thakkar and Verrier Elwin. Thakkar, as a member of the Servants of India Society, had started the Bhil Seva Mandal in Gujarat in 1923 and later chaired the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas (other than those in Assam) Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly. Sometimes, work for the Adivasis was done together with that for the other marginalised category of 'Harijans' because Adivasis were also regarded as untouchables by mainstream Hindu society. The Vidura Harijan Ashram worked among the Kanis and Kurumbas of Travancore. Other organisations were also formed in the various parts of India such as the Vanavasi Seva Mandal in the Central Provinces in the pre-Independence period. For the Gandhi-led nationalist movement social reform formed its bedrock. Divisive influences obstructing national unity against British imperialism were to be overcome through fostering an inclusive policy without obliterating differences, rather respecting those differences that were based on the division of labour and specific geo-spatial terrains.

As in the case of 'Harijans' the approach towards the Adivasis was two-pronged. On the one hand, if any Adivasi group showed any inclination to Hinduise or accept the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses, they were welcomed to do so; the prejudices of Hindus were sought to be allayed; a change of heart and self-purification were recommended. In any case, Gandhi was working towards a reformed Hinduism which would not make distinctions between high and low and nurture feelings of superiority or inferiority among its adherents. This was also to circumvent proselytisation activity by Western Christian missionaries, which was perceived as playing a divisive role and helping the colonisation process, or even to obstruct conversion to Islam, which these people might takes recourse in order to improve their lowly status. On the whole, the Adivasi Seva organisations formed during this period, often with non-Adivasis in leading positions just as in the case of the Harijan Seva Sangh, made no direct efforts at Hinduisation. But the attempts to 'purify' the Adivasis by encouraging abstention from liquor and meat, 'immoral' sexual behaviour patterns and marriage customs, spirit worship, exorcism and animal sacrifice, in order to make them more acceptable

to the dominant castes, can be viewed as a form of assimilation into mainstream society through a Sanskritisation process. There were also Adivasi reformers and movements that took this internal reform path of self-assertion for self-rule, such as the Tana Bhagat movement among the Oraons in present-day Jharkhand, Gonds in Central India and in the case of the Devi movement in South Gujarat. Tana Bhagats participated in various Congress-led anti-colonial campaigns as the non-co-operation and civil disobedience movements. Others participated in the later Quit India Movement too.

The other side of the work among these ethnic groups emphasised ameliorative welfare measures aimed at helping folk considered to be backward, primitive, less civilised, subhuman, ignorant, superstitious, secluded, much neglected, malnourished, poverty-stricken, diseased, exploited and suppressed, living in unhygienic conditions and wastefulness and not as the useful members of society. The slash-and-burn method of cultivation was regarded to be primitive and environmentally destructive. Sedentarisation in their own areas and a settled life in the plains were encouraged. Help was rendered mainly in the form of medical aid, educational services and improved agricultural practices. It is not very clear from available sources how much was done to revive the Adivasis' own medical practices and healing traditions, and to what extent there was an understanding of the need to impart literacy in their own tongues, which meant devising scripts for these languages.

Understanding regarding the importance of promoting small-scale artisanal and forest produce-based village industry such as iron smelting and blacksmithy, charcoal-making and so on was there. The role of British forest laws in leading to food deprivation and starvation, the exploitation by traders, contractors, usurious moneylenders and the government through heavy taxes, land alienation by 'foreigners', the competition of foreign commodities – these problems were understood and sought to be alleviated through providing loans at low rates of interest and lobbying for the lowering of tax rates by the government. During the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31, Congress workers joined Adivasis and poor peasants in Central India, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh for Forest Satyagrahas, which consisted in disobeying the government forest regulations prohibiting cattle grazing in forests and demanding restoration of their customary rights to extract timber and collect forest produce for consumption (Hardiman 2003: 146-147).

The approach recommended was to reorganise these village industries "purely in the interests of the aboriginal tribe folk under Government care on a co-operative

basis with the help of social workers..." (Swami Anand 1947). In this sense, the Adivasi question came within the ambit of the programme for the rejuvenation of village India on a democratic equalitarian basis—the resurrection of largely self-sufficient and self-ruled 'village republics' that were the contribution of Adivasis themselves to Indian civilisation—without undue exploitative drain of wealth from village to town/city and associated remote control. There was a great deal of emphasis on spinning and weaving even in areas where cotton did not grow. In the post-independence period the question of ownership of land and means of production, i.e., abolition of the zamindari system and control over the resource base, for example forests, was raised by some.

Amongst the Gandhian constructive workers there were also those who desired greater emphasis on the positive attributes of Adivasi culture, and who considered calling them backward and professing to 'civilise' them an insult. Even calling these suppressed people "aboriginals", as the British did, was incorrect, according to them. Rather, there is much in tribal cultures that could be emulated by modernisers such as their general simplicity and concept of friendship. The subsistence economy of the tribal people, who work the land with just the spade and hoe rather than using cattle and the plough, clearing small patches of land and operating largely on a barter basis is considered to be on Gandhian lines (Poddar and Raghaviah 1951).

The cause of the so-called Criminal Tribes and their rehabilitation was paid special attention. Addiction to alcohol that had been promoted by colonial and allied native interests was declared a social evil that had to be eradicated by all means. The Adivasis were encouraged to improve their standard of living by spinning and weaving, improved methods of cultivation and cattle rearing. The schools encouraged the study and enrichment of their own religion, culture and literature. Non-violent methods of protest against their oppressors were advocated and encouraged.

Work among the Adivasis was considered a humanitarian and solid part of the national movement for independence. The aim of working for tribal uplift was to incorporate them into the anti-colonial movement and integrate them into mainstream society not allowing separatist sentiments to come up. "No province and no clan or tribe of India can be kept backward if India is to stand up erect before the world" (M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 21 September 1947). The Constructive Programme as delineated in 1947 emphasised the importance of "securing civic rights and the removal of social disabilities in any form in respect of Harijans, Adivasis and other neglected communities, and should carry on an effective campaign for

the cultivation of public opinion in support of social equality..." (*Harijan,* 9 March 1947). The emphasis on the civic rights of the downtrodden communities was a direct contribution of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's interventions. Some Adivasi movements of self-assertion at the height of the nationalist movement were pro-Congress, such as the one led by Alluri Sreerama Raju in 1922-24 in the Gudem-Rampa forest tracts of Andhra and that led by Motilal Tejawat among the Bhils of the border areas of Gujarat and Rajasthan during this same period. They were ready to come under the ambit of the Gandhi-led nationalist movement. Others such as the Adibasi Mahasabha-led agitation in Chhotanagpur in the late 1930s for a separate State, which actually had the support of a good number of non-Adivasi local people, sought support from the colonial government. They were outright hostile to the Congress leaders and vice versa.

Tagore's educational experiment at Sriniketan apart from extension work in modern agricultural techniques also had the purpose to help the Santhal peasantry living on land purchased by the university to improve their livelihood through training in weaving at the Shilpa Sadan (Handicrafts Centre). Training given to villagers in other handicrafts production—woodwork, pottery, leather work—was expected to help them generate income during the non-agricultural seasons of the year. Some social work was done in terms of literacy and numeracy (with the Bengali language as a medium and with a focus on males) and medical aid. Their dances and songs are taught in *Patha Bhavan* (the school); they are the subject of some of the sculptures by Ram Kinkar Baij and feature in Tagore's poetry (see Majumdar 1956). But land alienation has been a steady process and the sad reality is that today the Santhal villages in Santiniketan are providers of cheap casual manual labour in the region in households and the university guesthouses.

Some of the symbolisation of the Gandhi-led movement for a self-reliant economy failed to incorporate the practices of subaltern cultures. An example is the valorisation of the cow economy which failed to take into account the role of the buffalo in the economy of the subaltern sections. The cow economy became characteristic of the sedentary peasant civilisation. But without the water buffalo the swampy lands of the Gangetic basin could not have been made productive. Semi-wild buffalos were herded by the Todas of the Nilgiris and constituted the main food supply for them and for the Kotas there. Similar is the high status given to vegetarianism and the low status accorded to meat-eating, particularly beef-eating cultures on the subcontinent, whereas the majority population in the country is non-vegetarian. The forest as a symbol of untamed and unknown wilderness to be feared had slowly changed as incursions into it took place since ancient times. With the establishment of ascetic hermitages as the frontrunners of domination

and exploitation by expanding empires and proselytising Brahminical Hinduism romanticisation of forests happened in popular and literary imagery, which was also taken over in the nationalist discourse by poets such as Tagore.

By the time of independence, there were about 20 organisations working for the service of the Adivasis in various parts of the country with Adivasi and non-Adivasi workers; some of them were being run entirely by the Adivasis themselves. An all-India coordinating organisation was formed in 1948 by the name Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh (the Association for the Service of the Primitive Tribes of India) with the object of working for the non-politicised social, economic, cultural and educational advancement of the *Adimjati* (primitive and aboriginal tribes). Interesting is the use of the term *Adimjati* instead of the term Adivasi invariably used by Gandhiji.

Communists and Adivasis

The pro-Adivasi stance of the Gandhian Constructive Programme with many organisations working for their welfare was one thing and the dominant caste landlord support base of the Congress was another, which created tensions at the ground level and prevented fundamental changes from coming through. In any case the concept of Swaraj (self-rule), the right to govern their lives according to their own traditional ways and interact with outlying society and its polity on their own terms, was not acceptable to them. This was so in Gujarat as well as in the case of the revolt by the Gond Adivasis of the Rampa and Gudem Hill Tracts of the Andhra-Odisha border region. In the latter case, Congress members belonged to the exploiter classes—the traders, contractors, usurers and immigrant cultivators—whom the Gonds were resisting. Not receiving the kind of support expected from Congress leaders on the local level the militant communist approach seemed to promise better returns for the Adivasis and attracted them into its fold. This happened during the Tebhaga agitation in Bengal, which saw the participation of Santhal, Rajbanshi, Hajong, Oraon and other Adivasi peasants of Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur and Rangpur districts; among the Warlis of Thane district in Maharashtra and during the Telangana uprising, all on the eve of independence. In these movements landlordism and its varied forms of exploitation—such as corvée—of the peasantry, including the dispossessed Adivasi peasantry, were the target. They, along with the Dalits, constituted a shock brigade in these rural movements. The Congress socialists too took up a few issues concerning the Adivasis in some areas (see Kela 2012: 287).

But we do not find the communists organising specific activities among the 'untouchables' or the Adivasis in the period preceding political independence. Nor did they pay much attention to social reform issues such as alcoholism or to questions pertaining to the religious beliefs of the people and their social impacts. They did not work hard enough on changing mindsets, values and attitudes of people on the issues of caste and gender.

In 1947, the CPI proclaimed as a programmatic point: "Autonomous Regions for tribal people and Adibasis wherever they live in compact areas."[8] In these autonomous regions the administration was expected to be controlled by the elected representatives of the respective Adivasi groups. Education was also expected to be imparted in the tribal languages after evolving suitable scripts. This was probably in the context of the tribal peoples' struggle in Chhotanagpur for a separate state under the leadership of the Adibasi Mahasabha formed in 1938. The slogan of an Adibasisthan was advocated by some CPI members as a confederation of autonomous units of territories of Hos, Mundas, Santhals, Oraons and others in the central Indian tribal belt incorporated as a unit of the Indian Federation.[9] Though this demand was supported by the Muslim League as a tribal corridor between the two halves of a possible Pakistan, it met with consistent hostility from the Congress encompassing as it did a territory rich in mineral and other forest resources.

The idea of an autonomous Adibasisthan came in the background of the CPI becoming aware of the multi-nationality nature of India in the context of the slogan for Pakistan and their subsequent arguments for self-determination and even secession rights for the various nationalities, though these nationalities were not in each case identified in a scientific manner and overemphasised communal and religious factors without adequate study. The economic model projected for this separate homeland of the Adivasis was one with a modern industry and agriculture and concomitantly modern education and health services while at the same time preserving and revitalising their languages, folklore, songs and dances, and other sound cultural practices. This approach took its cue from the approach to non-Russian nationalities of the East in the Soviet Union under Stalin, which promoted a degree of cultural autonomy of the various nationalities while integrating their pastoral and agrarian economies into the Soviet economic model of large-scale industrialisation and a centralised political system.

Later, post-1947, the CPI became a staunch proponent of national integration. The communist movement in the Indian subcontinent was caught in extreme theoretical conundrums right from its inception in Tashkent by non-resident

Indian revolutionaries associated with the Third International, which at that time was led by Lenin. Though Lenin did not fully subscribe to the perspective of a single-stage revolution in colonial countries of Asia, the programme for Indian revolution chalked out under the leadership of the Comintern insisted on a single-stage proletarian revolution to bring about socialism. The Soviet model was being blindly emulated. Indian revolutionaries were trained in the Soviet Union and sent home. Accordingly, the programmatic prescriptions implemented here were also imported without any realistic study of the concrete conditions existing and developing here. Not only the political programme(s) but also the party organisation structure followed suit. The CPI was dragged into muck several times as a result of this rampant parasitism and ideological and organisational slavery to the Bolshevik Party. Many vital questions like caste and indigenous rights were subsumed under the slogan of a single-stage revolution under the leadership of the working class, which was itself conspicuously underdeveloped.

Theoretically, neither the Gandhians by and large nor the communists broke completely away from the racist colonial anthropological approach of treating the indigenous peoples' societies as being 'primitive' and 'backward' on a linear evolutionary scale in line with Darwinian sociology. They did not succeed in finding a comprehensive solution to the Adivasi question. Today's progressive anthropologists do not share such a linear historical viewpoint and view indigenous peoples' societies in a comparative way, seeing them as more developed in some aspects and less developed in others. In any case, they represent an invaluable part of the cultural diversity of human beings. It is now well recognised that treating their cultures and civilisations as backward was only in order to provide moral justification for their annexation and exploitation of their resources. Wherever they have been able to and do still retain remnants of their culture and values and ways of life, their immense sensitivity and knowledge about nature enable them to live sustainably.[10]

Notes

1. See Sashishekhar Gopal Deogaonkar: *Tribal Administration and Development: With Administrative Profiles of Selected Tribes.* New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1994, pp.10-12, for classifications of tribal groups in India on geographical, ethnic and linguistic basis. Vidyarthi and Rai (1985: 64-74) have also made a classification according to (i) region, (ii) language, (iii) race, (iv) the level of integration with the rural folk they are connected to, (v) economy, (vi) cultural pattern as a whole, and (vii) the level of education.

2. Over a period of a few thousand years since the *Rig Veda* some pejorative names for the original peoples, such as the Santhals, were: *Anar* (noseless), dark or black-hued, eaters of raw flesh, blood drinkers (non-vegetarians, cannibalistic), *Atishudras* (lower than the untouchable castes) and *Jangli* (wild). The *Rig Veda* also called them by the general term *Dasyu* (meaning peoples, nations), which later after the defeat and subjugation of the aborigines was changed into *Dasa* with the meaning of slaves or servants. As their own political and identity consciousness developed under colonial rule more positive nomenclatures emerged: *Adimjati/Adijati* (original people with connotation of primitive); *Vanavasi/Vanajati/Aranyavasi* (forest dwellers/forest people) or *Girijan/Pahari* (mountain/hill dwellers); *Janjati* (folk/common people) in Hindi/Sanskrit in North India. *Adipraja* (original people) was the term used by the Gandhian, Thakkar Bapa. *Mulavasi* (original people), *Asli Vatanis* (actual natives), *Bhumijan* (people of the soil, coined by Verrier Elwin) or *Bhumiputra* (son of the soil) with the same meaning as the word aboriginal have also been used during the British period. In the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin State they were called *Kattu Jathi* and in Malabar as *Kattukurumman*, both meaning people of the forest. Today, they are generally known as *Girijanam* or *Girivargam*, just as in Andhra the term *Girijan* is common for them and is used by the Maoists as well. In Tamil Nadu, they are referred to as *Pazhankudi Makkal* meaning ancient people. In Gujarat, Adivasi communities were called *Kaliparaj* (black people) in distinction from *Ujliparaj* (white upper castes). *Upajati* (meaning low or inferior people) is used in Bengali. Denigrating pejorative Hindutvavadi names for them are *Mamas* (uncles) and *Adhivasis* (half-inhabitants).
3. There is some difference in approach to the Shudras in Chanakya's/Kautilya's *Arthasastra* and the *Manusmriti*. While Chanakya understood the value of the work done by the producers and the need for their careful treatment, Manu, taken to be the author of *Manusmriti*, seems to be an out-and-out Brahmin reactionary. He hated and feared the masses and justified their punishment, torture and economic extortion. Kautilya spoke as a rational ideologue of the state-run economy and as a patriarch. His rationalism did not allow him to advise taxation that would hurt the populace and reduce its capacity to contribute to the king's revenues (Ruben 1967: 185).
4. See Romila Thapar (1985: 256-264) for the contents of the various Asokan edicts cited here.
5. Kannan Kasturi: "Whose Land is Wasteland?" (http://infochangeindia.org/agenda/battles-over-land/whose-land-is-wasteland.html)
6. Under the 1935 Government of India Act 8 totally excluded and 28 partially excluded areas were listed. The excluded areas were under the direct administration of the Governor, who had the powers to amend, repeal or make new laws in the

interests of the tribal population; whereas in the partially excluded areas he could seek the advice of his ministers but could overrule them. No legislative enactment whether of the Federation or of the Province applied to an excluded or partially excluded area unless the Governor so directed by a notification. This was a move to contain the fierce rebellion of the original inhabitants as the British lacked the necessary forces to clear these areas of the people and totally monopolise resource use.

7. See Hoffman (2005: 27ff) for an enumeration of some of these fraudulent and violent methods.
8. Communist Statement of Policy for the Struggle for Full Independence and People's Democracy. Resolution on the Present Political Situation passed by the CC of the CPI at its meeting in Bombay from 7-16 December 1947.
9. Ghose, A.K.: A Note on Chhotanagpur and its People. *Marxist Miscellany*, vol. 6, April 1946. Bombay: PPH.
10. Padel, Felix and Samarendra Das: Anthropology of a Genocide: Tribal Movements in Central India against Over-Industrialisation. New Delhi: South Asia Analysis Group, 2006. [Available online at www.freewebs.com/epgOdisha/FelixPadel-SamarendraDas.pdf]

2

INTERNAL COLONIALISM IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

The recurrent and widespread growing anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles of various sections of the people across the country in conjunction with the weakened international position of British imperialism after the two world wars facilitated the transfer of power to the elite classes in India in 1947.

The policy adopted by the Nehru government towards the Adivasis has to be seen in the background of its overall policies of industrial and agricultural development, which in turn hinged on its caste-class support base. The all-India big bourgeoisie, drawn largely from the caste of North Indian Banias (traders), Tamil usurers (the Chettis) and Parsis from Gujarat, had become important financiers of the Congress Party from the 1920s onwards. The various popular struggles convinced them that the British would have to leave sooner or later, and they threw their weight behind the conservative political leadership of the freedom movement in order to prevent its radicalisation. The idea, of course, was to utilise the coming independence to enhance their economic power.

The elaborate administrative system of the British meant to facilitate the maximum extraction of surplus was inherited by the Nehru government and taken over without any serious alterations. The local feudal powers were still very strong but they could not resist the move of the new government to perpetuate the colonially imposed unity of the various nationalities, which was in the interest of the all-India big bourgeoisie. The limited resistance they offered was neutralised by

the show of arms and the granting of extensive privileges to the nawabs and rajas and their protégés.

The state in the immediate post-1947 period was an amalgam of diverse interests, but all representing the elite dominant castes/classes: the bureaucracy, the feudals and the big business community together with the political leadership of the Congress Party. In other words, the essentially weak economic and social base of the big bourgeoisie, which did not have strong regional roots and markets, having grown largely in the warm embrace of the imperialists, prevented it from staking an exclusive claim over the state.

These were the dominant sections, but they also faced the strong anti-feudal sentiments of the oppressed castes, classes and the Adivasis. The overall situation of poverty and oppression could any time create infernos and endanger the dominant sections and their interests. The agrarian uprisings in Telangana and the course of the Tebhaga movement had pointed to this. While suppressing the militant struggle in Telangana with the utmost ferocity and ruthlessness, the Nehru government simultaneously resorted to populist welfare measures and slogans to contain the threat to its existence. It also encouraged the Bhoodan movement for a voluntary giving up of surplus land to the needy to avoid a conflict-based approach. It is well recognised today that this movement failed to redress the land question and ensure equality on this front. This stick and carrot approach was clearly visible in its policies towards the Adivasis also.

Post-Independence Policies

In the pre-1947 period itself, the approach to be adopted towards the Adivasis had engaged the attention of the nationalist leaders in consultation with leading anthropologists. The possible approaches discussed at length were: (i) Isolation, (ii) Assimilation, and (iii) Integration. The first approach, which had largely prevailed prior to the British intervention and was the idea behind the creation of the Agency Areas under their direct rule through an agent of the crown and with an extensive degree of self-rule, such as the North-East and South-West Frontier Agencies, also referred to as excluded and partially excluded areas, was rejected outright as being impracticable under modern conditions. This was the model of reservations, even of 'national parks' initially proposed by Verrier Elwin under the nomenclature of philanthropology, a form of "paternalistic charity" (Devalle 1980: 43).

The *varna-jati* model of incorporation of sections of the Adivasi population into the lowermost rungs and at the peripheries of Hindu society was held out as one

possibility. This envisaged the assimilation of the Adivasis as peasant castes into the larger societies/nationalities through the wholesale adoption of settled agriculture and the linguistic and cultural norms of the respective dominant nationalities. This was a development which to some extent had already taken place in the case of some tribes in the pre-British and colonial periods. Concerned researchers have characterised this process as being neither absorption nor assimilation, but a process of integration into the politico-economic systems of feudalism and colonialism. In this process, Adivasis became peasants and peasants became workers without entirely losing their ethnic identity in forest-based industries, in mining and in agriculture.

A section of the 'Hindu nationalist' anthropologists (like G.S. Ghurye) would have liked the assimilation of the Adivasis, considered by them to be 'backward Hindus' (another way of calling them primitive), into the fold of caste Hindu society to be the official policy and were opposed to their segregation and isolation in separate administrative areas. The present-day Hindu rightist forces are also of the view that the Adivasis should be assimilated into mainstream Hindu society as Scheduled Castes. But this assimilatory approach was considered to entail a complete negation of the Adivasis as ethnic entities and the nullification of their values, customs, identities and way of life by 'progressive' nationalists like Nehru, who aided by Verrier Elwin opted for the 'integrationist' approach as outlined in his "Tribal Panchsheel." Lohia was also for their 'free' movement and integration into the mainstream by distributing waste and reclaimed land among them. In his view 'peaceful' struggle from below would be necessary to ensure justice as constitutional directives and legal methods would not suffice for this.

It was the approach of integration, which signified nothing but slow assimilation—a case of Orwellian doublespeak—that finally got embodied in the Indian Constitution, which was framed by a Constituent Assembly that was not based on universal suffrage but represented only about 10 per cent of the Indian population, who all belonged to the propertied classes/castes with hardly any representation of the Adivasis themselves. There was no effort to draw upon the traditions of tribal protests against the British regime in the course of the Constituent Assembly debates. The Adivasis on their part did not have any notion about becoming a part of the Indian 'nation.'

The Constitution itself did not represent much of a break with the colonial past. The Government of India took the stand that the Adivasis cannot be left out of the 'development' process and isolated. Nor can the natural resources of the Adivasi areas be neglected. Moreover, the politico-strategic importance of

the tribal question could simply not be ignored, their territories often being the frontier lands to other neighbouring countries. Therefore, integration into the mainstream in a phased and gradual manner without letting them be exploited—that is, acknowledging their rights on land and forest—was considered the best solution in these circumstances. This was to be done through a judicious mix of financial aid, welfare, and acceptance of the 'tribal genius,' their knowledge, arts and culture and identity. To carry out 'necessary development and administration' not too many 'outsiders' were to be injected, but as many of their own people were to be trained for the same.[1] Though the British policy of isolation was rejected the need for protection of these peoples was felt. In the case of the North-East the forcible integrationist approach of Nehru and Patel was very different from that of M.K. Gandhi, who had supported a maximally decentralised federal structure on the whole for Hind (Hindostan/India) and self-determination for the peoples of this region to the point of secession.

Scheduled Areas

That the usual laws should not automatically apply to the Adivasi areas was the principle underlying the passage of the Scheduled Districts Act (1874) and shaped the concept of Backward Areas in the Government of India Act of 1919, and the creation of excluded and partially excluded areas by the Government of India Act of 1935. The Fifth and Sixth Schedules under Article 244 (1) and (2) of the Indian Constitution of 1950 are a continuation of these policies, whereby the wholly excluded areas were included in the Sixth Schedule and the partially excluded areas under the Fifth. The Scheduled Tribes are treated as distinct socio-economic groups and the most comprehensive provisions are in place for protecting their rights, developing their areas of habitation and promoting economic, educational and social progress. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution provides for Statehood for Adivasi areas. The Fifth Schedule applies to the Adivasi areas in Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh; and the Sixth Schedule operates in the North-East. It provides for full tribal participation in matters concerning them through the formation of autonomous regional (in areas of many different tribal communities) and district councils with legislative, administrative and judicial powers.

This scheme of administration in the Sixth Schedule Areas was almost wholly based on the recommendations of the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly. The councils can make laws in matters concerning the social customs, land and forest.

Simultaneously, as in British times, it is very much under military control through the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. By such constitutional provisions the legal and institutional frame for the Tribal Areas was supposed to be so designed as to be in consonance with indigenous peoples' institutions already in existence. But the ground reality is that it has only created a new oligarchy with no chain of democratic or popular institutions from the villages upwards to the council levels. Moreover, the Sixth Schedule does not mandatorily vest any development function with the councils. And any law promulgated by the councils has to be given assent to by the Governor, who in his turn is guided by the State ministry. A further obstruction is presented by the principle of repugnance which makes any law enacted by the district council null and void if it is repugnant to any law made by the State legislature and the latter law prevails over the former. Many autonomous district councils (ADC) suffer from the fact that they do not receive their share of the collection of royalties and taxes from the State. Senior officers of the ADCs are on deputation from the State government and so are chiefly accountable to it, not to the ADC. Many indigenous people feel that these officers have too firm a control on their affairs. On the other hand, many States choose to ignore the ADC (Bhengra *et al.* 1999: 12). There are many ways by which remote control of the Central government is imposed, not least by driving schisms among different indigenous communities and between them and other communities.

The Fifth Schedule is protective in scope: the Union government can give directions to the States on the administration of the Scheduled Areas and the Governors of the concerned States have been given elaborate powers to protect the interests of the STs by giving him/her the power to disallow or modify laws enacted by the Parliament and Assembly, and even to enact rules for good governance of the areas. According to Part 4 of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, each State having a Scheduled Area should also constitute a Tribal Advisory Council. Such councils with mainly elected tribal MLAs can also be constituted in States having Scheduled Tribes even if they do not have demarcated Scheduled Areas. Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have established Tribal Advisory Councils (TAC) without having demarcated Scheduled Areas. In practice, the TACs do not function optimally as they are only consultative bodies without any substantive power. Nor have Governors bothered to utilise powers given to them to benefit the Adivasis and have mindlessly extended various anti-Adivasi acts to the Scheduled Areas. For instance, they could have allowed Adivasis living in Scheduled Areas to continue with shifting cultivation and to meet their small timber requirements without any restrictions; they could have allowed them to distil their own liquor to meet their ritual requirements and forbidden the vending of alcohol by other private or State

agencies in the vicinity of their habitations, which adds to indebtedness, health issues and family woes. Additional anti-Constitutional behaviour on their part is that they also fail to send regular and prompt annual reports to the President. State governments also have been lax in submitting utilisation certificates of funds released by the Centre for schemes in the tribal areas. The Fifth Schedule Areas have been seeing demands for more autonomy in the form of demands for Statehood and autonomous areas similar to the Sixth Schedule Areas. The South India Adivasis Federation has been demanding a Ministry for Tribal Affairs in Tamil Nadu and at least one reserved constituency for them.

While scheduling the tribal areas in 1874, the British omitted certain tribal majority areas. These areas similarly failed to be covered under the Presidential Order of Scheduled Areas issued in 1950. The welfare approach was so strong that even the National Commission for Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes constituted in 1960 under Article 340 of the Constitution, with Shri U.N. Dhebar as chairman and Verrier Elwin as its secretary, had come to the conclusion that it was not necessary to extend the coverage of the Fifth Schedule and include all the tribal majority areas hereunder. The Dhebar Commission mistakenly took it for granted that the State Legislatures would deal with the issues of the Adivasis in a sensitive manner and accordingly make and implement laws. Consequently, general laws and administrative structures of the State got indiscriminately extended into the tribal areas and the Adivasis' rights were not sufficiently protected. Worse, large-scale migration from non-Adivasi into Adivasi areas began to happen with its resultant dispossession and exploitation of the indigenes. There has also been the migration of Adivasis from one region to another as to the North-East and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Amendments in the Fifth Schedule by Parliament in 1976 enabled the President to extend the Scheduled Areas to cover all the tribal majority areas so that the Governor could make suitable regulations for the protection and administration of each of these areas. Accordingly, the Central government directed the State governments to send proposals for scheduling such tribal majority villages/areas. However, many State governments failed to send the requisite proposals. Many tribal majority areas have thus been left out of this process of delimitation of Scheduled Areas in Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. They have yet to start a process of scheduling because of the existence of a vast plantation economy in the hill areas where the Adivasis live. Tripura and Goa too have no Scheduled Areas. In South India such areas are Kodagu in Karnataka, Wayanad in Kerala and the Nilgiri district in Tamil Nadu, which fall in the Nilgiri bio-region.

Forest Laws

The basic British policy of ostensibly 'protecting' the Adivasis through their policy of the Agency system, while simultaneously undermining their livelihood and culture through monopolising forest resources as state property and unleashing market forces on them together with proselytising forces of all hues, has continued in neo-colonial India as well. The state, represented by the State Forest Departments, continues to be the landlord or owner of the forests in India; in fact, the neo-colonial Indian government has expanded the boundaries of state forest property, ostensibly for preserving the remaining vestiges of natural habitats and genetic heritage. The 1927 Forest Act, which had deprived the Adivasis of their homes and livelihoods, was adopted in toto by the new government without any changes or amendments. The Adivasis continued to be homeless. Their customary rights to the forest resources, which were reduced to "rights and privileges" as decided by the state in the 1927 Forest Act, were continued to be spoken of as "rights and concessions" in the 1952 Forest Act of the Government of India. Their vision of paradise as "miles and miles of forest without forest guards" has transformed into a nightmare of no forests, degraded forests or forests with plenty of guards! The forest villages were treated as labour camps for recruiting their labour at low cost whenever required by the Forest Department with the threat of summary eviction if they failed to comply.

A National Forest Policy resolution formulated in 1952 pledged forests to the "national interest" that included defence, communication and industry. It spoke on paper of ecological aspects of forests, such as the need to check denudation in the mountains and erosion on the treeless banks of great rivers and of the need to establish 'small woods' for grazing and firewood. But these policy decisions were not immediately translated into action plans or legislation. State governments treated forests as an exploitable resource to earn revenue. In fact, the rate of timber extraction was far more rapacious than it had been during the colonial period. With the destruction of the canopy cover the composition of the plants and other organisms on the forest floor gets altered and the growth of the other products extracted from forests for human use get affected. The government also vastly increased the area notified as forest without undertaking surveys and settling local people's rights, again affecting livelihoods of shifting cultivators, hunter-gatherers and other forest dwellers.

It was only in 1972 that a Protected Areas Network was launched by passing the Wildlife (Protection) Act (WLPA). It put a ban on hunting and notified areas of forests as National Parks or Wildlife Sanctuaries where Adivasis had co-existed

with wildlife for centuries. Boundaries of Protected Areas were often set arbitrarily without considering the loss of rights and consequent livelihood impacts on forest inhabitants. In 1976, the 42nd constitutional amendment brought forest and wildlife conservation that had hitherto been in the State list into the concurrent list of subjects, on which both the national Parliament and the State legislatures were empowered to legislate, with the Central laws judicially superseding the State laws.

In 1980, the Parliament enacted the Forest (Conservation) Act meant primarily to stall the diversion of forest lands for non-forest purposes as it was found that only about half the area officially designated as forest was under adequate forest cover and amounted to a maximum of 12 to 13 per cent of the country's land area. At the time of the first Forest Act of the British it was estimated to be 40% of the country's territory; by 1952 it had come down to 22%. An amendment in 1988 made it mandatory for States to seek prior Central concurrence for any such dereservation of reserved forests. The forest villages and settlements within forests became illegal under this Act and came under the threat of eviction. In fact, many Adivasis got evicted from the forests. Ruling parties in State governments had been regularising 'encroachments' as a kind of vote bank politics. During the colonial period another kind of settlement called Fixed Demand Leasehold Land had come into existence by an agreement between the Forest Department and the timber merchants. They had established colonies for migrant labour and employees for their work. These people had been settled at the forest fringes against the payment of revenue. After the declaration of the Forest Conservation Act the continued existence of these villages was also endangered.

In 1985, the Ministry of Environment and Forests was formed by shifting the Department of Forests out from the Ministry of Agriculture and merging it with the Department of Environment. A new National Forest Policy in 1988 spoke for the first time about the conservation of biological and genetic diversity and the restoration of ecological balance. The policy further spoke about the intrinsic relationship between forests and local communities, the protection of their customary rights, and recognised the forests as a means for their livelihood which had priority over commercial utilisation of forests. Afforestation and social forestry programmes were envisaged in it. But being a policy it was not legally binding on the Central or State governments.

As the 1988 Policy envisaged the participation of the local people in the protection and regeneration of degraded forests the state issued the Joint Forest Management (JFM) Notification in 1990, in order to involve village communities and NGOs for the regeneration of forests. But the Forest Department continued in

a legally dominant position vis-à-vis communities. In 1992, the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, which formalised the constitution of panchayats as micro institutions of governance, empowered these self-governing bodies to deal with matters concerning forests and other natural resources-related matters. Finally, the provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996, conferred ownership of minor forest produce to Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) and panchayats. Despite all these ameliorative measures, the colonial inheritance on the Adivasi question has been retained as the basic thrust continues to be given by the Indian Forest Act of 1927.

The Adivasis cannot be allowed to be wholly self-governing entities with control over their lands, water and forest resources because these are needed for industrial processing for urban-based consumer usage which is not always need-based. Mining activities, big dams, windmills and power plants including nuclear ones, road constructions, tourist resorts, educational establishments, plantations that include energy plantations and monoculture of commercially valuable timber through social forestry programmes, and aquaculture—all these activities and more continue to deplete and degrade valuable natural forests and other natural resource bases while displacing the Adivasis from their homes and means of livelihood on a large-scale. Thus state-sponsored foreign global imperialist corporations and Indian big business interests are destroying forests, denuding them of their biodiversity and wildlife, even while setting up wildlife parks and biodiversity zones. On the other hand, due to their separation from these life-giving sources, the Adivasis' who earlier adopted own earlier more nature-protective approaches, have been now giving way to more destructive and predatory ones, breaking their own earlier strictly followed laws and norms.

Health Status

The alienation of the Adivasis from their land and forest resources has had definite repercussions on their health and state of mental well-being and on ecosystem health. Physical health depends on good nutrition, which in turn is dependent on income levels and availability or accessibility to nutrition. The low incomes of Adivasis in general and their being cut off from the forest resources have led to the higher incidence of ailments and the emergence of a number of new health problems among them. The diseases specific and endemic to the Adivasis are TB, malaria, typhoid and in some areas sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia. Cases of leprosy are there, skin diseases are prevalent and there is a high incidence of gastro-intestinal infections. The causes for these diseases are traced to deficient

diet, poor sanitation, ill-ventilated houses and contaminated drinking water. Some health experts trace sickle cell anaemia in completely unrelated Adivasi groups to generations of malnutrition. Nutritional deficiency diseases like anaemia, diarrhoea, night blindness and goitre are also very much prevalent. Maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates are much above that for the rest of the population. Life expectancy is lower and there has been a great decline in the child sex ratio during the decades of 1991-2011. Sexually transmitted diseases seem to have entered their areas and have become endemic largely due to the incursions of outsiders.

A very high level of about 75 per cent stunting/wastage among children is reported. Malnutrition and hunger is becoming endemic among poorer communities in general forcing them to become labours and armed forces fodder in their own country. In many such areas people have stopped growing millets, pulses and vegetables; the collection of various varieties of wild greens, yams and fruits has gone down; and they have switched to the low cost polished ration rice. In such a scenario not only the health of poor people is negatively affected, but they have also lost their freedom, dignity and self-reliance. Incidentally, it is now recognised that natural foods from the wild are actually even more health producing than those cultivated 'organically.' Therefore, keeping a certain part of the environment in its natural wild state is essential for humans.

Commercially valuable NTFP is collected to get cash, which may be spent on *angrezi* (English/foreign) liquor for the men. Mental health and stability, particularly among the younger generation, are endangered due to the inability to cope with the replacement of their traditional community-based lifestyles and practices with their current unstable, insecure and oppressive lifestyles. Incidence of substance abuse and alcoholism can be traced to this devaluation of their identity. Modern lifestyle diseases, such as diabetes, have also begun to make their appearances. Diseases and ill health due to carrying out new occupations without adequate safety measures are also gaining ground. Deaths due to silicosis have taken place in quartz mines.

The Public Health Care Service is almost non-functional in the remote and sparsely-populated Adivasi areas. Lacking an integrated view and approach to their health problems it does not hold any credibility for them. Government's expenditure on health has been decreasing and Government hospitals nowadays are often short of medicines, which in any case have to be paid for, and often do not provide proper medical treatment. The Adivasis too, therefore, prefer to rely on private health care services, which for serious health problems are in any case out of their reach, or which bring them under huge debt. Over-prescription and

overcharging by quacks is common. Mobile clinics, which distribute medicines haphazardly and once in a while, also do not offer any adequate solution for the health problems of these Adivasis. Traditional women health practitioners are disempowered or replaced by patriarchal state health systems.

Tribal health care programmes, which indiscriminately propagate modern medicines and high cost diagnostics requiring repeated visits, as pushed by missionaries, the government and now the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rome, are not really appropriate for improving the Adivasi situation. In Adivasi areas, government agencies, the Department of Ayurveda and some NGOs have done commendable work in listing and identifying herbal medicinal plants. The fact is that the Adivasis' own tradition of herbal medicine is affordable, locally available and also capable of curing several ailments like malarial fevers, STDs and so on quite effectively. Restoration of good health and vitality among the Adivasis means to a large extent restoration of their rights in the forests and of their land and livelihoods, and together with that of some of their cultural traditions and medical practices.

Linguistic Reorganisation of States

It was the conscious policy of the policy-makers after 1947 that no prominent Adivasi area should be in homogenous State boundaries. Sardar Patel, the first home minister and deputy prime minister of independent India, and as chairman of the Advisory Committee responsible for fundamental rights and minorities, tribal and excluded areas in the Constituent Assembly, was adamant on this point and the initial reorganisation was done as per his plan. In fact, the freedom movement with all its concern for the plight of the original dwellers of this land under colonialism did not raise the crucial question of their territorial political independence and self-rule.[3] A telling indicator of the lack of acknowledgement of the sovereign status of Adivasi territories is the fact that after the transfer of power, while the rulers of the Princely States were made to sign "deeds of accession" on behalf of the ruled and were offered privy purses in return, the independent Adivasi areas were taken over without any kind of consent on their part and merged into the Indian Union. The contiguously inhabited Adivasi territories in Central and other parts of India were split up and incorporated into various States, the boundaries of which had been arbitrarily drawn up by the British colonial administration, as part of their containment policy of these rebellious people, who had carried out armed insurrections against their oppression.

The Kondareddis of Malkangiri district and other parts of southern Odisha lost their ST status when these territories were assigned to Odisha from Madras Presidency during States Reorganisation. This has also happened in the case of many other Adivasi areas in Central, Eastern and North-Eastern India where some communities, such as the Gonds, the Bhils and the Santhals, have been cut up into four or five States, each with a different majority language, making them into ethnic minorities in these States. These Adivasi inhabited areas are areas of mineral, hydro and forest resources crucial to the 'nation.' This cutting up of Adivasi-inhabited regions and incorporating them into different States was justified by saying that the concerned State could share the responsibility of 'developing' the 'backward' tribal areas and bringing them at par with the rest of the country. Instead, we find the tribal minority is at the mercy of the dominant social groups and strata in these States.

The Naga-inhabited areas were placed under four States – Nagaland, Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Particularly in the North-East, an abode of a large number of self-governing fiercely independent tribes, a forcible integration into the Indian Union had taken place. Post-1947 Nehru and Patel reneged on linguistic reorganisation and a decentralised federal union with residuary powers vesting in the federal units, which promise had been part of the Congress programme. Both the prime minister and the deputy prime minister were in favour of big States exactly in line with the colonial political set-up. In the 1950s many agitated States began to be reorganised on linguistic basis. Even then this principle was not applied to the Adivasis, whose territories often transcend these major language boundaries, and their rights were callously ignored because they lacked influential spokespersons and political pressure groups. Within linguistically organised States it happens that districts, taluks and panchayats have been demarcated in such a way that the tribal concentration is broken up, increasing their marginalisation. The Adivasis were the worst sufferers of this policy; their languages suffered badly and many languages ceased to exist. This is surely a great cultural retardation and loss that happened due to deliberate state policy to keep them divided.

Some of the indigenous peoples of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram have their counterparts across the border in Tibet, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. These indigenous peoples find themselves living in different countries disrupting their age-old economic and cultural relationships as a result of the artificially imposed boundaries drawn by the colonial rulers. Sedentarisation of nomadic and pastoral communities is taking place and the North-East remains a conflict zone with the imposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. The most

prominent reason behind this deliberate policy of the Central government was certainly the history of militant struggles waged by the indigenous peoples during the colonial period against colonialism, feudalism, and their allies. The post-1947 state power holders were scared of possible uprisings because they were well aware that the objective reasons for such uprisings continue to exist and hence they tried—unsuccessfully—to prevent resistance to state policies. Rebellions and protests have continued to occur. Often, they are not exactly Adivasi rebellions, however, they constitute the main participants (see Appendix).

Post-Independence Discourses

The disciplines of sociology, ethnography and social anthropology have made quantum leaps in post-1947 India. Most universities have departments of sociology and social anthropology. Apart from running regular graduate and postgraduate courses they are expected to conduct research activities too. Moreover, there are many national level research centres focused on research on the concerned issues. Then there are State research centres too specialising in the same issues. Fourteen tribal research institutes have been set up by the Central government in co-operation with the State governments financed on a 50:50 basis, but under the control of the State governments. However, it cannot be said that they are fully functional in terms of combining research with providing inputs to the authorities for chalking up and implementing meaningful ameliorative measures. The Indira Gandhi National Tribal University was set up in 2007 in Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh to cater to the tribal population in Central India. Open to students across the country it aims to promote research in tribal arts, cultures, traditions, languages, medicinal systems, customs and forest-based economic activities. Regional Centres are planned to be opened in tribal-dominated States; one has already started in Manipur in 2009. A Birsa Munda Tribal University is being mooted by the Gujarat government at Rajpipla in Narmada district with Sanskrit as one of the proposed subjects!

Additionally, there are thousands of non-governmental organisations funded from within the country as well as from outside undertaking research on Adivasi issues as a self-proclaimed part of their agenda. Every State government as well as the Central government has full-scale departments or ministries dealing with forest policies, Adivasi issues and related subjects. All these together constitute a formidable research infrastructure. Thus post-'47 India has already witnessed an enormous spurt in what is called tribal studies and activism. It is only logical to assume that the output also will be impressive.

Neo-Colonial Discourses

The colonialists tried hard to understand the original inhabitants and commissioned many studies on them. They knew very well that the Adivasis are the actual fighters against the aliens and hence they have to be understood properly, if colonialists have to survive. Ethnographic studies on the various peoples inhabiting India were started by them with this clear objective and their studies still remain the basic reference manuals on the different peoples. Any research study on tribes and other communities even now goes back to colonial studies, and not just British ones, and builds on them to develop theses on how to tackle the question. Writings of scholars like Thurston and Durkheim still occupy a pre-eminent position in Indian anthropology. Preparation of elaborate district Gazetteers or manuals (e.g. *The Malabar Manual* and *The Nilgiris Gazetteer*) became an important task at the district level and more senior administrators, and scholars back home avidly studied these gazetteers. Moreover, "Adivasi culture is the laboratory of the anthropologist seeking to transfer the insights gained from its study to an interpretation of mainstream culture" (Jayadas 1992: 126).

What immediately strikes even a casual reader of neo-colonial discourses on the Adivasi question(s) is their inordinate dependence on colonial discourses. It is true that the colonial missionaries, administrators and social anthropologists pioneered Adivasi Studies on modern scholarly lines and they had their own reasons for it. On a formal level at least these reasons do not exist in a neo-colonial society. Still, why is there no radical break with the colonial legacy? This question leads to other interesting ones like whether the colonial reasons for anthropological studies have disappeared entirely or do the colonial reasons continue to operate after 1947 too?

Apart from official and semi-official reports, studies, and resolutions there is a steady outpouring of academic studies relating to specific groups of Adivasis as well as on the Adivasi question in general. It is in the above-mentioned background that the actual present status of Adivasis and the theoretical advancements made in the field of Adivasi studies are to be looked at. The vast majority of academic studies are purely descriptive on the same lines as colonial ones and repetitive in terms of the parameters involved.[2] In these studies, the food habits, shape of the head, roots of the dialects of Adivasi communities, rituals, characteristics of the deities, social and community observances and rules, behaviour patterns towards non-Adivasis and society at large, integration and non-integration with what is called mainstream, landownership or landlessness, level of dependence on food gathering and hunting for survival are observed and sought to be quantified. Ready-made

models for such studies are available in plenty and there is little wonder that they turn out to be "eight-legged essays" of an inferior genre.

It is undeniable that this whole gamut of research output has generated an immense corpus of raw data on line with the Census of India. But unlike the census data these studies attempt to make the data more attractive by adding on colourful social customs like death and birth rites, marriage and puberty customs and such like. Some Adivasi groups and some regions are much more studied than others. About some 'exotic' communities like the Todas of the Nilgiris there is even academic diarrhoea by both Western and Indian anthropologists.

Formal political independence in 1947 did not lead to any fundamental break in the approaches to what is called tribal studies. The same debates on isolation, integration and assimilation of the Adivasis within the discourse of 'development' have continued in government reports, academic exercises and NGO interventions. From the side of the government and state there is the Constitution of India, which talks about Adivasi rights; there are various reports by commissions and committees constituted by the Central and State governments; then there are various quasi-governmental reports on specific issues like development induced displacement of Adivasis.

A mammoth undertaking called the "People of India" project executed by the Government of India together with the Anthropological Survey of India mapping the general characteristics of the different tribes, castes and communities in India on a State-wide basis deserves special mention. This work executed under the directorship of Dr. K.S. Singh is an updated elaboration of what colonial anthropologists like Thurston did. It acts as a ready reference manual for the historical (in the limited sense) and descriptive data (in the peripheral sense) about the different tribes and castes in the country. Although a commendable work, it is limited in scope because it stops short of describing the current socio-political status of the tribes and how the different tribes have come to their present status in the overall society. Similar encyclopedias, but again with a limited range, have been compiled by other scholars, too.[4] In general we can say that this genre of compilations of data also followed the colonial tradition of investigations.

The colonialists, in spite of numerous attempts, could never clearly and finally define who exactly the original inhabitants are. This is obvious from the semantic confusions in which they revelled. Their intellectuals and administrators could never come to a definitional agreement. They variously called the Adivasis animists, primitive tribes, forest dwellers, tribes, criminal tribes, hunters and gatherers, shifting cultivators, pre-literates or a combination of several of these

characteristics. At each phase of changes in colonial forest and Adivasi policies there were definitional changes too. In fact, this confusion is by no means over. Today's intellectuals and administrators are also confused along the same lines. Various indices like mode of sustenance, geographical characteristics, community traditions and regulations, community organisation patterns are being used and reused to define who exactly the Adivasis are. This definitional flux often verges on the borders of futile pedagogic exercises, and it is pointless to go into the umpteen numbers and variety of definitions, sometimes bordering on the frivolous, that have been churned out and are still being churned out by academics. For some academics manufacturing definitional confusions can contribute towards building up their careers. Their debates are mostly confined to themselves as characteristic of a guild or trade union and go over the heads of the subjects being defined and redefined again and again!

Sanskritisation Model

A departure from the colonial tradition of anthropological investigations came with a new spectrum of sociologists who have come to be accepted as the modern Indian scholars. They were all well trained in Western sociological and social anthropological tools of analysis and methodologies. Many of these scholars also spent much time and effort on definitional questions regarding the Adivasis. The term tribal is by and large rejected as being of colonial origin and as legitimising their colonising ideology and practice. Though many of the communities characterised as such are in the tribal (kinship-based) stage of social organisation, it does not reflect the changes these societies have gone through over time. It becomes an unreal fixed category.

Some of these scholars have attempted conceptual innovations of a different kind. Defining social processes into clear patterns was the gist of these attempts. The prominent and well known among these formulations was the concept of Sanskritisation, first propounded by Prof. M.N. Srinivas, but later adopted by a very large number of scholars in the country. Some scholars even portrayed this concept as a school of thought in Indian sociology irrespective of whether an Indian sociology ever existed or developed systematically in terms of its methodological content. M.N. Srinivas originally propounded this concept as an all-embracing one for the whole of Indian society, whereby upward mobility in material conditions and closer interactions between the subordinate and dominant castes result in the imbibing and internalisation of the cultural values and mores of the oppressor castes by the others. His followers sought to make this process applicable to the

Dalits and Adivasis as a whole too, who are essentially living on the margins or outside the mainstream society.

The main flaw with this formulation is that it is a gross oversimplification of the reality. To some extent it may be applicable to the middle castes, who themselves are oppressors of the Dalits and Adivasis. Proponents of this concept seek to portray the social process involved as a one-way traffic, i.e., upward mobility of the castes lower in the hierarchy towards the cultural and economic levels of the ones above. It is similar to the process of Westernisation of Indians in general. However, it is actually a two-way traffic. On the one hand, the ones on the lower rungs take over and adapt those elements of the higher culture which they deem appropriate to their upward mobility. But limited adoption of Hindu festivals and gods and goddesses by the Adivasis in some parts of the country is insufficient to show that they are adopting the Brahminical Hindu religion and culture as a whole. In the long history of the dispossession of the original inhabitants the expropriation process also included gods and goddesses. Only a close study of the Hindu religion from a people's perspective will throw more light on this process of whose gods and goddesses were expropriated, adapted and adopted by whom. It can also be that many of the gods and goddesses of the original inhabitants were transformed and co-opted by their expropriators and at a later time the Adivasis recognised this and started venerating their expropriated deities.

It is also a political, social and economic reality that the vast majority of Dalits and Adivasis are still grossly discriminated against and caste-based atrocities of all hues remain rampant in the entire country, which can range from abuse, humiliating treatment, looting, social boycott, arson, and stoppage of work. Dispossession of Adivasis is also on an ascending scale. Though a limited degree of differentiation into classes has occurred and is occurring among the Dalits and Adivasis due to the constitutional provisions of reservation in public services and education, experience at the ground level, crime reports compiled by the government and activist groups clearly show that it is quite limited and does not make a serious impact on the overall situation. These two indicators alone are sufficient to prove that no significant Sanskritisation is taking place among them.

Leftist Approaches

From the irrefutable fact that the Adivasis are the original early inhabitants it follows that their history is rooted in ancient India. On this account definitional confusions are actually redundant and, as we have already said, they are more often the creation of academic sociologists. The perspective of ancient Indian history,

as enunciated in the masterful works of D.D. Kosambi, possibly provides greater insights while still remaining within a linearly progressing historical framework. Unfortunately, with the possible exceptions of Romila Thapar and Sharad Patil, Leftist scholars have failed to systematically develop his line of investigation further. The most probable reason for this sorry state of affairs is the mechanical materialist approach consistently upheld by the leaderships of the communist movement throughout its history. The various factions of the communist movement discounted the caste system as one that will lose its relevance on its own as the revolutionary situation matures and the forces of production advance. In spite of the radical break within the communist movement during the late 1960s, the fundamental approach towards caste and indigenous issues has remained by and large mechanical materialist.

Dange's book *From Primitive Communism to Slavery* (1949) is exemplary for its dogmatic and mechanical materialist approach, not to speak of its being as pro-Aryan as bourgeois oppressive and exploitative dominant caste nationalists like Nehru and Tilak. In a review of this book[5] D.D. Kosambi aptly queries: "Did the Aryans bring a primitive commune into an empty wilderness?" This is because Dange in his book completely fails to even mention the pre-Vedic aboriginal and Dravidian populations of this subcontinent, and following Engels, tries to prove that Indian (read Aryan) history followed the 'universal' historical pattern of development from primitive commune to capitalism through slavery and feudalism and is, therefore, also on the path to socialism. He goes to ridiculous lengths to prove a primitive commune among the Indo-Aryans, whereas this existed perhaps only in the early stages of social organisation of the pre-Aryan matriarchal inhabitants of India, the Aryans having reached the stage of patriarchal militarised nomadic pastoralism (cum agriculture and associated crafts) by the time they entered the subcontinental area.

The second problem, also mentioned by Kosambi in his critique, is that mass slavery used in agriculture, crafts, manufacture, mining and even as sailors (as in ancient Greece) has not been proved in the subcontinental context, so it becomes a misnomer to speak in terms of a stage of slave society in the same sense as the European one. The existence of domestic and agrestic slaves and of Shudra slavery (which is closer to helotism, while having its differences therefrom) in the late Vedic period have to be recognised with their specific features particularly that of caste-class formation, if at all a stage of slavery is to be acknowledged.[6] Unlike slaves helots are not bought and sold. When entire tribes were subjugated in the Indian subcontinent, the subjugating Aryan or Aryanised tribes still had communal

and not big landed private property, and commodity production had not developed the way it had in Greece enabling a slave mode of production. In fact, the entire historical development in India through various socio-economic formations, which often co-exist simultaneously and interact for long periods and develop unevenly through its vast and geographically diverse terrain, has followed its own specific trajectories, which have to be understood in their specific region-based details for a liberationist theory to be worked out.

On the other hand, the socialists led by Ram Manohar Lohia at least attempted to point out the uniqueness of the Indian situation in this regard. Karl Marx, though he wrote quite a lot on India of the colonial period and even about the India before that, failed to observe the unique aspects of the history of the subcontinent that had evolved through millennia. On the whole, the position that caste and ethnic distinctions will automatically disappear as the forces of production advance has proved utterly baseless. Even the most advanced metro in India is an *adda* (hotbed) of caste and ethnic discrimination and oppression, not to speak of the millions of villages and small towns.

The militant Left movement, popularly known as the Naxalite movement or Maoist movement, deserves special mention concerning the Adivasi question. This movement is mainly outside the parliamentary mainstream and is far more powerful in the tribal belts of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. It captured hundreds of thousands hectares of land and redistributed them among the expropriated Adivasis. The movement itself originated among the Santhals and Mundas of north Bengal. Jangal Santhal, a Santhal leader, was one of the pioneers, though the majority of the leadership, whether in Bengal, Bihar or Andhra, was non-Adivasi in origin. Gunadhar Murmu from the Gopiballavpur area of Midnapore district was another Adivasi leader. The resilience of this movement despite several decades' long state repression and thousands of activists being killed is self-evident, and this is ascribed to the fact that it is based mainly among the Adivasis. The armed character of this movement is also mainly due to this factor.

Initially, when the Maoists started their militant activities of land confiscation, killing oppressor landlords, and raiding of granaries, the feudals in alliance with the compradors were considered the mainstay of the Indian state and the strategies were designed in accordance with this characterisation of the state. But their political leadership and supportive intellectuals did not pay much attention to the historical roots of the caste and indigenous questions, not to speak of related gender-based oppression. This certainly resulted in preventing the development of

a holistic approach to the questions concerned. Economic empowerment of the dispossessed is certainly of vital importance, but this by itself is not enough.

Apart from direct occupation and redistribution of productive assets like land, the Naxalite movement has an important indirect role too. This role is at the macro policy level. An important example is the new Forest Rights Act 2006, with its 2012 amendments of Rules, which gives certain rights in the forests to the forest-dependent people who are mainly Adivasis. This Act, lobbied for through a broad informal alliance of forest dwellers, Adivasi organisations coming under the umbrella of Campaign for Survival and Dignity, NGOs such as Ekta Parishad, rights activists, academics and other professionals, was passed in Parliament with the support of the official Left. It is at least partly aimed at containing the Naxalite influence among the Adivasis and is based on the perspective that law and order measures have utterly failed to contain the movement. Certainly, this is not the only compulsion behind the Act, but it is surely an important one, as is explicitly recognised by such sensitised and leading pro-Adivasi intellectuals and activists like Pradip Prabhu of the Kashtakari Sanghatna, Thane. How far this Act is being translated into practice is another matter. We shall be dealing with this Act and its implications in another chapter of this book (see Chapter 8). To summarise, the Naxalite movement has played a leading role and continues to do so in Adivasi affairs irrespective of its theoretical lacunae. The lacunae are most glaringly illustrated by the political and organisational ideology of Naxalite/Maoist parties and groups.

The political organisational structure of the Naxalites is monolithic in nature. Although it is proclaimed as democratic centralism as propounded by V.I. Lenin, in reality it is centralism without democracy. This is a contradiction, which has got built-in and this contradiction is between the proclaimed goal of the movement and actual organisational practice. The central formulation of the original Naxalite party was that there is no democracy in the country and the goal of the movement is to bring about genuine democracy, otherwise called New Democracy, which is possible only through protracted armed struggle due to the given class structure of Indian society. How far this goal is compatible with a Stalinist organisational structure and ideology remains to be answered. Adivasis are historically rooted in community-based democratic traditions, which are egalitarian in nature. When economic criteria like control over productive assets (which are central to the Adivasi question) are given one-sided emphasis at the cost of cultural and ideological parameters the equation can turn hostile to the long-term and even not so long-term interests of the supposed beneficiaries. Historically, this has been proved by the experience of the erstwhile Soviet Union and China where national

minorities and ethnic minorities were suppressed in the post-revolutionary era. India's case is even more complex because there are thousands of minority ethnic communities, apart from the religious and linguistic minorities (the only two categories recognised in the Indian Constitution), and the large majority of them are Adivasis. This is a serious issue, which the civil society groups working with the Adivasis have to anticipate and tackle in a preemptive way.

Within leftist academia and activism there is a stream, which considers the Adivasis in the light of the semi-feudal, semi-colonial characterisation of Indian society. According to this stream the Adivasis are in the process of being integrated into this economic, social and political system as its worst victims. The famous Bengali activist-writer Mahasweta Devi forcefully presented this angle through her novels, plays, short stories and essays. The problem with this approach is the validity of the generalisation on the character of state and society. In this era of reckless globalisation, characterising the state and society as semi-feudal and semi-colonial can be arbitrary and mechanical. Even before globalisation and liberalisation opened the floodgates to foreign capital in the early 1990s this characterisation was subject to serious doubts. In the early 1980s itself this characterisation had been challenged from within the radical left as being untenable and unscientific on the basis of concrete analysis of the concrete situation existing and developing in the country.[7] No doubt the position and presentation of the position by powerful writers like Mahasweta Devi is emotionally highly appealing, but how far that position can stand the test of scientific rigour has to be taken into account. The Adivasi question indubitably has to be viewed within the overall class-caste structure of the country; this makes it all the more imperative that the analysis of this structure should be as near the reality as possible.

NGO and Activist Interventions

The latest entry in Adivasi discourses is local and international non-governmental organisations. NGO interventions are on an increasing scale and unlike 'purely' academic exercises these interventions are geared to activism of diverse character. Activism ranges from field interventions aimed at mitigating the various problems faced by Adivasis to lobbying for policy level changes. There are also attempts by NGOs to mobilise the Adivasis around specific issues and to function as pressure groups advocating changes. At the same time, there are also several NGOs who make the theme into a lucrative business. How far these activities are successful or not is a relative question. But one thing is certain: as compared to the past there is now increased awareness concerning issues confronting the Adivasis,

and this increased awareness of civil society is in no small measure due to the non-governmental activism. More significantly, these sorts of interventions are happening in a situation where pedagogic exercises are increasingly proving themselves futile and non-consequential.

The basic perspective of the state is that the Adivasis are disposable people. This process of uprooting, instead of slowing down, is only becoming more vicious with the advancing of globalisation. Over 3000 major dams besides about 80% of the forests and 72% of coal mines are located in Adivasi areas making them major sources of raw materials on which the urban industrial complex of the 'nation' is based. The Maoist movement, though working mainly among the Adivasis, does not have a clear-cut answer to this vital problem confronting the Adivasis mainly because their class analysis and political programme do not and cannot accommodate issues like this. We can clearly see that NGOs are trying their level best to intervene in issues like dispossession and uprooting. An example is the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM).

The social and human rights activists working among the Adivasis know the actual situation much better unlike academics and bureaucrats who are often alienated from the ground realities. After all, they are not working in a vacuum but with concrete entities and circumstances. The activists face a very complex situation. The theoretical problem of who exactly are the Adivasis is not the least among the complexities they are confronted with. For the government, Scheduled Tribes are an administrative-legal category. Article 366 (25) conveniently defines Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this Constitution." The bureaucrats by and large go according to the Constitutional definition. It is a positive development that more and more activists are unambiguously taking up the historically defined and combative concept of Adivasis.

The word 'Dalit' means broken people, which is a Marathi word and is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Dal', which means to break, crack and open, split, scatter, crush and destroy. In the nineteenth century, Jotirao Phule, a revolutionary social reformer in Maharashtra, used the word Dalit to denote the oppressed and broken victims of caste-ridden society. Following this, Dr. Ambedkar used the term to denote the untouchables. Later, the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra used the term broadly to include the SCs, STs, landless, poor peasants, women and all those economically exploited (in other words, the marginalised sections of society).[8]

Similarly, the Jharkhand movement used the word Adivasi to include all subaltern castes/ classes and ethnic peoples.[9]

International Discourses

The indigenous movement first emerged in North America, Scandinavia and Australia in the 1960s and spread to Central and South America in the 1970s. By the 1980s people from the Pacific and Asia also got involved. Initially the term indigenous was eurocentrically used for referring only to the descendants of inhabitants of a country prior to its West European colonisation, that is, to the pre-invasion peoples of the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. Over a period of time the word indigenous in international discourse has come to be used additionally for denoting tribal peoples, the Fourth World and for marginalised cultural minorities (cf. Gray 1991: 7). However, it still excludes from this ambit indigenous peoples in various European countries as the Romas, the pastoral people in Greece and the Bedouins of West Asia where conquest/domination by others has been on a contiguous basis (Roy Burman 2003: 13-14). J. Pathy and B.K. Roy Burman propose ethnicity as a more encompassing term for all the various 'indigenous' and 'tribal' groups.

There are several covenants, resolutions and reports sponsored by the United Nations and its various organs on the rights of the indigenous peoples all over the world, who constitute an endangered species in many regions of South America and Asia, and who continue to face various types of discrimination.[10] In 1982, on the initiative of certain West European countries the Sub-Commission of the Human Rights Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities set up a "Working Group on Indigenous Populations," which in 2007 was replaced by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a subsidiary body of the Human Rights Council. A Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was established in 2000. There is also a Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People under the Human Rights Commission.

The UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations identified four criteria for determining which communities could be described as indigenous: pre-existent peoples, marginalised and dominated peoples, minority or culturally different peoples and peoples who identify themselves as indigenous. The Government of India's position on the UN definition of indigenous populations is that it does not apply to the STs of India. Its stand is that they cannot be considered the original inhabitants because like Africa, it considers the entire population of India

as indigenous. According to it, the complex history of subcontinental migration and exchange and the mixing of cultural and physical traits make it impossible to distinguish any group as indigenous in relation to other groups and they do not constitute a dominated or discriminated population. This position of the Indian government is in line with its unwillingness to acknowledge that the caste system is a form of racial discrimination.

The World Bank defines indigenous peoples/indigenous ethnic minorities/ tribal groups/scheduled tribes as "social groups with a social and cultural identity distinct from the dominant society that makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the development process;" and says that they "can be identified in particular geographical areas by the presence in varying degrees of the following characteristics: (a) close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas; (b) self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group; (c) an indigenous language, often different from the national language; (d) presence of customary social and political institutions; and (e) primarily subsistence-oriented production" (World Bank, Operational Directive 4.20).

The ILO at its 1989 Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples referred to the latter as "Groups whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations". NGOs in this country by and large follow the international understanding of indigenous and tribal, which has been arrived at through interventions by activists, NGOs and by academics on the basis of resistance by project-affected people.

Challenges Under Globalisation

The most visible, as well as the fundamental, feature of the neo-liberal world system is the widening of inequalities and concentration of wealth in the hands of the already rich and powerful. This is true whether it is in the United States of America or in a poor country like India. Adivasis, being on the lowest rung and with negligible or no bargaining power certainly stand to suffer the worst in this process of unbridled globalisation of the economy. In the specific context of India, globalisation directly means enhanced flow of foreign direct investment, and intensified exploitation of fossil fuels and other energy sources. Mining, construction of infrastructure, big dams, etc.,—all of which create tremendous

uprooting of the poor—are the necessary conditions for globalisation of the economy. This is what is euphemistically called creating a favourable investment climate. The areas rich in resources absolutely necessary for globalised capitalist industrialisation are predominantly the Adivasi areas as mentioned earlier.

As the perspective of the dominant caste Indian ruling classes is that the Adivasis are not to be seriously taken into account in the face of 'development' programmes, their uprooting and deprivation are bound to be intensified. From all indices the original inhabitants are in for further deprivations of a hitherto unprecedented nature. The logic is simple: "if we have to 'develop', some sacrifices have to be made"; but the question, why it has to be the poorest of the poor and utterly expropriated people who have to make these sacrifices, remains unanswered. Very obviously the meaning of 'development' in this context is facilitating plunder by corporations and making the rich richer and diversifying the scope for graft. It has nothing to do with economically empowering the poor and destitute. Dire poverty, starvation and unemployment of the vast majority are swept under the carpet, while growth rate and share market bullishness are trumpeted as the end-all of development. The convenient lie that is parroted against those who talk and write for the Adivasis is that they are all 'anti-development' malcontents. Activists working among Adivasis or advocating their just cause very often face this libel. And there is no hesitation at all in shooting down Adivasis refusing to yield their land willingly to big corporations like the Tatas in Singur.

It is in this background that we are preparing the present work. The cultural assault, something that is already of serious proportions, is also bound to be even more severe and damaging to their identity. To take a single illustration, there are already more than a hundred thousand Adivasi women domestic workers from Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand in Delhi alone. They are at the receiving end in every conceivable manner. Trafficking of women and children for sex and/or labour from the Adivasi belts to the cities and towns are ever on the rise.[11] Migrant Adivasi workers in the 'green revolution' areas make another sordid story by itself. Migration to cities and towns in search of means to avoid dire starvation is already thick and this flow is bound to get thicker in the coming days. In the cities they are rootless and are packed into slums that supply the cheapest labour possible and eternally live at the mercy of hoodlums in utterly dehumanised conditions. Where is even the smallest chance of protecting their identity and culture in such conditions?

The challenges which the Adivasi communities face are enormous. Already many of them have become extinct. A good number of tribal ethnic groups show

population decline or a tendency in that direction since colonial times such as the Birhor, Paharia and Korawans of Bihar. There is a sudden sharp decline in the population of the Thotis of Andhra Pradesh due to the loss of their traditional occupation. In Attappady Block of Kerala's Palakkad district over 50 infant deaths were reported in 2012-13 among Adivasis due to widespread malnutrition. Starvation deaths and deaths due to crippling diseases have become common among a good number of communities throughout the country. Kalahandi and Kashipur in Odisha; Amravati, Gadchiroli and Nandurbar in Maharashtra shot into the news due to starvation deaths of Adivasis.

Another important political question emerges at this point. Did the 1947 proclamation of political independence mean political independence for the original inhabitants? It may be instructive to look at the historical experience of the natives of North and South America and the Caribbean. By the time of the victory of the American War of Independence, the original inhabitants, whom Columbus had rechristened as Red Indians, had been largely annihilated and their survivors quarantined into enclosures. The War of Independence and its victory did not mean anything for these original inhabitants. Freedom was meaningless to them because they remained fettered as before. The same thing happened to the aborigines of Australia, New Zealand, and in the numerous islands of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Those who survived annihilation were either isolated in inaccessible and inhospitable areas or 'reformed' and assimilated.

In India's case too, the same question arises. No doubt, this is an extremely embarrassing question for the ruling parties and classes who try to keep the subalterns under their control through a patronage network in the name of democracy. The Adivasi traditional chieftainship system is sought to be replaced through an electoral and welfare system utilised by the Adivasi elite in the name of ethnic/tribal identity. During the colonial period the colonial planters, feudals, moneylenders, liquor and forest contractors were their enemies. Now in addition to the vestiges and inheritors of these antagonistic forces there are the all-powerful State and Central governments and the big corporations both national and international. The present trajectory of development intensifies the competition for land. The opponents of the original peoples have only increased in strength and magnitude.

Ultimately, the Adivasi question is a socio-political one warranting a socio-political solution. Under the given situation it is not conceivable that such a solution will be handed to them on a platter. They were always a fighting force and the logical conclusion is that the fight will have to be intensified and made

even more broad-based. The tendencies point towards this only. On the one hand, the articulated fight presently has two distinct modes—the militant face represented by the Naxalites and the fight within the constitutionally-defined parameters represented by NGOs and other civil society groups. Indigenous peoples' organisations are present in both these fighting modes in alliance with others as well as on the cultural-religious front, where they may sometimes ally with established forces or go it alone. As such the ground level resistance situation is complex and despite differing approaches the various struggle fronts may come together on specific local issues. We have to recognise the indisputable fact that restitution of and control over productive assets and resources, and reclaiming the lost rights are some of the issues which are at the centre of the fight for justice. Historically, it was so and it continues to be so.

Notes

1. The five points of Nehru's "Tribal Panchsheel" ran as follows: (1) Avoid imposing anything on the tribals. (2) Tribal rights to land and forest should be respected. (3) A team of their own people should be trained. (4) They should not be overwhelmed by a multiplicity of schemes. (5) Results should be judged by the quality of human character evolved. As recommended by Verrier Elwin this approach aimed to soften the 'developmental' process for the Adivasis with a variety of safeguards and integrate them into it in a gentler manner.
2. For an overview of tribal studies in the pre-1947 period, see Vidyarthi and Rai: 3-40.
3. Gandhiji is said to have been in favour of "local area autonomy" or self-government for areas where hill tribes lived so that they could preserve their traditional ways (see *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Hundred Days* by V. Ramamurthy. Chennai: Kasturi & Sons Ltd., 2003: 40).
4. As an example, K.L. Bhowmik et al.: *Tribal India: A Profile in Indian Ethnology*. Kolkata: The World Press Private Ltd., 1971.
5. D.D. Kosambi: Marxism and Ancient Indian Culture. *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*. Vol. 29, 1948 (published 1949), pp. 271-7. Also in Chattopadhyaya (ed.) 2002: 784-89.
6. According to Walter Ruben the similarity lay in the subjugation of an entire pre-existing population rather than individuals as in slavery, but they were not assigned to individual landless citizens of the conquering tribe as their domestic or agrestic slaves as in the case of helots in areas ruled by Sparta in ancient times. In ancient India the subjugated aboriginal populations were largely allowed and able to retain

their autonomous autarkic village communities up to the period of colonialism and the forces unleashed by it (1967: 88-89).

7. See T.G. Jacob: *India: Development and Deprivation: Neo-colonial Transformation of the Economy in a Historical Perspective*. Delhi: Mass Line Press, 1985.
8. Rajkumar: Is there a Need for Dalit and Adivasi Solidarity? In: Thundyl and Krishnan K. (ed.), 2002, p. 136.
9. "Who Are the Barbarians in our Homeland?" Declaration of National Campaign and Consultation, Jharkhand. Issued by B.I.R.S.A. (Bindrai Institute for Research, Study and Action) and Delhi Forum, 8 June 2010.
10. For example, the UN report on "The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples." New York: 2010. As enumerated here, the UN has devised a number of human rights mechanisms to deal with the concerns of indigenous peoples on a world scale, which come out with reports from time to time.
11. For more details on trafficking of Adivasi women and girl children see among others *Frontier*, 25-31 January 2015, pp. 3-4 under the note "They're all Gone" by M.M. Also see Mahasweta Devi: "Palamau in Bondage: Forever?" *EPW* 21 April 1984: 663-5.

3

OVERVIEW OF ADIVASI DEMOGRAPHY

Problems of Census Data

The main concentration of Adivasis in the country is in the vast central Indian belt starting from Rajasthan and Gujarat in the west, passing through Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, significant parts of West Bengal, north-western Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the central and eastern parts in addition to the entire North-East. In peninsular India, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka have a significant percentage of Adivasi population. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have very small percentages of Adivasis, but both these States as well as Karnataka have several dozens of distinct Adivasi communities dispersed over large areas. Again, there are a few concentrated pockets in these States also, but their dispersal is also very relevant. Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Goa, Daman and Diu in the West, Himachal Pradesh in the north, the islands of Lakshadweep, Minicoy and the Andamans and Nicobar are other areas of Adivasi inhabitation. It was in the areas of their concentration that the Adivasis arose against colonialism. And even now, in neo-colonial India, it is these areas that are witnessing strong Adivasi movements. This is only natural due to the demographic, geographical and exploitative factors involved.

Census operations were started by the colonial administration towards the later part of the nineteenth century, but systematic, comprehensive census operations came into being with the 1911 Census. Land revenue was the main source of colonial revenue and a reliable census of all classes, castes and communities of people was a necessity for them. Colonial census reports enumerated the population divided into castes and communities, which made it possible to arrive at the relative demographic position of every community and caste. At the same time, as the colonial administration was at a loss to decide who exactly constituted the original inhabitants, varying nomenclature was used in the censuses;[1] consequently, the data on the so-called tribal populations is inaccurate.

The 1950 Constitution of India listed the original inhabitants in the category of Scheduled Tribes. But in the 1951 Census no community distinctions were noted while listing a person under the ST category. At the time of the 1961 Census it was realised that special detailed tabulations of the individual tribes as well as of their social, economic, demographic and educational details were required for making the necessary efforts towards amelioration of their conditions. But after this census the Government of India discontinued caste- and community-wise census. This was reverted to only in the 2011 Census, which carried out a Socio-Economic and Caste Census. The data gathered under this, however, has to date not wholly been made public.

Moreover, in the census enumerations after 1947 the separate enumeration of the category of animists and minor religions was done away with. Only the major religions were listed. And in the 1951 Census Adivasis were listed as Hindus. The religious systems of the Adivasis are not given a definite place in the census along with the other main religions, but are subsumed under 'Other.' The tendency is to enumerate all Adivasis who have not converted to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Sikhism as Hindus. It is to be noted that there was no public debate or discussion on this question before the census operations were started. There were also no community level consultations to come to this arbitrary conclusion. How far this religious identification is valid is subject to serious doubts. In fact, such a classification has certainly given a shot in the arm of Hindutva advocates besides trying to obliterate the specific identity of the original inhabitants. This is a fundamental error perpetuated in the latest 2011 Census too. The political problems that can emerge out of this categorisation are self-evident. However, it should be noted that increasing numbers of self-aware Adivasis are reporting their religion as 'Other,' that is, not Hindu, Christian, Muslim or Buddhist.

Colonial perceptions on who are the original inhabitants or who are the tribes differed from time to time according to differing definitions and this indeterminacy has not ceased to exist even in post-1947 India. Not only the defining of primitive tribes remains fluid, the list of Scheduled Tribes as a whole also remains the same. The list is ever-changing with specific communities being deleted or added. The list of communities included as Adivasis also, therefore, naturally keeps on varying from census to census and this makes any macro level realistic comparison of censuses a near impossibility.

The President of India has the prerogative of specifying under Article 342 by a "public notification" the Scheduled Tribes, which is an administrative and legal term. Parliament, by law, can "include or exclude" from the ST list any tribal community or part thereof in any State or Union Territory. There is an opinion, which has been confirmed by various parliamentary committees set up to investigate these concerns, that many ethnic groups, which may realistically be said to belong to this category, are not in the scheduled list, while some non-Adivasi groups get listed as STs! One reason for this is the defect in the Scheduled Tribes Modification Order of 1956 and 1976, according to which a tribe is recognised as a Scheduled Tribe only on an area-wise or State-wise basis and not on an all-India basis. Even the Supreme Court has ruled that they would lose benefits guaranteed under the Constitution if they migrated to other areas. Thus a particular tribe scheduled as such in one district may not be recognised as such in another district or State. Malayalis are recognised as STs in other districts but not in Erode of Tamil Nadu. Adivasi migrants to the tea plantations in Assam are not recognised as Scheduled Tribes. While this violates Article 15 (1) and (2) and Article 19 (d) and (e) of the Constitution,[2] there are problems at the ground level when migrants may overwhelm the local people due to political connivance and vote bank politics.

Apart from definitional and ground level confusion there are also political and economic reasons for this continual shifting. There are certain Constitutional rights and guarantees for Scheduled Tribes, and the politico-economic aspect of these rights and guarantees are in the form of reservations in proportion to their population. These reservations are in the legislatures including Parliament, State legislative assemblies and local bodies, public services and educational institutions. Scheduled Tribe students have all the rights to seek admission in educational institutions as well as to stipends and free board. Minimum qualifications and experience stipulated for public services are on a lower level than for upper castes.

It is because of these concessions and reservations in education and public services that there is persistent clamour from non-Adivasi communities in several

States – such as the Badagas in the Nilgiris, Kurmis of Jharkhand and the Gujjars in Rajasthan – for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes because of the few privileges that may be thereby granted. Some such communities have found their way into the list. This is possible because politicians and political parties have vested interests in promoting specific communities as part of vote bank politics. Narrow caste politics plays a significant role, especially on the regional level. The situation is paradoxical. On the one hand, the Adivasis are considered socially inferior and are subjected to caste-based atrocities and discrimination. The reasons behind these atrocities lie mainly in disputes over land, that is, alienation of tribal land, bonded labour, indebtedness and wage disputes as per reports of the Commission of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. At the same time, many of those who subject them to this exploitation and discrimination aspire to corner the concessions that are constitutionally guaranteed to the oppressed and dispossessed due to the pecuniary benefits involved. This is symptomatic of the general moral degeneration and the opportunism of parliamentary politics in the country. It also shows that the census data are not exactly accurate but can only be taken as approximations to the real demographic situation.

Of late an issue that is being highlighted by Adivasi organisations and supporting NGOs is gaining increasing attention. Corruption is involved in providing community certificates to the Adivasis. For obtaining school or college admission or availing of the reservation quota in public services a formal community certificate from the administration is a must. The Adivasis are made to run from pillar to post to obtain this slip of paper with a government seal. In fact, it has become a major harassment for them. This situation could change only if the community leaders are authorised to issue the relevant legal certificates. At the same time, there is an increasing trend of fake certificates being issued to non-Adivasis. This is more common in States with a significant population of Adivasis. Even in the State of Kerala where Adivasis constitute only about one per cent of the total population there are hundreds of cases pending in the various law courts concerning fake community certificates. The number of cases getting into the courts is bound to be a gross underestimation because the Adivasis are seldom aware of the cheating done in their name. Moreover, their familiarity with law courts, laws and regulation is very meagre and their resources to wrest justice through courts are also limited. So it has to be assumed that the statistics about the number of Adivasis in public services is unreliable.

Data concerning the funds allocated and utilised for improving the living conditions of Adivasis is also highly jinxed. Several micro studies and newspaper reports clearly show that the benefits accruing to the proclaimed beneficiaries fall

far short of the funds allocated and expended. One obvious reason for this gross disequilibrium is that the benefits are mostly grabbed by non-Adivasis. It is easy for non-Adivasi settlements wanting piped water and electricity connections, proper roads or bridges, to obtain these facilities, if there is an Adivasi settlement nearby. In that name funds meant exclusively for the welfare of Adivasis can be utilised claiming that the Adivasi settlement is the beneficiary. This practice is extremely common. Hence, data showing the resources utilised for the welfare of Adivasis have to be taken skeptically. Their areas may 'develop', but they themselves remain 'underdeveloped.'

Mainly educated public servants conduct the census enumeration. A perennial problem with the accuracy of census reports is that plenty of underreporting and fictitious data find their way into these reports. This is particularly so in regard to the sprawling urban slums and remote Adivasi areas. Both are uncomfortable places to survey for the educated public servants. Numerous Adivasi colonies are located in remote inaccessible areas and reaching there is quite difficult for the educated public servants. One may have to walk many kilometres through inhospitable terrain to reach such colonies. It is often found that the enumerators find the easy way out by filling out the columns with fake data or by skipping entire colonies. Many Adivasis may not even be aware that such an enumeration is on. In the case of Adivasis heavy underreporting and misreporting is an obvious possibility. The logistical difficulties in correctly enumerating them are complemented by the mindset of the enumerators who often hail from the dominant castes. The manufactured perception that the Adivasis are lesser humans who need not be seriously taken into account makes them freely resort to guesswork to fulfil their official obligations.

Despite all the errors and imperfections of the census reports it has to be accepted that it is the second biggest such operation in the whole world. In terms of the comprehensiveness and details this is the only source available to us. This is so at least as far as the macro scene is concerned. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that the census reports, especially in the case of the Adivasis, cannot be hundred per cent dependable or accurate. The parameters necessary for gauging the socio-economic position of this category of population are also certainly not comprehensive enough to provide a completely realistic picture.

All-India Scene

According to the 2001 Census the total population of Scheduled Tribes in the

whole country (excluding Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Puducherry and the National Capital Territory of Delhi under the specious argument that there are no STs in these places) came to 84,326,240 persons. This estimate was certainly faulty because there has been a tremendous migration of Adivasis as wage labour into the 'green revolution' areas of Punjab and Haryana; a large number of them were also forced to migrate to metros like Delhi and Chandigarh as domestic help and unskilled labour. The National Commission for STs, set up in 2004, has criticised the fact that information relating to the migrant ST population is not collected in the census, while it is done in the case of the general population. The population of Scheduled Tribes living in the place of their nativity only is counted. This results in under-counting the population of the STs in the country, which leads to faulty assessment, inadequate schemes and also the exclusion of a large segment of ST population from the gamut of the planning and welfare processes.

In the 2011 Census, this total population showed an increase by 23.7% to 104,281,034. This number comes to 8.6% of the total population of the country. The number of main Scheduled Tribes currently listed is 705, whereas in 1950 it was 212, but it should be kept in mind that some of those listed are sub tribal groups or even synonymous nomenclatures of particular groups, and have in cases been included without thorough base level checking up. In addition, a number of proposals are pending before the Registrar General of India for inclusion in the scheduled list. If the section of Denotified Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes/ communities (DNST) is also added, for which there is no accurate estimate so far, the numbers and percentage of Adivasi population to total population would be much higher. The dominant class/caste rulers are simply not interested in accuracy in such matters, though the Supreme Court issued a notice to the concerned authorities in this regard in 2011. So far there has been no census of the DNSTs, though their number has been estimated at around 11 crore with 1620 communities. Being largely nomadic with no fixed abode census workers fail to record them. They may also avoid them due to their alleged criminality.

Table 3.1 gives the State-wise distribution of the Scheduled Tribe population in the country.

Table 3.1 State-wise (%) Distribution of Scheduled Tribe Persons 2011

Sl. No.	State/UT	% of STs in Total Population
1	Jammu & Kashmir	11.9
2	Himachal Pradesh	5.7

Table 3.1 *Contd.*

Sl. No.	State/UT	% of STs in Total Population
3	Uttarakhand	2.9
4	Rajasthan	13.5
5	Uttar Pradesh	0.6
6	Bihar	1.3
7	Sikkim	33.8
8	Arunachal Pradesh	68.8
9	Nagaland	86.5
10	Manipur (excluding 3 sub-divisions of Senapati district)	35.1
11	Mizoram	94.4
12	Tripura	31.8
13	Meghalaya	86.1
14	Assam	12.4
15	West Bengal	5.8
16	Jharkhand	26.2
17	Odisha	22.8
18	Chhattisgarh	30.6
19	Madhya Pradesh	21.1
20	Gujarat	14.8
21	Daman and Diu	6.3
22	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	52
23	Maharashtra	9.4
24	Andhra Pradesh	5.5
25	Telangana	9.3
26	Karnataka	7.0
27	Goa	10.2
28	Lakshadweep	94.8
29	Kerala	1.5
30	Tamil Nadu	1.1
31	A&N Islands	7.5
	India	**8.6**

Source Census of India 2011

Table 3.1 clearly shows that the Adivasi population of India is spatially dispersed with some States having above 85 per cent of the total population. Simultaneously, in some States and Union Territories they constitute a negligible percentage of the total population. It is also clear that at the time of the States Reorganisation their contiguous areas, especially in the central Indian belt, were segregated into different linguistic formations, sometimes even split up into as many as four to five States and languages. Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh with substantial Adivasi populations were formed in the year 2000 after a sustained struggle.

Of course, district-wise data gives a more disaggregated picture of Adivasi concentration. According to the 2011 Census, 90 districts in the country register an Adivasi concentration of more than 50 per cent of the total population. There are 62 districts registering a population range of 25-50 per cent. 134 districts have an ST population in the range of 5-20 per cent. Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands come in this category. The lower range of 1-5 per cent is recorded in the highest number of 282 districts, and another two peninsular States, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, are located in this group. And there are 55 districts without any ST population at all.

In South India, only Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka have representation of the numerically prominent Adivasi groups. The Chenchus, Gonds, Khonds and Porjas are numerically prominent tribes that live in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka. All other tribal communities found in South India are numerically insignificant on the all-India canvas. At the same time, the number of distinct Adivasi communities in the south Indian States is very large and varied. This general demographic data points out that in India the Adivasis are both spatially concentrated as well as dispersed and there is no uniform pattern relevant to the whole country.

The government has a further classification of certain Adivasi communities as "primitive tribes" (PTGs). This categorisation is done on the basis of the level of social and economic development (i.e., whether hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation is their predominant way of living) and degree of assimilation/integration/isolation with mainstream society. The criteria for determining this assimilation/integration/isolation were never clearly spelt out and even after seventy years of formal political independence this vagueness remains. Many of these communities are more forest dependent than others and live either within the forests or in the periphery of forests. This category was created during the Fourth Five-Year Plan following the recommendation of the Dhebar Commission Report (1961). On the basis of recommendations made by the respective State

governments a total of 75 tribal groups were categorised as PTGs by the end of the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-97). Currently 81 communities are listed in this category. According to the 2011 Census, there are 5 PTGs in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 12 in Andhra Pradesh, 2 in Karnataka, 5 in Kerala, and 6 in Tamil Nadu. In 2006, the government decided to rename PTGs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. The change in nomenclature reflected sensitivity to the fact that the concept of PTG carries negative colonial connotations and misses the actual complexity and richness of their cultural and economic heritage.

First People Last

In the context of acknowledged human development parameters like level of nutrition, levels of literacy and education, mortality rates, life expectancy, number of school-going children, school drop-out ratio, ownership of productive assets, accessibility of safe drinking water in or near the vicinity of habitats, availability of health care facilities near at hand, etc., the Adivasis as a whole are far behind the caste Hindu population and even far behind the other main dispossessed section of Dalits. This bleak situation in general living conditions automatically tells upon their health and embeds them in a vicious trap. The census reports clearly point out this characteristic situation of the Adivasis.

Although there are a few communities that still live largely by hunting and food gathering, the Adivasis have become a predominantly agriculture dependent rural population as their peasantisation has been a consistently followed government policy. Only some of them continue to practise shifting agriculture. Many traditional occupations have declined due to forest degradation and lack of sufficient access to the raw materials and markets. Agriculture practised by them is mainly subsistence agriculture with a marginal marketed surplus. Their percentage of total rural population has increased from 10.4% to 11.3% between 2001 and 2011. All other sections have decreased their percentages. The growth rate in both the rural and the urban population of STs is higher than the national average indicating greater dispossession and migration. The percentage of child population has declined during the same decade which does not necessarily indicate the success story of family planning programmes, but may rather be due to increase in mortality rates. There is also a substantial difference between the others and Adivasis in the percentage of aged males and females, which is a clear indicator of lower life expectancy among them. On the other hand, Adivasis still consistently score better in the case of sex ratio as compared with the all-India total population average (it is 990 per 1000 as compared to 943 per thousand). This is an indicator

of the better status of Adivasi women in their communities. However, following the trend in the all-India general population the child sex ratio (0-6 years) is a declining one (from 985 in 1991 to 957 in 2011).

There is more than a 10 percentage point difference in the literacy rate between Adivasis and of the total population, if these statistics are accurate. There could be a bigger gap in reality. The literacy rate among the Adivasis at 59% is far below the national average of 73%. Again, there is stark discrepancy between male and female literacy with the females way down below that for males at 49.4% and 68.5% respectively. ST enrollment in higher educational institutions is abysmally low at 4.4%. The statistics are deceptive on another count also because the literacy rate in the north-eastern States, which are predominantly tribal in population, is 80-96 per cent, and by clubbing them with the Adivasis in other States the general picture becomes inflated.

Concerning the availability of treated drinking water within premises, meaning within the hamlet or village, only 14.6% of the total number of Adivasi households as compared to 32% of the general population has any such facility. This facility, which is of paramount importance in maintaining health standards, has shown very little improvement between 2001 and 2011. Here again there is a great difference between Adivasis and others including Dalits. The same pattern can be observed in the availability of electricity. In 2011, at the national level around 50% of the total number of Adivasi households had electricity while the national average was 55.3%. The same discrepancy trend can be observed in the availability of toilet facilities with only 22.6% of the total number of Adivasi households having even some sort of rudimentary toilet facilities.

Fifty-one per cent of the total number of Adivasi households own single-room houses and the average number of occupants per household is between six and eight. This is again very general because in the mining towns and urban slums the number of occupants in one room/hut can go up to 20-30. There are many case studies about the Dhanbad mining enclaves and the Mumbai and Nagpur slums that are predominantly occupied by Adivasis and Dalits.

In the case of the work participation rate (percentage of Adivasi workers to the total Adivasi population) it is the highest, i.e., 48.7% in 2011. This is nearly 10% higher than the national average and it is also higher than that of SCs. This is in contrast to their relative deprivation with regard to other social and economic parameters. But the percentage of ST main workers (defined as anyone working for more than six months in a year) to total population is a little more than 10 percentage points lower than the national average at 68.8%! The percentage of

marginal workers is again almost 10% more than the workers at the national level. And the percentage of ST female marginal workers is even higher. Female migration from rural areas is an increasing trend. Marginal workers logically mean those who perpetually face starvation or semi-starvation conditions. The percentage of cultivators is higher than the other categories.

The percentage of Adivasi main workers in 'Other Services' to total Adivasi main workers is only 19.2% in 2011 while the national average percentage is 41.6%, and in the case of Dalits it is 36.1%. Again this is an oversimplification about Adivasis as a whole because the bulk of this percentage is contributed by a few small States and Union Territories where their percentage is on the high side, which means that the main Adivasi areas are grossly underrepresented in the category of 'Other Services'. Among the southern States it is as low as 15.8%, for example, in Andhra Pradesh.

In the case of female main workers, too, this difference with the general population can be seen. The percentage of Adivasi female main workers is higher (around 10% points) than the all-India average for women workers. Between 1991 and 2011 the ST female work force in household industries registered an increase of more than 5%, but there is still almost a ten percentage point gap with the others.

The census data in general points to the fact of a marked deterioration in the economic and cultural conditions of the Adivasi population across the country. During 1991-2011, due to the development pattern adopted, there has been a decrease in the percentage of main workers and cultivators, while simultaneously there is an increase in the percentage of marginal landholders and agricultural workers, both in relation to total ST population and the total general population. In this process the decrease by 10% in the number of cultivators among Adivasis between 2001 and 2011 is higher than that of SCs or general population. As cultivators by and large they are marginal and small farmers. At the all-India level the average size of marginal land holdings is 0.24 ha, while that of small holdings is 1.42 ha. The trend of increasing landlessness is more among SCs than STs, but the quality of land of STs is on the whole poorer. Again, the proportion of agricultural labourers, although higher than the national average, is a little lower than in the case of SCs.

Between 1991 and 2011 the percentage of agricultural workers has decreased in the case of SCs and increased in the case of STs. In line with the general urbanisation trend, we find the percentage of workers in 'Other Services' is increasing during this period. We know that the Adivasis are integrated in the

informal labour market—which comprises at least 97% of India's workforce—in agriculture, fisheries, construction, mining and other industries as the lowest-paid unskilled workers, often as bonded contract labour. But the percentage of Adivasis as compared to their total population is the least in this sector. Other governmental data show that while the population has increased, the issue of unemployment and underemployment has also increased manifold.

Denotified Communities

In free India, mostly nomadic communities classified and treated as 'criminal,' complained that instead of getting their freedom and other facilities they were even deprived of the facilities given to them by the British, and that their condition in general had become much worse than previously due to fresh and stricter restrictions being imposed. In December 1946, a Criminal Tribes Enquiry Committee had been appointed which in its report recommended the total repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871. Madras Province repealed the Act in 1947. Other provincial governments such as that of East Punjab and United Provinces were reluctant and opposed a bill put up by a member in the Central Legislative Assembly for the total repeal of the Act. The Bombay government passed a Habitual Offenders Restriction Act in December 1947, which contained a provision for the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act after two years in 1949.[3]

The Government of India revoked the 1871 Act in 1952 but the purpose of this repeal was utterly ruined when the same government promulgated a series of Habitual Offenders Acts similar in spirit to the Act it was repealing. The denotified tribes, now called *vimukta jatis* as per the recommendation of a Backward Classes Commission set up in 1955, were simply reclassified as habitual offenders in 1959. The notification and denotification of these communities reinforced and strengthened the caste system because the colonial administration and the post-1947 state apparatus were serving the interests of the oppressor caste feudal elements which had been the main support base of colonialism. Many of the oppressed communities who opposed Brahminical suppression had been put under this category, such as the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh. Later the interests of the big bourgeoisie and the Indian state coincided. Other Acts such as the Prevention of Begging Act, 1959, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1986, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the Excise Laws also contain provisions that stigmatise and penalise these communities and need to be reviewed and reframed keeping their rehabilitation and livelihood interests in mind.

The Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes are still a much neglected section among tribes. The nomadic communities are pastoral or non-pastoral. The pastoral communities may combine herding with other activities such as cultivation and trade. Non-pastoral nomadic communities provide goods and services to sedentary communities ranging from making tools and utensils, trading wool and salt and providing medicines, herbs and entertainment. Many of them find employment as seasonal agricultural labourers. They are mostly listed under BC/OBC, ST or SC categories, but may not be there in any of these lists, or may simultaneously be listed in more than one list.[4] There are anomalies in these lists, which need to be removed. These anomalies are there in the case of STs and SCs also. In many cases a particular caste/community has been included in the SC list in one or more States, in the ST or OBC lists in some other States, and has not been included in any list at all in some States. Similarly, various Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes have been identified district-wise in the same State: a caste/community has been included in one list in some districts of the State, in another list in some other districts and in no list at all in the remaining districts. This is also unreasonable. In an age of occupational mobility, if a family moves from one district to another, it should not mean a loss of legal status of that family. Area restrictions need to be removed and castes/communities should be granted the same legal status throughout the State.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment constituted a National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes (NCDNT) in November 2003, which was reconstituted in March 2005. The Commission submitted its report in July 2008 and made a whole host of recommendations. The National Advisory Council headed by Sonia Gandhi had also made a number of suggestions to improve their livelihood and general situation. Some of these are: At least one member in the National Human Rights Commission and the State Human Rights Commission should be drawn from the DNTs. It is important that complete list of such communities should be compiled by each of the State governments and all benefits including reservations accruing to SC, ST and OBC communities should be extended to them, especially in the field of education. Their crafts and other traditional occupations should be supported. The Forest Rights Act should be extended to them too and their knowledge of forest flora and fauna used for conservation purposes and for the collection of minor forest produce. Rehabilitation measures in cases of displacement should be strengthened. In their case, too, a prevention of Atrocities Act needs to be passed. The communities themselves have been demanding a separate schedule in the Constitution, a separate ministry, advisory committees at the State levels and welfare boards at the

district levels to look after their specific interests. Some nomadic communities are requesting rehabilitation in forest villages with requisite services and infrastructure as done in the State of Madhya Pradesh.

Though they are being termed as tribes by the state, most of them were treated as castes in rural society earlier. They were not considered untouchables, but occupied the bottom positions in the social hierarchy. Since some of them are not covered by any of these categories they are unable to avail of any benefits extended by the state. Hence they belong to the most destitute and underprivileged communities in India today. They continue to face stereotyping and exclusion as thieves and criminals, though they may no longer be considered as 'born' criminals. This is because those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy have since long, even in pre-colonial times, been considered the 'natural' first suspects in the case of crimes. Police harassment to extort 'confessions', and deaths in police custody are some of the common occurrences. There have been cases of public lynching also. Landlessness remains a problem. A good number do not have the necessary papers to prove their citizenship; they do not even have ration cards, not to speak of access to modern education. Even if they manage to get some formal education, getting a job is not easy due to the stigma still attached to their communities. Unable to continue with their traditional occupations or art and entertainment forms which have no space or patronage in a modernised economy, many of them sustain themselves by working as seasonal agricultural labourers, as night watchmen in fields or even as rag pickers. Some, particularly the women, take to casual begging. Due to lack of livelihood options thievery is resorted to or they can be pushed into criminal activities by giving them petty bribes.

Mahasweta Devi and G.N. Devy have done considerable work with this neglected group and have been instrumental in setting up the Denotified and Nomadic Tribals Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG). Its newsletter *Budhan*, named after the Adivasi Budhan Kheria, who was killed while in police custody, is doing its bit to draw attention to the problems faced by these people.

Annexure: List of Notified Scheduled Tribes in South India and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

Excluding the subgroups there are 33 defined Adivasi groups in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. They are:

1. Andh
2. Bagata
3. Bhil
4. Chenchu, Chenchwar (PTG)
5. Gadabas (Bodo and Gutob Gadabas are listed as PTGs)
6. Gond, Naikpod, Rajgond
7. Goudu (in the Agency tracts)
8. Hill Reddis
9. Jatapus
10. Kammara
11. Kattunayakan
12. Kolam (PTG), Mannervarlu
13. Konda Dhoras
14. Konda Kappus
15. Kondareddis (PTG)
16. Khonds, Kodi, Kodhu, Desaya Khonds, Dongria Khonds (PTG), Kuttiya Khonds (PTG), Tikiriya Khonds, Yenity Khonds
17. Kotia, Bentho Oriya, Bartika, Dhulia, Holva, Paiko, Putiya, Sanrona, Sidhopaiko
18. Koya, Goud, Rajah, Rasha Koya, Lingadhari Koya, Kottu Koya, Bine Koya, Rajkoya
19. Kulia
20. Malis
21. Manna Dhora
22. Mukha Dhora, Nooka Dhora
23. Nayaks (in the Agency tracts)
24. Pardhan
25. Porja (Bondo and Khond Porajas are listed as PTGs), Parangiperja (PTG)
26. Reddi Dhoras

27. Rona, Rena
28. Savaras, Kapu Savaras, Maliya Savaras, Khutto Savaras, (Konda Savaras are listed as PTGs)
29. Sugalis, Lambadis
30. Thoti (PTG)
31. Valmiki (in the Agency tracts)
32. Yenadis
33. Yerukulas

The Agency tracts comprising the districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Vizhakapattanam, East Godavari, West Godavari, and Khammam have the biggest Adivasi concentration.

Karnataka

Among the four States, Karnataka with its 50 scheduled Adivasi communities accounts for the highest number. Koragas of Dakshina Kannada district and Jenu Kurubas, concentrated in the districts of Mysore, Chamarajnagar and Kodagu, are classified as 'primitive tribes.'

1. Adiyan
2. Barda
3. Bavacha, Bamcha
4. Bhil, Bhil Garasia, Dholi Bhil, Dungri Bhil, Dungri Garasia, Mewasi Bhil, Rawal Bhil, Tadvi Bhil, Bhagalia, Bhilala, Pawra, Vasava, Vasave
5. Chenchu, Chenchuvar/Chenchwar
6. Chodhara
7. Dubla, Talavia, Halpati
8. Gamit, Gamta, Gavit, Mavchi, Padvi, Valvi
9. Gond, Naikpod, Rajgond
10. Gowdalu
11. Hakkipikki, Harnshikari
12. Hasalaru
13. Irular
14. Iruliga
15. Jenu Kuruba (PTG)
16. Kadu Kuruba

17. Kammara (in Dakshina Kannada district and Kollegal taluk of Chamarajnagar district).
18. Kaniyan, Kanyan (in Kollegal taluk of Chamarajnagar district)
19. Kathodi, Katkari, Dhor Kathodi, Dhor Katkari, Son Kathodi, Son Katkari
20. Kattunayakan
21. Kokna, Kokni, Kukna
22. Koli Dhor, Tokri Koli, Kolcha, Kolgha
23. Konda Kapus
24. Koraga (PTG)
25. Kota
26. Koya, Bhine Koya, Rajkoya
27. Kudiya, Melakudi
28. Kuruba (in Kodagu district)
29. Kurumans
30. Maha Malasar
31. Malaikudi
32. Malasar
33. Malayekandi
34. Maleru
35. Maratha (in Kodagu district)
36. Marati (in Dakshin Kannada district)
37. Meda, Medari, Gauriga, Burud
38. Naikda, Nayaka, Cholivala Nayaka, Kapadia Nayaka, Mota Nayaka, Nana Nayaka, Naik, Nayak, Beda, Bedar, Valmiki
39. Palliyan
40. Paniyan
41. Pardhi, Advichincher, Phanse Pardhi
42. Patelia
43. Rathava
44. Solaga
45. Siddi (in Uttara Kannada district)[5]
46. Sholigaru
47. Toda
48. Varli
49. Vitolia, Kotvalia, Barodia

50. Yerava

Kerala

Kerala, the smallest State in South India, has 14 districts with an Adivasi population of 1.5% of the total population. They are there in all the districts, but with a concentration in the Wayanad, Palakkad and Idukki districts. Not all communities which could have been classified as tribes are included; the official list includes 36 distinct Adivasi communities, which are as follows:[6]

1. Adiyan
2. Arandan
3. Cholanaicken (PTG)
4. Eravallan
5. Hill Pulaya (Mala Pulayan, Kurumba Pulayan, Karavazhi Pulayan, Pamba Pulayan)
6. Irular, Irulan
7. Kadar (Wayanad Kadar) (PTG)
8. Kanikkaran, Kanikkar
9. Karimpalan
10. Kattunayakan (PTG)
11. Kochuvelan
12. Koraga (PTG)
13. Kota (omitted as per Amendment Act 2002)
14. Kudiya, Melakudi
15. Kurichian
16. Kuruman (Mullu Kuruman, Mulla Kuruman, Mala Kuruman)
17. Kurumba/Kurumbar/Kurumban (PTG)
18. Maha Malasar
19. Mala Panickar
20. Malai Arayan/Mala Arayan
21. Malai Pandaram
22. Malai Vedan/Mala Vedan
23. Malakkuravan
24. Malasar
25. Malayan, Nattu Malayan, Konga Malayan (excluding the areas comprising Kasaragod, Kannur, Wayanad and Kozhikode districts)

26. Malayarayar
27. Mannan
28. Mavilan
29. Muthuvan, Mudugar, Muduvan
30. Palleyan, Palliyan, Palliyar, Paliyan
31. Paniyan
32. Ulladan, Ullatan
33. Urali
34. Then Kurumban, Jenu Kurumban
35. Thachanadan, Thachanadan Moopan
36. Vetta Kuruman

Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu has distinct Adivasi communities spread over the entire State but which are concentrated in some districts. They form a little over 1% of the total State population. Though there are demands to include some other communities in this list, at present the following communities are listed:

1. Adiyan
2. Aranadan
3. Eravallan
4. Irular (PTG)
5. Kadar
6. Kammara
7. Kanikaran, Kanikkar
8. Kaniyan, Kanyan
9. Kattunayakan (PTG)
10. Kochu Velan
11. Konda Kapus
12. Kondareddis
13. Koraga
14. Kota (PTG)
15. Kudiya, Melakudi
16. Kurichian
17. Kurumbas (PTG)

18. Kurumans
19. Maha Malasar
20. Malai Arayan
21. Malai Pandarum
22. Malai Vedan
23. Malakkuravan
24. Malasar
25. Malayali
26. Malayekandi
27. Mannan
28. Mudugar, Muduvan
29. Muthuvan
30. Palleyan
31. Palliyan
32. Palliyar
33. Paniyan (PTG)
34. Sholaga
35. Toda (PTG)
36. Urali

One obvious aspect of the above listing is that a number of Adivasi communities are common to all the south Indian States. This is especially so in the cases of Tamil Nadu and Kerala where a good number of the denominations are common to both States. The degree of concentration of such communities varies, with one of the States having the majority population of a particular Adivasi community. This tendency is even more explicit when we come to the central Indian tribal belt, e.g., northern Andhra Pradesh and Odisha or western India where prominent Adivasi communities are even divided up into four or five linguistic groups. As already mentioned, this was very much part of the state policy.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands

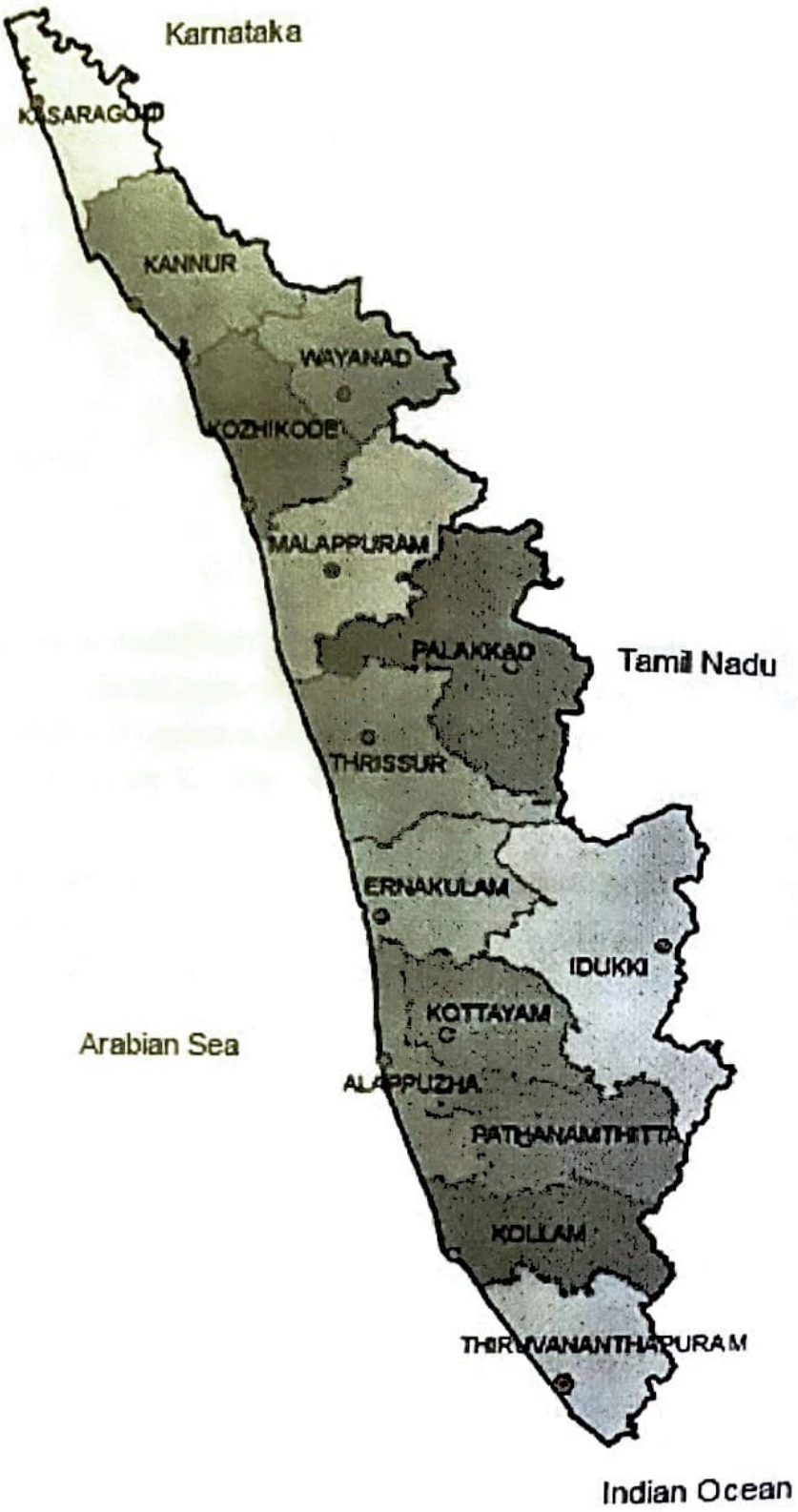
The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are home to some of the most ancient people of the world, and scientists are of the opinion that their gene structures may throw light on the origin of the species. Up to the arrival of colonialists it was a hundred per cent Adivasi region with very little external interaction. Different self-sufficient hunter-gatherer communities had their own demarcated territories or inhabited different islands. With the arrival of colonialists the situation changed drastically because

their policies towards the aboriginals was nothing but genocidal in nature. Several Adivasi communities faced extinction and several others are presently on the verge of extinction. Presently, six Adivasi communities are listed by the Census of India. All except the Nicobarese are listed as PTGs.

1. Andamanese: Chariar, Chari, Kora, Tabo, Bo, Yere, Kede, Bea, Balawa, Bojigiab, Juwai, Kol
2. Jarawa
3. Onge
4. Sentinelese
5. Nicobarese
6. Shompen

Notes

1. In 1872 during the first census carried out by the British rulers these peoples were categorised as 'Primitive Tribes;' in 1891 they were listed as people having a tribal form of religion; as animists in 1901; as tribal animists or following a tribal religion in 1911; as hill and forest tribes in 1921; again as primitive tribes in 1931; and simply as tribes in 1941.
2. These articles coming under fundamental rights prohibit discrimination, restriction or liability of any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. They also guarantee the freedom to move freely and to reside and settle in any part of the country.
3. "The So-called Criminal Tribes" by Rameshwari Nehru. *Harijan*, 26 June 1949.
4. See Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed: Tenuous Lives. *Frontline* 25 February-9 March 2012. Available at http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2904/stories/20120309290409500.htm
5. Of African origin and achieving ST status in 2003 after a sustained struggle, Siddis are a racially discriminated community.
6. The list given here is as per the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 2002 (Act 10 of 2003) vide Part VII – Kerala – Second Schedule notified in the Gazette of India dated 08.01.2003. Some scholars in the field peg the figure higher at 48 or even 53 communities.



District Map of Kerala

4

FIGHTING AGAINST HEAVY ODDS
ADIVASIS IN KERALA

The Adivasi situation is extremely paradoxical in this evergreen, populous State. The many divisions and sub-divisions of the Adivasis are mainly concentrated in three districts of the State, namely Palakkad and Wayanad in the Malabar region and Idukki in the central region, though there is a smattering of them in most districts of the State. Within the districts they are now concentrated in certain pockets like Attappady in Palakkad, in the Wayanad Hills, and in the Agasthyavanam Forest in Thiruvananthapuram district. Again, when we look at the district-wise demographic data it is only in Wayanad that they constitute a significant variable. There is a small group of Adivasis called the Koragas, who hail from Kasaragod district, currently in Kerala; but culturally and linguistically Kasaragod can equally be considered a part of the bordering State of Karnataka. Likewise, Attappady has a lot in common with the bordering Tamil land both culturally and ethnically and has a large Tamil Gounder settler community. Idukki district as a whole is also heavily Tamil-influenced with the majority of the plantation workers being of Tamil origin.

When we say that the Adivasi situation in Kerala is paradoxical, it certainly does not mean that their present situation is something that organically developed to put them into a vicious trap. It is not so. A long period of deliberate marginalisation perpetrated by non-Adivasis is behind their present predicament. They were a self-respecting people with a world view that was nature-friendly, humanistic, and they

had their own system of social management, dialects, and art forms dealing with their history, ethos and problems.

Not all Adivasi communities currently residing within the State are original to the place though most of them are. Some Adivasi communities migrated to still higher regions of the Nilgiri Biosphere which are no longer part of the State of Kerala. Often these migrations occurred for preserving their traditions, beliefs and ways of life, which were under persistent threats from outsiders. The small community of Todas now living in the upper plateau of the Nilgiris are an illustration. Splitting up of Adivasi communities into different language-based States operates as a serious debilitating force on their cultural/linguistic homogeneity besides drastically cutting into their community-level collective bargaining power in Kerala too.

A Historical Note

The oldest engravings on the walls of the rock caves in Edakkal in Wayanad depicting tribal chieftains, elephants and tools hail back in time to pre-literate palaeolithic and megalithic periods of hunting-gathering people, specifically the Mullu Kurumbas of the Nilgiri bio-region, and reflect the spirituality and rituals of those times including so-called devil worship. Every Adivasi community in Kerala is rich in folklore; like all Adivasi communities in India and the world in Kerala, too, they have a rich and varied literary tradition. The enslavement and dispossession process prevented them from developing their languages by creating scripts. To date there have been no attempts to develop any script to their languages and this operates as a major handicap in any Adivasi children's educational programme. Hence there are no written historical records but the oral tradition and evolved audio-visual forms of expression are very rich. There are numerous songs, musical instruments and dance forms. Their dance forms, like the harvest dance of the Paniyas of Wayanad, are exquisitely graceful and organically linked to production processes. Their songs describe the creation myths and relate stories about their past and the process of dispossession.

Themes of social systems akin to what can be termed as primitive communism and autonomous tribal republics can be culled from their orature. The story of Mahabali relates the demise of an egalitarian social order in which all were equal, all were honest, and all were prosperous. This story was so deep-rooted in the psyche of the people that it became the basis of the national festival of Malayalees, Onam. Its origin lies in the egalitarianism of Adivasi society, the original features

of which have been replaced with diametrically opposite characteristics long back; and the festival itself has become a festival of rank consumerism with Brahminical features. But the original theoretical idea of the festival still remains in the minds of the people. The institution of slavery in Malabar is attributed to Parasuraman, who is said to have organised the agrestic slave castes when he handed over the country to the Brahmin clans. Of course, there may be many Parasuramans and Ramans involved in the process of myth-making and hence an exact dating is irrelevant and futile. What we can safely surmise is that it arose out of the conquest of the original inhabitants of the soil by the invaders and settlers from the north during the Vedic period.

Every aboriginal group, all over the world, is a gold mine of traditional wisdom and culture. Being consistently victimised in the course of their struggles for survival their traditions and culture were forcibly prevented from organic development limiting them mostly to oral expressions. In Kerala, Wayanad being the cradle of Adivasi culture is especially rich on this count. The oral historical records are also substantiated by archaeological relics. Unfortunately, mainly because professional archaeologists and anthropologists are non-Adivasis, no serious attempts to unravel the relics and oral records, and weave together their fascinating social history are being made. Malayalam, a highly Sanskritised language that is not theirs, is imposed on them and this imposition has succeeded in obliterating their own identity to a large extent. Nevertheless, their historical myths have survived all odds and the stories that emerge are very interesting indeed.

There is a tendency among the so-called modern or mainstream people to dismiss myths as irrational and make-believe stories not to be taken seriously even for study purposes. Going back to myths is viewed scornfully and ridiculed. Let us take, for example, the case of Puthadi Kota (fort) in Wayanad. There are very clear archaeological remains and plenty of oral literature concerning this fort, which are not being preserved now. According to the oral tradition of the Adivasis, Puthadi Kota was once the headquarters of a thriving Adivasi republic based on the democratic participation of different Adivasi gothrams (clans) comprising the entire Wayanad and other significant parts of the Nilgiri Biosphere. This republic was smashed by an alliance of plains chieftains from Kerala through treachery and mass massacre of the original inhabitants and their chiefs and warriors. This most probably occurred during the late medieval period.

According to folklore a plain's chieftain wormed his way into the good books of the chieftain of the Adivasis and dishonestly arranged a marriage between him and the daughter of the latter under the pretext of love and forming a political

alliance. Adivasis do not carry arms during festive occasions. In the midst of the festivities the false bridegroom's fully armed minions launched a sudden murderous attack killing a large number of unarmed Adivasi warriors, subjugated the fort and destroyed it. The Adivasi control of Wayanad was ended in this way. It is something that makes you draw a parallel with the brutal Spanish and Portuguese murder sprees in South America.

A good section of the Adivasis who escaped the wholesale massacre ran away to dense jungles and within a few generations became jungle folk surviving on hunting and food gathering. Such people have survived to date. Yet another section of the Adivasis who remained was forcibly converted into slaves of the new lords foisted over them by the conquerors.[1] Adiyans and Paniyans are examples of this latter category while Kattunayakans are examples of the former.

Or take the myth of Karinthandan which came up at the beginning of colonialism in Malabar. According to folklore, the British were desperate to find a convenient path, visualising a motorable road, to the heartland of Wayanad from Kozhikode. Then they understood that only a knowledgeable son of the soil would be able to show them the path. Accordingly, they coaxed or bribed an Adivasi youth called Karinthandan to help them. The innocent Adivasi showed them the pass which is now known as Thamarassery pass. But instead of rewarding him the white explorers killed him at the entry point of Wayanad called Lakkidi. Perhaps, the spirit of 'discovery' was so burning that the explorers turned psychopath murderers! There is a memorial for Karinthandan at this place which is a sturdy iron chain hung from a giant tree. This is now a tourist attraction but the Adivasis venerate the place. For them he is a folk hero who was treacherously killed by the enemies. There are many other historical myths concerning Adivasi history in Wayanad which will need a separate narrative of their own.

The Kurichiar rebellion occurred and lasted for nearly ten years immediately after the defeat of the Pazhashi-led rebellion against the British colonialists. The Raja, though he was ready for compromise with the English if his looted wealth was given back, was earmarked for destruction mainly because of his known plans for aligning with Tipu Sultan of Mysore, who in turn was making efforts to align with France and Napoleon Bonaparte. The English were sorely afraid that the war going on in Europe will spread to India making the annihilation of future allies of France in India a necessary condition for their survival here. The Anglo-Mysore wars were crucial for the survival of the English in India and any future allies of the Sultan were also marked for destruction. The small-time Raja was one such element for them and hence there was no compromise in their agenda. They

provoked his feudal mindset by looting family jewels, and the condition set by him that he will cooperate if the family jewels are returned, was rejected scornfully forcing war. The Kurichiars, a warrior subgroup of the Adivasis of Wayanad, skilled in archery, who had been given gifts of land and money by local kings for their heroic participation in local wars, joined the fight on the Raja's side making it difficult for the colonialists to score an easy victory over him in spite of the defection of most of his feudal allies. They had to sweat for a few years before the Raja and his close lieutenants could be cornered because the Adivasis could provide unassailable shelters. The Raja committed suicide and many fighters were hanged or blown from the mouths of canons.

A good number of Kurichiar warriors escaped to the jungles and fought a guerrilla war for ten years. It is this anti-imperialist war that has come to be known as the Kurichiar rebellion. This Kurichiar rebellion in the first decades of the nineteenth century was an uncompromising one and hence has to be viewed as distinct from the Raja-led fight. For the Kurichiars it was a matter of life and death fight with no conditions unlike the Raja's fight. Initially they fought with bows and arrows, sickles and axes against the colonial guns but scored a signal victory by attacking and totally destroying a colonial camp, killing the entire English force and capturing all the weapons. This gave an even more serious turn to the fight and the Company was forced to call in reinforcements from Madras and Calcutta. The Kurichiars were alone in their fight while the English had enormous backing of both human and material resources. They could sustain the fight for so long mainly because they were waging a guerrilla war which means the terms were largely set by them. The Kurichiars were utilising hit-and-run tactics against the modern army of the English which had the feudal allies at their back. The Raja was sustained by the Kurichiars in the first phase of the fight, but the Kurichiars were up against the English as well as their toadies who had betrayed the Raja too. It was a highly unequal fight and it is difficult to think that the Kurichiars were unaware of the ground reality.

The Kurichiars were ultimately defeated and savage reprisals were executed against them. It was only after the conclusion of this fight that the English could consolidate their grip over the hills and major economic activities like opening up of extensive plantations could be launched in earnest. Severe restrictions were enforced by them on all the Adivasis: their hunting and forest rights were severely curtailed, carrying of arms became punishable, they were degraded and victimised on all counts. All the Adivasis were officially treated as suspicious characters to be perpetually kept under jack boots and punished severely for the smallest of offences. Any petty crime got automatically transferred to their shoulders making

them into alibis for petty criminals who migrated to this region during the Second World War and later. Even now labelling them in this fashion is very convenient for others. The defeat of the rebellion which came after their loss of political power pushed them into an abyss making it very difficult for them to recover. This was probably why they were not able to resist the onslaught of hordes of migrants during the mid-twentieth century. They lacked the will to resist such mass onslaughts.

The martyrdom of Karinthandan is certainly an important landmark in the Adivasi history of Wayanad and the history of the whole region itself. His martyrdom symbolised the opening up of all Adivasi areas in the region (which means the entire Nilgiri Biosphere) to a colonial plantation economy of tea, coffee, cinchona, pepper, pine and eucalyptus. The upper grass lands were converted to quick growing water guzzling tree plantations used as fuel for tea production and other purposes. No doubt, it was the vanquishing of the earlier Adivasi Veda tribal republic that had planted feudal elements, the Nair chieftains, in the region. And it was the very same feudal system that got a severe jolt with the coming up of large-scale commercial agriculture rearing cash crops directly owned by colonial planters, who sought to practise agriculture with capitalist features. There is some evidence of pepper plantations as early as the fourteenth century, but the feudal elements were mostly content with easily available income from the forests and slave labour of the Adivasis. The newly-arrived colonial planters, on the contrary, sought to raise a highly lucrative export-oriented plantation economy based on the production relation of wage labour and capital. The large majority of feudal elements were content to extend full co-operation to the colonial planters after the defeat of Pazhashi Raja and the subsequent Kurichiar rebellion.

One important characteristic that can be gleaned from this folklore of blood and defeat is the utterly differing world views of the Adivasis and their attackers. Details of the social system of the defeated Adivasis are yet to be convincingly derived, but the details of the social system that replaced the Adivasi system are fairly well known. It was a system that was based on feudal relations of production and it was this system that was sought to be undermined by the colonial intervention, though the colonialists also recognised the political need to maintain the feudal elements as their social base making the undermining process half-hearted. Moreover, the strength of the earlier social system can be understood from the widely held belief of the Adivasis that it was through base treachery and alliance of feudal chieftains from outside the region that the Adivasis could be defeated, which goes to show that the British were genuinely afraid of defeat in a straight battle for conquest/supremacy. This tells a lot about the innate strength and moral power of the Adivasis against the cowardly tactics of their enemies. At the same

time, it is quite logical to assume that their economic system not being based on rapacious plunder of Nature and fellow beings set obvious limitations on surplus accumulation, which makes it nearly impossible to maintain a parasitic standing army for any sustained period of time. There was a clash of opposing world views in which the humane side lost out.

Many archaeological studies have been made on the megalithic rock caves in Wayanad but nothing on more recent history. It is perfectly understandable why the scions of the invaders and mass killers are unwilling to study the relics and literature on this aspect of Adivasi history in Wayanad, while the Adivasis nostalgically remember these events in their songs and dances till today. They do not as yet have such researchers and funds for conducting research. Let us work towards that and hope that sensitised researchers too will take up this topic and reconstruct the history of the fall of Adivasis in Wayanad.

Immigration and Slavery

Jains from Karnataka had been the earliest migrants to Wayanad and other parts of the Nilgiri Biosphere around the 12th century CE.[2] They introduced eco-friendly settled agriculture and adopted indigenous exotic varieties of paddy avoiding deforestation to the maximum extent possible. Few, very few, of such varieties of paddy still survive and they are cultivated mainly by landowning Adivasis on a small-scale and by a few Jain landowners on a relatively larger scale. Some of them engaged in trade also. They were followed by the Chettis of Karnataka who were also traders. When the Chettis also started engaging in agriculture too Muslims came in as traders and agriculturists. All these migrants introduced the concept of private property in land, a concept negating communal control of common resources and thoroughly alien to the indigenous peoples. Legal infrastructures were put in place seriously jeopardising the ancient natural rights and status of the original inhabitants. When land and labour power became commodities with the former enjoying legal safeguards the Adivasis lost out because of the simple reason that the whole game was totally alien to them. Commercial transactions used alien language and alien money. Monetisation of economic exchanges using monetary units unknown to them placed them at a great disadvantage. The new arrivals failed to understand their culture. A manufactured cultural untouchability acted greatly to the advantage of the new elements because it could be effectively used as a powerful tool for marginalising the original peoples. Not just that, they also came to be regarded as 'primitive', uncouth and ignorant less-than-humans. Incessant repetition of this approach, still an ongoing process, is certainly bound to affect the

collective psyche of the suppressed people. At the same time, only they knew the terrain and hence they were very much needed for the others to generate surplus.

Before the advent of the British the Adivasis in Wayanad were bought and sold as slaves for paddy cultivation. They were auctioned at the annual festival of the Valliyurkavu temple for a period of one year to one particular landlord (Aerthayil 2008: 30). Slavery was abolished by the colonial Indian administration during the governor-generalship of William Bentick, but it continued in the plantation areas, though the planters were not directly buying slaves. The system could continue because of the in-migration of a good number of middle men together with their muscle men whose job was to procure a sufficient number of labourers for the plantations. Thus the Adivasis came to be subjected to multilayered exploitation by the feudal elements, labour contractors and colonial planters. Moneylending and migrant moneylenders—like Tamil Chettis—made their appearance from this period onwards, and they have now come to be established as a powerful economic bloc in the financial market. In the early period of the plantation economy these moneylenders often doubled up as labour contractors also. Karinthandan's martyrdom heralded all these developments.

What is important in this context is that the massive colonial economic intervention did not fully succeed in uprooting the feudal slave-based social and economic system. The feudal elements continued to buy slaves and the colonialists turned a blind eye to this gross illegality because the feudals were their social base. Moreover, they themselves indirectly practised slavery by resorting to moneylenders and labour contractors for sufficient supply of labour power. The moneylender-contractor nexus was indenturing labour through advancing money and in this way supplying workers to the plantations. The Mother Goddess deity of the Adivasis was being used as witness to bond contracts. The pattern was the same in all the areas where the colonial planters opened up big plantations. They exported labour in this fashion from the Tamil land to Ceylon, Burma and Malaysia. The term 'Assam coolie' found a place in the lexicon. The condition of the original inhabitants became a lot more miserable. It is remarkable to note that slavery in one form or the other survived even up to the 1960s in this 'progressive' State.

Modern-day oppression of these nature-friendly people, who have a symbiotic relationship with nature, started with the colonial planters, who pushed them to the most inhospitable and infertile mountains after grabbing the fertile slopes and valleys for establishing plantations. Gradually, a large section was inducted as plantation labour, which was nothing but indentured (bonded) labour. Subsequently, there was a large-scale in-migration by predominantly small farmers

hailing largely from the land scarce central Travancore region to the highlands. Starting in the 1940s, the migration itself was catalysed by the economic factors engendered by the Second World War, which marked the increased deprivation of the small and marginal peasants in the midlands. The acute dependency of Kerala as a whole on outside areas for basic food is by no means new. The Second World War brought it out in stark relief. The conquest of Burma by Japan cut off the rice supplies. It was the popularisation of cassava (tapioca) under the initiative of the king of Travancore and the migration of peasants that avoided a Bengal Famine-like situation. Cassava became a staple food item for the poor and in combination with fish it was a sort of balanced diet for them. The migrants exported cassava cultivation to the hills. Also, the wild growth of black pepper was greatly supplemented and systematised by the import of seedlings from Travancore where pepper was already an export commodity. Wayanad was highly suited for growing pepper and it remains so to date. Wayanadan pepper has its own distinctly high position in the hierarchy of world pepper production.

Hundreds of thousands of peasant families migrated in waves to these jungle areas, under the nominal control of feudal chieftains. The first wave hit the Wayanad and Idduki ranges, and the second wave hit the Kasaragod and Kannur high ranges. An impoverished Raja was one of the first migrants in the 1930s. He occupied more than 20,000 hectares of land in the Alakkode division of North Malabar, but he was by no means interested in cultivating the land. The feudal chieftains, who had vast areas of forests under their control, were also least interested in agriculture and the land-hungry settlers descended on the magnificent hills like locusts, procuring land from the non-cultivating feudal chieftains (who often did not even know where their land begins or ends) at a nominal cost. The Adivasis were thus driven out from their traditional habitats into further inhospitable terrain. These innocents were ignorant about legal niceties and could easily be duped by the wily settlers. Whatever fertile land the Adivasis still possessed was taken from them either through cheating or by offering paltry cash and commodities like arrack, tobacco, salt and dried fish. They were made to put their thumb impressions on blank papers, which were converted into sale documents by the settlers. The Adivasis had no notion of proprietary rights; in fact, they considered the land that they lived on as their heritage for centuries. Those who refused to be duped were forcibly driven out. The migration was an absolutely brutal one.

The pioneers in dispossessing the Adivasis from their land, the British planters, had occupied vast tracts of fertile land in Munnar in the Idduki district for the cultivation of tea, cardamom and coffee whose inheritors are now the Tata business group. The migrant settlers continued the cash crop plantation economy initiated

by the colonial planters. The Adivasis, who had already been marginalised and pushed out from the fertile valleys by the feudal chieftains and colonial planters, were pushed further uphill, and ultimately they had no way but to become serf labour for the migrants. The migrants were poor to begin with, but they were hard working and possessed the know-how of making the forest land yield to systematic agriculture.

The local indigenous people who were strangers to law courts, police stations, legal documents, Malayalam and English, plastics, and cosmetics got lost when the settlers, most of who came with stinking dried fish and cassava sticks, overwhelmed their land. People with healthy sex lives were perverted with poison liquor, cheap trinkets and synthetic clothes. Those who still refused to fall prostrate were handled with brute force. Many of the old settlers' houses even now display the long bamboo poles that were used to drive the Adivasis out of their habitats. The settlers displayed all the vigour reminiscent of the behaviour of the whites from Europe (many with a criminal background) towards the original inhabitants of the Americas and Australia.

As can be deduced from the Jnanapith award winning novel *Vizhakanyaka* (Poison maid) by S.K. Pottekkad, though the majority of the settlers were poor peasants forced out of their original habitats by economic forces combined with petty political victimisation, a good number of criminals also made their way into the hills to escape the law, and even the poor peasants imbibed criminal attitudes towards the Adivasis. The State and Central governments encouraged such migration under the specious logic of 'grow more food' because the country as a whole was facing acute food scarcity at that time and socio-political unrest centred on food was threatening to undermine the fragile political independence.

The migration process got intensified in the 1950s assuming its own momentum. The migration that happened in Wayanad before and after the Second World War was quantitatively and qualitatively different from the earlier migrations and as such had much more devastating impact on the original inhabitants. By the 1960s, many of the early migrants had become middle-level plantation owners and a distinct class structure had evolved. The earlier methods of using force, false promises and cheap alcohol, or sheer deceit, were continued for grabbing Adivasi land. By the 1970s, thousands of hectares of Adivasi land had already passed into the 'legal' ownership of the big settlers, institutions like the church and into the hands of the government as reserved forests and wildlife sanctuaries. The end result of this chicanery is that today the Adivasis of Kerala are left with no land for viable agriculture and are a landless and most deprived lot. Most of them have become

agricultural labourers, blurring the economic distinction between them and the other Dalits. Indebtedness is especially high among them, and consequently, they cannot be called free labourers, unlike the traditional Dalits. They are being exploited in a multifaceted manner, and the depletion of the forest resources due to heavy deforestation (itself a result of the massive migration and State policies) does not give them a chance to resort to traditional livelihood patterns.

The Land Question

The background to the Adivasi question in Kerala today, which is essentially a land question, is very interesting. It is a State which created political waves in India and abroad by democratically electing a Communist government for the first time in the history of the world immediately after the State was formed in 1956. After the Communist Party of India withdrew the Telangana armed agrarian struggle in 1951 and embraced the thesis that the Indian National Congress and its leadership embodied in Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, represented the progressive national bourgeoisie, it could cash in on the long and violent period of struggles in the State. With the landless oppressed castes as the spearhead, promises concerning land reforms could polarise the anti-landlord sections of the population to its side. Moreover, the role played by the CPI in the successful struggle for the formation of the State on a linguistic basis got the support of significant sections of the middle classes, and this coupled with the slogan of "land to the tiller"[3] assured it the winning vote banks. There were promises galore for the benefit of Adivasis, too, which included recognition of their land rights and a plethora of welfare measures for their uplift like universal education with equity. In fact, this promised programme of the CPI was in content the same as that of the ruling Congress Party, where it was labelled as "Nehruvian socialism" and projected as its populist face.

The Communist ministry was dismissed by the Central government within a short period when land reforms and educational reforms were mooted by it. In fact, both land and educational reforms mooted by the CPI in Kerala were no different from those promised by the Congress Party, but the fear that they may be implemented was the cause for dismissal. It was a severe jolt to those in the CPI who had tied themselves to the ideas of peaceful and parliamentary means to bring about socialism, which was equated with public ownership of the forces of production. The land reforms envisaged by the CPI did not aim at radical redistribution of land but only at abolition of tenancy which left the agricultural workers and Adivasis out of its scope. The real tillers of the soil were promised

hutments of five to ten cents of land, while the big plantations which were all on Adivasi land were left outside the land reforms because they were classified as industrial agriculture, thus leaving the Adivasis and plantation workers, often one and the same, where they were. Dalits and Adivasis and in general the toiling masses were betrayed by the envisaged land reforms, which were the only reforms implemented in the State by the subsequent governments. Dalit writers have of late repeatedly pointed out this cheating, although social democrats of all hues hail the Kerala land reforms as 'historic', 'revolutionary', etc.

The paradox, however, is that the 'progressive' land reform measures introduced by the communists became a factor in the loss of land by the Adivasis, for example in Wayanad. Having been cheated into indebtedness through the operation of provision and liquor shops run by the immigrants the Adivasis began leasing out their land to them at rock-bottom rates. If they were not able to pay back the debt, which had been calculated interest upon interest, they would be forced to surrender their land. Moreover, according to the land reform law, the tenants would be entitled to get the land after a certain period of time and after paying nominal compensation in installments. What happened then was that the wily settlers got legal ownership of the land that belonged to the Adivasi 'landlords,' who were forced into the position of becoming coolies on their own land. The Adivasi 'landlords' often did not even get the compensation due to them because of the complicated processes involved (Aerthayil 2008: 38)!

In the further course of Kerala's modern history the conditions of the Adivasis got further compounded. In other words, their situation steadily turned bad to worse. The Constitutional provisions of reservations in education and public sector employment no doubt enabled sections of Dalits to enhance their position, but in a relative sense their overall position remained backward. The position of Adivasis is different. Both in absolute and relative terms their overall position has deteriorated. This is not to say that there is absolutely no class differentiation among them. Some of them are small landowners (mainly the Mullu Kuruman and the Kurichian), but the vast majority remains landless or owns unsustainable pieces of mostly uncultivable land in inaccessible hilly areas. The Adiyans and Paniyans are largely agricultural labourers. The Urali Kuruman, an artisan group, has also largely joined the rank of agrarian labour. It is only the Kattunayakan, classified as PVTG, who almost entirely still depend on forests for their livelihood, either as forest workers or as collectors of NTFP. Some of them have got government or semi-government employment, but most of them are unemployed or underemployed.

Presently, the situation is such that a few Adivasi groups are almost on the verge of extinction. The Koragas of Kasaragod district are a case in point. Deprived of their traditional, mainly forest dependent means of livelihood, and the resultant malnutrition, starvation, deadly diseases and heavy alcoholism, their death rate has increased alarmingly. If drastic steps are not taken, they are liable to disappear from the soil of Kerala. The Cholanaicken community similarly shows dwindling numbers. In Attappady in Palakkad district, there are hundreds of 'unwed mothers' due to exploitation by non-Adivasi settlers, and a juridically totally dry area is flowing with illicit spirit. Here too, starvation deaths and the spread of deadly diseases mainly due to gross undernourishment have become a common phenomenon. Even primary health facilities are often not available to Adivasi settlements not to mention facilities for handling 'modern' ailments like cancer, which have become rampant in the plantation sector of the hills. Though primary education is near universal in the State, it is rare that an Adivasi boy or girl reaches the school. Their drop-out rate is high. Sometimes the school is as far as 20-25 kms and the teachers are mostly non-Adivasis ignorant of Adivasi dialects and culture.

By all these means they have become reduced to such an insignificant section of the total population that no political party is seriously interested in them as vote banks. But it has come to light that during elections political parties have engaged in capturing hamlets and keeping them under siege with supply of food and hooch for the sake of their votes. Nevertheless, in terms of numerical and economic power, forming as they do only one per cent of the total population, they of course stand in no comparison to the settlers. Predictably enough, due to the game plans of electoral politics, the interests of the settlers get priority over justice and fair-dealing in relation to them. Even in Wayanad where they form one-fifth of the total population they can win an election only in the constituency reserved for them. Thus indifference on the part of the parliamentary parties is a continuing phenomenon dictated by the dynamics of parliamentary politics.

The economic, social and moral standards of these people have plummeted. The future of these erstwhile forest dwellers and forest workers is becoming darker and darker with every passing day because the problem of land distribution for sustainable living has not been resolved despite welfare and NGO activities involving crores of rupees. The image that powerfully strikes a sensitised outsider who looks at the Adivasi situation in Kerala is that they are being shamelessly exploited and oppressed as an 'unwanted' people.

Land Struggles

Most of the struggles waged by the Adivasis in Kerala have been around the land question. Out of the three districts of Adivasi concentration, Idukki and Wayanad are mountainous cash crop rich districts in the rolling hills of the Western Ghats and both have undergone tremendous demographic changes during the last 50-60 years. This is especially so in the case of Wayanad. Here we will focus on the struggles waged in Wayanad.

From being a thinly-populated Adivasi majority area even during the 1940s, they have become an inconsequential minority now, coming to hardly 20% of the total population of this district. The history of Adivasis in Wayanad is one of continuous struggles for survival in which they have lost out to outsiders, but they are still on the struggle front. This has been the case from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period. From being the controllers of this fertile land they have become utter destitutes, at least the vast majority of them. Economically, they are dispossessed by the new entrants on the scene. The essence of the conflict involving the settlers, government and the Adivasis is the land question.

This plight of the original people has given rise to modern-day protests. In the 1960s itself they had organised themselves into the Wayanad Adivasi Swayam Sevak Sangham (WASSS). It used various means such as picketing, dharnas and satyagrahas to achieve their aims such as exemption of stamp duty in civil courts and restoration of alienated land. The leading leftist party, the CPI (M) organised the lowest rungs of the Adivasis, the Paniyans and Adiyans, into a trade union of agricultural workers (Karshaka Thozhilali Union) in 1968 and agitations were waged on economic demands and to fight the bonded labour system. It also used the methods of dharnas and satyagrahas.

Violent political activism started amongst them during the early 1970s. During this period, the non-parliamentary communists tried to unite them and launched struggles to regain their traditional rights, but these were nipped in the bud by the state. After the attacks on the police stations in Tellichery and Pulpally (both in Malabar), *Peruman* (chief) Varghese, himself an organiser of a trade union of agricultural workers, organised the Adivasis in and around the Tirunelli forests on a political platform and launched a course of armed actions. These were waged within the framework of the programme of the then existing CPI (ML). It was an offensive fight, and the first casualty was a notorious landlord, who could rightfully be called a savage bandit chief having close linkages with ruling politicians and law and order authorities. Among the black acts committed by him, he and his henchmen had sliced off the breasts of an Adivasi woman. He was beheaded under

the leadership of the Adivasis, and some more militant actions followed upon this. The state established police camps all over the area and let loose massive repression. Varghese was captured, horribly tortured, tied to a pole and shot dead. Repression was all-round. The Adivasis, left without any leadership, could be cowed down. The women were raped, men were maimed. The memory of Varghese as a *Peruman* remains alive among the Adivasis to this day. This attempt was made to regain their lost prestige, and self-respect but it failed without sinking any serious roots in the soil. A visible result was the improvement in connectivity in the region and the enlargement and modernisation of the police machinery. Another result was the entry of different political parties including the Hindu right-wing Jana Sangh among the Adivasis. These political parties operated among different Adivasi communities, which meant that party political schisms came into being among them.

It took quite some time for the Adivasis to stand up again. They increasingly started realising that only they could protect their legitimate interests that belong to the realm of basic human rights, and which is ultimately political in nature. During the 1980s and '90s a new ferment became obvious. The rights of the indigenous peoples (which are endorsed by the United Nations) came to the fore. The central slogan now was, "return Adivasi land to the Adivasis," and several organised efforts are being made along these lines. The Adivasi Ekopana Samithi (Adivasi Unity Forum) was formed under the leadership of Ms. C.K. Janu, an earlier leftist activist belonging to the most deprived section of Adiyas, and disappointed with the CPI (M)'s avoidance of taking on specifically Adivasi issues. Through this organisation the demand for the restoration of their traditional lands was raised which meant dispossession of those who have illegally occupied Adivasi land and subsequently manipulated legal ownership. Despite their small numbers the Adivasis could make a State-wide stir, which is still continuing, though it has lost its initial momentum. Their struggles enjoy the support of democratic, progressive sections throughout the State and of the different CPI (ML) factions because of the explicit human rights angle.

Numerous struggles during the 1990s on the land question came to a spectacular flash in the State capital in November, 2001, when an Adivasi front called Gothra Mahasabha (lit. Adivasi Parliament) led by C.K. Janu and M. Geethanandan launched a militant agitation on the Secretariat premises. The focus in this particular agitation was the question of land distribution to the most deprived Adivasi groups and sections. As their land was grabbed by others and they are landless they threatened to occupy the Secretariat land, and Janu, in a press conference, declared the Adivasis would cut the Secretariat to pieces. Dalits and traditional

fish workers joined hands with the Adivasis and the struggle also enjoyed solidarity from some of the democratic elements across the State, particularly progressive youth. The government cowed down and declared a compromise, accepting many of their demands, especially the one regarding providing land to all landless Adivasi families. On the understanding that restitution of productive resources would be made available without any significant lapse of time and that the Fifth Schedule would be implemented in Adivasi areas the Gothra Mahasabha called off the struggle, and after dismantling the sheds in front of the Secretariat, went back home. The agitators went back with some sort of hope, but were determined to continue the struggle in new forms if the promises were not fulfilled. The government was acting under pressure and was bargaining for time, as subsequent events proved.

The Gothra Mahasabha was not idle. It was planning to organise on a wider and more militant scale but did not really know how to go about it by taking the civil society also into confidence. In the meantime, the government was expecting that the pressure would slide down on its own, again took a callous attitude by indefinitely postponing the resolution of outstanding issues, thereby betraying its own promises. When the situation showed no tangible improvement towards restitution, the Adivasis resolved on direct action. Different Adivasi organisations including those linked with political parties began to occupy forest and government land in various parts of the State. The most prominent of these land occupations was the one in 2003 when they occupied a part of the Muthanga Wild Game Sanctuary, which they claimed as ancestral forest land. A hundred and thousands Adivasi men, women and children started living there in makeshift huts declaring the sanctuary as an Adivasi self-rule area under the constitutional provisions. Although Muthanga was supposed to be a wildlife sanctuary, eucalyptus trees had been planted in it on a large-scale for the cheap consumption of the Birlas' Gwalior Rayons factory located at Mavoor in Malappuram.

The struggle soon took on a high voltage character with opinions for and against the Adivasi action becoming strident. The government adopted a wait-and-watch approach by not mooting any idea of dialogue and political settlement. The Adivasis controlled the entry and exit of the area and instituted their own security system. The whole area became tension-ridden and environmental apologists of the tourism model of 'development' (the entire district of Wayanad was declared a 'tourism' district in the early 1970s) began to howl about the destruction of nature by the Adivasis. The situation was building up for a confrontation between the state and Adivasis. Provocations were there from the side of the police and forest officials. In the process a police constable who was accused of spying was killed.

The massive well-armed police force kept in readiness immediately launched a systematic and massive attack on the Adivasis. There was firing and indiscriminate brutality. This brutality was not confined to Muthanga alone but was extended to all the Adivasi settlements in the whole State under the pretext of looking for the killers of the policeman. In fact, Muthanga became the alibi for an all-out attack on the Adivasis in the entire State.

The manner of the state action clearly revealed the calculated aspect. It was an attack aimed at permanently debilitating the Adivasis as a whole so that they would find it very difficult to articulate their grievances in any militant form in future. Though killing was confined to Muthanga, thousands were maimed in police brutalities, and a large number of actual and potential activists were trapped in prolonged legal wrangles which they simply could not afford. Even the firing in Muthanga on 19th February 2003 was aimed at not making a large number of martyrs but to maim as many as possible. Even the skulls of breast feeding babies were deliberately broken by police lathis. Many children suffered from eye-related problems due to overexposure to tear gas. The leadership was nabbed just within a few days of the police action, horribly tortured, and jailed for waging war against the state.

Though the state acted with calculated brutality, some carrots also followed. This came in the form of limited land distribution. Of course, there was no question of restoring erstwhile Adivasi land. But some of the most destitute Adivasis were offered land and resettlement in other areas. Adivasis had rejected this proposal earlier but under the changed circumstances many of them accepted it, though the land offered was often scattered and not as a village or hamlet, and generally of the uncultivable type. The fact remains that many of them became landowners though on a much lower level than what had been demanded. Instead of five acres it became one acre or even less. For the totally deprived this can be characterised as a partial economic success, though it is doubtful that they can even extract bare minimum sustenance from such land pieces. This means their economic status as landless agricultural labour remains basically unchanged; the only gain being that now some of them have a secure place to raise their huts.

Yet another result of the Muthanga episode is the more vociferous jumping in of different political parties into the Adivasi arena. The most prominent among them is the main social democratic party, the CPI (M). These parties formed their own Adivasi platforms and some of them started agitating for ameliorative measures. In fact, some of their agitations have been partial economic successes. Their focus is on the land issue. Large-scale estates earmarked for settlement of

landless Adivasis came in for special attention by these political parties and they gained from such efforts. For example, it was a gain when C.K. Janu of the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha recently collaborated with a Hindu right-wing political party on the electoral front. The BJP and other Sangh Parivar outfits like the Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra have been trying hard to gain space in the State also by espousing some Adivasi issues while giving them an anti-religious minorities' thrust.

Muthanga marks a turning point in Adivasi politics in Kerala. Now there is greater general awareness about the state of affairs of Adivasis in Kerala. Their history of expropriation, which also means the history of the prosperity and consumerism of the cash crop sector of Kerala precipitated by this expropriation, is also better known. It has become more difficult to get away with atrocities against Adivasis after Muthanga. The visibility of the problems of Adivasis is much higher now. That Muthanga has given a boost to their self-respect as a distinct people who still have a fighting spirit is by itself an achievement. Muthanga made it evident that they cannot be a forgotten people. This is more so because the leadership and mass base of the struggle was composed of the most deprived sections and subgroups among the Adivasis themselves.

An interesting position taken by the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha and its chief leader is worth noting. Janu stated clearly that if they were given good cultivable land in sufficient quantity they would change the food habits of Malayalees into healthy ones. They will cultivate organic vegetables and feed the population with non-poisonous, clean food. This is a very important point. More than ninety per cent of the daily food basket of Malayalees comes from outside, and the dependency for meat, vegetables and cereals is simply appalling. The vegetables that come to Kerala from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are saturated with deadly insecticides and pesticides apart from having a low shelf life and a proper study is bound to bring out the highly possible strong linkage between cancer, which has become endemic in Kerala, and poison food. The cash crops-growing districts of the State are more prone to cancer; and there are several villages in Wayanad where every household is cursed at least with one cancer patient. What is important to note is that it is not just the foodstuffs coming from outside but what little is grown here for the market is equally poisonous. The Adivasis still uphold traditional healthy processes of production wherever they have land. The fragrant, high nutrition, medicinal and other more hardy than hybrids indigenous rice varieties of Wayanad are now cultivated mainly by the Adivasis and this gene bank is being used by other farmers too. Empowerment of Adivasis with forces of production is not only good for them but positive for the whole society when we look at it from this angle.

One criticism of the Muthanga episode that came from apparent well-wishers of Adivasi rights is that the choice of a protected forest area for occupation was misplaced or short-sighted. Actually it is this criticism that is misplaced. The Gothra Mahasabha had an understanding with the government and it was the responsibility of the latter to honour the agreement. As the government proved unwilling to recover the expropriated land of the Adivasis it was betraying the agreement; and if the Adivasis had encroached upon the presently privately held expropriated land it would have led to violence between people that would have done great harm to the cause. Of course, the large estates do possess large acreages of illegally occupied land, but to occupy them would have clearly been a premature move and the resourceless Adivasis would not have been able to withstand the backlash. But when the conflict was directed at the state, which stood in the position of betrayer, the political gains are significant even if the Adivasis were not able to hold on to the land under government control. Moreover, large amounts of alienated land are in the custody of poor and middle farmers who themselves are groaning under the weight of debts. Even when the Gothra Mahasabha was demanding restoration of their land they were clear on the point that the farmers occupying their land should be resettled on the surplus land available elsewhere. It would have been certainly political imbecility or adventurism to attempt to dispossess these small farmers and thus create a deadly split between Adivasis and non-Adivasis. The Adivasis were demanding their constitutionally guaranteed rights and it was the responsibility of the state, which claims to represent them also, to facilitate the same. Hence we can say their tactics were politically correct.

Muthanga is a wild game sanctuary, essentially a tourist destination. Adivasis with their music and dance forms are considered as a tourism commodity with their art forms reduced to capsule forms for the consumption of tourists, Indian and international. It is certainly a perversion when human beings and their culture are subject to ogling by leisure-loving parasitic people who claim to be 'advanced' by virtue of their consumerism! The Muthanga episode brought out this black irony at least symbolically: People who are classified as a tourist commodity were inhumanly brutalised in a tourism destination—which in all probability is their natural legacy—when they raised questions of bare subsistence!

Land Legislations

Much of the alienated Adivasi land in the State is in the possession of rich, often absentee, landlords, and corporate houses like the Tatas, Goenkas and Birlas for plantations and resorts. Some of the land is owned by religious institutions and

some is also government-owned. There is a clear nexus between some politicians and landlords. But it is constitutionally obligatory for the State governments to enact and implement legislations to protect the rights of the Adivasis and restore their alienated land.

There is no lack of legislations and enquiry commissions seeking to protect the rights of the Adivasis. In 1961, the U.N. Dhebar Commission recommended the return of all Adivasi lands alienated after the declaration of the Constitution of India. This recommendation was put in cold storage for many years. In the case of Kerala, it was only in 1975 that the State Assembly passed the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act (KST Act 1975). The passing of this Act was due to the pressure exerted by the Marxist-Leninist movement which had taken up the issue of land and other rights of the Adivasis in a big way. Under this Act transfer of immovable property possessed, enjoyed or owned by an ST member to a person other than an ST member effected on or after 1960 became null and void. Actually, by this date immigration to tribal lands was almost complete. But this Act remained on paper, though it got the President's approval and was included in the Ninth Schedule. Inclusion in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution ensured that the Act could not be challenged in any court of law. It was only when angry protests began to erupt from the side of the Adivasis in a sustained manner that the government once again suddenly woke up to the situation. The Adivasis demanded the implementation of the 1975 Act, which is their constitutional right.

Between 1975 and 1999 there were several attempts to water down the 1975 Act and protect the interests of the settlers by the rulers (party affiliations are not really important), simply because they do not consider the Adivasis a sufficiently significant bloc, economically or numerically, to be taken into serious account. For some time all the attempts at passing new Bills or amendments were shot down by the President of India, whenever they were sent to him for his assent. Even in the face of the rejection of amendments by successive governors, the President and the highest court of the State, the State government was determined to deprive the Adivasis of their rights and protect the rich settlers. In the interim public interest litigation was filed in the High Court of Kerala and the court ordered the government to implement the 1975 Act within a time frame. The government responded to the court directive by hurriedly amending the 1975 Act. This amendment bill passed by the State Legislative Assembly in 1996 legalised all transactions of tribal land up to 24 January 1986, though most of the land alienation had taken place prior to that, and the President refused to give his assent.

The last attempt along these lines was the Kerala Restriction on Transfer and Restoration of Lands to Scheduled Tribes Bill 1999, which aimed to circumvent presidential approval by defining 'land' as 'agricultural land' (a State subject). Only alienated land in excess of two hectares appropriated by settlers would be restored. Alternative land in lieu of alienated land less than 2 hectares would be provided elsewhere. The Kerala High Court rejected the Bill and the State government appealed to the Supreme Court and obtained a stay order. Even this law failed to be implemented and the Adivasis were not able to get back their alienated land nor have they got alternate land in the requisite quantity or quality. For example, in October 2013, the Chief Secretary of Kerala stated that only 530 hectares of alienated land would be restored to the tribal people of Attappady Hills under the amended 1975 Act, while as many as 10,796.16 acres (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) of land had been alienated according to a government survey (*The Hindu*, 26 October 2013). During the 50-year period from 1951 to 2001, the percentage of Adivasi population in Attappady decreased from over 90 per cent to 41 per cent.

The simple fact is that no mainstream political party can afford to antagonise the powerful settlers' lobby. Even forty-odd years after the passing of the 1975 Act we can see that the Adivasis are still denied justice and various devious ways are resorted to by the political leaderships of the State to circumvent this issue. Land alienation, transfer of land to non-Adivasis including to wind mill companies, resort owners and organic farmers continues in connivance with revenue department officials. Various relocation and rehabilitation programmes as the Western Ghats Development Scheme in Attappady, financed by the Central government and implemented by the State government, have failed miserably due to bureaucratic mismanagement and corruption of contractors (Ramunny 1998: 140-41). The anti-poverty Kudumbashree Project meant to boost local food production by women farmer collectives (many of them Adivasis and Dalits) has the drawback that the women remain landless and work on leased out land with no security of tenure.

The Adivasis of Wayanad, while acknowledging the quintessence of the Act that provided for alternate land to those who have had their lands alienated, and land to all landless Adivasis, were worried about the operational aspects. They were rather alarmed that the authorities would provide lands for them in faraway places, where they would be strangers. Some communities like the Kurumar rejected the 1999 Act and its provision for alternate lands. This was seen as the beginning of the re-articulation of their Adivasi identity by evoking their attachment to place. Their major assertion was that it was their right to have the lands restored as they had a historical attachment to the place, in a way the non-tribal settlers could not demand. As such the Adivasis demanded that the government could give alternate

land to the settlers and their own lands should be redeemed. The rationale of such a demand was that the non-tribal settlers' livelihoods could be reproduced elsewhere unlike the Adivasi livelihoods that were 'place-situated.'[4]

After the repeal of Emergency and the return of Naxalite politics, Wayanad once again witnessed militant actions against local tyrants. Due to internal schisms and programmatic confusions, this new move from the militants has so far not been able to strike roots. It faces severe police repression. At the same time, the ghost of Varghese is haunting the hills, especially after the policeman who shot him came out with a candid admission on how he was made to do it. The situation is volatile and has the potential of turning violent. There is also a renewed cultural awakening among the Adivasis. It is difficult to expect justice from the rulers given the socio-political and economic power balance existing in the State. The question concerning the Adivasis of Kerala, besides being a legitimate constitutional right of a people, is above all a moral one and one of the question of self-determination and self-rule. Reparations must be done to correct at least partially the centuries' long injustice perpetrated on them by successive dominant caste-class interests. It is becoming increasingly evident that only a powerful popular movement with the support of all genuinely democratic sections can really look after the interests of the Adivasis.

It is a fact that Adivasis constitute the most downtrodden people in Kerala. During the colonial period some of them fought against the colonialists heroically and paid a heavy price. Initially, they were being used by a feudal chieftain called a Raja for retaining his position. It is difficult to surmise that the Kurichiars joined his fight because of loyalty to the Raja. Rather, they joined his forces in their own interests. That is why even after the Raja committed suicide and his feudal allies had turned turtle the Adivasis on their own fought against the British. At that point they were leading themselves and the struggle was their own. It was an independent fight like the Santhal rebellion. In the post-1947 period we find that it was the Naxalites or Maoists who took up the cause of the Adivasis. But it was by no means an Adivasi struggle and their political programme of capturing political power was not Adivasi specific. Adivasis being the most exploited lot through the operation of archaic relations of production were and still are considered by the Maoists as explosive human material which can be used for building up organisational strength for capturing political power. It may be true that the organisers and theoreticians declass themselves to identify with the Adivasis. But even then there is a disjunction with the result that often the Adivasis are left to fend for themselves when severe repression follows political actions of the Maoists. No doubt, the state then steps in to grant some developmental and welfare sops like

roads, milch cows and better access to schools for the children. This has happened in Kerala more than once. Whatever the rhetoric of revolution may be, in its basics this is also utilisation of a people.

In the above context the emergence of Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha as a struggle front of the Adivasis in Kerala assumes importance: its programme was Adivasi-centric and its leadership and followers consisted of Adivasis. At the same time, its programme did not fall within the non-governmental organisation framework of the "human face" of capitalist imperialism. Being a bold experiment its formation and struggles have touched raw nerves and, in the face of this, immediate success or failure is immaterial.

Present Situation and Prospects

The environmental degradation perpetrated by the timber mafia and large industries like the now defunct Mavoor Rayons as well as big dams affected the Dalits and Adivasis the most. The Adivasis of Wayanad and the Koragas of Kasaragod are standing testimony to the ill-effects of deforestation. Both are facing starvation due to the loss of their traditional forest resources. Environmentalists are vocal and they could score a few signal victories like saving to some extent the Silent Valley in Palakkad district. But they could not save the bamboo forests of Wayanad or Nilambur from their rapacious use by paper and fibre industries, with the result that tens of thousands of Adivasis and Dalits are robbed of their means of livelihood as basket weavers and cane furniture craftspersons. The Kanikkars of Agasthyavanam in southern Kerala are facing the same fate. The general feeling among the policy-makers seems to be that these are people who can be dispensed with. On the part of the larger public also there is no adequate support because the people do not see their problems as interlinked and therefore as having a common solution, which would serve the interests of all.

The Kerala Adivasis have got increasingly linked to the market because subsistence farming for one's own consumption of paddy and other food crops has given way to the cultivation of cash crops like coffee and pepper, and collection of forest products has diminished greatly due to the forest policies of the government and international agencies such as the World Bank sponsored eco-development project as in Idukki. Neo-liberal market reforms at the behest of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) led to a crash in the prices of cash crops, especially in the 1990s. Price fluctuations in agrarian and forest products are common due to the import policy of the government. The ensuing crisis affected the wage workers

including Adivasis in that the number of days of employment went down and so did wages. At the same time, government reduced subsidies in the PDS system as part of the liberalisation process under the pressure of international agencies like the World Bank and WTO leading to the increase in prices of essential food commodities. The introduction of Above Poverty Line (APL), Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Antyodaya categories affected many Adivasi families who were wrongly assigned APL status. Those who had migrated to Coimbatore for working in the textile sector also lost their jobs when many of the smaller factories closed down due to their not getting subsidies and support from the government as earlier.

The reduction in the cultivation of paddy in the *vayals*, the seasonally flooded wetlands, and their reduction has disturbed the retention of surface and ground water leading to water scarcity in an area which is the natural reservoir of the Kaveri and other rivers. Droughts have become frequent. Dam constructions have added to the loss of fertile paddy lands and the displacement of a large number of people without rehabilitation. Soil has become nutritionally deficient. Cash crop cultivation with frequent crop switches depending on market prices has affected the land and exacerbated the agrarian crisis in which the Adivasis are also embroiled. Those Adivasis assigned land again start losing it to richer, devious outsiders. This has happened to Kanis living in the Thiruvanthapuram forest territorial division who then started encroaching into the forest with the encouragement of the land-grabbing outsiders (*The Hindu*, 19 July 2004). Exploitation of the precious traditional medicinal knowledge of Adivasis is a real danger. While Adivasi groups die a slow death there are valiant attempts to grab this beneficial knowledge without just, thoughtful and caring benefit-sharing.

The Kerala government's plan to recruit tribal youths as home guards to combat Maoists, particularly in forest and hilly areas where non-tribal combatants of government forces find it difficult to adjust with the hostile terrain, is in reality a notorious design *a la* Salwa Judum[5] to pit Adivasis against Adivasis dividing villages and clans and thus creating new killing fields. The Supreme Court ruling against Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh has not stopped other State governments, like the West Bengal government in the Junglemahals, from following the same tactics of recruiting tribal youth into the regular police force to divide tribal people and pit them against one another, or for the Chhattisgarh government to initiate a Salwa Judum-II in the form of Village Defence Committees and loosely formed civil vigilante groups, whose membership is largely constituted by non-Adivasi ex-Salwa Judum people belonging to the trading classes but also consists of surrendered Naxalites. The Adivasis also tend to get divided among various political parties and possibly put too much faith in the existing electoral politics, which will not get

them the desired liberation. However, the fact that a number of independent non-party political Adivasi organisations have come up in Wayanad indicates some realisation of this reality. Among others these are: Adivasi Aikya Samithi (The United Adivasi Forum), a platform of various indigenous groups at the local level, which united itself at the regional level to create the Adivasi Vikasana Pravarthaka Samithi (The Adivasi Development Activists' Forum), and the Wayanad Adivasi Federation. But there is still no single Adivasi umbrella organisation which can act as a federation at the State level of various organisations of different Adivasi communities in the same way.

Tribal rehabilitation schemes like Cheengeri, Sugandhagiri and Priyadarshini spread over hundreds of acres of land virtually turned out to be profitable rehabilitation schemes for government officials, who were deputed to work in these projects, by means of colossal misuse of funds. There are co-operative societies in the name of tribals, which are entitled to collect and market forest produce, but they are totally controlled by party politics and wages are often not adequate. Value addition activities are not undertaken. In this context it is worthwhile to remember that hundreds of crores of rupees have been spent on 'tribal welfare' during the last few decades and a part of that money would have been enough to give every landless Adivasi family five acres of good cultivable land. Where has all this money gone, or, rather, who has eaten this money? In all the basic indicators they are still at the bottom. Electricity still has not reached all their villages. Unemployment is endemic. The menial jobs given to them by the Forest Department are mostly temporary and being insecure put them at the mercy of the forest officials.

The land question in Kerala has of late assumed wider dimensions. Now it is not only the Adivasis community who is demanding land. But the Dalits have also joined the ranks. The long-standing agitation of Chengara in Pathanamthitta district is a vivid illustration to this broadening of the land question. The anti-Dalit character of the famous land reforms of Kerala came to the fore through this agitation. Thousands of Dalit men and women together with Adivasis occupied a big plantation raised by a big business house whose lease had expired. The agitators threatened to commit mass suicide if attempts were made to evict them forcibly. They had fuel cans and nooses ready. The estate trade unions, led by the social democratic parties, tried economic embargo, sexual assaults, etc., to break the agitation but could not succeed. As the communist slogan "land to the tiller" had not actually meant land to the actual tillers, who are the Dalit workers, but land for the upper caste tenants, the Dalit workers within a couple of decades had again become landless. In any case they remained agricultural workers or were pushed into the ranks of urban unorganised workers, or lumpenproletariat. Their

wages increased and working hours got regulated. At the same time, the days of employment dwindled. Of course, the outflow of unskilled and semi-skilled workers to the Gulf countries and the policy of reservations in employment and education did create some level of differentiation among them, but the vast majority remain landless. Chengara flashed this ground reality.

Dalit leaders are coming out in unambiguous support for the land struggle of the Adivasis. These pioneers in the struggle for land in modern Kerala certainly ought to take this new development into serious account. They are together along with other small and marginal farmers in the Plachimada struggle against the Coca Cola Company, which badly affected their livelihood by its enormous extraction of ground water and polluting activities. The dalits and marginalised farmers can come together with those of the Adivasis to develop a gender-just culture of the dignity of labour.[6]

Notes

1. K.J. Baby's novel *Mavelimantam* gives a graphic description of how these people were enslaved and made into animal-like objects, which could be bought, sold or pawned by the masters.
2. There are several rock-built Jain temples which are as old as 700-800 years in several places in Wayanad and Gudalur. These Jains were obviously fleeing religious persecution from Brahminical revivalists in the aftermath of Sankara. There is almost no evidence of these early settlers expropriating the original inhabitants, though the same cannot be said about their later scions.
3. The slogan "land to the tiller" was a central one in the mass mobilisation programmes of the CPI throughout the early part of its history. But the question is: who are the actual tillers of the soil? In the context of Kerala, the depressed castes like Dalits and Adivasis constituted the overwhelming bulk of the actual workers in the fields, while the overwhelming number of tenants came from castes and communities like Syrian Christians, Nairs, Muslims, Ezhavas, and others. The struggles like Vayalar in Alappuzha were primarily Dalit struggles under the leadership of the non-Dalit leaders of the CPI and projected the land issue as the focal point. In this single struggle alone thousands of Dalits were butchered. Once the party emerged over ground and fought elections, the Dalits *en masse* voted for the CPI. They and the Adivasis legitimately had a lot of expectations. But what actually happened was that these sections were sidelined when the actual land reforms came, which themselves had a zigzag career.

4. See http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/19634/10/10_chapter4.pdf
5. During 2006-11 an orgy of government supported burning and looting emptied hundreds of Adivasi villages, the inhabitants of which were herded into government-run camps. The aim was to clear the land of Adivasis for mining and other 'developmental' purposes. The young men amongst them were armed and given a small wage to act as Special Police Officers (SPO) or irregular combatants against insurgent Adivasis, that is, those who refused to join this organisation founded by a non-Adivasi Congressman and other non-Adivasi leaders with RSS links. More than 1 lakh Adivasis fled to neighbouring States, thousands were jailed. Those who fled to bordering areas of Andhra Pradesh were persecuted there and not allowed to live in peace. The tactic of getting local unemployed people to act as SPOs is being used in J&K as well, although the Supreme Court ordered the disbanding of SPOs in Chhattisgarh. Instead of taking recourse to social, economic and political policies to address the root causes for the conflict situation the government is even training Adivasis in guerilla warfare against the Maoists, in whose ranks there are many Adivasis. Again it is a tactic of pitting Adivasis against each other. Security operations under Mission 2016-17 are also completely lawless in their functioning. In the name of combating Maoism there is an all-out attack against the resisting Adivasis and civil liberties activists, and many battalions of paramilitary forces are active in areas like Chhattisgarh.
6. See Kancha Ilaiah: *Turning the Pot, Tilling the Land: Dignity of Labour in our Times.* New Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2007.



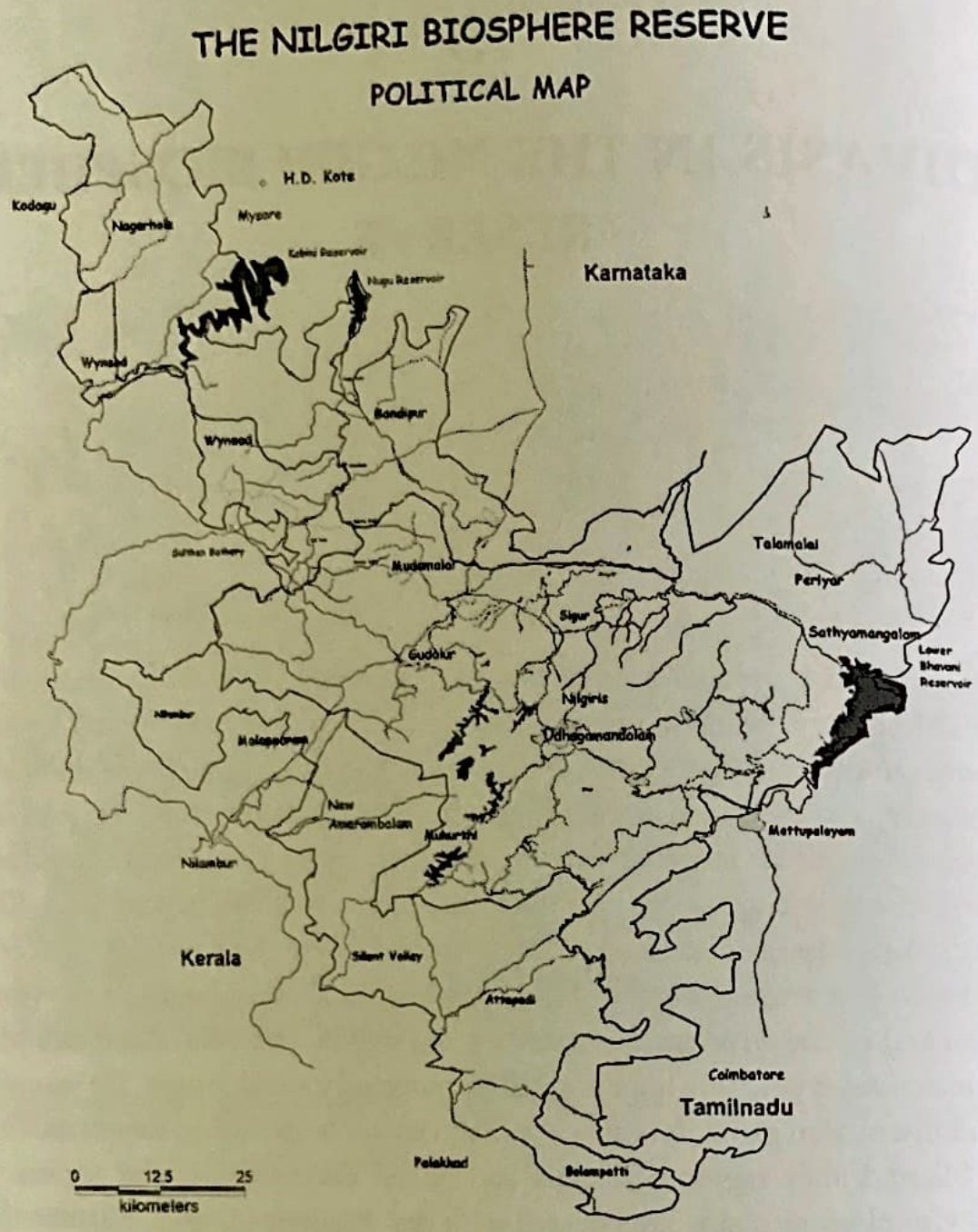
Theyyam performance of *Kuttichathan*, a mischievous imp and minor devil
Photo: M. Dasan

5

ADIVASIS IN THE NILGIRI BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The Nilgiris are a unique biosphere in the Western Ghats characterised at the higher altitudes by savannah (grasslands) and shola (evergreen montane) forests in the ravines, moist and dry deciduous forests and thorn and scrub in the middle and lower ranges, and evergreen and semi-evergreen forests to the West. Three-fourths of the lower ranges are still forested. The biosphere thus encompasses a very diverse variety of climatic and geographic micro regions at heights ranging from 400 m to over 2500 m above mean sea level. It is located where the Eastern and Western Ghats meet. The average height of the Gudalur and Wayanad parts of the plateau is 900 m and in the Mudumalai sanctuary and in Nilambur, the forests are of the moist deciduous type. Here huge and tall commercially valuable trees like rosewood, teak and myrobalan grow. It is also a bamboo area. The evergreen forests are found in the Silent Valley region of Kerala and in the Wayanad-Gudalur region. The Burliar-Coimbatore plains are covered with dry deciduous forests. Further thorn and dry deciduous forests exist at Anaikatty and on the Sigur plateau.

The Nilgiris are home to a large variety of flora and fauna, some of them endemic to the region. New species continue to be discovered. But it has also become a biodiversity hotspot where some species have already become extinct and others are under threat of extinction.


THE NILGIRI BIOSPHERE RESERVE
POLITICAL MAP
H.D. Kote
Kodagu
Nagarhole
Mysore
Kabini Reservoir
Nugu Reservoir
Karnataka
Wynaad
Bandipur
Wynaad
Sultan Battery
Mudumalai
Talamalai
Periyar
Sigur
Sathyamangalam
Lower Bhavani Reservoir
Gudalur
Nilgiris
Udhagamandalam
Nilambur
Malappuram
New Amarambalam
Nadukani
Mettupalayam
Nilambur
Kerala
Silent Valley
Attapadi
Coimbatore
Tamilnadu
Palakkad
Pollachi
0 12.5 25
kilometers

Some animal species of the Nilgiris like the tiger, the tahr, the lion-tailed macaque and the Nilgiri langur have become endangered species and many plant species have become rarer due to environmental degradation in the past couple of centuries. Since ancient times the Hills are also home to a number of Adivasi groups, prominent among them being the Todas and Kotas on the higher ranges, the Alu Kurumbas and Irulas in the middle ranges and the Paniyans, Kattunayakans and Mullu and Urali Kurumbas in the lower ranges. Migrant peasant refugees from the Mysore plains, the Badagas (Northerners) and Gounders, as they are called in the lower ranges, also live here.

In 1986, the Nilgiris were declared to be a Biosphere Reserve. It was one of the first biosphere reserves to be established in India, and is one of the 440 biosphere reserves in 97 countries launched in the early 1970s by UNESCO under the *Man and the Biosphere* programme (MAB). It encompasses an area of 5220 sq km from 8 districts belonging to three States—Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala—and includes the protected forests of Nagarhole, Bandipur, Mudumalai, Begur, Silent Valley, Mukurthi, and Wayanad. Besides these, a number of reserved forests are encompassed by the NBR. These include Sathyamangalam, Moyar, Thengumarahada, New Amarambalam and Nilambur.

The NBR was formed to conserve diversity of species, to restore and rejuvenate degraded ecosystems and to function as an alternate model for sustainable development. It is a part of the Western Ghats that play a crucial role in maintaining global ecological balance just as the tropical rainforests of South America. The Western Ghats influence the well-being of the entire peninsula through modulating climate, river water flow, ground water recharge, adding fertility to river valley and delta soils and by providing a wide variety of natural produce. As part of this oldest mountain chain (the Western Ghats are called the Sahayadris in Sanskrit, meaning robust and resilient) the Nilgiris (blue mountains) go back to a time when the earth's crust was being formed and being the faulted edge of an upraised plateau the Ghats are not a mountain chain in the same way as the Himalayas. Thirty-nine sites in the Western Ghats were declared as UNESCO world natural heritage sites by the World Heritage Committee in 2013 because of their exceptionally high level of biological diversity and endemism. These are bound to become international tourist destinations as a result.

The changes in land use patterns in the last couple of centuries and resource extraction are threatening this unique bio-geographic zone with repercussions for all life dependent on it. Unfortunately, so far NBR remains only a concept with no legal status. The kind of research being done and its findings are available only

to an exclusive set of individuals who use them for their own ends. The average local population remains uninformed and its participation in formulating and implementing conservation strategies is minimal. Hence fragmentation and destruction of habitat, wildlife and fauna continue unabated due to the development pattern imposed upon the region with no let-up by the vested interests—political and commercial. We will look into the nature of the development that has been taking place in this biosphere and see how it has put the ecosystems of the place under stress and the kinds of changes it has wrought in the culture and livelihood patterns of the indigenous communities living here. In the Nilgiris, it is Wayanad district and its contiguous Gudalur Block that have a higher than average concentration of Adivasis. According to the 2011 Census, the ST population of Tamil Nadu is 1.1%, while in the Nilgiri district it is 4.46% of the total general population. In Wayanad (Kerala) it is much higher at 18.5% of the district population.

Romanticism Versus Reality

The Nilgiri upper plateau was the habitation zone of the Toda tribe, who were a peace-loving nomadic and pastoral people. They had large herds of semi-wild hill buffalos with different pastures during the dry season from January to June. Their settlements in the midst of shola forests with good surrounding pasture land and running water nearby are called *munds* (actually *mod* meaning a herd of cattle). The main source of the Toda livelihood were the buffaloes they bred with great love and care, and indeed worshipped. The buffalo milk was processed into butter, ghee and buttermilk, the surplus of which they bartered with neighbouring tribal groups and visiting merchants from the plains for other necessities. The sholas provided medicinal plants, fruits and other edibles.

Millets were grown by agriculturalist Badaga people who had migrated in waves to the region centuries back. They had been granted land for their settlement and shifting cultivation by a council of men from the indigenous Toda, Kota and Kurumba tribes. In part, they cleared virgin tropical montane forest. In many ways they adapted to the lifestyle and culture of the pre-existing ethnic communities for the sake of their own survival. They also served as traders for goods from the plains together with itinerant Chettis (a trading community). Clothes, grains, jaggery, salt and other commodities including opium derived from poppies grown by the Badagas were obtained from them by the Todas, who also provided them with churning sticks of rattan and cane products like beds and baskets in addition to milk and milk products and their beautifully embroidered shawls for ceremonial occasions. It was a custom for Badaga corpses to be covered with Toda shawls.

Sometimes a Badaga would entrust his buffaloes to the care of his Toda partner who would take the animals along with his own to the pastures. Todas often approached Badagas for some medical help. There was mutual acculturation.

The Kota people were the blacksmiths and smiths in gold and silver, potters, cultivators and musicians. They live scattered in seven settlements in the Nilgiri district and there is one settlement in Wayanad. Each Kota family serviced a certain number of Toda and Badaga families living at not more than a day's walking distance. They provided them with pots for the household, metal tools, axes, knives, jewellery, oil lamps, clay smoking pipes and other metal works. In return they got ghee, male buffalo calves and buffalo carcasses for leather work from the Todas. When there was a death in the Toda family the Kota had to provide many of the necessities like arrows, knives, sieves, etc., including music for the funeral. At a Kota funeral, which the Toda attended, they provided a buffalo to be sacrificed as well as ghee to be poured on the pyre. During the Kota annual ceremony in honour of their god Kambataraya, the Todas supplied ghee made from milk processed at their sacred dairy temples. The Kota also supplied leather goods and did carpentry work for the Badagas. Additionally, they helped to thatch the houses and provided ceremonial music. In return the Badagas supplied cloth, grain, jaggery and salt to the Kotas. For the hunting ceremony of 'bedasami' held by both Badagas and Kotas, the Todas used to bring clarified butter to smear on the weapons.

The Kurumbas were the forest-based tribes and they provided forest produce like honey, bees wax, herbal plants and therapy, baskets, winnows and large grain storage baskets to the others. They also practised shifting cultivation. From his Alu Kurumba partner who lived in the upper plateau, the Toda got forest produce, particularly honey, bamboo and rattan for house building and baskets for a variety of purposes. The short wooden post to which buffaloes were tied for sacrifice and the long wooden pole set up in front of the funeral temple at the second funeral of the Todas were also supplied by the Alu Kurumbas. In return the Toda gave buffalo calves, some ghee and clothes. Because of their deep knowledge of the forests the Kurumbas were also feared as sorcerers, particularly by the Badagas. At the same time, their services were solicited for warding off magical attacks on them and for protecting their crops and animals from diseases. The Alu Kurumbas had a cordial relationship with the Irulas who lived lower down on the hills. They helped each other in growing their crops in shifting cultivation. The Irula priest offered priestly services to the Kurumbas in their ceremonies.

The social symbiotic relationship among these five indigenous groups involved economic, cultural and ritual interactions. While each group had its specialisation, it also carried out multiple livelihood activities. The Kotas, for example, also herded animals and grew some millets, cereals, garlic, mustard, etc., for self-consumption through shifting cultivation. The Kurumbas and Irulas also carried out slash-and-burn agriculture and domesticated animals. But they depended on each other for several necessities of life. This relationship involving not just economic exchange of goods, but with ritual and social dimensions, was mostly between families of each community on a hereditary basis.

The Badagas were ancient Hindu (Shaivite) peasant refugees. When Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan established their kingdom in the Deccan, a large number of peasants came to the Nilgiris as refugees. They were mainly from the Mysore part of Karnataka. By and large they got settled in the present-day Tamil Nadu side of the Nilgiri Biosphere where some of their compatriots had earlier wandered in and settled after the Veerashaiva anti-caste Hindu reformist movement faced severe repression in Karnataka during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Another in-migration wave happened here in the mid-sixteenth century at the time of the fall of the Vijaynagara Empire due to the consequent political instability. At around this time the Mysore State rulers converted to Vaishnavism and made the worship of Vishnu a state cult, which began to be enforced upon the people. This created some conflict between the Shaivites and Vaishnavites and this could be one of the reasons for the flight of Shaivites to the Nilgiri Hills (Hockings 1980: 227). They are there in Kodagu and Wayanad also where they are known as Gounders. After an initial 'tribalisation' process, whereby they adjusted to the indigenous peoples of the Nilgiris, they went on to become the dominant local community.

These groups were endogamous and their interrelationship resembled that of the Hindu Jajmani system but without the extremes of hierarchy and complete subjugation of some groups as in the latter system. If the reciprocity was not adhered to there was a withdrawal from the co-operative arrangement and no other family from the withdrawing group would replace the one who had withdrawn. The need for the other would necessitate the required adjustments and mutual co-operation. In their search for land suitable to millet cultivation the Badagas probably pushed Kurumbas lower down the hills and the Todas further upwards, but this does not appear to have been done through using any violent means. Rather the methods used earlier were consensual. By and large it was a peaceful and autonomous existence in the hills. Each community had its own priests and council of elders with no overlord and came together for consultations in cases which concerned all the groups living in this region.

This peaceful and autonomous existence came to an end in the early seventeenth century when the kings of Mysore became the rulers of Wayanad and titular possessors of the Nilgiri Hills. The latter were under the immediate rule of the dependents of theirs called Udaiyars or the Rajas of Ummattur. The Plateau became involved in a long military struggle between various provincial kings for control of tribute from the Badagas. In the process a number of fortresses were erected in various parts of the hills. But the general way of life of the first settlers was not disturbed due to this tussle for overlordship of the region.

Colonialism and Changes in Land Use Patterns

In 1792, the British acquired the Nilgiri Plateau through the Treaty of Seringapatam after the defeat of Tipu Sultan. The British first developed Ooty as a sanatorium and resort for old, sick and disabled British personnel. Then it was developed as the summer capital of Madras presidency. A military cantonment was also established in Wellington near Coonoor. Finding the soil and climatic conditions suitable for the cultivation of tea, coffee, cinchona, pepper, cardamom, ginger, and other spices plantations were started for the growing of the same for the national and international markets. European fruits and vegetables were cultivated in small gardens and farms. In place of the native species many water guzzling exotic tree species like acacia/wattle, eucalyptus, cypress, fir and pine were planted to be used as fuel wood for domestic fires, in tea factories, and for industrial use, to some extent in the hills, but mostly in the plains (for the manufacture of quinine, paper and medicinal oils like eucalyptus). Christian missionaries and churches, schools run by them and by the British administration also became part of the landscape.

How the land in the region passed out of the use of the indigenous tribal groups and was taken over by the British planters and administrators is an interesting story. In the early 1800s the slopes of the upper plateau were bought over by the colonisers from the Todas for a rupee an acre using legal means for land encroachment and appropriation. The land legislation promulgated by them in the 1860s and '70s forbade shifting cultivation and made the forests into state property without any compensation at all to the concerned Adivasi groups.

It was the British interventions in the region which started the process of massive changes whereby the hill peoples and the environment, the flora and fauna were at the receiving end. The land revenue farming system of the British and their transformation of the area into a cash crop cultivation one had their repercussions on the indigenous peoples' livelihoods and interrelationships. The deforestation, loss of forest resources and drying up of streams and wetlands affected the livelihoods

of the indigenous people who lost hunting and grazing areas, sources of forest produce and plentiful fresh water supply. The changes in the land use pattern also affected the terrain negatively. Land erosion began to take place.

The invasion of the place by new settlers and a new economy made the nineteenth century into a traumatic one of droughts, famines, starvation and epidemics (plague, smallpox, cholera) for the indigenous people and their livestock. Having lost the sources of their livelihoods and culture they had perforce to adapt themselves to the new times. Different communities reacted differently to the British encroachment. The Badagas followed and adapted, the Kurumbas retreated further down the hills. It was during this time that conflict between Badagas and Kurumbas over land ownership and control became acute. Periodic massacres of the Kurumbas by the Badagas took place in the nineteenth century under the charge of witchcraft. There was a steady decline in the population of the Todas from 2,689 in 1881 to 1,731 in 1891; they were counted at 807 in 1901, 748 in 1911 and 640 in 1931, and still numbered only 875 at the time of the 1981 Census, well on the way to extinction. Venereal disease had appeared among them thanks to the colonial settlers and this is seen as one of the causes for their population decline. Since then due to state-supported health interventions their population started increasing and has stabilised at a little over 2000 (as per the 2011 Census).

By the early 1800s the Badagas had already become the numerically dominant community due to increased migration of peasants from the Mysore plains and soon they became the economically dominant one as well. The first peoples of any area consider themselves superior to those who come later, but generally get overpowered by the newcomers. In the case of the Nilgiris the Todas were overtaken by the agriculturist Badagas due to their greater production of food, which also enabled them to grow in numbers more rapidly. They in turn were dominated by the British because of their cunningness and knowledge of various technologies.

An internal differentiation took place within the community. Even earlier there had been some differentiation but now it grew apace. Those who could not pay the land tax became tenant small holders, landless labourers and plantation workers. Indebtedness grew and much Badaga land was sold to British planters. Only some villages near the new towns of Ooty and Coonoor achieved a measure of prosperity. Jakkatala sold much of its land to the government for the Wellington Barracks and then profited further from contracts for gangs of labourers to build the barracks, the railway line and some other public structures. By the beginning of the twentieth century some Badaga families had become very wealthy as contractors. The value

of modern education was also realised by many in this community. English and Tamil literacy enabled them to take over positions in the British administration as *karnams* (accountants) and managers. Farmers took to commercial farming in imitation of the British and started using fertilisers and pesticides. Moneylenders and other middlemen made their appearances.

The Toda lifestyle was rudely disrupted by the colonial interventions in the region. They were no longer able to pursue their pastoral nomadic way of life as earlier. A large chunk of their grasslands were now occupied by plantations or exotic tree species. Trees like acacia and eucalyptus dried up much of the marshes and swamps, which had been sources for reeds used to build Toda huts. The eucalyptus tree also releases inhibitory compounds that adversely affect the germination and growth of neighbouring plants. The kurinji along with other plant and shrub species largely disappeared with the vanishing of the shola grassland landscape. The dark brown honey processed from the nectar of the kurinji flower by the bees was no longer available. Due to the disappearance of swamps because of construction activities and acacia, pine and eucalyptus plantations some wild medicinal plants used by the indigenous people also vanished.

Starting in the early part of the twentieth century the co-operative relationships between the indigenous groups more or less came to an end by the 1950s with the marketisation of the economy. The market became a means of exchange for all the groups. Many of the products produced by these groups no longer had any takers and became slowly extinct. Kota pottery, which was mainly the work of the Kota women, has almost become an extinct art. The demand for Kota blacksmith articles also dwindled drastically because of British policies of import of goods and lack of support for Indian rural crafts. The blanket-weaving activity of Kurumbas too came to an end because of lack of demand. Loss of land and livelihood transformed many Kurumbas and Irulas of the Upper Nilgiri Plateau into plantation labour. The percentage of the population of the indigenous people declined in relation to the total population due to large-scale in-migration.

Post-Independence Period

After 1947, the most consequential thing that happened to the Nilgiris was the bifurcation of a homogenous biosphere into three States and three linguistic regions. With the States reorganisation in 1956 this biosphere was split into three states—Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. Kodagu went to Karnataka, Wayanad to Kerala, and what is now called the Nilgiris was incorporated into Tamil Nadu. With this bifurcation of a unique biosphere and meeting point of

many different ethnic groups the identity of the Nilgiris was artificially reduced to what is now known as the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu forming roughly 40% of the total Nilgiri Biosphere. Of course, this dismemberment was done on the basis of language, and this meant the languages of the settlers who were never rooted in the region. The original inhabitants of the region did not count at all each of whom speaks in their own Dravidian tongue. Such an artificial and imposed bifurcation of homogenous communities compels each such split-up community to adapt to the culture and politics of the State in which it happens to find itself.[2]

The plantation economy of the Nilgiris continues, though now the ownership has been transferred to Indian business houses. The region has also developed into a major domestic and to some extent international tourism destination as has happened in the case of most 'hill stations' developed under British rule. Every significant bank and big business house within the country built up its own holiday home and all major business families built summer resorts for their own personal purposes. Hundreds of hotels, small, medium, big and large have come up. Much of the construction activity takes place in gross violation of hill area building rules and the Master Plan. None of this heightened building up was followed by a complementary expansion of civic amenities like proper roads, waste disposal means or sewage facilities. Thousands of tourists come to a town like Ooty every day during the tourist seasons. The situation is alarming for public health. Already incidences of jaundice and typhoid and other such water-borne diseases have spectacularly increased in the last many years.

The tourism sector is carried by private players coming from outside the region. There is little benefit for the local indigenous people apart from some sales of embroidered shawls by Toda women and some pottery items by Kota women. Some youths find employment in tourism-related activities such as taking tourists on pony rides. Toda villages are objects of tourist curiosity and the streams of visitors to the village sited above the Botanical Garden have misled some of the inhabitants to indulge in begging from the tourists. Exocitisation and cultural museumisation is happening to some extent with the participation of the tribal peoples.

Hydro-electric power stations have broken up older pasture lands of the Todas and destroyed their hamlets. Roads and highways that are built for trade and tourism purposes cut into the remaining pasture lands of the Todas endangering whatever buffalo stock they still had with them. Now buffalo herding is done in the vicinity of the settlements and the milk and milk products sold. This remains a source of livelihood for the majority of the Todas though drastically limited

now. Many Todas and Kotas, too, have become agriculturists cultivating potatoes, vegetables and even tea. Many of them however do not practise agriculture but lease out their land for cultivation. This is a common practice among erstwhile hunting/gathering pastoralists or swidden agriculture-practising people because they are unable to accustom themselves to this new occupation and lifestyle. They then prefer to lease out whatever land they have and work as agricultural labour on other people's land.

There are disputes with others and with the Forest Department over land. Not all Todas have been able to switch to becoming agriculturalists. They are poor and are not able to avail of bank loans required for modern agriculture. They do coolie work, collect eucalyptus leaves, get work in the tourism sector. The change in lifestyle and loss of the traditional buffalo culture, much unemployment among the educated youths and the free and plentiful availability of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) has made a large number of Toda men alcoholics. Healthy habits like drinking buttermilk are replaced by tea and coffee drinking. There is clear-cut degeneration of once tremendously healthy people with modernisation. Every Toda festival now sees happy and satisfied smiles of bar owners.

Toda women are trying to improve their status within a largely patriarchal pastoral culture. While polyandry and infanticide are no longer practised, bride price has given way to the dowry system. Equality is not yet assured to the women, who are not allowed anywhere near the sacred dairy temple, where the priest is always only a male, and where no ceremonies accompany the name-giving function of a female child.

Water pollution due to factories and pesticides and fertilisers being used in plantations and vegetable cultivation has affected the local plant species many of which do not flower now. This pollution also kills many local insect species and fish populations in the water bodies. Many species of Nilgiri bees are disappearing. Chemicals used in agricultural lands adjoining the forests are destroying them. Forest Protection Acts are often violated in connivance with forest officials and trees are cut down. Illegal stone quarrying by stone mafias is going on and road contractors buy stones from these illegal quarries with impunity. Due to globalisation and market dependency of cash crops there is a severe agrarian crisis pertaining to crops like pepper, tea and coffee in the entire biosphere region.

The tea crisis with the crash and fluctuations of tea prices since quite some time, and overall price increases of essential commodities due to the inflationary policies of the Central government have worsened the situation of the Adivasi labourers. They have to contend with job losses, fall in the number of days of

employment in a year, further job losses due to mechanisation, and increase in the number of working hours and workload. Not to speak of the increase in the cases of cancer in general due to chemical pesticide-based agriculture that is also contaminating the water sources.

It is estimated that in the Nilgiris, sholas have shrunk from 8,600 to about 4,225 hectares. Their role as 'overhead tanks' feeding underground aquifers, from which springs the Kaveri many kilometres away in Kodagu, is thus undermined creating water shortages crucial for farming in the plains and deltas of Tamil Nadu. The swamps in the region too have diminished in numbers due to exotics. In addition to sustaining many wetland flora and fauna they also have the function of supporting many streams with water round the year. They too need to be conserved for their role as water catchments. The Forest Department is making efforts now to remove many ecological predator species that have got introduced into the region. They include acacia, eucalyptus, lantana and parthenium weeds. Pine trees are also not suited to the thin soil of grassland terrain. Having shallow roots strong monsoonal winds are apt to uproot them and crash them down causing much damage to overhead electrical power lines, dwellings and passing vehicles on the roads. Water shortage is there in many parts of the Nilgiri district too with an unsustainable rise in the settled population and with an enormous floating tourist population.

With every passing year so-called natural calamities are also increasing in scope and frequency. For example, the two principal towns—Coonoor and Ooty—are often cut off from Coimbatore, which is their life-line. Enormous land slips occur with even a few days of rainfall. It is not that the rainfall is extraordinary, but the reality is that the whole land mass is steadily becoming more and more vulnerable. The frequency of heavy and light vehicular traffic on the roads, the unscientific construction activity, and the agricultural practices – all have become clearly insupportable for the terrain.

In short, the process of displacement and marginalisation of the tribal communities has taken place due to commercial forestry, cash crop cultivation and tourism development. Their earlier sustainable use of natural resources and symbiotic relationship with nature has taken a hit with many becoming modern farmers and getting integrated into the wider regional, national and global economies with a concomitant change in the mode of production followed by them. Todas in the Nilgiris, for instance, who have largely become vegetable cultivators, are at present not at all concerned about the damaging effects of the use of chemical fertilisers. Such an approach buttresses the position of environmental fundamentalists, who

would prefer to exclude humans, that is, the Adivasis and other forest dwellers from the forests for the sake of conservation and are in favour of the tourism mode of environmental protection. This model is a money spinner for some conservationists turned owners/shareholders of resorts and other profitable tourist enterprises along with forest bureaucrats. But it has its own set of negative side-effects as already elucidated!

Glimpses of Adivasis in Gudalur

In this section we take up for analysis the situation of the original inhabitants—the Adivasis—in the Gudalur block of Nilgiri district. Gudalur block consists of Gudalur and Pandalur taluks, the other taluks in the district being Udhagamandalam, Coonoor, Kundah and Kotagiri. Densely forested at one time it is the watershed area for a number of major rivers, such as the Moyar, Chaliyar and Kabini.

Prior to the arrival of the British the area in the Gudalur region was initially divided among three rulers: Vallavanoor, the leader of the Paniyas; Nelliarasi, another Adivasi ruler; and the Nilambur Kovilagam, a kingdom. The Kovilagam expanded its borders by conquering the other two areas. Vallavanoor was killed and Nelliarasi kidnapped, and forced to hand over her lands. In this way approximately 100,000 acres of land came under the control of the Kovilagam. Between 1845 and 1969 about half of this land, known as 'janmom' land, was leased out to major plantation owners, who used part though not the whole for cash crop cultivation. They have also encroached on surrounding lands and indulged in heavy deforestation and illegal felling.

The population of this area as of the upper plateau, both hitherto sparsely populated, grew by leaps and bounds with large-scale in-migration from the plains for doing the coolie work on the plantations. In the Gudalur-Wayanad region it was also settlers migrating in from southern and northern Kerala. Tea plantations are the mainstay of the economy in Gudalur block owned by big business houses, small farmers and the State government. Nearly 8,000 acres of dense evergreen forests have been cleared by the Tamil Nadu government-owned Tamil Nadu Tea Plantation Corporation Ltd. (TANTEA), where the plantation workers are mainly repatriates from Sri Lanka.

Livelihood and Cultural Status

The Gudalur region is inhabited by various tribal groups, namely the Mullu

Kurumbas, Urali Kurumbas, Paniyans, Kattunayakans and Urali Sholigas. With 32.08% Pandalur is the taluk with the highest concentration of Adivasis in Nilgiri district. All these communities were living in symbiotic relationship with the forests, of whose flora and fauna they had an intimate knowledge. Their world view was one of considering themselves as part of the total ecosystem and not as superior beings with an exploitative attitude towards bountiful natural resources. Like other forest-dwelling Adivasis, they also have a practical knowledge of ecosystem functioning, the relationship between humans and the non-human environment, the interdependence of floral and faunal species. The concept of property or of accumulation beyond simple needs was alien to them. The different tribal communities are presently at different socio-economic levels. By examining the livelihood patterns and culture of some of these tribal ethnic groups over a period of time, we will be able to see how development and modernisation have affected their lives.

Kurumbas

They are the pre-Dravidian ancient inhabitants of the Nilgiris. Kurumba is not the name of a single tribe. Rather it indicates a common name applied to different ethnic communities in and around the Nilgiri area in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. In the Mysore plains they are considered as a shepherd caste. Their name probably originates from their early occupation of tending sheep (*kuru*) as a pastoral people. According to legends, the Kurumbas in the Nilgiri Hills are the modern representatives of the ancient Kurumbas or Pallavas, who were once very powerful throughout southern India. Their power was at its zenith in the seventh century, but the Kongu, Chola and Chalukya chiefs succeeded in overpowering them several times. They were finally overthrown by the Chola dynasty of Thanjavur in about the ninth century CE and got scattered far and wide. Many fled to the hills and presently their descendants are found in the Nilgiris, Wayanad, Kodagu and Mysore.

Five different groups of Kurumbas have been identified in the Nilgiris—each of them being a distinct ethnic group differing from the others in language, religion, traditional occupations and other cultural features.[3] They also inhabit different parts of the Nilgiris. The Alu or Palu Kurumbas live in the higher ranges, the Betta Kurumbas (also called Kadu Kurumbas) and Jenu Kurumbas (also called Kattunayakans) in the lower heavily forested areas, and the Mullu and Urali Kurumbas in the lower ranges and foothills. Only the latter two groups of Kurumbas live in Pandalur taluk and in Wayanad district of Kerala.

Mullu Kurumbas

The word *mullu* means arrow or thorn, but can also be related to the word *mula* (bamboo), which grows profusely in this area and is an intrinsic part of their culture and occupation. The Mullu Kurumbas are bow-men and hunters, who consider that they belong to the Veduvar (hunting) tribe that once ruled parts of Wayanad with the capital at Puthadi. They also participated in the Kottayam Raja's anti-British revolt and joined the Kurichians, a neighbouring ethnic group, in their rebellion against the British power at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Traditionally, they were forest dwellers dependent on food gathering, hunting of small game, extensive fishing carried out mostly by women, and slash-and-burn agriculture. They speak a Kannada dialect called Kurumba *bhasha* with an admixture of Tamil and Malayalam words. They live in uni-ethnic settlements in the Wayanad district of Kerala, and there are about 10 settlements of theirs in Pandalur taluk with 8-12 households in each settlement. Their houses are neat, clean and aesthetic with a colour wash to the walls with designs. They are arranged in a planned manner around one or more quadrangles at the centre of which is a temple house, called deiva perai or koil veedu (god's house). This is of the same design as the other houses and its walls are decorated with various designs drawn and inscribed by the men at the time of its construction. The religion of the Mullu Kurambas is animist and their principal deity is Boothadi Deivam or god Kirathan. They worship other deities also namely Thambirathi, Malampuzha, Deivam Kali and Mariamma. A separate shed for husking harvested grains is also put up near the temple. They are experts in wall paintings and the making of hunting implements. Their folk songs are sung by men and women; in their dances it is mainly men who participate. Their musical instruments are mostly percussion instruments.

The land and forest policies of the colonial government and the in-migration of settlers have disenfranchised these people. Having restricted the practice of shifting cultivation and hunting the British government had provided a few acres of land for each of the Mullu Kurumba households. The lands allotted were mostly slopes of hills and unirrigated. Prior to the advent of the British planters and their establishment of huge plantations cultivating tea, pepper and coffee on a vast, commercial scale, there had been a migration of Jains, Gounders and Chettis into this region from Karnataka and Kerala. Establishing themselves as agriculturists they had used Adivasi labour as bonded labour. Nair chieftains had also established themselves in the area. During the Second World War there was another wave of migrant settlers, this time Syrian Christians from Travancore. This last wave of migrants wanted to acquire property and make money quickly. They are responsible

for reducing a large section of the Mullu Kurumbas into a landless agricultural labour population. Despite repeated demands the Fifth Schedule has so far not been applied in Adivasi areas of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Today they are either settled agriculturists cultivating their own land or work as labourers for big landowners and coffee and tea plantation owners. As marginal farmers they cultivate both dry and wet lands. In dry fields they raise spices such as pepper and ginger and crops like coffee and plantains. They cultivate paddy in the swampy wetlands. A very small percentage is employed in the private and public sectors, and a few Mullu Kurumbas run petty shops.

They have not benefited much in monetary terms from settled cultivation. Even when cash crops like coffee, pepper, tapioca, areca nut, etc., were introduced to them, they initially lacked the knowledge of fertilisers and pesticides for getting a good yield. Following the example of the migrant settlers they took loans for these new inputs. But once the interest on these loans was paid, they had little left to support themselves till the next crop. This situation made them all the more indebted, and ultimately they gave up their lands to the settlers to free themselves from the pressure of loans and became regular daily wage labourers. By 1965 the majority of Mullu Kurumbas had become daily wage labourers. Only a few of them escaped this fate. As a result of the break-up of communities into individual or family-based labourers, class differentiation started taking place among them. Individualism is taking the place of a collective ethos and community solidarity. Poor Mullu Kurumbas borrow from their more well-off brethren and this increases the gap among them. Moneylending within the community is leading to further land alienation. A few rich Mullu Kurumbas are grabbing land by giving loans at compound interest to their own community people. Indebtedness has become a chronic phenomenon among many of them.

New social evils like alcoholism, introduced by the Malayalee settler migrants, have crept in. New costs, like those for agricultural inputs, allopathic treatment in hospitals and clinics and by private doctors, expenses towards the education of children—all these are reasons for indebtedness that lead to land alienation. For a people who had eaten a protein-rich diet in the past the new found poverty is hitting their health status, particularly that of women and children, very hard. Higher than average infant and maternal mortality rates, anaemic women, undernourished children—all are the direct result of dietary insufficiencies.

Having intimate knowledge of the plant and animal life of their territory some of them have specialised in herbal medicine and are experts in curing illnesses. But

deforestation and lack of free access to forest interiors have curtailed the supply and access to wild medicinal herbs. This is the case in all the phyto-geographic areas of the country where these medicinal plants are to be found. Unsustainable harvesting practices of plants and their products used in the Ayurveda and Homeopathic industries are also making many such plants rare or extinct.

The elders' council is called Mumpanmar kuttam (meeting of the elder men). The hereditary chief, Mumpan, is assisted by the Porvunnavan, a religious ritual head, and the Veliccapati, who acts as a diviner during council meetings. This council settles all cases of violation of social norms and maintains social solidarity. With the breakdown of community life and values, the authority of this council has got considerably eroded. With their integration into mainstream society they have also begun to observe festivals like Vishu, Onam and Sankranthi. Their cultural heritage is in danger of dying out due to the percolation of modern media like cinema, television and radio. Special efforts are needed to preserve and develop it.

Urali Kurumbas

They are Kannada-speaking Kurumbas who have migrated from Mysore, where they lived in a large number. Earlier they used to live in the depths of jungles and were hunters, musicians, artisans (mainly as potters and blacksmiths) and sorcerers. But nowadays they live adjacent to big villages and towns and are hence called Urali Kurumbas, the word 'ur' meaning village; or they may live close to their non-tribal landlords or near their own cultivable fields. Their community headman is called Mudali or Ejaman, and their traditional tribal council is called Oorukoottam. Their religion is also animistic and they worship spirits like Kuttichathan and the goddess 'Bhagwati' in stone form. But some of them also visit faraway sacred centres of Karnataka like Dharmasthala, Udupi, Mookambika and also Tirupathi. Their community has an oral tradition with much folklore and many folk songs. They play wind and percussion musical instruments and both men and women participate in the dances. The Urali Kurumbas are more integrated into mainstream life and culture than the Mullu Kurumbas.

Like the Mullu Kurumbas and through a similar process the majority of them today are agricultural and tea, and spices plantation labourers. A few have lands and cultivate spices like ginger, pepper and cardamom. Some are engaged in animal husbandry, or in the collection and sale of minor forest produce, while others continue to hunt small animals and wild birds, which they also sell in the market. Or they live by carpentry and blacksmithy and the practice of traditional handicrafts such as basketry, pottery, or the making of bamboo mats and winnows.

Some of the women work as domestic maids, while some Urali Kurumbas are permanent employees in public and private sector undertakings.

Land alienation having taken place among the Urali Kurumbas, many are in the grip of indebtedness. The process of proletarianisation, when individuals of a largely self-sustaining community become wage labourers, has many consequences for them. As self-reliant and self-sufficient communities they were gathering, hunting, or growing what they needed most, that is, food. Only surplus was exchanged for a few other goods that they needed. Today wages are paid in cash not in kind, and by employer landholders, who grow crops according to the dictates of the market to get the maximum profit for themselves, rather than to meet the immediate requirements of the people of the region. The crops cultivated are cash crops like coffee, areca nut, rubber, etc. Most of these crops are processed, but the processing takes place outside the region. Value addition takes place somewhere else. Lack of industrial development in this region is in the interest of big planters, as they can then get their labour locally, easily and cheaply. By paying barely subsistence level wages the workers are made dependent on their employers, moneylenders and traders and this leads to indebtedness. Socially and politically they are completely marginalised and lack a common platform to assert their interests.

Paniyans

Paniyans live in the States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Within the Nilgiri district they live only in the Gudalur and Pandalur taluks. There are around 47 Paniyan settlements in Pandalur taluk and about 19 in Gudalur. They are the most ancient inhabitants of Wayanad and are expert hunters, agriculturists, dancers and musicians. They were brought over from Malabar in Kerala to the Nilgiris by the Manthadan Chettis as agricultural labourers. Often they were captured physically by members of landowning communities, provided shelter and held as bonded labourers.

The term Paniyan originates from the Malayalam word *pani* meaning work; *pannikkar* means worker or labourer. The term paniyan is used to address males, whereas the females are referred to as panichi. In physical appearance they resemble African tribes. At one time they were the principal stock-in-trade for the slave trade on the West Coast, and it is possible that they were imported from Africa and sold in Malabar. They speak 'Paniya' *bhasha*, which is a dialect of Malayalam with some Tamil and Tulu words; and they are able to converse in Malayalam and Tamil as well.

They were bought and sold as slaves until the "Abolition of Slavery Act" of the British government in the nineteenth century and worked as labourers on the farmlands owned by rich landlords. One general consequence of this bonded labour system was the breakdown of the family unit because a not-so-good worker spouse would be gotten rid of, and the labourer coaxed into remarrying a more productive person. A number of them continue to work as bonded labourers for landlords, although officially bonded labour has been abolished by the Indian government, and many of them were rehabilitated on government-owned farms. The Paniya habitat could be a thick forest where wild animals roam; or cultivated land where crops like paddy, millets, plantains and spices like pepper, ginger, tapioca, etc., are grown; or also marshy low-lying lands where paddy is grown. Paniyan settlements are close to cultivating land-owning caste/religious groups like the Manthadan Chettis, Muslims from Malabar known as Moplahs, and Syrian Christians from Travancore known locally as Chetans.

Most of the Paniyans are employed as agricultural labourers. A small percentage of them work in tea estates and tea factories. Many are engaged in the collection of fuel wood in assigned non-reserved forest areas. They sell the fuel wood to government-run co-operative depots in Pandalur and Gudalur towns. A small number engage in self-cultivation of spices, but mostly lack the money required for the inputs. The Paniyan households being very poor are also in a state of indebtedness. They take loans from neighbouring Kattunayakans and also from non-Adivasi friends working on tea estates.

The transition to a modern capitalist monetary economy where the forest is largely out of bounds for them has hit the Paniyans the hardest and put them at the bottom in terms of impoverishment, deprivation and outright destitution and homelessness. Some have taken to beggary as a livelihood means. Many have become prey to social evils like alcoholism and prostitution. There are more liquor outlets than food or medical shops near Paniya habitations. Chewing of betel leaves and nuts to kill hunger is a common addiction among men and women. Earlier they had plenty of good food to eat—vegetarian and non-vegetarian—which they freely took from the forests and were, therefore, in a much better state of health than today. The forest provided timber, thatch and bamboo for their houses and abundant fuel for cooking. Their needs were few and the forest met most of these needs; and they bartered forest produce or grain for requirements such as cloth, salt, etc.

The bonded labour system broke up their community, especially families. Today it is the scourge of alcoholism. The bonded labour system meant complete

dependency on the Chetti landlord for all religious and social ceremonies. He provided the rice, coconuts, oil and betel nuts. A wedding was financed by him. Fire for all their religious ceremonies was brought from the Chetti temple. The religious and cultural takeover of authority by the feudal landlords impacted their religious practices because of their denigration of Adivasi values. The fact that they had to wear their mund (lungi or loin cloth) not lower than the knees was to teach them to know their place in society and not to ape their 'betters.' After the feudal system broke down under the onslaught of a cash economy the Paniyans are not able to afford a traditional wedding. Elopement has become the norm and this has led to erosion of the authority of elders and customary norms.

The Paniya habitat region of Wayanad in Malabar was partly transferred to the Nilgiri district as a result of the 1956 States Reorganisation. This break-up of the Paniya habitat disturbed their traditional cultural and social patterns. Every Paniya settlement has its own traditional panchayat or council called Kottani. It is a permanent body consisting of a non-hereditary headman (called Muppan or Kuttan) and a group of elderly Paniyans called 'Muppanmars.' At the meetings of the panchayat all the adult Paniyan males of the settlement can participate. The participation of women is avoided unless they are involved in the disputes brought to the panchayat. The headman is assisted by other Paniyan specialists in community organisation and social control. In the Nilgiri district these specialists are generally brought in from the Wayanad (Sultan Bathery) region as the political areas or Nadus of the Paniyans in Gudalur and Pandalur are very small. During the bonded labour stage the headman was usually selected by the landlord on whose farm they were settled and working. Nowadays he is elected by the Paniyan elders. The Paniyans simultaneously participate in the government panchayat system, where women are also elected as panchayat members. Paniyans are members of the State Tribal Advisory Council and participate in the activities of NGOs as well.

Paniya religion is animist. Ancestral spirits and male and female deities are worshipped. The spirits are invoked for good actions by their shaman called 'Attali'. Their chief goddess is Kattau Bhavathi (goddess of the forest). Devil worship is also prevalent. Most of the Paniya songs invoke their ancestral spirits and deities. Paniya stories depict the relationship between Paniyans and their non-Adivasi masters, the problems with their wives over affairs in their master's household, and their relationship with animals around them. Hinduisation is also happening to some degree where Hindu gods and goddesses are worshipped together with other castes and tribes, which implies an acceptance of the Hindu caste system with its hierarchies. Nowadays, Paniyas go on pilgrimage to the Subramanya Swamy temple at Palani and to the Ayyappa temple in Sabarimala.

There have been many suicides among Paniyans in recent times. The reasons vary from poverty and indebtedness to conflict within the family or its break-up due to migration by some members; alcoholism; chronic stress and mental disorder due to insecure and impoverished livelihood conditions; feelings of alienation, loneliness, depression; lack of psycho-social solidarity or community feelings – all by-products of their present-day living conditions.

Kattunayakans

Kattunayakans are an Adivasi group found in all the four southern States. The name connotes that they are the nayakans (chiefs) of the kadu/kattu (forest). They are autochthon of the Western Ghats. In the Nilgiris they are found only in Pandalur and Gudalur taluks and live in about 43 settlements located in or near the forests.

The Kattunayakans of the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu speak Kannada and Malayalam with Telugu and Tamil words. Their traditional occupations are hunting and gathering, fishing, bird trapping and shifting agriculture. A large section of Kattunayakans still depends on their traditional occupation of gathering non-timber minor forest produce from forests and plains areas and selling it to traders with the knowledge of the Forest Department. The whole family including children move out during the collection season in search of roots, tubers, fruits, leaves, honey and deer horns. Some of them work in the Forest Department as watchers, fire destroyers, tamers of wild animals and mahouts. Although now most of the Kattunayakans have their own allotted lands, not many go in for self-cultivation of paddy and spices; most of them go in for wage labour on tea and spices plantations. Some of them lease in land and do all the work themselves on a family basis and share the crops and grass on a 50:50 basis. With their knowledge of plant and animal species of the forests they are considered adept sorcerers; many women work as health workers and healers using magico-religious herbal medicine.

The Kattunayakans are well-known honey collectors. They collect honey from the honeycombs inside the hollows of trees or stones. They use honey as a special diet for newborn children, pregnant women and aged male patients. By using reeds and bamboo logs the Kattunayakan men and women weave baskets and make bamboo vessels of different sizes and shapes for their own use and also for sale. Today, because of the scarcity of raw materials they have to cover long distances into the forests in search of them.

The Kattunayakans worship nature in the form of animals, birds, the sun, the moon, even shelter and the shade. They still worship rocks, hills, snakes and animals claiming their origin from them. They have implicit faith in charms, sorcery, black

magic and *mantrams*. Deities are Mari, Mastideivam (male), Hethappan, Mala Deivom and they also worship Siva by the name of Bairava. They celebrate festivals like Onam, Vishu and Adiyantiram jatre. Their oral tradition flows through music and dance along with songs and tales about forest trees, wildlife, famous temples and about acceptable behaviour in kinship relationships. Musical instruments used are the thambattai, kuzhal, pipi, kulalu, mard, parai, tempte, pukiri, kadimai and tavai.

Their council, headed by the muttam (headman), is called Nyaya. Every settlement also has a headman called karanvar or modale. Like the other Adivasi communities the Kattunayakans today are also an indebted community due to land alienation and deforestation. Work being seasonal, earnings are often not enough to cover all the costs of food, clothing, shelter and life cycle rituals in a monetised economy. They borrow from the neighbouring Kannada-speaking cultivators and Muslim moneylenders residing in Gudalur town.

Urali Sholigas

They are a subgroup of the Soligas of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Their traditional occupation was shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering, fishing, basket-making and the collection of minor forest produce. Today they continue with these activities along with working as agricultural labourers and are employed by the Forest Department. Some of them have converted to Christianity. Others follow their traditional religion of reverence for natural objects, plants and animals and their deities along with worshipping Hindu deities. Indebtedness is a fact of their life.

Each of these communities tries to maintain its distinct ethnic identity and, therefore, maintains a social distance from the others. In the past the ethnic groups, while maintaining their social distance from one another and preserving their cultural lifestyle and occupational differences, respected each other's territory and there was no conflict of interest. In fact, there was an exchange of goods and services. Even today, Paniyans and Mullu Kurumbas have economic or monetary transactions between them besides the ritual exchange of gifts, but Mullu Kurumbas consider themselves to be a superior and more advanced community as compared to the others. All the communities are afraid of the Kattunayakans because of their practice of black magic and sorcery. At the same time, in the early period all three communities took the help of the Kattunayakans' herbal medicine and magical powers to cure the diseases of men, women, children and domestic animals. The

concept of private property in land has been introduced and it is now usually passed down the male line.

The Paniyas are considered to be the lowest in the social hierarchy and the most polluting by the other Adivasi communities due to their dependent serf status. The Kattunayakans will not eat food cooked by them, and the other communities do not allow them to enter beyond the outer veranda of their houses. Unfortunately today, with some breakdown of community values, there is insufficient interaction and solidarity on the basis of their loss of freedom and exploitation and consequently deprived and disadvantaged status. The Adivasis of Wayanad and the Nilgiri district are no longer homogenous groups. Caste and class differentiation has taken place, and the Paniyas are the lowest among the low, and are treated as untouchables by the others.

Extensive land grabbing continues to be done in a speculative way, by big estate owners, who are always trying to increase their holdings, by those who are politically connected and through the process of bribery. Land disputes involving large areas are there. Adivasis are again a casualty in this process. A PUCL report of 2002 cites an Adivasi family residing near the village of Chalivaiyal who allegedly had been forcibly evicted from their houses and farmlands three times within a period of three months. The evictions were performed by a neighbouring estate, which was continuously expanding its area and tried to take over their lands. Each time they were beaten, their houses demolished and their property destroyed. The Tamil Nadu government's Janmom Lands (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act, 1969, notified in 1974, completely bypasses the question of Adivasi land rights.

In any turnaround from the current situation the interests of Adivasis and concomitantly the environmental conservation interests need to be fore-grounded. As such they are the dispossessed ones here and, as the original inhabitants, land and forest produce rights have to be restored to them and ensured to the other poor of the area, particularly to the large repatriate Dalit population from Sri Lanka.

Education Status

Literacy level is one of the key indicators of the socio-economic conditions of a society and of the social groups within it. There is a considerable gap in the literacy level of STs as compared with that of the general literacy level in the State of Tamil Nadu, which mirrors that in India as a whole. The literacy level for STs is 54.3% in the State as against 73.3% for SCs and the general average of 80.33% (as per the

2011 Census). The gap in tribal female literacy is still more glaring. According to a 2000 Planning Commission report, the school drop-out rate among STs in Tamil Nadu between classes 1-8 is 71.60%. In the Nilgiri district it is about 74% between the eighth and tenth standards. This was higher than that recorded in Karnataka and Kerala. In the Nilgiri district the drop-out rate of the tribal girl child is much higher than among the STs of other districts. The literacy level among the Adivasi communities in Pandalur taluk is the lowest in the district with high drop-out rates at the upper primary and high school levels.

In Tamil Nadu—as in the rest of India—formal school education began to be imparted to the Adivasi population by Christian missionaries during British rule. After independence following the provisions of the Constitution under Articles 15(4) and 46, the Government of India and the State governments have established primary, middle and high schools under varying nomenclature in Adivasi areas. The Government of Tamil Nadu has been extending formal education to Adivasi children through the Department of Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare. The Department runs tribal residential (GTR) schools offering various incentives to increase enrolment in these schools like scholarships, stipends, free hostel facilities, material aids in the shape of stationary, textbooks, uniforms, cycles, etc., as in other parts of the country. To encourage the enrolment of Adivasi girls and to avoid drop-outs, the government is giving Rs. 500 per annum to Adivasi girls who are studying in standards 3-5. The Adivasi girls entering sixth standard are given a sum of Rs. 100 each per month for 10 months.

There are 280 government tribal residential schools and 26 hostels in the State and 25 such schools and 2 hostels in Nilgiri district. In Gudalur block there are 9 Government Tribal Residential (GTR) schools, 21 government primary schools, 15 government middle and higher secondary schools, and 10 mostly church-run private schools from the primary to the higher educational levels. The fees charged by the private schools are on the high side with the tuition fee being more than Rs. 5,000 per year. Additional expenditure has to be done on the uniform, transport costs, books and so on. The schools are also quite far from the villages. It is not only Adivasi children who study in these schools; SC, MBC and BC students as well as students from other communities are also enrolled. In some of the schools the non-Adivasi students outnumber the Adivasi students, however a quota of at least 60% is allotted by the government to STs in these schools.

When we look at the student performance in these schools we find a high wastage, i.e. drop-out rate, at the upper primary level, and the percentage of Adivasi students passing the tenth standard exam is also very low. The pass percentage in

Adi Dravidar schools has consistently been lower than in almost all other categories of schools. For example, in 2006 the pass percentage of Adi Dravidar students in the higher secondary exam recorded a new low of 53.61%, while the average pass rate was 74.51%. This means that the students are promoted from class to class without having learnt much. There is in fact even an allegation by a Tamil writer (D. Ravi Kumar) that if at all Adi Dravidar students pass the higher secondary exam it is because they are allowed to copy *en masse*!

The reasons for this abysmal performance lie in the quality of the schools. The infrastructure with regard to furniture, classrooms, laboratories, toilets, drinking water and other facilities is inadequate; there is an acute shortage of good, qualified and motivated teachers. A large number of teachers' posts remain vacant. Even the appointed teachers often play truant and fail to turn up in the school because of the distance they have to travel to reach the schools. They are often from other community backgrounds and do not have a positive attitude towards the students they teach. Sometimes they double up as moneylenders for the poor parents. Certainly they do not act as a source of inspiration for the students. As the medium of instruction is not the Adivasi languages, students are often unable to comprehend the lessons. The syllabus is inappropriate to felt needs and is alienated from their culture and life patterns encouraging rote learning. Loss of identity is indicated by the fact that school names are adopted from the dominant culture and language and differ from their original names.

There are few middle schools at a walking distance. The school hours interfere with hours of work that the children need to do for their families, particularly during the peak agricultural seasons. As the Adivasi parents are both busy—they leave early and come home late—they are unable to take proper care of their children. They are not able to prepare them for school and in no way can they help them in their homework or studies, unlike the parents of middle class children. Migration of parents in the search for employment interferes with the education of their children. They are unwilling to leave their children in hostels where facilities are inadequate. The general poverty levels are a deterrent in the continuation of formal education, which has many hidden costs despite the subsidies. This paves the way for child labour. The majority of the rural Adivasis feel that even after attaining education, a basic or decent livelihood is not ensured.

The government schools are not supposed to charge fees at all. But many teachers go on leave to Mettupalayam or Coimbatore, and then the Parent-Teacher Associations collect money from the parents and give it to the school for appointing a teacher in the school. Money is also collected for maintenance work

and for building extensions. Such monies are not collected against receipts. There is no accountability. It is alleged by local people that headmasters of government and GTR schools regularly bribe the District Officer in charge of the Adi Dravidar and Welfare Department to look the other way at their own siphoning off of government funds for the schools. Many headmasters are known to be corrupt and have built big bungalows for their use and own tea estates as well.

The high girl child drop-out rate has its own specific reasons. One of the important reasons for low enrolment of girls in the Adivasi areas is the lack of relevance of formal education for their roles and responsibilities in their own culture. Parents encourage girls to participate more in economic and domestic duties after they attain puberty. Public celebration of 'puberty rites' is there and very often marriage alliances are fixed around this time. From this time on the girl is oriented to marriage and family rather than formal education. Girls are not encouraged to stay in GTR hostels due to the scarcity of lady wardens and the lack of proper toilet and food facilities. Life cycle and other rituals and festivities also demand the presence of girls at home for many days at a time. Parents have a fear of possible affairs and elopements taking place out of the Adivasi communities. The wages that adolescent and adult girls can earn through their labour are needed by the poverty-stricken parents, and they are sometimes not allowed to continue with their education for this reason also.

Unaided private schools in the Nilgiris are by and large not implementing the Right to Education (RTE) Act in the proper spirit and are catering to the well-off children locally, from the plains and even other countries without bothering much about their responsibilities with regard to the marginalised and underprivileged in the area. The idea of neighbourhood schools and common schooling with all the challenges it involves hardly finds any takers.

National Parks and Tiger Reserves

Land ownership has become a critical issue in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve due to the incursions of plantations and parks and sanctuaries, though there are standing orders that land assigned to specific Adivasi communities shall not be transferred to persons not belonging to the same class without permission of the Divisional Officer. There are many illegal encroachments of disputed lands by estates and forest bureaucracy and this happens not only in the Nilgiris but in others places as well. The Dalits and Adivasis who work as cheap and sometimes bonded labourers in the tea and coffee estates do not always get the protection under the Plantations

Labour Act. The Nilgiris as other erstwhile Adivasi regions are symptomatic of development sans development.

So-called eco-tourist initiatives within national parks are not only environment-unfriendly but also a cause of displacement of the indigenous people. Creation of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in 2007 out of the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park was not done in a particularly transparent and democratic manner, as local panchayats and people were not consulted on its formation as required by law.[4] It again put into jeopardy the livelihood concerns of Adivasi groups living in the precincts of and in the vicinity of the Reserve. This is done while at the same time encouraging resorts. Some researchers and activists have come to the conclusion that forming Tiger Reserves is another form of land grab from the Adivasis and local non-Adivasi small farmers in the teeth of their opposition by vested and interlinked political and commercial interests. It is indeed strange that the amount of monies spent on tiger conservation (often to combat poachers) far exceeds the amount that hs been spent on relocation or rehabilitation of ousted Adivasis and other forest dwellers. The Global Tiger Recovery Programme is heavily supported by Germany, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and other international financial institutions and it is estimated that per animal expenses work out to more than $100,000 on a world scale.[5] Simultaneously, the actors involved in the international illegal sale of tiger body parts and that of other endangered wildlife, remain highly camouflaged.

The Forest Department has been responsible for clear-felling much of Mudumalai and is responsible for most of the degradation that has taken place there. Corruption in the Forest Department is high; illegal logging and poaching with the connivance of the Forest Department is a daily occurrence. Often Adivasis are implicated in these activities when there are actually mafias involved that include traders and forest officials with political connections. With large-scale habitat destruction and introduction of cash crops, animal-man conflicts are on the rise. This particularly affects those Adivasis who live in the fringe areas of the forests, whereby there is inadequate or delayed compensation for these losses. Crop raids by elephants and wild boars are frequent. Tiger, bear, gaur and leopard attacks lead to human and cattle casualties. Overall rainfall has decreased due to deforestation and this has affected the role of the region as a watershed for neighbouring plains areas.

Mudumulai is part of an elephant corridor area and the report of the Elephant Task Force set up by the MoEF in 2010 unambiguously identifies developmental projects as open cast mining, hydroelectric and irrigation projects, roads, railway

lines, high-tension electric lines, and monoculture plantations as the primary cause of degradation and fragmentation of elephant habitats. The interrelated nature of forests and elephants can be gauged from the fact that a number of species of plants and trees germinate well only when their seeds pass through the alimentary canal of the elephants. Seeding in jungles is a service carried out by many other animal, bird and insect species, of course, which is well recorded in Adivasi lore! The Task Force recommends the identification and securing of elephant corridors through purchase of land, voluntary relocation of people and, specifically for STs, an additional relief and rehabilitation package. Again, without being the cause of the problem, vulnerable STs along with others get in line for eviction and loss of lands and livelihoods.

Adivasi Struggles in Nagarhole

The Nagarhole National Park in Kodagu district of Karnataka is a part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. An area of 57,155 ha in Nagarhole, an erstwhile royal hunting preserve, had been constituted as a sanctuary in 1955. The Government of Karnataka declared a small part of Nagarhole (which means 'Snake stream' in the local language) as a Game sanctuary in 1972. Subsequently, the area under the sanctuary was further increased to 643.39 ha. The Nagarhole National Park was constituted in 1988 and it was declared a Tiger Reserve in 1999. It was renamed Rajiv Gandhi National Park in 1992.

Several ethnic groups have inhabited the area from time immemorial subsisting on the use of natural resources such as medicinal plants, agriculture and horticulture. There were Jenu Kurubas, the honey-gatherers and gatherers of other forest produce such as tamarind, gooseberry, tree gum, roots, and herbs selling them at throwaway rates to the traders who came to their settlements; the Hakki Pikki (bird-trappers); the Betta Kurubas who specialised in making bamboo baskets and utensils, and who along with the Jenu Kurubas had been pushed away by peasant castes from the fertile lands along the Kabini river in an earlier period; the Yeravas who survived on fishing; and the Soligas who from hunting, gathering and shifting agriculture, have diversified into settled subsistence agriculture, herding goats and working as migrant contract labour in coffee and pepper plantations, and at construction sites in Kodagu, Wayanad and Coimbatore. Apart from those who lived within the forests, there were thousands of Adivasis residing within 5 km distance, all depending on the Nagarhole forests for their survival.

Non-Adivasi lands converted into coffee estates were carefully kept out of the National Park area, although they were encroached lands. The Indian Institute of

Public Administration, Delhi prepared a plan in 1993 for Eviction, Development and Rehabilitation in Nagarhole. This was done on the basis of a detailed eco-development report by the Field Director of Nagarhole National Park, as part of a Preliminary Indicative Plan for Nagarhole National Park for Biodiversity Conservation through Development.

Under the UN scheme for Biosphere Reserves, the forests, animals, birds, agriculture and the Adivasis ought to have been protected for their uniqueness. But the government agencies violated this norm for lucrative business interests. The natural forests have been extensively logged and substituted with plantations of teak, eucalyptus and rosewood. In more than 40 hamlets within the park, Adivasi lands were taken over for these plantations. Nearly 15 per cent of the area within the National Park is now under plantations. Governments have been systematically pushing the Adivasis out to the forest fringes making them into 'conservation refugees.'

Severe restrictions were placed on indigenous people who continued to live within the forests. They were seen and labelled as illegal encroachers. Trenches were dug in their fields and paths. No cultivation of any kind was allowed. Hunting, even ritual hunting, was banned. No livestock or dogs were allowed; no wells could be dug. The houses could not be renovated. A total ban on collection of minor forest produce such as tubers, mushrooms and wild vegetables was imposed. Adivasis were not allowed entry to their sacred sites and burial grounds within the forests. The government even sought to put a ban on traditional music and dance forms. The Adivasis were constantly harassed and intimidated. Several Adivasi women were molested. Many were put behind bars on fake charges of forest offences. These and many other methods are used to make the forest dwellers agree to shift out of the forest. Cases of suicides and murders, hitherto unheard of, also came up because of the disruption of their communal lifestyle. These displaced/resettled Adivasis will likely get into conflict with already existing populations.

The indigenous people had to suffer all this while several non-Adivasi encroachers were allowed to remain within the forests and cultivate nearly 660 ha of forest lands on payment of yearly taxes. Many among them managed to get title deeds for nearly 100 ha of forest land. Since its actions and approaches towards the Adivasis decimate their population even leading to the extinction of some groups, the State government adds new groups to the list of STs to camouflage this. Such additions to the existing list may be favoured in terms of reservation and welfare measures and serve as vote banks for political parties, who use this method for 'divide and rule' and this is the case not just in Karnataka but elsewhere as well.

Eco-tourism and Eco-development

The worst of such preference shown to the non-Adivasis and the rich pleasure-seeking people at the cost of the indigenous people came about when in 1994 the State government entered into a lease agreement with the Taj Group of Hotels, one of the richest business groups in India, to build and operate a three-star tourist resort on 10 ha of forest land at Murkal in Nagarhole. The agreement was in total violation of the Forest (Conservation) Act and the Wildlife (Protection) Act. The agreement contradicted all tall claims of protecting the ecological balance and the biodiversity in the National Park. The plan of the Taj Group included building a bar, conference hall and restaurant and organising guided tours of the forest. Once the indigenous peoples were thrown out, the forests would be opened up to scientific visitors interested in biodiversity research—a euphemism for bio-prospecting (screening of plants for useful gene sequences) and for trading in other forest products as bio-pesticides, gums, resins, and dyes, which have a good demand all over the world.

But organised resistance by the Adivasis with support from various quarters made these plans difficult. When the Adivasis blocked the construction of the 'Jungle Lodge', the authorities arrested all of them—men, women and children. The Adivasis launched an "enter the forest campaign" on the Independence Day of 1995 and declared self-rule as their goal. They also demanded the scheduling of Adivasi areas in the State. The Adivasis struggled for many years and finally a writ petition was moved in the High Court of Karnataka by the Nagarhole Budakattu Hakku Sthapana Samithi (Nagarhole Adivasi Rights Restoration Forum) and others against this ethnocide through forced eviction. On 20 January 1997, the Karnataka High Court ruled that the assignment of forest land to the Taj Group was in gross violation of several national laws for conservation of nature and wildlife.

Then there came up another challenge for the indigenous people. In 1996 a World Bank-supported eco-development project was proposed to be started in Nagarhole. In 1980, in the situation of livelihood crisis created for the forest dwellers, because they do not have accessibility to natural forest resources, a conservation strategy—subsequently conceptualised as eco-development—was proposed by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), UNEP and the WWF. It emphasised the importance of alleviating rural poverty through village development as a component of conservation planning. In the mid-1990s, India negotiated a grant-cum-loan of US dollar 56 million with the World Bank's Global Environment Facility (GEF) and International Development Association (IDA) for eco-development

at seven locations around select PAs instead of using monies available with rural development agencies.[6] Under this 'India Eco-Development Programme' that was executed between 1996 and 2004 piggery, poultry, milch cattle farming and potato cultivation were introduced at the various project locations, but they failed because they were alien to the traditional knowledge and practices of the local people. Moreover, there was corruption in dealing with project funds. The main aim of this programme seems to have been to reduce forest dependency of forest-dependent people by providing alternate means of income generation.

The Nagarhole eco-development project was one among these and it was provided a loan (42%) by the Bank's IDA and a grant (30%) by its GEF; the rest of the finance required was to come from the Central government (10%) and State government (12%) and the balance (6%) from the project beneficiaries contributing in cash, kind, or labour. The eco-development project actually negated the World Bank's own norms of "not carrying out any involuntary resettlement of people," not eroding the "customary tenure rights over land and other assets of tribals living in the Protected Areas" ensuring "prior informed consent and participation" and "compensating the people relocated". Nevertheless, with the multi-crore eco-development project promising a huge bounty, the government intensified the pressure to evict the remaining indigenous people from the Nagarhole Forests. The project intended to wean away the Adivasis from the forests by nominally 'training' them in subsistence occupations such as pig rearing. This enterprise would be shown to be viable by pumping in massive subsidies. With this the indigenous people could be resettled outside the forests. The World Bank would have its hands clean.

At Nagarhole a resistance built up against this project. An important element of the Nagarhole resistance was that it was led by the indigenous people, however various NGOs and activists extended their support to it. The indigenous people declared self-rule in the area and drew up their own development plan for the regeneration of the forests based on their deep knowledge of the forests. In the face of such determined resistance the World Bank prudently withdrew from implementing the project at Nagarhole.

Lands and Livelihoods in Jeopardy

The land reforms of the 1960s and '70s did not benefit the Adivasis in any way in Karnataka too. Though the State government passed the Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prohibition of Transfer of Certain Lands) Act,

1978 the state continued to retain its control over forest protection, production and management, and the plantations were exempted from the ambit of the land reforms. As we have seen, the formation of the Nagarhole National Park in the late 1980s resulted in forcible eviction of the Adivasis from the forest interiors to their peripheries. So did the formations of the Kudremukh National Park and Bandipur Tiger Reserve. Other State projects that resulted in the displacement of various Adivasi groups as Betta Kurubas, Jenu Kurubas, Soligas, Yeravas and Paniyas were the Harangi Dam Project, Naval Seabird Project in Karwar, and the Kaiga Atomic Power Project in the Uttara Kannada district. In none of these cases has there been proper rehabilitation of those displaced from their homes and sources of livelihood.

It is under these conditions of the loss of earlier ways of life and livelihood that many are forced to opt for seasonal labour in the coffee plantations. The miserable conditions of living and working and the exploitation by the planters and contractors has not changed much from the colonial times, as described in Karanth's novelette, *Chomana Dudi* (Choma's Drum). The cash crop nature of coffee cultivation and its dependency on the vagaries of the external domestic and international market create its own set of problems. But the planters try to manoeuvre this situation to their own advantage, while keeping the Adivasi and Dalit labourers in their grip. The resorts constructed in forest areas provide scope for jobs for many tribal children almost as bonded labour. Sometimes the tourists buy tribal children paying some amount to their parents and take them to their homes for domestic and agricultural labour.[7]

Among the alternative livelihoods sought and found are those as agriculture labour in other villages, migration to the ginger fields in Kodagu and to the tea and coffee plantations of Nilgiri district. Tens of thousands of Adivasis from Sultan Bathery and Mananthavady of Wayanad district toil in the ginger fields of Kodagu as well as Mysore and Shimoga districts under killing conditions of work (Vijayan 2009: 16-17). Knowing full well their economic vulnerability, smuggling mafia and corrupt forest officials engage them to smuggle out sandalwood, ivory and other costly wood. If they are caught, they face harassment and legal punishment. Those who engage them easily escape.

Adivasis very often have to suffer atrocities and oppression at the hands of a police force which is more geared towards supporting those in power and dancing to the tune of political bosses rather than protecting the vulnerable, oppressed and poor. For nabbing Veerappan, the sandalwood smuggler, a Special Task Force of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu police was set up. Raping of women, unlawful detention, custodial deaths, encounter killings, robbing the Adivasis of their sheep,

chicken, etc., using them as menial and unpaid workers were some of the activities indulged in by the police force during this time.

An alternative development and land use pattern in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve area is the need of the hour. The current predatory tourism and monoculture plantations-based economy has to be given up in favour of one that would seek to regain food security and self-sufficiency on the basis of chemical-free organic agriculture and would seek to conserve original forest species and biodiversity. It would seek to promote traditional artisan activity, traditional herbal medicines, and the development and maximum possible use of renewable energy sources. The presence of only those educational institutions should be allowed that are inclusive and sensitive to the needs of the Dalits, Adivasis and other poor. All these radical changes cannot come from above through a bureaucracy that is by and large corrupt, lethargic, callous, apathetic, or with the help of existing political parties, or NGOs. To get the economy and society onto this development trajectory a joint front of the Adivasis is required with other poor and middle income sections and like-minded individuals in the area and beyond, who believe in putting people before profits and uphold humane values.

Notes

1. These reserves were set up with the basic objective of conserving and developing a knowledge base about the biodiversity of a region, with the emphasis on humans as an integral part of the ecosystem and the philosophy that local communities should be actively involved in conservation programmes. In actual fact, the Forest Department continues to be in charge. Ecologists like Madhav Gadgil have noted that in none of the Biosphere Reserves established in India is there any attempt to reconcile developmental activities with conservation (note the havoc caused by unbridled commercial tourism in the Nilgiris), to properly harness the traditional knowledge of local communities, or to involve such communities in environmental management in order to achieve the objectives envisioned for these reserves.
2. Post-independence the Nilgiri region was claimed by the Kannadigas and Tamils. Malayalees claimed mainly Wayanad and Gudalur (previously called Nilgiri Wayanad), as their rajas had controlled parts of these territories over a long period of time, and they had a strong presence in these areas due to immigration during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Each group put forth its arguments to the Linguistic Provinces Commission formed by the Government of India. Wayanad subsequently became part of Kerala State and Gudalur was retained in the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu.

3. The currently accepted divisions of the Kurumbas are the ones put forth by Dieter B. Kapp. See "The Kurumba Tribes" by Dieter B. Kapp and Paul Hockings in: Hockings (ed.) 1989.
4. Consent from the Gram Sabha and public consultations with the stakeholders as the Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers in the area is required before a Critical Wildlife Habitat/Critical Tiger Habitat is declared both under the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act and the Forest Rights Act. The FRA was oriented towards recognising and vesting scheduled tribes and other forest dwellers with 13 different rights within forests, including that of cultivation for livelihood, based on historical claims. Before declaring an area to be CWH or CTH 'scientific evidence' that activities of local people would cause irreversible damage to wildlife has to be produced. None of this was adequately done. Furthermore, not having obtained consent from local communities was a move that undermined the central purpose of the FRA, namely that of increasing local democratic control over natural resources (see Taghioff and Menon).
5. Jonathan Watts: Doubts Linger as First Tiger Summit Ends. *The Hindu*, 26 November 2010.
6. "Where Communities Care: Community-based Wildlife and Ecosystem Management in South Asia" by Ashish Kothari, Neema Pathak and Farhad Vania Pune: Kalpavriksh and International Institute of Environment and Development, 2000, pp. 36-37.
7. B. Sharanappa: Life and Livelihood of Karnataka Adivasis. In: *Women and Environment*. 4(1), January-June 2002: 14.

6

POLITICAL MILITANCY AND ADIVASIS IN TELANGANA AND ANDHRA PRADESH

The Adivasis of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have a history of rebellion against the Indian state. The main Adivasi groups inhabiting both the plains and hills in these States are the Gonds, Koyas, Hill Reddis, Savaras, Bagatas, Jatapus, Valmikis, Yerukulas, Chenchus and Yenadis among others. The Adivasi belt in this part of the country was broken up and incorporated in the States of Andhra Pradesh (A.P.), Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha by the British colonial government. The Adivasis of A.P. and Telangana live in both Scheduled and non-Scheduled areas. Scheduled or Agency Areas cover about 10.7 per cent of the undivided State and are spread over eight districts, viz., Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam and Mahbubnagar districts. Adivasi groups are also present in Vizianagaram, Kurnool and Prakasham districts of Andhra Pradesh. In all, there are about 33 different Adivasi groups in the States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Their percentage of the total population is higher in Telangana at 9.3%, whereas in A.P. they constitute 5.5% of the population.

Besides the series of Adivasi uprisings during the British period, the Adivasis of this region were very much involved in the Telangana insurrection (1946-51) as well as in the later Naxalite-led anti-feudal, anti-state struggles of the late '60s.

Amongst these, the guerrilla movement of the Adivasis in Srikakulam district was marked by its intensity and stated aim of overthrowing the existing state structure and establishing a "people's democratic dictatorship led by the proletariat."

Struggles During the Colonial Period

The relative autonomy of the tribal communities, which existed despite their interaction with detribalised and peasantised society and feudal kingdoms, was slowly undermined in the course of British colonial rule. The changes introduced by the British in the areas inhabited by the Adivasis, the repercussions of these on their lives resulted in a series of uprisings against these encroachments on their rights and way of life. A narration of some of these uprisings in A.P. will suffice to illustrate the kind of changes introduced by the British.

The Gudem and Rampa tracts in Andhra, which witnessed a number of rebellions, are largely inhabited by the Telugu-speaking Hill Reddis, the Koyas (a branch of the Gond Adivasis speaking the Kui language), the Konda Doras, a more Teluguised ethnic group in speech and custom than the Koyas, and the Kammars (blacksmiths). Before the ceding of these tracts as part of the Northern Circars to the East India Company in 1765, the revenue collection within the feudal set-up ran through a chain of intermediaries (*muttadars,* zamindars, *mansabadars*, rajas and the emperor). At the local level, in the Adivasi areas, were the *muttadars* drawn from among the local chieftains who had the hereditary duty of keeping watch over their *muttas* (estates consisting from 3-30 villages) and handing over any rebels or outlaws, and collecting revenue—*kist* or *kattubadi*—from each village fixed according to the number of households. Some villages were granted as *mokhasas* (gift lands) to relatives of the *mansabadars*/zamindars or to those whose services and loyalty needed to be rewarded. Smaller land grants (*inams)* were given for the maintenance of the overlords' servants and retainers and some were held by his *paiks* (military peons).

This situation changed after the accession of these territories to the British. The colonial interest in commercial utilisation of the forest resources and promotion of commercialised agriculture for the external market encroached upon the rights of the Adivasi communities in these areas, who had been subsisting through the collection of forest produce and by carrying out *podu* (shifting) cultivation. The building of roads into the hills connecting them to the plains areas and to the Madras-Calcutta railway, incorporated the hills into the national and international economy. Forest and agricultural produce went from here to other Indian cities

as well as to international markets, for example, London and Hamburg. The extension of settled agriculture into the more accessible parts of the hills drew migrant cultivators (largely Telagas) from the plains as well as moneylenders and/cum traders. These were from among the Malas and Komatis. While the Malas engaged in petty trading, the Komatis traded in the more lucrative products like timber, opium or alcohol. With the introduction of commercialised production the hill tribes found themselves forced into subordinate positions. They were forced into settled cultivation and many became poor tenants and sharecroppers or bonded labourers working for an outsider landlord producing crops for the market.

In regard to the collection of minor forest produce the Adivasis became subordinate to contractors and other plains people, who were given permits by the government and who paid them very little for the produce thus collected. The colonial Forest and Land Acquisition Laws enabled the government to extend its absolute sovereign rights over the forests here as in the rest of India. In place of need-based customary and free use of the forest resources by the Adivasis and adjoining peasant societies, a set of restrictions came to be imposed. The inhabitants of the forests were treated as 'encroachers' and 'podu' cultivation was virtually forbidden. Many free Adivasis were pushed into the status of a landless, semi-proletariat working for a plains contractor at very low wages—cutting bamboo, felling trees, hauling timber, constructing roads—which led to further erosion of the forest wealth, soil fertility and environmental degradation.

This was the scenario in Gudem and Rampa as well. The hitherto alien concept of private property had been introduced, and the *muttadars* began to mortgage the land under their jurisdiction to outsiders, earlier an impermissible phenomenon. Sometimes they became insolvent and indebted to the moneylenders-cum-traders and allowed the land to be alienated to them or to outsider cultivators. In 1904, the British government consolidated this process by deposing the *muttadars* and converting several villages into ryotwari settlements, giving land titles to outsiders. The hitherto independent forest dweller was also reduced to doing paid and unpaid (*vetti*) labour for the officials of the forest, revenue and police departments and the contractors. The *gothi* system was also in vogue, whereby the Adivasi was bound to work as an agricultural labourer till his debt was cleared off. The creditor-employer paid him inadequately and extracted too much work. The Adivasi was burdened further with a number of new taxes to be paid for resources earlier available freely, like for cutting wood for personal house building, and for collecting minor forest produce. Often the forest officials extracted more than the amount stipulated by the government.

extracted forced labour from them for road building. The first of these *fithuris* (rebellions) took place in 1802-1803 and the last of them under the leadership of Alluri Sreerama Raju in 1922-24. This last one became a clear-cut part of the countrywide national liberation struggle against the British, but it was prepared to use the armed path rather than the Gandhian path of non-violence. It also attempted to unite the Adivasis of the hills and the peasantry in the plains.

It was due to the outbreak of many such rebellions in the Adivasi tracts in various parts of the country including Andhra that the British changed their tactics but not their basic policy in these forest areas. Though all these rebellions were directed against British rule, the colonialists preferred to view them as directed against the exploitation by *mahajans* and zamindars. The solution they came up with was a form of direct executive rule in the Adivasi areas. Administration and the collection of revenue were vested in an officer denominated Agent to the Governor-General. The Ganjam and Vizagapatnam Act of 1839 thus set the Agency Areas apart from the rest of the Madras Presidency in terms of administration and revenue collection. In 1917 the Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act was passed, which was aimed at preventing land alienation from the Adivasis to the outsider non-Adivasis. Any such transaction could be declared null and void with the proviso that the authorities could evict violators of the law. It provided that the rate of interest on any debt or liability against a member of an ST shall be below 24% per annum. It ruled out charging any compound interest or any other collateral advantage against an Adivasi. Another important Act was the Andhra Agency Debt Abolition Regulation of 1940 of Madras Presidency. Regulation III of this Act abolished the system of bondage in Adivasi areas and the violators were made liable for punishment.

However, since the rest of the policies relating to government sovereignty over forest areas, that is, the commercialisation of forest resources and encouragement of cash crop cultivation remained unchanged, and clever outsiders knew how to circumvent the laws, this so-called policy of isolation, protection and preservation of Adivasi areas did not work out in practice to ameliorate their conditions, and the process of land alienation and other forms of exploitation of the Adivasis by outsiders continued unabated.

Before proceeding to look at the post-1947 situation of the Adivasis in Andhra Pradesh/Telangana we can also briefly consider their situation in the Nizam-ruled State of Hyderabad, where they formed part of the population of Khammam, Warangal, Adilabad and Mahbubnagar.

Party. The landless in the Godavari forest area, mainly from the Koya Adivasi community, helped them in their war against the Indian Army and many of them joined the guerrilla *dalams* (squads). They had to pay a heavy price for this when the Indian Army burnt down the Adivasi hamlets and herded the Koya people into concentration camps as part of their suppressive tactics.

The transfer of power to the Congress-led Indian government in 1947 did not give rise to any drastic change for the positive change in the situation of the Adivasis because support to the Congress came from these very same landlord-moneylender-trader sections who wanted to continue their exploitation of the Adivasis and their territories with even more of a free hand.

In recent times the Adivasis of this region have supported the formation of a separate Telangana State in the face of economic and cultural hegemony and the appropriation of the resources in Telangana by the ruling classes and business interests of Coastal Andhra. Coal, water, minerals, forests – these are an inalienable part of the homelands of the Gond, Koya, Kolam, Nayakpodu, Chenchu and other Adivasis. If in the new State decisions on resource utilisation are not a matter of Adivasi self-determination it amounts to a continuation of internal colonialism.

Srikakulam and Political-Ideological Developments

In Chapter 2 we have elaborated that there was no basic change in the conditions of Adivasis in post-1947 India. Under these circumstances it was natural that after a lapse of about a decade or so, in the late 1960s, many rebellions and struggles broke out again in the Adivasi areas. Although passing through highpoints and ebbs, ferocious repression, and many strategies aimed at co-option a sharp contradiction continues to exist between the aspirations of the Adivasis and the state projects imposed on them. The situation is no different in Andhra Pradesh. In 1961, eighty per cent of the Adivasis in A.P. were dependent on agriculture, but the per capita holding was only 0.66 acres.

Here we shall discuss in detail the Adivasi movement in the Agency areas of Srikakulam district in the 1950s and '60s, which became famous all over India for the challenges it posed to the oppressor caste dominated state power. The highpoint of the struggles came in 1968-69 when the Adivasis were able to establish 'liberated areas' under the leadership of the CPI (ML) for a short period before they were crushed by the fire power of the state machinery.

continued with shifting cultivation despite the ban on it as the only means of growing food for themselves.

Although a large number of land reform laws pertaining specifically to the Adivasi areas were passed, they remained largely ineffectual in changing the basic condition of the Adivasis. These included the Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Areas) Land Transfer Regulation of 1959, which was basically a repromulgation of the British Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act of 1917, but had imposed more stringent restrictions on land transfers in Scheduled Areas than the Act of 1917. However, this Act was not implemented with the necessary will and alacrity and remained largely on paper, while land alienation to non-Adivasi outsiders continued. For nearly ten years after passing the regulation, the working rules were not framed. The 1959 Act was originally applicable only to the Scheduled Areas of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East and West Godavari districts in Coastal Andhra. Late in 1963 it was extended to the Scheduled Areas of Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam, and Mahbubnagar districts of Telangana by the Regulation II of 1963. There were also other legislations in force, like the A.P. Moneylenders Regulation, 1960; the A.P. Scheduled Tribes Debt Relief Regulation, 1970 and the A.P. Regulation for the abolition of *muttadari* and *malguzari* (of 1971).

The Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Areas) Land Transfer (Amendment) Regulation, 1970, popularly known as the "I of 70 Regulation," prohibited land transfers from one non-Girijan to another non-Girijan. It presumed that any immovable property in the Agency areas and in possession of non-Girijans had been acquired by way of transfer from Girijans. It also envisaged restoration of Adivasi lands occupied by others in contravention of the conditions for their transfer. Any such land was to be sold only to an Adivasi or to the government, which was expected to distribute it back to the Adivasis. The 1970 Amendment Regulation was promulgated in the context of the Naxalite-led rebellion and to wean the Adivasis from Naxalite influence, but only after drowning the Srikakulam movement in blood. Then it was tucked away in the record rooms to gather dust.[1] In 1971, with a view to ensuring that the restrictions imposed do not impede the flow of credit to the tribals in the Scheduled Areas, an amendment was made to the 1970 Act providing for mortgage of land in the Scheduled Areas to the Land Mortgage Bank and other financial institutions approved by Government. This was subject to the condition that in case of default, the land so mortgaged shall be sold only to Adivasis or a co-operative society consisting solely of Adivasis.

the general indifferent and condescending attitude of the bureaucrats in-charge, who are perceived by the Adivasis to be not much different from the police and Forest Department officials in their approach. The moneylender is found to be a more flexible party to deal with. He lends and collects in kind as well as in cash. Unlike the government agencies, he is not averse to lending for the fulfillment of the Adivasis' social obligations and hence is preferred by the Adivasis despite his usurious rates of interest.

The Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC) was similarly unsuccessful in its aim of purchasing farm and non-farm produce of the Adivasis at fair prices; supply of domestic requirements, also at fair prices; and supply of credit for agricultural development. Although it had monopoly purchase rights over minor forest produce, because of larger overheads and operational costs its rates were lower than those paid by the private traders. The GCC depots often ran short of the daily requirements of the Adivasis, like salt, kerosene and food grains. Instead, items like soaps and cosmetics, which were out of their pocket and for which the Adivasis had not much use, were more abundantly available. Consequently, the small merchant continued to be the main supplier of essential commodities.

The GCC employees' corruption further reduced its utility and credibility. Many depot managers are reported to have made huge amounts of money through cheating the Adivasis by using false weights and issuing false receipts for loans granted. Tribal Development Blocks set up later were perennially short of funds and the employees, mostly non-Adivasis coming from the plain areas, were not committed to their work and often considered their stay in the 'backward' hilly regions as a punishment and kept trying to get transferred back to the plains. Similarly, there is corruption on the part of road and house-building contractors. Schools are often non-functional because the buildings, teachers and students exist only on paper, and so on.

The welfare measures adopted by the government thus had certain inherent premeditated limitations. Neither were the representatives of the Adivasis in the Legislative Assembly motivated to help their constituency, coming as they all did from princely families and having no idea or interest in Adivasi problems and issues. The introduction of the three-tier Panchayat Raj system did not improve the situation either. If anything, it worsened matters because it infringed on the areas of functioning of the traditional Adivasi councils. Reservation of the posts of *sarpanch* (village headman), president and vice-president too did not serve much purpose as the local non-Adivasis always managed to have one of their henchmen elected so that they could themselves run the whole show, if not directly, at least

and charged with criminal offences. Apart from leading the struggles, the aim of which was the "victory of the new democratic revolution," the communist revolutionaries also propagated that problems like land and the constitution of an Autonomous Region of the Adivasis could not be solved without the establishment of people's rule, (that is, a new democratic state), which would replace the present big bourgeois-landlord state. However, the mass movement was by and large peaceful, and there was lack of widespread propaganda at this stage about the need to carry on armed struggle to resist police repression and capture political power.

The administration, however, was getting panicky. After the uprising in the Adivasi area of Naxalbari in West Bengal in May-June 1967 involving Santhals, Oraons and Rajbanshis, the authorities, apprehending similar happenings in the Parvatipuram Agency, stepped up police patrol and under their protection the landlords continued their atrocities against the Adivasis. In a clash between the landlords and Adivasis proceeding for a Conference at Levidi, two Adivasi peasants were shot dead. There was an all-round step-up in police repression. In September 1968, the court judgement of the Levidi case came out, and not very surprisingly those who had been accused of killing the Adivasis were acquitted. This judgement, along with the police repression, enabled the communist cadre to elucidate to the Adivasis the link between their feudal oppressors and the government which, they explained, had to be overthrown and political power to be seized for the sake of their complete liberation from feudal tyranny.

At this juncture, we need to go into the theoretical-ideological background to the struggle being led in Srikakulam by the communist revolutionaries. The Communist Party had split in 1964 along with the split in the International Communist Movement between the Russian Party-led camp and the Chinese party-led camp. Differences on the approach to be taken on the Indian revolution also divided the two Indian parties. Now differences on ideological questions came up within the newly-founded Communist Party of India (Marxist) as well. The Andhra State Plenum rejected the official draft of the Central Committee and emphasised that the big bourgeoisie in India had a comprador bureaucratic nature. According to the Andhra communists, the comprador character of the bourgeoisie consists mainly in its trading nature in addition to the industrial aspect, whereby it acts largely in collaboration with imperialist capital. The growth of Indian big business is linked with the growth of foreign capital and the bureaucratic nature of its growth is because of its excessive reliance on the state machinery. The Andhra communists particularly attacked the Central Committee's decision to join coalition governments as nothing but a preaching of the peaceful parliamentary path. The power of the ruling classes would not change by a mere change of the parties in

activities to the Gunupur subdivision of Koraput district to make it part of the intended liberation zone in continuation of Srikakulam. Slogans like "Long live Mao Tse-tung" and "Naxalbari Zindabad" came up in English and Oriya on the walls of Gunupur town. Rebels seized properties of landlords and attacks on police camps became regular. But the police were able to militarily crush the incipient movement in Odisha.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Telangana region also developed into a centre of armed struggle led by T. Nagi Reddy, another veteran communist. The Nagi Reddy group did not associate itself with the AICCCR for long after its break away from the CPI (M). Later it followed its own independent course of action. It also formed several guerrilla *dalams* in Warangal, Khammam, Karimnagar, and East Godavari districts and succeeded in developing revolutionary bases and sustaining them for some time against ruthless police persecution. This group was able to establish a base in the Adivasi inhabited forest stretches in Warangal and Khammam too. Koya and Gond Adivasis inhabited the villages adjacent to the forests and they faced the same problems of land alienation and indebtedness to moneylenders as elsewhere.

There was only one major difference in the strategy followed by the Nagi Reddy group as compared to the CPI (ML) under Charu Mazumdar's leadership. Mazumdar's strategy emphasised launching an offensive against the class enemy, seizure of political power being the main objective. In this approach, land redistribution followed the annihilation of landlords. Nagi Reddy's immediate programme, on the other hand, emphasised the importance of agrarian reform or land redistribution first, and resistance to the landlords and police later. The basic plan of the Naxalites was to clear the villages of feudal landlords and moneylenders by killing the notorious ones and terrorising the rest either into submission or exile. After this, social and economic life and administration had to be reorganised through redistribution of land among the Adivasi landless peasants and by cancelling their old debts.

Initially, the insurgents succeeded to a large extent in achieving their aims. In "A Report from Srikakulam" in 1969 from the CPI (ML) organ, *Liberation*, it was stated that "red political power" had been established in 300 villages. The landlords had left the area and the administration was being run by the Ryotanga Sangrama Samithi. Guerrillas and self-defence squads were protecting the villages, and it was proclaimed that the redistribution of land seized from the landlords would soon commence. Under these circumstances, the State government declared Parvatipuram, Pathapatnam and Palakonda as "disturbed areas." The Central

under the protection of the police camps. The state, instead of its avowed aim of protecting the Adivasis from their exploiters, delivered these back to them. The Adivasis had to go to work on the lands that were in their old villages, but from where they had been removed, and which were miles away from their new settlements. Since they could not stay overnight in their old villages, and had to return by dusk, they were forced to leave the ripening crops at the mercy of wild pigs and other animals. Their children were kept hostage in the new hamlets by the armed forces, so that they could not even think of escaping. Again, they went back to selling forest produce to the *sahukars* and got back into their clutches.

However, there were also many weaknesses in the strategies and tactics of the CPI (ML), which played a role in the inability of the movement to sustain itself. In the case of Srikakulam in particular, the communists were unable to extend the movement from the hills to the plains areas, where the caste-class composition was different, and there were still many prejudices against the 'tribals.' In fact, the police was later able to scare off the plains people from any involvement in and support to the struggle by raising the bogey of a 'tribal' invasion of the plains from the hills.

After the violent suppression of the uprising in Srikakulam, the CPI (ML) cadre tried to become active in the coastal districts of Krishna, Guntur, Godavari and Nellore. Here there were no longer landlords in the classical feudal sense, but the polarisation was more between a large contingent of landless labour and rich peasantry. The anti-feudal programme of the Naxalites did not fit the ground reality here, and they were not able to make much headway in this region.

In the absence of being able to kindle a mass movement in the plain areas, many a cadre applied the 'tactic of annihilation' in a mechanical and indiscriminate way, sometimes killing even small landowners, who were hardly the 'main enemies' of the people. When Charu Mazumdar had spoken about "annihilation of class enemies," he had meant the liquidation of the feudal classes in the countryside in the sense of elimination of feudal power, and not in the sense of arbitrary physical annihilation of members of this class. In the application of this strategy, he had wanted the party cadre to rely on the poor and landless peasants who had the most intense hatred against the feudal class, and hence would be most vitally interested in its elimination. He was never an advocate of the annihilation of isolated class enemies by non-local petty bourgeois party cadres, a deviationist practice, which cropped up quite often in the course of the movement. Such actions, on the whole, did not meet with the approval of the people at large and helped in the isolation of the party from the mass base.

The leading cadres were petty bourgeois upper castes from the plain areas, and the Adivasis with very few exceptions were not inducted into the leadership. While supporting their claims on land and forest produce, supporting *podu* cultivation and higher prices for sale of forest produce, culturally, the Adivasis were under pressure from the dominant caste party leadership to assimilate to the upper caste values in terms of their appearance, abdication of their own rituals, festivals, etc. From this point of view, self-respect lay not so much in conscious assertion of their identity, but in the emulation of upper caste mores, which would make them more acceptable in the eyes of the latter.

Differences and factionalism existed among the leadership of the Srikakulam District Committee. While one section wanted to wage struggles mainly on economic demands, another section wanted to press ahead with an armed guerrilla struggle and form a people's army for the seizure of power and establishment of 'revolutionary committees,' which would be governments in embryonic form. This was also the advice of Charu Mazumdar for the Srikakulam comrades. But by the end of 1970 the police had annihilated the top leadership of the party; the second-ranking leaders, relentlessly pursued by the police, had no commonly agreed upon programme of action, and the movement suffered a definite setback.

Impact of Neo-liberalism

In the wake of these armed rebellions in the late 1960s and early 1970s 'tribal development' became 'big business' in many Adivasi areas. Apart from the land legislations in their favour, many welfare programmes were put into place. The Indian state embarked on an ambitious programme to change the internal agrarian structure of the Adivasi societies. The idea was to accentuate existing divisions among them on class lines. Various tribal development projects were designed and elaborate bureaucratic machinery which included specially trained tribal welfare officers was set up. The big jump in the expenditure on Adivasis and other backward classes was accompanied by the mushrooming of 'voluntary agencies.'

Private and public sector industries have been given lands in the Scheduled Areas in contravention of the Land Transfer Regulation Act and the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. The private sector is favoured through giving leases and disinvestment of public sector companies. In contrast to the displacement very few find employment in the new industries set up. The state is thus the main antagonist of the Adivasis. It is the state that usurps their homelands, restricts their rights to the forest resources and arrests and sends them to jail, if they break

the laws and cultivate forest land. If ever *pattas* are issued to them on such lands in contravention of its own laws to 'protect' forests, the purpose is political. It is the state that manages a large share of the procurement and sale of forest produce; it is the state that monopolises the felling and auctioning of timber; it is by the backing of the state that contractors, traders, landlords, Indian and foreign corporates are able to exploit the forest resources at the cost of the Adivasis. It is also the state that frequently arrests and often kills Adivasis on the charge that they have been harbouring 'Naxalites.' It even goes to the extent of burning down Adivasi hamlets to punish them for lending this support, and in a bid to deter them from the same. This policy was first put into effect at the time of the Telangana struggle, then during the Srikakulam struggle, and is now used whenever Adivasi struggles break out; whether it is the struggle of the Gonds in Adilabad, the Koyas in East Godavari or the Konds in Viskhapatnam. Some concrete instances of state atrocities against the Adivasis in Andhra in the last few decades are as follows:

On 20 April 1981, there was a massacre of Adivasis at Indravelli in the tribal district of Adilabad, in which about 100 Gonds were killed. The Adivasis had been resisting exploitation by forest officials and land alienation by non-Adivasis under the leadership of the CPI (ML). They were also taking up issues of deforestation and forest ownership and police atrocities. In this particular case of 20 April 1981, the police had actually given permission for their organisation, the Girijan Rytu Coolie Sangham, to hold a meeting. But two days before the meeting, senior police officials of the district and one battalion of the A.P. Special Police had moved to Indravelli and converted the village into a police camp. People coming by bus were arrested as they alighted from the bus. Other groups of Adivasis coming on foot were forcibly driven back. When one large group of unarmed Adivasis resisted the attempts to drive them back, the police ensconced safely in the trees around fired upon them. Arrests and illegal confinement of Adivasis became a daily routine of law enforcement agencies.

The Gonds of Adilabad in Telangana have been exploited since long by moneylenders from Gujarat, Maharashtra and other parts of Telangana charging even up to 100 per cent interest. Lambadas, migrating here from Maharashtra, and also classified as Scheduled Tribes under the name Sugali in 1977, compete with them for reserved

seats in educational institutions and politics, and have been bigger beneficiaries of governmental welfare programmes; the Gonds of this region have not received their due share. The settler Lambadas have also legally gained possession of Gond land after their scheduling.[2]

The Bhadrachalam Paper Mill set up in 1977 has denuded the bamboo forests. As a result, the Godavari River, its tributaries (e.g. Shabari) and the forest streams, which had water throughout the year, have water for only six months disrupting the Adivasi cropping pattern and causing shortage of drinking water. Government-promoted tourism on the Godavari River has affected the Kondareddi and Koya tribals living on the banks. Moreover, a large number of boats have increased water pollution affecting the availability of river fish.

Scores of Adivasi hamlets have been burned down by the police in the plains of Karimnagar. Chintapalli in Visakhapatnam district witnessed the worst of this type of carnage on 2 and 3 May 1987. Forty-six hamlets with a total of 638 houses were burned down. The police party which completed this job started at one end of the valley in which the hamlets lie and reached the other end by the evening of the second day. This was done on the pretext that the Adivasis were harbouring Naxalites. Many cattle and goats, fowls and bags of grain, in which currency notes were also hidden, were destroyed in the process. The rape of Adivasi women is 'collateral damage' at such times.

The small village of Gothi Koyas (Poongutta village in Pega Panchayat of South Bhadrachalam Forest Division) has been repeatedly torched by the Forest Department and the Gothi Koyas are portrayed as criminals by vested interests.

The Adivasi oustees from the site of the Nagarjunsagar dam live in resettlement areas that still have no roads, electricity, water pumps or tap water, although this is one of the country's largest irrigation and hydropower facilities. Being the original owners of that land the benefits of the use of that land and its resources should have firstly come to them and not to anyone else. This is apart from the fact that in the first place large dams in themselves are ecologically and environmentally unsustainable. The oustees of this project live

in abysmal poverty and some of them are forced to even sell their children to earn money.

The Polavaram Dam project across the Godavari River, the first river merge multipurpose one, is anticipated to displace around 300 villages in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Chhattisgarh and submerge large forest tracts including important archaeological sites. Scheduled Area Adivasis constitute the majority of such a displaced population; the Koya community would be specially affected. Affected villages in the State of Telangana, constituted in 2014, were merged into Andhra Pradesh through an ordinance. The urban industrial interests of Coastal Andhra and Visakhapatnam City in particular would be the beneficiaries.

Presently, the Andhra Pradesh government seems to have given up even the façade of legal defence of crucial Adivasi interests. There was a move by the TDP (Telugu Desam Party) government under Chandrababu Naidu to amend Section I of the 1970 Amendment to the Land Transfer Regulation Act of 1959. The A.P. government requires this amendment so that it can exploit the bauxite reserves in the tribal belt of Coastal Andhra. Since the State government itself does not have the resources to mine the bauxite, it is considering leasing out the land to private mining companies. The Eastern Ghats in general are a storehouse of bauxite and the States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are some of the most mineral-rich States in India. Areas rich in minerals such as limestone, bauxite, mica, phosphate, granite, uranium are also Adivasi homes. Bauxite mining in the Jerrila Reserve Forest and Chintapalli Mandal in Visakhapatnam district will affect the Adivasis living there through creating water shortages and severe pollution of drinking water sources (Bhatta 2008: 28-29).

Mining by private entities in Scheduled Areas is contrary to the law. Grant of mining leases to private parties of non-Adivasis amounts to transfer of land from the government to a non-Adivasi; this is prohibited under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution and this was upheld by the Supreme Court in the Samatha vs. State of A.P. judgement of 1997. In this judgement the State too is considered a non-Adivasi if it is acquiring land for mining by a non-Adivasi mining company. It also noted that mining operations in these areas are to be conducted solely through co-operatives of Adivasis with financial assistance of the state and a portion of the net profit should be spent on education, health and other essential services

apart from reforestation and maintenance of ecology. Twenty per cent of all past profits were to be given to the Adivasis. While the Andhra Pradesh government has found means to circumvent the judgement, other State governments like that of Odisha evade this issue by saying that it applies only to A.P. and do nothing to modify their mining rules.

All evidence and studies point to the continuing process of land alienation; the Adivasi peasants, therefore, continue to struggle against this. Wherever irrigation was developed in Scheduled Areas it only invited more land grabbers from outside. As many of the newcomers occupied the good cultivable lands, they were also wealthy enough to be able to bribe the minor revenue officials. The proportion of the population of non-Adivasis has been steadily increasing in the Scheduled Areas. As this process is going on unchecked, the danger is very real that several areas may cease to be a part of the Scheduled Areas, so that even the crumbs of special schemes and protective laws will be lost to the Adivasis, who will then be completely assimilated into the larger Hindu/Telugu society, largely as slaves and destitutes. The identity of some of them as a distinct people already faces the danger of total extinction.

The introduction of a market economy and the monetisation of exchange relations in the Adivasi areas have created several adverse conditions in their lives. The introduction of cash crops in subsistence agriculture among the Koyas indebted them, while other groups relying purely on subsistence economy are free from this burden. Some researchers report that cotton cultivation, a cash crop in A.P., widened the class differences among the Gonds. The terms of trade are not in their favour. The presence of multinational agribusiness, development of orchards and farmhouses has not added value to their lives but only marginalised them further. There are several sectors in which they have expertise, such as fishing, honey hunting, crafts and pottery, but the investment by government and other agencies in these sectors is very low and little effort is expended in developing them (Chalam 1999: 37).

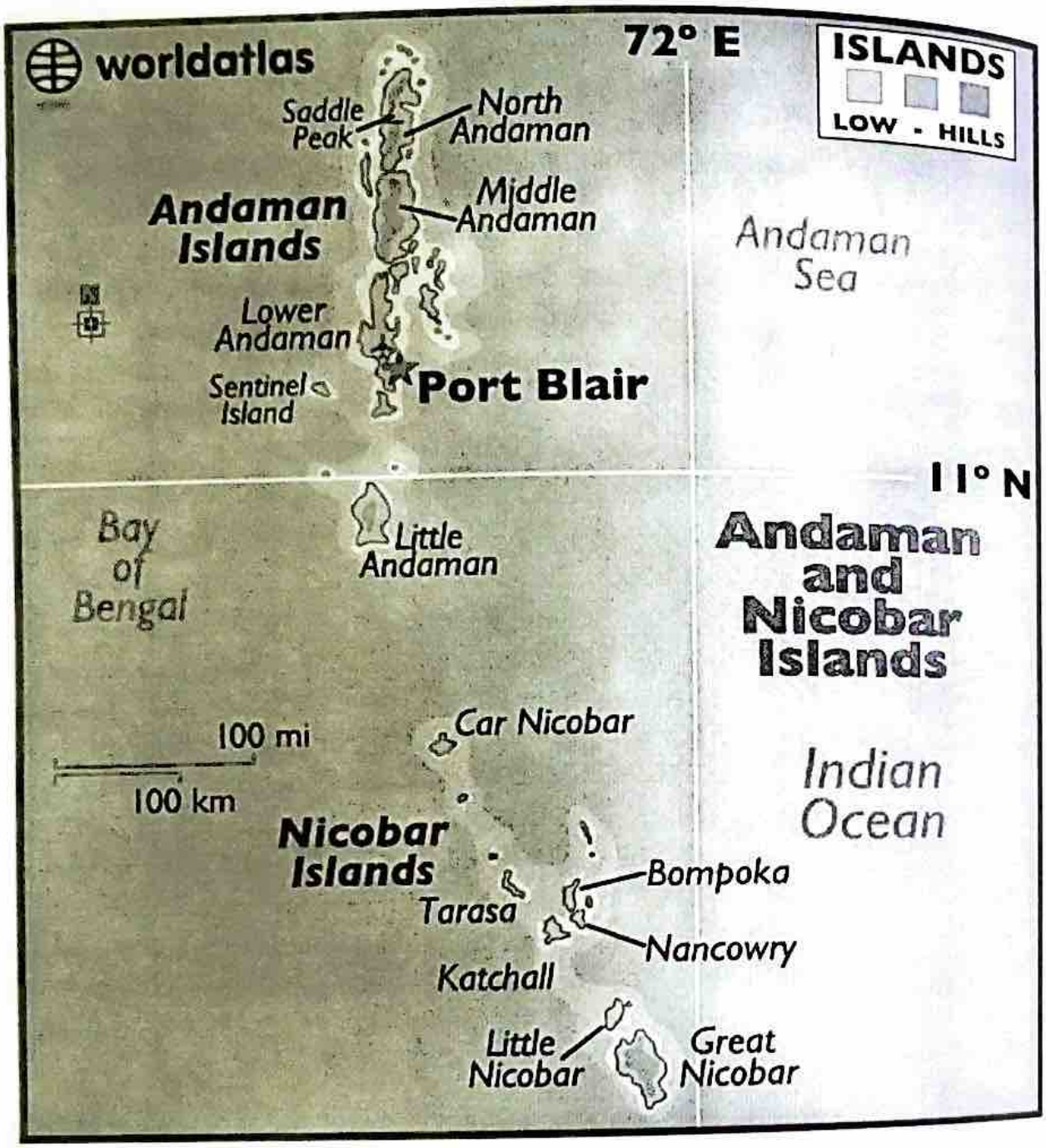
Notes

1. P. Jaswantha Rao: Girijans Fight for Lands. *Frontier*, 24 January 1998, p. 9. See also Balagopal for a detailed exposition of how this law was ineffective in restoring much of Adivasi land to them.
2. The numerically large community of the Lambadas has spread to other districts as Khammam, Warangal, Mahaboobnagar, Kurnool, Nalgonda and Prakasham.

There they have taken over the lands of the local Adivasi groups like the Gonds, Chenchus, Koyas, Kolams, etc. The Chenchus have been worst affected in terms of land loss by this migration.



District Map of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh



Map of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Source https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/lgcolor/andamancolor.htm

7

ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS
A TALE OF DECIMATION

The situation of the original inhabitants of these equatorial-tropical islands exemplifies the endangered and vulnerable situation of indigenous peoples the world over in a rapaciously capitalist-imperialist world. More so than even those of the North-East these people remain on the edges of public awareness in India. Reasons for this could be the distance—a little over 1,000 km from mainland India in the Bay of Bengal—and the smallness of this archipelago consisting of 306 islands and 206 rocks and rocky outcrops, with currently only 38 of them being inhabited as most of them lack perennial sources of fresh water such as streams, rivers, lakes or springs. In contrast to the distance from India, Myanmar is 280 km to the north and Sumatra 145 km distant in the south. The Andamans are considered to be the emergent peaks of the extensions of the submerged Arakan Yoma mountain range of mainland Myanmar, while the Mentawei Islands off the west coast of Sumatra are presumed to be a southern continuation of the Nicobars.

The Andaman group of islands is inhabited by indigenes of Negrito origin: the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa and Sentinelese. The Nicobar Islands are home to people of Mongoloid origin—the Shompens and Nicobarese. The Shompen inhabit the interior areas of Great Nicobar Island. The latter is a generic term for various ethnic groups with different names inhabiting twelve different islands of the Nicobar group of islands with a major concentration in Car Nicobar and who may have migrated from Indonesia's Sumatra Island. Their languages/dialects belong

to the Austro-Asiatic language family—Mundari and Santhali also belong to the same language family. Each tribal community in these two groups of islands is distinguished by its own language, territorial occupation and land/resource use creating a diversity of cultures. Different areas of the shore and offshore, mangroves, and forests are seasonally used by different groups to harvest required resources. Common to all is the symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. Each tribal community fiercely defend its own spaces in the Islands in case of any encroachment by other tribal groups or by outsiders. Recently, an outsider who tried to enter the island was killed by a Sentinelese. At the same time, there is provision of amicable resolution of conflicts and probably exchange relationships also as in the case of other peacefully co-existing tribal groups in the Indian subcontinent.

It is conjectured that the short-statured (pygmy) Negrito people, the Onge, who are found in the Andaman Islands, may have migrated out of Africa around 70,000 years ago along the northern rim of the Indian Ocean. Year by year they ventured further staying near the coasts entering the forests of India and Myanmar (Burma) and, as ice ages dropped ocean levels, moved along the forested mountain range that joined Burma to Indonesia. The returning ocean in warmer periods buried the mountains partially under the sea leaving some patches of islands on which some of these people got marooned and lived a life of great but not complete isolation. They are believed to have considerable ethnic affinity with the Semangs of Malaysia and the Aeta of the Philippines.

These islands were known to the outside world at least from the Greco-Roman geographer, Ptolemy's, time (second century CE). Chinese Buddhist travellers, Fa Hien (fifth century) and I-Tsing (seventh century) have mentioned these islands in their accounts, so did two Arab travellers in the ninth century. Marco Polo (thirteenth century) and after him missionaries from Western Europe have described these islands and their people. The Chola dynasty's (which was at the peak of its power from the latter half of the ninth to the thirteenth century) name for the Nicobar Islands was Nakkavaram, the land of the naked, which appears to be directly related to the modern one for the southern group of islands. Some of the Nicobar Islands are believed to have been part of the overseas kingdom of the Chola king of Thanjavur. From 1017 CE the Cholas used these islands as a base shelter station for waging war and keeping control over their territories in Malaysia. Trade with outsiders, such as the Tamils, Burmese, Malays and Chinese, had been carried out by the indigenes in products such as copra. Occasionally in the past Malays and Arab traders sailing by these trade routes had captured members of these Islanders as slaves. Malays seem to have used these islands for piratical activities as well.

In fact, due to these long-standing contacts miscegenation in the central group of Nicobar Islands has been so extensive that the native people have lost their original group characteristics. Open to outside influences ninety per cent of Nicobarese at present follow the Christian religion after having come under the influence of Christian missionaries during British rule. There are also small numbers of Muslims and animists, who still follow the traditional faith. But post-conversion the Nicobarese have not given up their traditional festivals and rituals. The Andamanese, on the other hand, have been more hostile to outside forces; crews of wrecked ships or those who came for shelter in stormy weather or in search of fresh water were generally slain and their ships looted and destroyed. But in the process they learnt the use of iron and have been using it to make their tools.

Colonial Times

From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries Portuguese and French Jesuit missionaries were propagating Christianity in the Nicobars; so did some Italian missionaries in the early nineteenth century. In 1756, the Danes took possession of these islands and established their headquarters on Kamorta Island, but after suffering from several malaria outbreaks, they finally abandoned them in 1848. In 1789, Lt. Archibald Blair of the British Indian Navy was appointed to survey the islands with a view to finding a harbour to serve military needs in these islands located strategically between South and South-East Asia. The first British attempt at establishing a settlement here was met with extreme hostility by the indigenes and could not succeed also due to the colonisers getting ravaged by tropical diseases. The second attempt in 1858 was successful in setting up a penal settlement for convicts and freedom fighters from mainland India despite determined resistance by the native Island populations. Many rebels of the 1857 uprising were deported to this penal settlement and their labour along with that of convicts and indentured labour from both India and Burma were used to colonise the islands. These people were made to do the work of logging, draining swamps and building infrastructure. In 1869 the British formally took possession of the Nicobar Islands also by buying the rights to them from the Dutch and linked this group of islands administratively with the Andaman Islands group.

In order to overcome the hostility and resistance of the indigenous peoples, and after a lot of bloodshed in battles big and small over the years, the British colonisers tried to establish 'friendly' relations with the local inhabitants by sending contact missions with gifts of cloth, metal buckets, mirrors and food items. They were able to win over in this manner the Aka-Bea-Da, who occupied the long shores,

creeks and some forest areas. The Jarawa lived mainly in the interior rainforest areas, and probably being later arrivals, periodically clashed with the Aka-Bea-Da over spaces and resources. Tribes and groups within tribes had developed their own methods of conflict resolution over resources and territories. Once the Jarawa area too began to be colonised, violent conflicts erupted between them and the colonisers, convicts and tribes friendly to them. To overcome this resistance the British periodically launched punitive as well as friendly contact expeditions into Jarawa territory. Indigenous friendly Andamanese were recruited by the colonial government to capture escaped convicts and were also liberally supplied with iron for making arrows, rifles and guns to kill the Jarawa. Consequently, the Jarawa in the Middle Andamans migrated from the eastern to the southern and subsequently to the western part of the Island where they are concentrated today. Those who lived on Rutland Island were driven to extinction.

Within half a century of this invasion and attempt at 'civilising' 'primitive' people nine tribal groups among the enumerated Andamanese became extinct. Such 'friendly' contacts by outsiders proved to be a traumatic experience and disastrous for the life and livelihood of these innocent people. Hundreds of Great Andamanese were allowed to die in epidemics of pneumonia in 1868, syphilis in 1876, measles and smallpox in 1877, and influenza in 1896 without being offered any sort of medical aid. Massacres by the colonial settlers in the course of punitive expeditions, curtailing of their resource base through deforestation and building of outsider settlements, further reduced their numbers drastically (Sekhsaria 2007: 19). Others were stricken with substance abuse such as that of alcohol, tobacco and opium introduced by the British, and with cultural decimation through inducing dependency on so-called 'Andamanese Homes.' Setting up these 'Homes' was an early policy of the colonisers to acculturate and 'tame' the wild forest hunters and gatherers regarded as 'anthropophagi' (cannibals) (Chandi in UNESCO 2010: 13).[1] In these Homes they were taught 'good manners', the use of knife and fork while eating, made to wear clothes, learn new trades and handicrafts and also the English language. This close contact with outsiders led to their infection with the diseases mentioned above and these were spread to others if any of them escaped from these Homes back into the forests.

In the mid-1880s, the Onges of Little Andaman Island were also contacted through gift-giving of modern goods and food items, and over a period of time they too became dependent on external assistance to survive in sedentary settlements set up for them by the government. Their numbers too were decimated due to catching diseases like hepatitis from contact with outsiders. The Sentinelese living

on the North Sentinel Island continued to remain relatively isolated as their island is by deep sea.

From the 1920s due to the high cost of maintaining the penal settlement through imports emphasis also began to be laid on agricultural development, that is, commercial farming and plantations.[2] As part of this plan to encourage self-supporting farming rebelling Moplahs from Malabar and Bhantus (a tribe labelled as criminal in North India because of their nomadic lifestyle) were settled in the Island jungles, but spatially isolated from the penal colony and the local-born, who were often inducted into the local administration. Those political and criminal convicts who had served their terms were also settled as self-supporting farmers.

Soon forestry, that is, the extraction of timber became the main commercial-industrial revenue-generating enterprise considering the demand for it and not just in the Indian subcontinent. The Forest Department with the aim of timber extraction was set up in 1883. The biggest saw mill in Asia, the Chatham Saw Mill, was also set up towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1929, the Swedish Western India Match Company (WIMCO) set up a match splint factory at Port Blair. Additional labour was provided by Karens and other Burmese brought in for this purpose. Indigenous labourers from the Chhotanagpur plateau in Central India were also recruited as coolies through the Catholic Labour Bureau in Ranchi. Although belonging to different Adivasi ethnic groups such as Oraons, Mundas, or Kharia, they all became subsumed under the name of the place of recruitment and came to be collectively called Ranchis. All this further eroded the subsistence base for the original peoples of these Islands.

World War-II saw the occupation of the Islands by the Japanese imperialists who extracted timber for wartime needs and resorted to indiscriminate bombing and firing in several parts of the Islands. Suspecting the Great Andamanese of being informers for the Allied forces they tried to confine them to a particular place in Port Blair. They, however, managed to escape; subsequently, some of them did become informers for the British being enticed by offers of liquor, tea, sugar, tobacco, etc. (Sarkar 1990: 47 and Chakraborty 1990: 64). Some local settlers were imprisoned, killed and tortured. Forced labour was introduced in the Nicobar Islands during which some people lost their lives (Pandit 1989: 86). During the period of Japanese occupation (1942-1945), Subhas Chandra Bose was allowed to install a 'Provisional Government of Free India' (Azad Hind) in 1943. But effective control was very much with the Japanese. The British retook the Islands in 1945 after Japanese capitulation and in 1947 handed them over to the Government of India at the time of political independence.

Having been a penal settlement during British rule they evoked an image of dread and fear of the fact that those sent here may never return. For this reason they were popularly called *Kalapani* (black waters) during the colonial period. As a number of national leaders such as Tilak, Savarkar and many more were incarcerated here. Since the island was a base for Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army, it is considered by the mainstream Indian to be a locale of the nationalist resistance movement, a site of patriotism.

Constitution of a Mini-India

As we have seen in the case of the other indigenous communities of politically independent India internal colonisation was the path chosen by the newly-installed rulers rather than freedom and independence for the 'first nations and peoples.' Indian expansionism, a Greater India, was the ruling class ideology: it was desirable not just to retain the same frontiers and territories as British-ruled India, albeit already truncated due to Partition, but to expand them if possible. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands with their strategic location close to the countries of South-East Asia and an important commercial shipping lane linking West Asia, South Asia and East Asia was a prize to be retained by all means. Without undertaking any consultation process with the indigenous populations the Government of India incorporated the A&N Islands into the Indian Union as a Union territory and imposed its own preferred developmental path on them.

Within the framework of Nehruvian industrialisation the Islands' forest resources were seen as a source of abundant timber, just as in the colonial period. The plantation, horticultural and agricultural economy that had been put in place during the colonial period was also developed further without any regard for the flora and fauna evolved over aeons and the indigenous people's traditional livelihood. Ironically, the new coloniser incorporated the Islands into the national imagery of freedom from colonisation and even linked the name Andaman with the Hindu god Hanuman for just these selfish purposes! The All-India Forward Bloc wanted to rename the A&N Islands as Shaheed and Swaraj respectively. Now the Hindutvavadis want to name after Veer Savarkar according to their brand of nationalism!

To strengthen this inclusion the Central government from the beginning encouraged and continued the further settlement of these thinly-populated Islands with various peoples from mainland India. Migrants hailing from different regions, ethnic groups, castes and creeds of the subcontinent including those displaced from

Myanmar settled here over the years making it into a Mini-India, as some call it. The big flow of funds from the Union government to this Union Territory makes it dependent on the former and enables a higher standard of living than in many other parts of India.

In 1956, the Government of India introduced a regulation—the Andaman and Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation (ANPATR)—for the 'protection' of aboriginal tribes, which restricted entry to outsiders, particularly to the Nicobar group of islands. Ninety per cent of the Andaman group of islands is Reserve Forests and Protected Areas with 36% constituting Tribal Reserves. The entire Nicobar group of islands has been declared a Tribal Reserve; similarly North Sentinel is officially a reserved tribal area and no outsider is allowed entry there except for official purposes. The fluctuating extent and permeable boundaries of the Reserve Areas, actually indicating a robbery of territory, were unilaterally imposed by the government without any process of negotiation with the affected native people setting up a scenario of clash and conflict, while simultaneously putting in place 'welfare' and 'developmental' measures intended to ultimately assimilate the 'primitive' tribal people as in mainland India.

The first contingent to be sent here were Bengali Hindus who had become refugees due to the partition of Bengal. Some forest areas in South and Middle Andamans were cleared to settle them and augmentation of the Bush Police was done to protect them from the Jarawas. In 1954, retrenched army personnel were settled here by the Indian government. 330 ex-defence personnel were settled in some de-reserved areas of the Great Nicobar Island. Later, in the 1970s, some of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees were also settled on Katchal Island of the Nicobar group of islands—a designated tribal reserve—to work on rubber plantations. Telugu as well as Tamil repatriates from Burma were also settled here. In the early years most families who got settled here were given four acres of flat land for paddy cultivation, five acres of hilly land for tree crops and one acre to build a homestead. Twelve tonnes of free royalty timber was given for house construction and an additional 5 tonnes for house repairs every five years. In addition they were supplied with food items, pesticides, buffalo and/or cow and some cash (Sekhsaria 2007: 7).

Parallel to the state-sponsored settlement of people there has always been from the beginnings of colonisation an independent movement of people to and from the Islands. Among the migrants are soldiers, administrators, servants, labourers, traders, teachers, fishermen and so on, who come either temporarily, as circulating labour, or to settle down permanently. Poor people from southern and eastern

India have come looking for land to settle on and cultivate. While the majority of educated white-collar migrants, mostly from Kerala or West Bengal, returned to the mainland after some years of service, however a considerable number has taken up permanent residence in the Islands. For accommodating all the incoming migrants more 'Ranchis' were recruited as contract labour to clear the forests, ironically considered 'wastelands'. In more recent times, Rohingyas, fleeing from persecution in Myanmar, have also landed here and have been kept in detention camps before being repatriated to Bangladesh.

In the late 1960s an official plan to colonise these Islands was finalised by the Indian government and forests were opened up for logging as part of this plan. Private plywood industry was given huge incentives in the form of subsidies to set up saw mills, plywood units and furniture-making enterprises here. Nearly 98% of the plywood manufactured was exported to mainland India and was not for local consumption. The subsidies offered by the government included low priced local timber, 90% subsidy for the transport of goods to and from the mainland, and an over 80% power subsidy (Sekhsaria 2007: 8). Workers in this industry were Adivasis (the so-called Ranchis drawn from Chhotanagpur) and largely Dalit labour from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, rural poor from West Bengal, and 'illegal' Bangladeshi migrants, all hired on contract basis.

Among these, the case of the Adivasis from Chhotanagpur deserves further elaboration. As contract labourers they are not considered for rehabilitation and settlement schemes. Some 197 Ranchi families were settled on the Islands by the government. They are treated as a floating population and expected to return to their native places. However, many such migrants have taken up more or less permanent residence on the Islands by themselves. Many Ranchis bring their families and settle down by leasing in or buying land from other settlers. They build their houses with gardens on encroached forest or revenue land. As a community they are politically marginalised and are not provided the facilities of schools, primary health centres, electricity and other infrastructure as is the rest of the population (Zehmisch 2012: 11).

The plywood industry could not be sustainable at all for the Islands' forests and the people dependent on them as it was rapaciously exploitative. In the 1980s the need for conservation of forest resources was felt all over India and the National Forest Policy of 1988 made a special case for the protection of the A&N evergreen rainforests. In 1996 came the Supreme Court order on forests stopping all logging in the absence of a working plan and a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in 1999 in the Kolkata High Court in the matter of destruction of forests in Little

Andaman. In 2001, the Supreme Court issued an order prohibiting the felling of naturally grown trees. Another order issued in 2002 banned all tree felling in the Islands except for the *bona fide* use of the local islander populations on the recommendations of the Shekhar Singh one-man Commission appointed by the Court. It called for steps to reduce immigration from mainland India; shutting down of the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Plantation and Development Corporation (ANFPDC) that had been practising over-logging in Little Andaman and phasing out of the existing monoculture plantations of teak, rubber and red oil palm. It also ordered that the licenses of private saw mills and wood-based industries in the Islands be terminated with effect from 31 March 2003 and that 'Working Plans' for limited timber extraction for local use be reformulated and submitted to the Court. All this has helped in the reduction of logging on the Islands (Sekhsaria 2007: 41,43).

Beginning of the End?

From an estimate of 5000 at the time of British colonisation the number of Andaman Islands' indigenes has reduced to around 850. Table 7.1 graphically shows the fate of most of the indigenous people.

Table 7.1 Population of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands[3]

Year	Total Population	Great Andamanese	Onge	Jarawa	Nicobarese	Shompen	Sentinelese
1901	24,649	625	672	468	5,962		
1911	26459	455	631	114	7,991		(117)
1921	27,086	207	346	114	8,248		
1931	29,463	90	250	70	9,589		(50)
1941	33,768						
1951	30,971	25	(150)	(50)	11,902	(20)	
1961	63,548	19	129	(500)	13,903	71	(50)
1971	1,15,133	24	112	(275)	17,874	92	
1981	1,88,741	27	97	200	21,172	223	
1991	2,80,661	28	95	280	26,000	250	(50)
2001	3,56,265	43	96	241	28,653	398	
2011	3,79,944	44	101	380	27,168	229	15

Note Figures in brackets are estimates

In 1858, the number of the Great Andamanese—valiant and intelligent people—was estimated at more than 3,500. Already by 1901 their number had come down to 625 and by 1961 they had reached a low of 19 individuals living scattered lives and doing odd jobs to survive. Becoming 'friends' of the British they had been inducted into the Bush Police, in the Forest Department, as seamen or guards in the British Navy during the War, or as *Jamadars* collecting shells, birds' nests, etc.

In 1949, they were relocated to Bluff Island to protect them and again in 1969 to Strait Island. As cash compensation for their lands taken away, the Great Andamanese were receiving up to Rs. 10,000 annually till the late 1970s. Not familiar with sensitive use of money or a cash economy, they spent mindlessly and in the process a good number of them became smack, opium and alcohol-addicts besides getting habituated to tobacco smoking and tea drinking. Due to these addictions there was a decline in their fertility rate and hence a further reduction in their already depleted numbers. New imposed dietary practises have undermined their health and made them susceptible to diseases. They have begun to suffer from anaemia, dysentery and frequent worm infections. Infant mortality rates are high and there are deaths due to diarrhoea, malaria and tuberculosis.

The death in 2010 of Boa Senior of the Bo indigenous community (one of the Great Andamanese groups) meant the final extinction of this particular group and its language. A year before that the last survivor speaking the Khora language had also passed away. That left only about 3 of the original 10 Great Andamanese language groups extant, though the small number surviving could be considered a single Great Andamanese ethnic group with mixed ancestry of tribal and non-tribal communities, due to the large-scale exploitation of their women. They have mixed with each other and with Burmese and Hindi-speaking communities from North India. The ethnic and linguistic identities of the original 10-12 Great Andamanese groups are thus largely lost. With all these changes a lot of their traditional knowledge is also lost. Those surviving still do retain a separate identity by retaining many life cycle rites and rituals albeit in a modified reduced form. They speak either Hindi or Great Andamanese creole. Although this small group still obtains some of its diet from hunting, fishing and gathering, they also practise some agriculture, have established some poultry farms and are fairly dependent on government support for survival.

The Onge, believed to have been living in bands (co-operative, fluid, spontaneously evolved communities of hunter-gatherers) rather than as clans, and showing evidence of prelithic, that is, pre-Stone Age culture without the knowledge

and skill of making stone tools, currently live in two major communities on Little Andaman. They were the sole inhabitants of the island up to 1967, had in-depth habitat knowledge, and were leading very simple non-hierarchic lives. Then the government decided to open up this island on the basis of the report of "An Inter Departmental Team on Accelerated Development Programme for Andaman and Nicobar" prepared by the central Ministry of Rehabilitation, set up in 1965. It became specially earmarked for a Rehabilitation and Resettlement Programme, though it had as a whole been declared a tribal reserve in 1957, for the settlement of outsiders and to exploit its rich natural resources, in particular timber, by setting up a timber-based industry here. East Bengali, other Indian and Nicobarese settlements were set up, and forest land cleared for agriculture and plantations of coconut, areca and palm oil. In two stages 30% of the island was denotified from its tribal reserve status. However, the ANFPDC carried out logging even in the tribal reserve area with the connivance of corrupt forest officials as in many parts of mainland India. Moreover, poaching, logging and encroachments by the settlers in the Onge reserve take place and are increasingly contributing to ecosystem degradation and some degree of species loss along with resource depletion for indigenes.

Hundred odd Onge are now forced to live with an alien population of 3000 or more and have had to give up vast tracts of their island. Hut Bay area—the settlement headquarters—was traditionally their hunting and collecting ground (Pandit 1990: 7-8). They are getting increasingly dependent on government aid and have largely lost their self-sufficiency; being increasingly drawn into modern consumer society, it may lead to their final dissolution as a community and exploitation by outsiders. There are already attempts, sometimes successful, to lure their youth into various addictions and to take their women. Those addicted to alcohol are ready to part with valuable resources such as honey, turtle eggs, and wild boar meat for liquor. Besides, there has been an attempt by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to patent a discovery based on their herbal knowledge as a cure for cerebral malaria. It is generally interested in the medical knowledge of the indigenous peoples and is setting up a digital biodiversity registry for the avowed purpose of protecting the intellectual property rights of the indigenous peoples. It is important that their botanical and zoological knowledge and their skills are used for their benefit and for the benefit of humankind without exploiting them (Sekhsaria 2007: 30-31).

The Shompens as nomadic hunter-gatherers lived in Great Nicobar as the monarchs of all they surveyed undisturbed till the late 1960s. Then the East-West road was constructed through their territory and repaired in the post-tsunami period. These self-sufficient people have begun to be supplied alien items such

as rice, biscuits and cloth by the administration. Their reserve area which earlier covered the entire island has been reduced and settled by outsiders. Their numbers seem to have gone down greatly between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses.

Post-1947 Jarawa life continues to be disturbed in many ways. The neo-colonial mindset, fit only to be called fascist-bureaucratic, of the post-independence dispensation is manifest by the idea expressed in 1952 by the then A&N Chief Commissioner that the Jarawas should be bombed (Acharya in UNESCO 2010: 76). The present territory of the Jarawas was colonised during the last century or so after the advent of the British and their founding of Port Blair in South Andaman in their original habitat. With the decimation of the Great Andamanese, the land area available to them increased but now the settlement area has expanded again shrinking their hunting grounds; their access to water sources has been endangered and intrusion by unauthorised hunters, fishers and timber seekers has affected their natural sources of food supply. The forest extraction operations and the road construction of the Andaman Trunk Road within and along their reserve areas with heavy machinery, elephants and men moving around and causing disturbance and destruction has posed a continuous threat to them, which they consistently opposed. With the help of political patronage many illegal settlements have come up in the reserve area. In a system of representative democracy numbers count and the numbers of the Jarawa people—though reported to having increased to 471 in 2017—and other aboriginals are too negligible for them to have any clout with the political parties, as in South India generally. There is understandably a consistent tension over land rights between the new settlers and the ancient first settlers – the Jarawas.

In recent times, possibly overwhelmed by the external forces and seeing no other way the Jarawa people have begun to come out of their forests 'voluntarily' to seek contact with the new settlers and the alien administration. Often, they do not leave until they are gifted food items as bananas and coconuts. They have even begun exchanging crab, deer meat and other forest produce for food items like rice, oil, or even money. By doing so they may possibly be digging their own graves as they are already in grip of measles, tuberculosis, bronchitis and other infections which are causing havoc among them. Not just food, a number of other modern items, such as match sticks, torches, plastics and so on, have entered into their regular use. In fact, 'friendly' contacts with the settler population have increased with the exchange of goods and the learning of each others' languages. Many of them have learnt colloquial Hindi. Hunting parties of settlers are not always attacked as they appease the Jarawa people with generous gifts of food such as coconut and bananas. Some of the settlers even try to live with them for some time,

lowed, in order to strengthen a non-hostile relationship (Chandi in UNESCO
): 15-16).

The ATR and the Jarawas – "A Public Thoroughfare through a Private Courtyard"[4]

The Jarawa Tribal Reserve covers an area of roughly 1,000 sq km along with 500 sq km of sea along its western coast. Covering forests in South and Middle Andaman Islands it also includes a few small adjoining islands that are foraging territory for the Jarawas. Nevertheless, this is only a fraction of their original land. Along its borders, police camps have been established to keep the Jarawas confined within the reserve area and to prevent encroachments by the settlers. The building of the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) in the 1960s through the heart of the Jarawa Reserve connecting Port Blair to the north of the islands opened up more areas for logging, the setting up of commercial timber plantations, settlement by outsiders and extraction of other forest products and resources. Due to protests by the Jarawas, sometimes violent, work on the road was temporarily stopped in 1976 but resumed soon after and completed in 1989. Forceful methods were used for this such as outright killing of protesting Jarawa and their electrocution by live naked electric wires put up by the construction agency.

Environmentalists, social anthropologists and even the UN have been recommending closure of this road through Jarawa territory, which is being maintained at an unnecessarily high cost, and rerouting of the entire passenger and cargo traffic by sea. There has been an international outcry against suggestions for their resettlement and rehabilitation as that would certainly decimate their numbers to the point of their annihilation as a community. On a global level relocation has resulted in genocide and decimation in many a case ranging from Amazonian tribes to the Chakmas from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It goes against their rights as per the UNDRIP.

In 2002, the Supreme Court ordered closing down of the ATR for vehicular traffic where it passes through the Jarawa reserve. It had become a source of the introduction of alcohol and tobacco, tourists who threw processed foods such a biscuits to them just as to monkeys,

sexual exploitation of their women, and a kind of cultural exposure to innocent Jarawa children who were not really equipped to cope with it. Their forest area and a 5 km buffer zone around it were also declared as "no go" areas for tourists and others. Again in 2013 the Supreme Court issued an order banning tourists from using the ATR as it passes through the Reserve. So far both court orders have been ignored by the A&N administration. Traffic through the ATR is now regulated by allowing convoys chaperoned by army vehicles to pass at fixed times to ensure there is no interaction with the Jarawas. Photography, videography, etc., are now banned under the A&N Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Amendment Regulation, 2012 and a nodal officer appointed to monitor all activities in the Reserve section of the ATR. Despite all these regulations tourist vehicles conveniently break down or stop on some pretext to facilitate possible viewing of these ancient people.

Voluntary overtures by the Jarawa to break out of their isolation and seek contact have increased the extent of exploitation of their resources by outsiders, which endangers the as yet rich biodiversity of this reserve area. Illegal sand mining from the beaches on the western coast of the Islands as well as fishing, poaching and removal of non-timber forest produce (NTFP) have increased dramatically and in unsustainable ways. On top of that in 2013 the Lt. Governor of the Islands even reduced the sea component of the Jarawa Reserve! How much of the contact is on an equal level, on the basis of mutual trust and understanding, is the question. The Jarawas are certainly in a vulnerable and defensive position. It actually befits the dominating side to take measures so that the relationship can be equalised in mutual interest and decisions regarding the developmental path on the Islands be taken on a dialogic basis where the Jarawas' points of view are actually listened to.

Infants born out of unions between Jarawas and outsiders were earlier killed, but that does not seem to be the case now. Marriages or liaisons outside the tribal framework usually give rise to loss of culture, which they do not find acceptable, and often the women who enter into such relationships are ostracised, punished, and looked down upon, which becomes a part of gender-based discrimination also. 'Outsiders' are not accepted as part of the tribe. It seems it is important to have the same blood in order to have the true spirit of the people. But such forbidding goes against the spirit of the times and also of ancient times when much mixing of blood and races has been there. Inter-ethnic, inter-caste, inter-tribal, tribal and non-

tribal marital and sexual relations are an ongoing process and are bound to increase as the different peoples interact on the socio-economic plane. It is retrograde to be exclusionary in such matters as marriage. What is needed is that the 'outsiders' be not exploitative in their attitude—as it often leads to the phenomenon of 'unwed mothers'—and are open to the positive life-sustaining values, culture and spirit of the indigenous people.

The Sentinelese are the sole inhabitants of North Sentinel Island. They still manage to live an isolated life as hunter-gatherers relying on forest and sea resources. Unlike the Jarawa they have so far not allowed their isolation to be pierced through 'friendly' contact expeditions from mainstream society coming with their 'gifts' of 'civilisation' and mostly show great hostility to any visitors by showering them with arrows. However, efforts in this direction have not been stopped. This community has bio-medical value and could be targeted by bio-prospectors for valuable genetic traits that may have long ago vanished in other ethnic or racial groups.

Inhabitants of basically the coastal areas of the Nicobar group of islands, the traditional economy of the Nicobarese was horticultural in nature involving the cultivation of a variety of yam, pandanus, plantain, papaya and sugarcane. They also maintained coconut plantations and carried out herding, fishing and hunting. They have been trading on a barter basis since long with outsiders. After the British took over the Islands they bolstered the traditional tribal leadership to establish their own control over the community. Unscrupulous traders made huge profits through the barter system by making highly unequal exchanges. As a result the Nicobarese fell into heavy debt and were forced to mortgage their coconut plantations to such traders.

After World War-II some of the traders disappeared from the islands, others were killed, and some of them gave up their business as they could not finance their transactions. R. Akoojee Jadwet was one such trader who continued operating there and after 1947 the Nicobar Islands were managed by Messrs. Jadwet Trading Company in which the islanders were partners. Later the firm was renamed Nicobar Trading Company and then Nicobarese Commercial Company. In the early part of 1977 it was converted to Ellong Hinengo Limited (EHL) on Car Nicobar while in the central and southern islands it has a separate name, Manulo Matai Limited (MML). A primary co-operative society called the Panam Hinengo Limited came into existence after 1947 with the guidance of Jadwet. In this scenario the Jadwet-owned company had monopolistic rights and garnered the major share of profits. Now these companies are fully owned by Nicobarese, but the situation does not seem to have changed for the common man there.

EHL and MML are responsible for the supply of essential commodities, but though they own cargo vessels, there are regular crises in the supply of such commodities. Nicobarese workers, who are engaged in stevedoring works, like the loading and unloading of EHL cargo ships, are not paid on time. EHL has brought in a good number of workers from outside for construction and other activities. It also exerts political influence in the Nicobar Islands. Common Nicobarese, therefore, resent these companies. They are not satisfied with the stagnant prices of copra and betel nut and have started selling their coconuts or copra and betelnut to merchants in Port Blair or the mainland (Justin 1990: 106-09).

As far back as the early 1960s the Dhebar Commission had recommended that there should not be any exploitation in the sale and marketing of Adivasi produce and their requirements should be met at reasonable prices. But we can see that these national and international market forces have continued to play havoc with their lives despite many a struggle on their part. Introduction of a cash crop economy tends to make the indigenous people get indebted and also tends to lead to stratification among them.

It should also be noted that the Nicobarese are the one group which up to 2001 had shown a good population growth. It is officially estimated that 250 Nicobarese died because of the 2004 tsunami.[5] It created havoc with their culture and civilisation as it destroyed entire villages along the coast apart from the destruction of vegetation. The new settlements on higher ground set up with the help of external aid are in many respects not in line with their earlier traditions and way of life. It is not possible to give a full estimate of the Nicobarese population because many among them have settled in urban areas and do not want to be identified as tribals. They have registered themselves on the basis of religion.

As per the 2011 Census the total Islands population showed a growth rate of 6.86 per cent; in comparison, the population of the tribal people decreased from 29,469 to 28,530 showing a rate of decrease of 3.19% as compared to the 2001 Census figures. The Census 2011 estimate about the total population of the A&N appears to be an underestimate as population mobility and labour migration is ignored to a significant extent. Local estimates put the population total at 5 lakhs including the floating population (Zehmisch 2012: 19), which would further reduce the percentage of the indigenous people to the total and is an indicator of the success of state-sponsored expropriation and decimation of the original people.

At present individuals of the Onge and Great Andamanese are living in human zoo-like conditions having lost their social and economic cohesion to a great extent. They are subject to psychological trauma due to the chauvinistic and greedy

attitudes of the dominant ethnic groups that have settled in their homes and wish to take advantage of their vulnerability in the face of modern civilisation. Their difference and perceived inferiority is taken as justification for this exploitative approach of snatching their resources leading to their decimation.

The government has followed a two-pronged approach towards tribal people. On the one hand, it is responsible for all the resettlement and 'development' policies that have harmed the tribal habitat and endangered their way of life and very existence while paying lip service to their unique human heritage. Again, though ostensibly there is no intention to forcibly bring tribes like the Jarawa into the mainstream, all the initiatives of the government push them just towards that by a consistent undermining of their resource base and by cultural onslaughts. On the other hand, in the face of the ensuing slow extinction of small populations and cultures they offer some ameliorative measures with the help of NGOs, activists, and officially appointed anthropologists from the mainstream.

The Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samithi (AAJVS) was formed in 1976 as an autonomous organisation on the advice of the Anthropological Survey of India with the special assistance of the Central government's Ministry of Home Affairs. Its task was to protect the health of the tribes of these islands and prevent their extinction. All contact missions to the Jarawa reserve, for example, are organised by it; they, however, hardly follow the concept of reciprocity or equality and are, therefore, liable to give rise to misunderstandings. It has been focussing on the Great Andamanese and the Onge with its welfare measures who live in settlements built for them by the government. In actual practice, the Samithi is working as an appendage to the Tribal Welfare Department of the Andaman administration, which takes all decisions without including any tribal or field-level worker of the Samithi in the decision-making process. Its personnel, being fully bureaucratic in understanding and approach, have failed to realise the needs and problems of the indigenous people. The introduction of a 'raja' or leader for administrative convenience among the tribal groups that they work with is an anomaly in the democratic tribal culture.

In the case of the settlement it has set up for the Onge people in Little Andaman the Samithi largely confines itself to doling out rations (which includes tobacco!) and providing some modern medical facilities. The schemes of poultry and pig farming, of milking cows supplied and manufacturing milk products, have failed because the Onge do not drink milk, and are not interested in the domestication of animals except the dog introduced by outsiders, which they found to be of great help in their hunting pursuits. The tin/asbestos-roofed wooden huts, community

hall and hospital built for them are not designed keeping their traditional building designs in mind. They are found too hot by the Onge who mostly still prefer to use their own traditional huts. While trying to introduce them to horticulture and agriculture they are employed as daily wage labourers with minimum wages to clear the undergrowth of the coconut orchards and to collect the coconuts. In their opinion, according to their egalitarian ethos the wages should be distributed equally among the workers irrespective of the hours of work. Education also is hardly tailored to suit their needs and would need to be more vocational in nature by focussing on crafts that utilise local resources and their traditional knowledge base which is increasingly getting lost as it is not being used in the course of the assimilation process (Basu 1990: 75ff; Chandi and Andrews in UNESCO 2010: 48). They are also used as menial servants for visiting Samithi staff and made to clear up the settlement weeks in advance. The work of the Samithi and the approach of the administration in general thus become more of an assault on Onge culture than leading to its development!

Rather than doles or charity in the form of free provisions for the surviving Onge and Great Andamanese, their territorial rights should be restored and they could be encouraged to enter into an exchange of commodities even in barter form. In general, if welfare measures were focused more on settlers who need them, or in obviating the need for migration to the Islands by improving conditions of the poor on the mainland, it would help to prevent resource depreciation on the Islands. Alternate sources of livelihood for the settler populations have to be found, such as deer hunting (deer have become a sort of pest on the Islands as an introduced species), and in such a way so that they do not encroach on Jarawa or other indigene resource bases. Horticulture and cultivation of spices and herbs rather than agriculture may be better suited to forest soils. It should be noted that the current population of the Islands exceeds their carrying capacity.[6] The migrant population cannot live at the cost of the indigenous one and needs to be off-loaded to an extent, or it should learn to respect the knowledge of indigenous groups, such as it remains, and learn to live sustainably on the Islands together with them.

Stone Age to Nuclear Age

The present day economy of the Islands rests on a thriving fishing industry (its Exclusive Economic Zone is 30% of India's entire EEZ), handicrafts, exploitation of mineral and energy resources, sand mining and tourism. Beach sand mining for construction activity has become associated with a mafia having strong political connections and it is affecting turtle-nesting sites. By destroying beaches it is

increasing sea erosion. The turtle population, a popular and important food for the native people, is endangered by the huge global trade in their eggs, meat and body parts, and oil used in various products. It is also jeopardised by dogs, first introduced by the British, who destroy turtle nests and eggs, pick up hatchlings and harass nesting adults to the point of making them abandon their nests.

There is an exponential expansion of the domestic Indian and international tourism industry here. Uninhabited islands are being targeted for 'tourism development.' It should be noted that even if not inhabited, the resources of many of such islands are used seasonally by the indigenous people. Internationally, it is being marketed as an untouched frontier (Zehmisch 2012: 3). A tourism model that is not environment-friendly or has the interests of the native population in mind has its pitfalls (such as the introduction of inflationary trends for the local population) and the tourist circuit getting rooted here needs to be examined from such angles too. Already, in addition to tropical evergreen forest destruction, mangroves are eroded, which added to the impact of the tsunami of 2004 that also decimated some of the endemic Islands species; coral reefs are impacted by logging and resultant soil erosion. All this and the pesticide-using agriculture have made the Islands into a biodiversity hotspot, though a good part are covered by Protected Areas including seven National Parks and ninety-five Sanctuaries to conserve and study the natural fauna and flora. As on the level of human beings the introduction of alien floral and faunal species, particularly on islands with a high degree of endemism, leads to irretrievable loss of native species, and this has happened in the case of the A&N Islands also.[7]

Regarding tourism and mega or mini events organised around it, they should not become convenient entry points for bio-prospectors[8] and pharmaceutical multinationals always on the look-out for newer, virgin areas to explore. The tourism model should be an eco-friendly travel-oriented one that makes a net contribution to the Island economy by generating local employment without disturbing the native culture, and its benefits should be equitably shared. The opposite seems to be the case when we hear about tourism companies that bribe officials to conduct 'human safaris' on the ATR with their clients gawking at the local Jarawa people enticed out of their forest reserve to beg for modern food items. All too often the World Tourism Organisation promoted brand of eco-tourism ends up making the original inhabitants and their lives into experiential show-pieces for the diversionary pleasures of the rich and stressed urban professionals. Some indigenous people, as in Kerala, and international advocacy organisations like Survival International have strongly objected to the promotion of this kind of tourism by government agencies, which reinforces racist stereotypes.

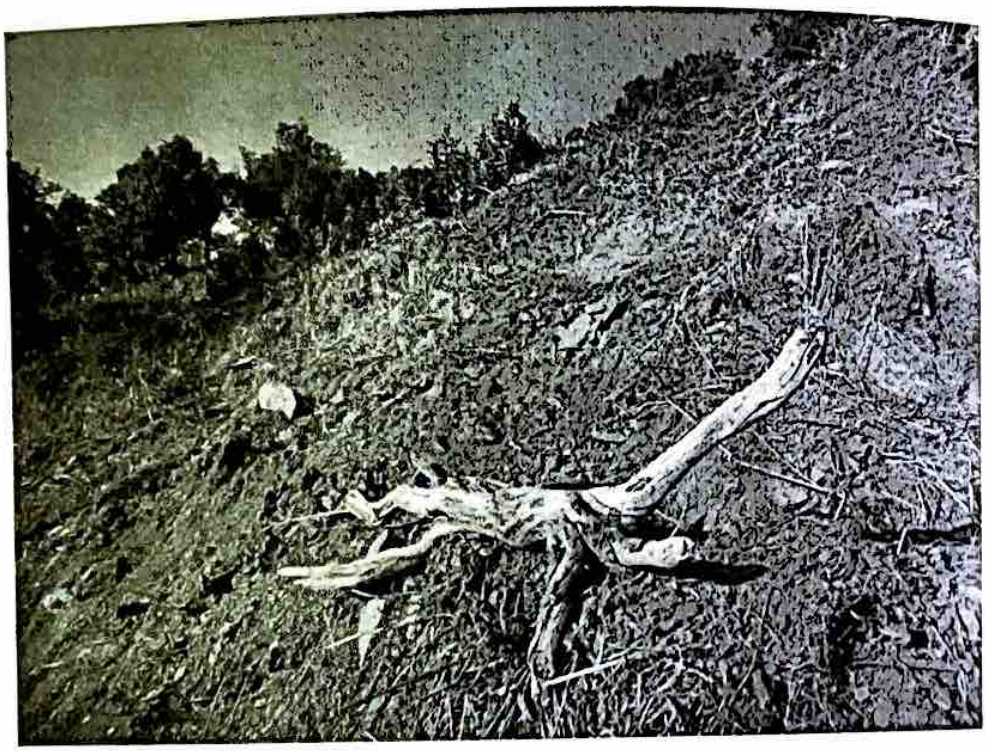
In the context of the current geo-strategic environment in the Indian Ocean region where China is ramping up its presence with conventional and nuclear submarines from Colombo to Karachi the Indian government also feels the need to crank up its military forces and infrastructure in this region, and here the A&N Islands play an important role. The Islands are treated as a 'forward military base' and used for firing practice, missile testing, deployment of spy drones, and so on. Keeping the Islands' military role in mind, the latest Lt. Governor to be appointed here is a retired admiral. The Islands' proximity to the Malacca Strait—a busy sea lane—make them a strategic location for basing troops, aircraft, warships and nuclear submarines, more of which are planned to be manufactured under the 'Make in India' model. Currently India is also utilising Japanese investment for upgrading civilian infrastructure on the Islands and so joining the military co-operation alliance being built up in the region against China with the US in the lead. Such military use of the Islands is certainly detrimental to wildlife and completely contrary to indigenous natural resource utilisation practised for millennia.

Notes

1. Colonial stereotyping imagery of the Negrito tribes of the Andamans is exemplified in the Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four*, published in 1890. In it the murderer turns out to be a 'black cannibal' from the Andamans, who had been used as an exhibit at fairs and shown to be eating raw meat and performing war dances. In tune with descriptions of aborigines at that time he is described as looking cruel, fierce, wild, malevolent, hideous, with misshapen head, thick lips, bestial, intractable, half-animal, in other words, a savage, an Unmensch (barbarian). He is finally killed by Watson and Holmes after a chase down the Thames River, again a replica of the killing of many indigenous peoples by the British in the Islands while endeavouring to found settlements in them.
2. Various kinds of plantations, mostly monoculture, were established over a period of time ranging from pandanus, coconuts, spices such as pepper, nutmeg and cinnamon, coffee, rubber, teak and other varieties of timber trees, red oil palm, cashew nut trees, and other fruit trees such as mango, jackfruit and pineapple. Reserved forests are often used by the Forest Department for timber extraction and even planted for the same purpose with teak, padauk or matchwood. Coconut, areca nut and silk cotton trees are also grown.
3. The sources of the figures given in this table are: Sekhsaria (2007: 15); http://www.and.nic.in/stats/Economic%20survey%20ANI/CHAPTER%20-%202.pdf; Office of the RGI and Census Commissioner of India, and the series on the

tribes of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, published by the Anthropological Survey of India in 1990. In general, the population figures for the tribes are not precise. Till the 1961 Census only the enumeration of the Andamanese and the Nicobarese was done, the other indigenous groups being totally inaccessible. The Shompen and Onge were enumerated for the first time during the 1961 Census and the Jarawa began to be enumerated only in 1981. In the 1981 Census only 31 Jarawa people could be enumerated, although their population was estimated at 200 persons.

4. These are the words used by Dr. R.K. Bhattacharya, former director of the Anthropological Survey of India, in a report on the ATR submitted to the Calcutta High Court in 2004.
5. Of the 3,513 people reported dead or missing, 3,449 were from the Nicobar group of islands and of these 2,955 were from the Nicobari tribal community (Sekhsaria 2015: 41).
6. Supreme Court orders of 2002 in relation to these Islands also called for the creation of an 'inner line regime' together with a process of issuance of Islander identity cards to curtail immigration.
7. For more details, see Sekhsaria 2007: 60-64. See also Chandi in UNESCO 2010: 38.
8. Bio-prospecting is the search for plant and animal species from which medicinal drugs and other commercially valuable compounds may be obtained. It is not a new activity and dates back to the sixteenth century, to the beginnings of the colonial enterprise.



8

THE END OF DIGNITY

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is often referred to as the father of the Indian Constitution. This is not the whole truth. The initial draft of the Constitution was prepared during 1946-47 prior to the handing over of power by Indian Civil Service members of the British Indian government, chief among whom was Sir B.N. Rau. One of the striking features of the new Constitution was its great similarity with the British Government of India Act of 1935. The main work of rewriting the draft was done by Dr. Ambedkar, as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, on the basis of reports of various committees and sub-committees appointed by the Constituent Assembly and decisions taken by the Assembly. The oligarchy of Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, and Maulana Azad decided every provision before it reached the floor of the house and made sure that nothing was incorporated in it which they did not want. Nehru's promise that the Constitution could and would be revised once there was a Constituent Assembly based on universal suffrage was not kept.

Dr. Ambedkar was not fully satisfied with the safeguards provided for the SCs in the Constitution. He also felt that the Scheduled Tribes did not have adequate representation to safeguard their interests. In fact, he had prepared his own draft Constitution, which provided for separate village settlements and separate electorates for the SCs. It laid down a state socialist economy where key and basic industries were to be owned and run by the state, and agriculture too was to be carried out as a state industry. This was based on the idea that political democracy without an equivalent economic base would not serve the purpose of improving the

lot of the downtrodden and would lead to irreconcilable contradictions that would threaten to blow up the entire structure. Ultimately, his disappointment with the ruling political sections, their insincerity, was so great that he stated in the Rajya Sabha in 1953 that he would like to burn this Constitution which does not suit anybody and that far from being the maker of the Constitution he had played the role of hack and had worked on others' biddings rather than according to his own will and wish and as per the full interests of the oppressed. (Sharma 2002: 58). The place given to the policy of reservation was a compromise solution on his part till discrimination was overcome through annihilation of untouchability and the entire caste system in society.

The nature of the Indian state and economy that was ushered in with the transfer of power was that the Indian big bourgeois class aligned with imperialist capitalists and feudal landlords took up the reins to preside over a neo-colonial dependent economy. Growth and enrichment are essentially facilitated for the big industrial bourgeoisie, nationally and internationally, and for global finance capital. This increasingly negates the possibility of a pluralistic economy, where even the tribal modes of production have a space. This path of growth chosen paved the way for a welfare state.

Integration Through Welfarism

In the Constitution a number of Articles (especially Article 46), directly and indirectly protect and promote the interests of the STs and SCs. Articles 330 to 342 deal with special provisions relating to certain classes including the STs and SCs. Articles 330 and 332 reserve seats for them in Parliament and the State Legislative Assemblies. Article 335 gives concessions in recruitment into government services. Article 339 enables the Central government to give directions to the States on the administration and welfare of the STs. Amendment of Article 338 made provision for a National Commission for SCs and STs, set up in 1992, to monitor all matters relating to constitutional safeguards. Its reports, most often ignored by parliamentarians, have consistently found that many a law—and ground level reality and practice in any case—violate the spirit of the Constitution and fail to safeguard basic human and fundamental rights of the tribal peoples. It must be remembered that a number of black laws are in place and resistance of Adivasi and other people has always been violently crushed by state forces starting with the example of the Telangana struggle, even while theoretically the "Tribal Panchsheel" and a welfarist approach were being upheld. Criminalisation of politics and *goonda raj* (rule of hoodlums) are in opposition to any kind of democratic set-up. The

extension of administration to their areas includes the police *thanas* (stations), which often are a tool of oppression rather than welfare.

Other special provisions exempt the STs from the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, and from land alienation. The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 are additional legislations enacted to protect them from torture and atrocities. As per the National Crime Records Bureau's (2014) "Crime in India" report 11,451 cases of crimes against STs were registered, a jump of 68.6% over the previous year. This is in addition to the crimes committed against them under the Indian Penal Code, which numbered 4,522 in 2014.[1] The implementation of the Act suffers from non-registration of cases, delays in investigations and trials and low conviction rates. An Amendment Bill was passed in 2014 making public servants liable for punishment in the case of neglect of cases coming under this Act. It included additional prevailing forms of atrocities, especially against women, and made it mandatory for every State to establish exclusive special courts in every district to ensure speedier disposal of such cases; they are also expected to formulate a scheme to ensure the rights, relief and rehabilitation of victims and make arrangements for their protection and that of witnesses as well.

The main purpose of the development and welfare programmes is to change the Adivasi economy and way of life and integrate them into the larger economy albeit at a slow pace with the help of Adivasi leaders, NGOs, social scientists and people's representatives. Actually they have helped in consolidating the Adivasi areas as internal colonies and bringing them under the stranglehold of industrialists, contractors and other middlemen. The manner in which this integration is carried out tends to create a sense of dependency and reduces them to objects of sympathy and charity. This leads to a loss of sense of self-respect and self-esteem and could blind the Adivasis to the real issues affecting their existence and development. It creates a division with encroachers/migrants, who feel that enough is being done for the original inhabitants and they need not bother further, as over a period of time they and their progeny want to feel they are also sons of the soil. It makes difficult for the 'outsiders' to realise that there are many issues that can be solved only in common and in co-operation with each other.

As the benefits to an extent are given on an individual basis they can be cornered by an influential stratum within an Adivasi group or by some Adivasi groups leaving others at a disadvantage. Land allotment by the government also does not happen in an equitable way; some get it but others are left out. A gulf between such ethnic groups and strata within them thus opens up. However, even

creamy layers so created cannot compete on an equal basis with already entrenched elites.

To eliminate the age-old exploitation of Adivasis, the government introduced co-operatives into Adivasi areas during the First Five-Year Plan period (1951-56) itself. In the 1950s with US aid and advice a community development model was introduced. It promoted simultaneous development in rural areas such as agriculture, animal husbandry, education, infrastructure provision, industry and crafts. It assumed that once the ground was laid in these areas a process of self-generating and self-sustaining growth would be set in motion. In Adivasi areas special multipurpose development projects with emphasis on education, health, agriculture, communication and housing programmes were initiated. During the Second (1956-61) and Third (1961-66) Five-Year Plans, special 'tribal development blocks' for integrated development were introduced in different States on the lines of the community development blocks in Adivasi majority areas, but the benefits were garnered by the forward castes. This is because the Community Development Programme assumed integrated communities in villages and hence ignored the inequities and social distance and discrimination on the basis of the caste system. It completely bypassed the question of land reforms.

The Bhoodan movement initiated by Vinoba Bhave was supposed to work in co-ordination with the Community Development Programme, but that did not work out due to the differing perspectives of the two movements. The Bhoodan movement failed in its objective of resolving the land ownership issue in India. Only very miniscule quantities of land donated actually got distributed, and out of this very little had found its way to Adivasis. Some of it got entangled in litigation, there were charges of corruption and of the land getting into hands and for purposes it was not meant for.[2] The Community Development Programme emphasised cash crop cultivation for supply to industry as raw material and as a result sufficient local employment opportunities were not created. Bureaucratic lethargy did not allow the entire funds allocated to be spent. The multiplicity of schemes and agencies also became a retarding factor in the implementation process.

The Fourth Plan (1969-74) adopted a more comprehensive regional approach and pilot projects were implemented in some States through separate Tribal Development Agencies that covered groups of blocks. However, the onset of a violent Naxalite movement in many Adivasi areas of the country was an indicator of the lack of success of governmental programmes to stem the main tribal problems of indebtedness and land alienation. By the Seventies conflicts had increased in frequency due to this situation and under this threat the Government of India

devised and adopted new strategies of containment. Therefore, with the Fifth Plan (1974-78) an Integrated Area Development Programme approach was pursued and, on the initiative of the Home Ministry, the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy was adopted as a plan within the State plan; whereas earlier, welfare of Adivasis was being meagrely budgeted under the head of "Welfare of Backward Classes." Each State now earmarked funds for Adivasi development on the basis of the proportion of their population, while the Centre and institutional agencies provided aid. The sub-plans (not more than two per cent of the total plan expenditure) are supposed to provide additional resources for the development of the STs, over and above the resources that are available for their development within the general plan sector, where they also do not receive a reasonable share.

Under the TSP the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) formed the basic planning unit to protect the Adivasis from exploitation and promote their socio-economic interests through income generating schemes allied with infrastructure development programmes. Areas of Adivasi concentration as well as those where their population was more dispersed were sought to be covered. To cover areas with lesser tribal concentration projects like MADA (Modified Area Development Approach), Micro Project, Cluster and DTDP (Dispersed Tribal Development Programme) were devised. During the Sixth (1980-85) and Seventh Five-Year (1985-90) Plans the areas covered by the sub-plan strategy were extended. Skill development through education and training programmes were envisaged.

At the level of implementation the TSP was reduced to an area plan and most of the outlay was used for the development of regions that are inhabited by both Adivasis and non-Adivasis. In fact, in a good number of such areas the non-Adivasis are more in number. Most States spend a good amount of this fund on infrastructure, which actually benefits the exploitative sectors of the economy, and is routed through an arrogant, dominant caste bureaucracy. The beneficiaries are more often than not a bloated bureaucracy, a contractor lobby and NGOs. A huge squandering of resources meant for Adivasi welfare is there because of corruption and funds mismanagement. The bitter truth is that only a small percentage of the outlay actually reaches the target population.[3] This problem is in addition to the diversion of funds. Often, funds earmarked for the Adivasi sub-plans are allowed to lapse due to lack of sincerity and political will. So much so that the Andhra Pradesh government found it necessary to legislate the Andhra Pradesh SCs Sub-Plan and STs Sub-Plan (Planning, Allocation and Utilisation of Financial Resources) Act, 2012.

There was a fairly big jump in budget allocations between the Fifth and Eighth Plan periods. Due to big infrastructural investments in Adivasi areas as targets of TSP, these areas became growth centres attracting successive waves of non-Adivasi settlers. The incessant process of land alienation drove the dispossessed Adivasis away from these growth centres into deep and inaccessible forests and steep hill slopes. So there are prosperous Adivasi areas and pauperised Adivasis. Thus, they became victims rather than the beneficiaries of the development that took place in their name and at the cost of enormous public resources (Kunhaman 1997: 42).

There is little involvement of the target population in the formulation and execution of the plans and associated welfare schemes, though the Eighth Five-Year Plan had this as a specific objective. The concerned parliamentarians and MLAs do not devote sufficient time to deliberate on issues related to these sections of the population. The concerned official bodies, committees and councils too do not meet as often as required. Moreover, the flow of funds for Adivasi sub-plans has been declining over a period after 1991, when LPG policies were introduced and began to be implemented by the government. In any case, the amount invested by the government in welfare projects is lower than what is taken out from these areas in terms of resources. In areas of Maoist activity sub-plan budgets were used for enhancing allocations for police forces including the purchase of automatic weapons and drones.

As per recommendations of various commissions Integrated Credit-cum-Marketing Co-operative Societies (LAMPS) were also introduced. The purposes of these societies were to provide production and consumption credit, storage facilities, and undertake marketing of forest produce, ensure remunerative prices for forest and agriculture produce, and distribute consumer goods and agricultural inputs. All these facilities are available under one roof. Moreover, TRIFED (Adivasi Co-operative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd.) has been set up primarily for marketing the items of Adivasi produce, especially minor forest produce and related products, and for eliminating private traders from the scene. However, these co-operatives because of control by political parties, corruption and other irregularities such as licensing to middlemen, seem to have become almost as exploitative as moneylenders. The Adivasis again have the status of being just the workers in these co-operatives. The introduction of schemes such as PACS (Primary Agricultural Credit Society) has failed to provide any benefit to the Adivasis in real terms. The majority of the Adivasis are not eligible for any significant amount as loans since they do not have sufficient immovable property to pledge as collateral security.

A separate Ministry of Tribal Affairs was hived out of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 1999. National and State-level Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporations were set up in 2001, the objective of which is to provide ST families with loans at concessional rates of interest for entrepreneurial schemes. They provide soft loans in the agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, minor irrigation, small industries, trade, service and educational sectors. The budget allocated is quite meagre. Implementation is not taken seriously and cases are there of other people taking advantage of such funds in the name of STs. Providing aid to voluntary organisations, setting up of Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, etc., were other schemes initiated to enhance the transition of SCs/ STs to non-traditional occupations.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) resolved to "resolve unresolved issues and persisting problems" of rehabilitation of the displaced, restoration of alienated land, linking of tribal interests with biodiversity and environmental restoration, improvement of their health and nutritional status, and proclaimed its intention to protect them from the adverse effects of ongoing globalisation and liberalisation processes through employment and income-generation activities.

Problems of getting community certificates to authenticate tribal identity ensure that the number of bona fide beneficiaries remains small and as a result many Adivasis cannot avail of governmental welfare schemes and reservations. A good amount of Central government funds thus remains unutilised or gets diverted.

The integration-related policy measures of the various Five-Year Plans and the National Tribal Policy have thus remained rhetorical and have largely failed in the objective of social and economic empowerment and justice for the majority of the increasingly dispossessed Adivasis. They have, however, certainly contributed to the trend of stratification within the Adivasi communities. The channelling of public resources through various official bodies has helped the Adivasi chiefs and other former similar social leaders of their communities to accumulate the means of production. Some Adivasi groups have benefited more and at the cost of others. But this process of class differentiation where Adivasis are found to be working as labourers on the land of richer Adivasis is still a rare phenomenon.

The current BJP-led government at the Centre has made big cuts in the budgets of priority social programmes including that of the Adivasi sub-plan, which has been reduced from Rs. 32,386 crore in 2014-15 to Rs. 19,979 crore (budget estimate 2015-16). Funds available for the MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) have also been reduced. Cutting back on this programme is meant to facilitate rural to urban migration

and the super exploitation of the migrant labour on the lines of the Gujarat urban centric developmental model.

Governmental welfare measures and programmes can be only halfway useful to the target populations and generally only if there is some real understanding of their culture and needs. This is particularly so in the case of housing, which very often locationally and otherwise, does not meet their needs and goes unused. For a number of such ethnic groups, such as the highland Bondas of Koraput, permanent dwellings offend the natural order and are considered inauspicious, and hence left unoccupied. The Rajis of Pithorgarh in Uttarakhand similarly left *pucca* (longer lasting) houses built for them within a few months because they believe that falling sick is a manifestation of malevolent spirits and a sign that they should seek new dwellings. Cash and other monetary compensation cannot compensate for the loss of sacred spaces and customs and ways of livelihood due to displacement and relocation to sites that have not been chosen by them, but have been decided upon by the authorities.

That the Adivasi sub-plan strategy failed to stem, rather it exacerbated the situation of deprivation, is clearly because of the overall developmental trajectory adopted by the Indian state post-1947. This favoured large-scale technology intensive centralised industry rather than organic agriculture and small-scale agro- and local resources-based industries. There was also no coordination between forestry and Adivasi development policies. External elements continue to play havoc with Adivasi lives. Usurious moneylending and indebtedness continue leading to loss of land and labour bondage. The moneylenders are non-Adivasis lending edge to the emancipatory movements of Adivasis as ethnic groups against external forces.

The continuing deterioration and decline in the conditions of the Adivasi population in the post-1947 period is an indication of the fact that the plethora of affirmative action legislations and welfare measures meant for their benefit are only a smokescreen behind which the plunder of their resources by outsiders is going on relentlessly and at a faster pace.

Decentralisation Through Panchayat Raj Institutions

Panchayat Raj institutions were established in the Fifties to realise the spirit of Article 40 of the Constitution to make democratic institutions vibrant at the village, block and district levels. Almost all State governments neglected the Panchayat

Raj Institutions (PRIs) by not holding elections on some pretext or the other due to the threat perceived by the rural elite who also had their urban linkages.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments introduced in 1992 as Part IX increased powers given to local bodies and placed new matters under their jurisdiction such as land improvement, land consolidation and soil conservation, social forestry and minor forest produce. It also made it obligatory for State governments to hold elections to PRIs every five years and provided for compulsory reservation for women, STs, SCs and other backward classes. A Finance Commission was set up at the State level for devolution of funds to the local bodies. A new Schedule (Eleven) listed the roles and responsibilities of the panchayats. Some critics have unkindly referred to the Panchayati Raj as a means of spreading corruption to the local levels. Others criticize it as a means for the Centre (aka the ruling party/ies) to control the local levels bypassing State governments. Yet others allege that it helps the industrial class to exert greater influence on the local level bodies. In the absence of thoroughgoing land reforms the rural elite will surely continue to control the panchayats.

The operation of Part IX was not extended to the Scheduled Areas. Simultaneously, it also withdrew the legislative powers of the State legislatures and the special powers conferred on the Governors to make regulations in the Scheduled Areas regarding the Panchayat Raj set up. The Central government reserved to itself the power to make a separate legislation with necessary modifications for the Scheduled Areas. However, State governments enacted Panchayat Raj Acts and extended them to the Scheduled Areas contravening the restrictions imposed on them by the Constitution.

Based on the report in 1995 of the Bhuria Committee, which was set up in 1994 under pressure from Adivasi organisations upholding self-rule, the Panchayat Raj Act was amended and extended to the Scheduled Areas with the necessary exceptions and modifications. Known as the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) it is not a law by itself but a directive for the States to make laws for the Scheduled Areas "which shall be in consonance with the customary law, social and religious practices and traditional management practices of community resources." It talks of self-rule and empowers every Gram Sabha to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution." It gives the right of ownership of minor forest produce (MFP) to the respective local communities; yet the collection and trade of most of the high value MFP continue to be monopolised by the Corporations of the Forest Department of the States

and the forest dwellers are employed as wage earners by the contractors. Forest Departments argue that PESA's mandate does not extend to forest land and that it has not defined MFPs. The law also gives the Gram Sabhas the right to be consulted (though the Bhuria Committee had talked about prior *consent*) before any land acquisition is taken up and before settling or rehabilitating persons affected by projects; the right to approve (but not to draw up) project and development plans and control resources allocated in tribal sub-plans of State governments; recommendations of the Gram Sabha or panchayat at the appropriate level will be mandatory prior to the grant of prospecting licenses or mining leases for minerals or the grant of concessions for exploitation of minor minerals by auction. Some other rights relate to regulation/restriction of the sale and consumption of intoxicants, controlling moneylending and managing village markets.

As States with Scheduled Areas have not carried out the necessary legal and administrative reforms, despite prodding from the Panchayat Raj Ministry to devolve power and finance the functions assigned to the Gram Sabhas in order to counter 'extremism,' they remain *de facto* under the control of the State administration.[4] On the other hand, in the absence of equality at the local levels such decentralisation can be misused by often factionalised dominant classes/castes and all may connive with powerful external commercial forces to the detriment of conservation of forest biodiversity. We need to be chary of the fact that the World Bank and other global institutions, not least through the media, exercise their influence at every level of the body politic and this can lead to 'democratic' decisions at the local level for the siting of industries, dams or mines provided enough 'compensation' is dangled.

The involvement of political parties with their own vested sectarian interests in panchayat elections also does not bode well for thoroughgoing pro-people measures to be taken. In West Bengal, Panchayat Raj was less about devolution of power and more about consolidation of state power and extension of CPI (M) influence in rural society. Politics of patronage was carried out where developmental funds were channelled mainly to its supporters. Kerala to some extent provided an exceptional case by the way in which it implemented the Tribal Sub-Plan in the Adivasi areas through a People's Plan Campaign using local self-government institutions such as *Oorukootams* (traditional Adivasi panchayats) to identify projects and their beneficiaries and had social activists from Adivasi areas to assist in the process of providing housing, drinking water, sanitation and education. On the whole, however, despite cartloads of studies regarding the benefits of Panchayat Raj, it will remain a co-option technique unless conscious people learn to forcefully assert their hard won legal rights in a meaningful way.

Forest Policies

The division into reserved, protected and village forests was a colonial one under the 1878 Forest Act. Mixed forests suited the forest dwellers for serving their myriad needs. However, monoculture of commercially and industrially valuable species like eucalyptus, pine, and teak was preferred in the forests managed 'scientifically' by the government rather than maintaining vast areas under mixed species with trees such as wild mango, tamarind and sal useful to the people for their basic needs of consumption, house building and fuel. As elephants do not eat teak leaves their depredations in areas under crops increase. Forest policies have hardly had the goal of supporting the Adivasi subsistence economies. Rather they look upon the forests as sources of industrial raw materials and Adivasis as wage labour. The Forest Policy is one of internal colonisation based on the assumption that all land vests with the State.

Post-1947 forests have been felled for commercial and industrial purposes, for the settlement of refugee populations from Pakistan, Tibet and Sri Lanka, and for the expansion of agriculture. In order to protect the rest of the forest cover from further degradation the remaining forests have been brought under the intensive control of the government. This, however, is only the ostensible purpose; the real purpose is to establish control over the precious resources of the forests in the interests of the dominant classes nationally and internationally, for mining, for plantations of tea, coffee, cashew, cardamom, and other horticultural cash crop cultivation. For this purpose all-weather connecting roads to market centres are important and so are dams for irrigation and energy.

International organisations have been influencing forest policy in the post-independence period. FAO, OEECD and USAID experts counselled production forestry for rapid industrialisation which was followed through large-scale monocultural plantations of quick-growing, high-yielding tree species. To channel the flow of adequate institutional finance to the forestry sector Forest Development Corporations (FDCs) were set up in various States by 1979-80. These corporations—accused of being Forest Destruction Corporations and agents of the Tatas and Birlas—were formed for developing commercially/industrially valuable species. Their indiscriminate clear-felling of large areas of virgin forests, auctioning off the timber at a huge profit, and then replanting the cleared areas with commercial species such as teak triggered off a movement among the forest dwellers against the Forest Departments that act as landlords, traders-cum-police with full state support, and their policies. Even sacred groves were not spared; important non-timber forest products were nationalised. Thus during the 1970s

we witnessed the Chipko Andolan in Uttarakhand, the Jharkhand movement in the Adivasi areas of Bihar, Bengal and Odisha where the Adivasis had started uprooting all teak plants from government plantations and nurseries, and similar attacks had been seen against tropical pine trees by Oraons and Gonds in Bastar district at that time in Madhya Pradesh, Jungle Bachao Andolan in Maharashtra and the Appiko movement in Karnataka.

World Bank (and in some cases SIDA, USAID, JBIC and JICA)-funded Social Forestry programmes in various parts of the country have displaced thousands of village poor. Instead of being social forests in the true sense of the term and catering to the fuel, food, medicine, fodder, building construction and cultural needs of villagers and supporting the Adivasi economy and way of life they have been converted into captive plantations of paper mills and synthetic fibre manufacturers and have benefited some rich farmers. They have promoted the cultivation of fast-growing species like eucalyptus and casuarinas, and large pine or teak tree plantations in reserved forest areas. The Tropical Forestry Action Programme sponsored by the World Bank in the 1980s, for example, ended up destroying natural forests and replacing them with commercial tree plantations. While the Bank is putting some money into "biodiversity enhancement" the amount it allocates for destructive schemes is much higher.

Birlas have long been given reserved forest land in Andhra Pradesh for commercial plantation. The Kerala government provided them bamboo at the rate of Re. one per tonne and leased out reserved forest areas for their use. The Government of Karnataka leased prime Adivasi forest land at a pittance to Karnataka Pulp Woods Ltd. Forest dwellers had to pay much higher prices for the same bamboo used in basketry and other purposes. Adilabad district in Telangana that was once full of bamboo stands got denuded of them when these forests were leased to paper mills. The daylight robbery of the people involved in this stands out. Moreover, as bamboo got exhausted because of over exploitation, paper and other industries changed over to soft wood species like mango from which the Adivasis had got much of their food.

World Bank funded top-down projects transfer power and authority to the Forest Departments and local elites away from the local people with their historical cultural and economic ties with the land. Farm forestry has benefited the big rich farmers; community forestry to serve villagers' needs does not receive the support it deserves and they (rather the women) have to spend many more hours traversing great distances to gather fuel wood. Building all-weather roads in the forests connecting them to markets is an activity funded by the World Bank and other

international and regional multilateral banks to comply with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) policies to increase exports allowing global imperialist corporations to access natural resources for their global supply and production chains.

It seems that West European countries that want to save their own forests from further depletion would like to assure themselves of timber from the Third World by promoting social forestry programmes there. Impelled by the growing pressures from within the Western societies against depletion of forests and against newsprint and plywood industries, the World Bank, in an act of 'green imperialism', encourages the growing of raw materials for these 'dirty' industries in the hills and forests of Andhra, for example, in the name of afforestation. The government used a World Bank loan to replace 40,000 hectares of mixed forests in tribal Bastar with tropical pine for the pulpwood and paper industry. The Adivasis who cultivate food crops or any other commercial crop of their choice in the so-called forest lands even today face severe repression from the Forest Department. They are treated as poachers, trespassers, thieves and vandals and charge-sheeted, jailed, and can even be shot dead with impunity for their 'offences.' Adivasis are the first people to be picked up in cases of illegal timber extraction, whereas the real criminals may be thugs with political and other connections with corrupt forest officials.

Due to its own policies of providing cheap timber, pulp and other raw materials for the paper, the artificial fibre and plywood industries for domestic use and for export, the government depleted the forests to such a dangerous degree that it decided that the help of Adivasis is required to regenerate the forests for continued commercial benefit. This was the *raison d'être* of the Joint Forest Management Policy of 1990. The Adivasis were to help regrow and conserve the forests while the maximum benefit was to go to industry. International funding—from the World Bank, for example—was utilised for this and natural forest gave way to commercially grown species such as acacia and eucalyptus in neat plantation style. However, there are serious ecological repercussions of growing such commercial species as they are instrumental in decreasing soil fertility, biodiversity and in destroying the habitat of wildlife. There were other serious deficiencies in the programme of JFM, which expanded rapidly in the country, such as it being restricted only to degraded forests, with less importance given to NTFP, and to communities involved. Cases of misappropriation of funds as well as poor record keeping are there.

The Adivasis continued to have no rights over the forests and its timber; they had the right only to the minor forest produce and that too at the pleasure of

the government. Some State governments have commercialised the sale of MFP to maximise their own revenue at the cost of the needs of collecting Adivasis creating friction between the two. In multi-caste villages women and SCs/STs were supposed to be included in the Joint Forest Management (JFM) committee (which did not include all adult members), but in practice it often gets dominated by men and forward caste members with a resultant conflict of interests. JFM tends to have a compartmentalised and standardised rather than a local specific and holistic approach to forest management; therefore inter-community and inter-village reciprocity in resource exchanges tend to go down as now exchange is mediated through the market.

The 'forest' lands have become so sacrosanct that the forest dwellers, who are estimated to number around 250-350 million,[5] are sought to be kept out of them. The only way they can continue to live in their own traditional areas and work on the lands which traditionally fostered their communities is by accepting the framework of Joint Forest Councils wherein they have no right to raise the crops they need or prefer but are forced to raise monoculture exotics. For accepting a meagre initial sum they will have to forgo their rights not just over their lands but also on the World Bank-specified crops they have raised. They don't have an independent say on when they can cut the trees, to whom they are going to be sold, and at what price. Worse still, they are not provided clear tenurial or ownership rights over these lands which are supposed to be jointly 'managed' by them, though it is well established that tenurial security can motivate biodiversity conservation. Plants and animals among the endangered species today had survived without problems as long as the forest dwellers had full control over the forest domains and produce.

In 2002 the MoEF (now called MoEF & CC) launched a National Afforestation Programme which was to be implemented through the formation of Forest Development Agencies (FDA) with the funds transfer taking place through JFM committees. A new leadership came up in the FDAs that alienated the traditional leaders and the general public (Wani 2008: 88). The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) was established under a policy of creating Protected Areas as compensation for the loss of forests through industrial use or infrastructure development by charging the project proponents. If followed, it could lead to further land alienation and loss of livelihoods. Though the stated aim is to regenerate forests and create infrastructure for wildlife management and employment opportunities, a key concern remains to increase timber production for industry. Forest land continues to be leased to private companies throughout the country without respecting forest rights. The

Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill/Act seeks to release crores of rupees for afforestation without ensuring that these funds are not misused, and are actually used for the enhancement of the land rights and livelihood of the Adivasis. This has often led to a situation where pristine natural forest is destroyed for some project or the other and on the nearby grassland, which should have been left alone, exotic species are planted; the net result is the destruction of two natural habitats (Roy Burman 2008). Incidentally, activists point out that the survival rate of trees planted under various afforestation programmes (National Afforestation Programme, the Green India Mission, etc.) in the country is only 10-20%.[6]

The National Forest Commission (NFC) set up in 2003 also actually had the purpose of efficient management of forests to cater to commercial industrial demand which can be met through agro-forestry and plantations and aimed to increase the forest cover to 33%. Since liberalisation of the economy in 1991 the government of India is more than ever willing to cater to the growth imperatives of global corporations and Indian big industries. While so doing it is allowing the World Bank, IMF and the UN organisations to help it in designing forest and mining laws and policies relating to the environment and natural resources including water to make them freely available without environmental constraints. In line with the World Bank approach the NFC spoke of the forests having a direct role in poverty eradication and sustainable development.[7]

The primary goal of the World Bank and the IMF, however, is to maximise the bottom-line for Western investors. IMF loans at the time of the balance of payments crisis in 1991 had stipulated 160 conditions, one of which was the devaluation of the rupee. This allows the richer countries like the US to buy more of India's outputs and primary mineral resources at cheaper prices and leads to intensified extraction of precious non-renewable resources with no gain to forest dwelling and local communities. Allowing the private companies into sectors such as mining coal and iron adds to increased deforestation with the ensuing misery for forest-dependent peoples. Mining in general continues with impunity in several tiger inhabited forests, while deforestation has led to regular floods in Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam bringing into it leached pesticides from surrounding tea estates.

India's dependent capitalist development has relied on a continuous subsidy to capital by the state ensuring the provision of free or cheap minerals, water, timber and land from the forest areas. Simultaneously, the population displaced or partially proletarianised thereby has also acted as a source of cheap super exploited reserve labour for the various 'development' projects and as consumers

of industrially-produced basic commodities. In other words, wealth is transferred from them to the corporate industrial sector. The cost of reproduction of labour is reduced due to the partial dependency of the migrant Adivasi workers on forest resources for survival and their continued communitarian utilisation through community forest management, collective grazing systems and in the collection of minor forest produce. By adding to the huge reserve army of workers the strength of the organised working class as a whole is diminished. In the forest areas the state and its machinery along with other exploitative class/caste elements of traders-cum-moneylenders and corporates are seen as the enemy. Because of this Fourth World dimension, that is, of internal colonisation and expropriation of the original dwellers some of these areas are subject to acute contradictions and therefore become the arenas of radical political formations and struggles.

When the forest villages were created during the colonial period no official document was issued recognising their right to the land. Since then the population of forest dwellers has increased, no new land has been allotted to them, and land has become fragmented into small uneconomic plots. They are not allowed to increase yield through 'modern' farming practices or even avail of loans from banks for the same because they do not have the official papers recognising their ownership of the land as needed by bank officials for the granting of loans.

Small-scale forest products-based industry is also not given the kind of support that it deserves. Neither are the several sectors in which the Adivasis have expertise such as fishing, poultry and bee-keeping. In the case of the Buxa Tiger Reserve Forest in northern West Bengal, Subhendu Dasgupta (*Frontier*, 24 September-21 October 2006: 78-79) reports that the collection and use of non-timber forest products by the forest dwellers have been declared illegal. They are not allowed to use forest resources for food, medicine, shelter, manure, fuel, fodder and as inputs for manufactured goods. Or to sell some of this produce in the market as inputs for other manufactured products. The Forest Department meets its requirements of labour through contractors who bring in cheap migrant labour rather than hiring local forest dwellers.

The Central and State government Forest Acts are inconsistent with the Indian Constitution, especially with Articles 14, 21, 31(b) and 39(c), which uphold equality of status and opportunity, protection of life and liberty including the right to pollution free water and air and forbid concentration of wealth that is detrimental to the common good. The orders issued by both the Union and State governments are also often in conflict with the existing laws. For instance, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, subsequently amended by Parliament in 1991

without any debate, includes all forest resources such as trees, shrubs, and grasses as wildlife, thereby violating the right to livelihood of forest dwellers and other forest-dependent communities, which is provided in Article 21 of the Constitution (Cheria 1995: 18).

The forests must be saved for society and preserved in a healthy condition. For that they do need humans in them who know how to do it. It would be wise to tap and utilise Adivasi knowledge in this regard. And when the Adivasis fight against the conversion of natural forest into production forest and for their traditional rights they are combating their own growing alienation from their homes and re-emerging as its guards and protectors. Wherever this is happening it needs to be encouraged because the reverse process is also fast gaining ground, where the Adivasis are so entrapped in the external rapacious and destructive forces that they become complicit in this destruction. They cease to be fully conservationist in their approach and start losing their traditional knowledge base about forest resources not least due to their alienation from these implemented by the state forest policies. For example, through overgrazing, valuable aromatic and medicinal plants can be lost as is happening in the grasslands of Garhwal and Ladakh. Forest fires, mining and quarrying, and bad practices of collection are also some of the causes for their depletion. This situation cannot change unless communities themselves are the prime beneficiaries of conservation programmes.

Policies over land tenure rights in general have resulted in the concentration of the best agricultural lands in the hands of a few powerful individuals and poor landless are allowed to encroach into the forests and clear land for cultivation by the government as a safety valve. Here the non-tribals clash in their values and relationship to the forest with the forest indigenes. Population pressure in the interior areas also leads to forest degradation through increase in shifting cultivation in smaller areas. If the terms of trade for selling MFP are not favourable for the collectors, unsustainable harvesting practices increase. Without systemic change there is no hope.

Forest Rights Act

The Scheduled Tribes and Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) is being implemented since 2008. It recognised on paper that the forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes are integral to the survival, revival and sustainability of the forest ecosystem, including wildlife. It anchored the land rights of STs and other forest dwelling communities in the forests and also their rights to use, manage and conserve forest resources for subsistence and livelihood

needs and not for exclusive commercial purposes, which was long pending. The aim was to pre-empt them being labelled as encroachers and brutally evicted under the garb of development, which is what had begun to happen after the Supreme Court ruling in the Godavarman Case.[8] It was also to enable them to benefit from welfare programmes of the government by giving clear-cut land titles which are heritable but not alienable or transferable.

At the individual level, it recognises the right to hold a piece of forest land either for self-cultivation or for any other common occupation or habitation so as to ensure livelihood. At the community level, it recognises the right to access minor forest products other than timber and to carry out fishing activities in water bodies; it permits traditional and seasonal access to pastoral communities and nomadic tribes for grazing; intellectual property rights over traditional knowledge can be claimed. The Gram Sabha is vested with the authority to initiate the process of implementation by constituting a Forest Rights Committee (FRC), which decides the nature and extent of individual or community forest rights, or both, that may be given to the forest dwelling communities under its jurisdiction. These procedures are examined by a subdivisional level committee which forwards the same to district level committees for final decision-making. It is also mandatory to have a State level committee to monitor the process of recognition and vesting of forest rights. All committees consist of members from the departments of revenue, forest and tribal affairs as well as members from local bodies.

In September 2012, FRA rules were amended and various guidelines and circulars issued for strengthening the provisions of Community Forest Rights (CFR) and clarifying instances of ambiguity. Nevertheless, the Act has been criticised for the way it was rushed through disregarding key recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee's report and defining 'forest dwellers' in such a way as to ensure that 90% of the tribals and forest dwellers would be excluded from eligibility for rights under the law (*The Hindu*, 20 December 2006). A number of ground level problems in the implementation of this Act persist. These include:

- Rushed and lackadaisical implementation in many States to show achievement as reflected in numbers, without on-ground empowerment. This also leaves large tracts free for commercial exploitation.
- The FRCs exist often only on paper; non-Adivasi representation may be higher than that of Adivasis; FRC members may be selected by officials and not elected by the Gram Sabha.
- The emphasis is on distributing individual claim forms rather than CFR forms. While land titles are given in the name of both husband and wife

promoting gender equity in a comprehensive way does not come under its ambit.

- Some conflict-ridden areas such as parts of Chhattisgarh, the Polavaram dam submergence area and others are left out of the recognition process of CFRs.
- Lack of convergence with other relevant laws such as the (colonial) Indian Forest Act, Forest Conservation Act, Wildlife Act, Biological Diversity Act, Panchayat Acts and the MGNREGA and watershed programmes.
- Cases of violation of the FRA in the notification of Tiger Reserves and Critical Wildlife Habitats (CWH) and diversion of forests for 'developmental' including eco-tourism projects, which are claimed to bring in much needed foreign investment and revenue to 'strengthen' the Indian economy! Relocations and evictions from Tiger Reserves have been done without completion of due processes of recognition of rights as per the Act. In Tamil Nadu after the illegal declaration of a Tiger Reserve and an elephant corridor in the forests of Sathyamangalam the Adivasis living there initially faced curtailment of their rights in the forest and displacement and relocation. Among all States Tamil Nadu has been most lax in implementing the Forest Rights Act and issue title deeds.
- Another case involves the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple (BRT) Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, which was declared a Tiger Reserve through a notification by the State government in 2011. This was despite the protests by the Soliga Adivasi community inhabiting this sanctuary, who feared displacement from the core area of the declared Tiger Reserve, though a large number of Gram Sabhas in it had been granted Community Forest Rights (CFR) under the Forest Rights Act (FRA). This is yet another case where the provisions of two laws—the Wildlife (Protection) Act and the FRA—contradict one another in some ways. The WLPA mandates that Critical Tiger Habitats (CTH) be kept inviolate to accomplish which villages within the CTH will be voluntarily relocated following certain procedures set down in the Act. As compared with the FRA, the WLPA gives more powers to the Forest Department than to the Adivasi communities. Even their collection of NTFP allowed under FRA became subject to permission from the Conservator and Director of the BRT Wildlife Sanctuary. Thus, tiger reserves now being pushed in various States pose a serious challenge to the exercise of rights by local communities.

- Neglect of and lack of mechanisms for the recognition of rights such as access to seasonal grazing grounds by pastoral nomadic groups and habitat rights for PTGs and rights in forested municipal areas and effective implementation in Protected Areas.
- Many grazing lands have been termed as 'waste lands' and have been diverted for other use or are being converted into 'forests' through plantation drives. They may even be converted into Protected Areas excluding pastoralists. Grazing restrictions and penalties are faced by pastoralists of Madurai, Virudhunagar and Erode districts of Tamil Nadu because of forest working plans, formal declaration of the respective area as a sanctuary and restrictions on night halt in the forest.
- There is insufficient or negligible importance given to some other community rights listed in the FRA such as the right to traditional knowledge and intellectual property rights and the management of forest resources by communities. Habitat rights, too, have hardly been recognised anywhere in the country. Instead, there is an effort to provide them with alternate means of livelihood.
- Procedures, unnecessarily complicated, are implemented top-down and require the help of outside agencies, volunteers, etc., to submit claims and follow up on implementation, which increases the dependency syndrome of these communities rather than furthering self-reliance and decentralisation of power.
- Related to the above is the fact that indigenous structures, institutions, informal community forest protection groups and modes are ignored or undermined while forming the official Van Suraksha Samitis (Forest Protection Committees) instead of building on or making constructive use of them. This is the case in all governmental interventions. In fact, the Adivasi modes of production depend on the entire habitat of land, water and forest. To limit their rights individually to some piece of land, that too in a 'permanent' way, is actually a transgression of their way of life.
- There are also contradictions and violations of rights of forest dwellers in the provisions of the new Land Acquisition Act according to which community rights of forest dwellers can be alienated through a compensation amount fixed by the Collector. The new mining policy too does not give adequate protection to the various rights of Adivasis on their customary forest resources in Scheduled Areas and elsewhere. Tourism, even some so-called eco-tourism projects, usurp Adivasi land

and also curtail community forest rights, while providing some of them jobs of guides and chefs. Infrastructure built in protected forest areas by State government tourism departments is environmentally damaging and tours of Adivasi villages are organised in a way that commodifies them and makes them into exhibition pieces. Chenchu settlements in Andhra Pradesh and Santhal villages in the vicinity of Santiniketan are the apt examples.

- The provision for converting forest/unsurveyed villages into revenue villages remains unimplemented in most of the forest villages. Some rare exceptions are there as in the Dooars area of North Bengal.
- There is the fear on the part of Greens that in the absence of proper income or livelihood opportunities in the forests any land allotted to tribal communities will get transferred to private possibly commercial hands, which would be highly detrimental to forest conservation.
- Many tribal and other forest dwellers, such as Gonds and Chenchus living in tiger reserves of Adilabad and Mahbubnagar districts in Telangana, prefer to voluntarily opt for relocation packages offered by the government due to the difficulties of eking out a livelihood and the lack of modern amenities in remote and often degraded forest areas.

In the south Indian States of Kerala and Karnataka the number of community titles granted is very small as compared to the community rights claims submitted. Forest dwellers have to agitate in order to get the law implemented on the ground. On the whole, the reporting by the States in the matter of claims is very inaccurate and the implementing agencies often lack in understanding the implications of the Act or have no action plans for its implementation. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is the implementing agency for this Act, but overall the Forest Department under the MoEF & CC, which had opposed the necessity of this Act, continues to be the manager even of CFR recognised areas; and it is more interested in revenue than being a service agency for local people and communities for sustainable use of forest resources. It is reluctant to share records and information with communities because of its feudal bureaucratic approach. Rather, in many areas such as the Sunderbans, forest-dependent Adivasis, Dalits and Muslims live in fear of a repressive Forest Department that still refuses to recognise their rights.[9]

All the above problems indicate that the Forest Rights Act has become yet another seemingly progressive Act, which is continuously being breached on the ground level and requires all the tenacious energies of the people to make the law-enforcing agencies implement its provisions in a way that ensures justice to the

Adivasi communities. The very fact of considerably delaying its notification, which had to be struggled for by grass roots groups, gave forest officials time to carry out many evictions and to take illegal possession of land. Simultaneously, there is a backlash against the Act itself and there are demands in some parts of the country for its repeal as it is ostensibly being misused. The present strongly pro-corporate government is trying to circumvent the implementation of the provisions of this law.

The Land Acquisition Act

The policy of the Government of India and by extension of all the State governments is that all land in the territory vests with the state. The state has the right to acquire individual land, even *patta* land, in the name of 'public purpose', which it alone defines. This is a feudal concept of 'Eminent Domain' initiated during the period of British colonialism. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 had been repudiated as a policy by the abolition of the zamindari and ryotwari systems and also the enactment of the Land Reforms Act after independence. Under section 170 (B) of the Land Revenue Act Adivasi land may not be sold/mortgaged to a non-Adivasi. And according to a land enactment in 1960 all land of the Adivasis thus alienated after 1960 would be restored to them. Similarly, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 was finally repealed after a long struggle and a new law put in its place. But what is the ground reality? The enactment of 1960 has its loopholes, and this and patent illegality has allowed for its manipulation and continued transfer of Adivasi land to non-Adivasis. Once displaced out of any Scheduled Area it becomes difficult for them to get their constitutional rights. Those Adivasis, who were displaced due to public sector projects, and if at all rehabilitated elsewhere, more often than not got less and worse quality land than what they had lost.

"Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act" (LARR Act) that replaced the 1894 colonial Land Acquisition Act in 2013 due to pressure from below has failed to adequately protect the rights of farmers, fish workers and other Dalits, and Adivasis because it continues to view land as a saleable commodity and not as a livelihood that includes cultural aspects. 'Common property resources' do not come under its ambit. The landless labourers, tenants, sharecroppers, artisans, dependent on the land for their livelihood, are excluded from its special provisions. In the compensation scheme there is no firm commitment to alternative land or secure employment for those affected. A veritable clash of concepts and civilisations is involved. Already the 1984 amendment to the colonial Act had broadened the definition of 'public

purpose' allowing the state to acquire land for private profit-oriented projects. The 2013 Act similarly puts strategic purposes, infrastructure and industry under 'public purpose,' and it does not apply to the cases where the government needs to acquire land for its own use. The absolute power of the state to do so is retained.

Thirteen earlier laws relating to land acquisition are as yet exempt from the LAAR Act, such as the Coal Bearing Areas Acquisition and Development Act 1957, and the Land Acquisition (Mines) Act 1885, and they need Parliament's approval to bring them under the new Act. This is in addition to the complete failure of the Indian government to carry out a thoroughgoing land reform post-1947. Several State governments have used the urgency clauses applying to national defence and emergencies arising out of natural calamities to acquire fertile land and pass it on to big real estate companies and private industrial capitalists. Acquisition of land for developmental projects without proper Gram Sabha consent is happening. Consensus is bypassed or manipulated by organising fake village level meetings or using coercive and corrupt methods (see Premkumar 2014).

The Modi government twice used the anti-democratic ordinance route in this case, as in the coal mines and insurance sectors, to bypass important provisions of this Act and brought back the era of the colonial Act at the behest of interested corporates. The ordinances dropped the consent clause whereby 70-80% of the affected population had to agree to the land acquisition. The social impact clause, which mandated a public social impact study by the government, was similarly dropped as well as the questions of food security and compensation and rehabilitation for sharecroppers and farm labourers. Five sectors were kept outside the purview of law, such as defence, infrastructure, industrial corridors and housing projects. Multi-cropped, irrigated lands could be handed over to industry. Despite continuing to provide for rehabilitation and compensation at a higher rate as in the LARR Act, the right to an alternative livelihood for the affected populations continues to remain unaddressed. It sought to protect government officials who commit offences in the process of land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement and revoked the clause under which land is to be returned to the original owners or legal heirs if unutilised for the purpose acquired for five years. Thus basic tenets of this Act are being diluted. It probably hopes to eventually repeal this Act altogether, though it faced concerted opposition to the above amendments through ordinance by the affected sections including Adivasis.

Similarly, the process of making retrograde amendments to the environmental, labour, forest and employment guarantee and food security laws in anti-people and pro-corporate ways has already begun. The Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act,

1908 and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy (Supplementary Provisions) Act, 1949 had given some rights to the Adivasis to protect them from land alienation. The Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act was amended in 1996 itself to enable acquisition of Adivasi land for mining and industry. The BJP government tried to further amend these Acts, too, in order to facilitate agricultural land alienation for industrial purposes.

Land transfers, to a great extent has taken place from Adivasis to non-Adivasis. Adivasi to Adivasi transfers do happen, but transfers from non-Adivasis to Adivasis are very uncommon. Inter- and intra-tribe economic inequalities are negligible and still have not led to significant class formation amongst them, though there are cases of land transfer and mortgages within the community due to indebtedness resulting from expenses over medical care and modern education of children. The state itself through its 'development' projects and Forest Acts has been the biggest illegal encroacher and grabber of Adivasi land, their common property resource. Beyond this, because the state administrative and legal systems do not always and everywhere recognise community ownership and tribal customary laws, it becomes not just a mute spectator to the phenomenon of non-Adivasi migrant settlers grabbing Adivasi land, but it has often colluded and openly supported the land grabbers by legitimising the fraudulent land transfers through legislative, administrative and coercive processes, as we have clearly seen in the case study of Andhra Pradesh/Telangana. It has even defied court orders for this purpose (Kunhaman 1997: 41). In the case of Common Property Resources (CPR) the government does not recognise any need for compensation. Existing indigenous customary laws and practices also get modified due to the individualising impact of capitalist modernisation that favours and promotes male supremacy.

The latter is also reinforced through biased governmental legal processes such as that *patta* land is conferred in the name of males only. When Adivasis are induced to grow cash crops like tea and rubber, the Coffee Board and Rubber Board give loans and subsidies only to individuals and heads of families understood as men. Financial institutions in general recognise only men as the heads of households. Such policies definitely tend to reduce female power within the community. Land alienation for 'development' projects is made easier due to other policies and approaches of the government. Even in Sixth Schedule areas the government treats the *gaonburah* (village chief) as the owner of village land when in fact it is owned and controlled by the entire village. To transfer land for defence, infrastructure and other projects, the government proceeds to deal only with this chief and not with the entire village community. A lot of common property resources are simply

considered government property and are used for 'development' projects ignoring Gram Sabha resolutions against them and without any pretence at consultation, compensation or rehabilitation of Adivasis, who have been using this land for their livelihood and who suddenly find themselves bereft of their livelihood resources. And their relationship to natural resources, which is not that of ownership but of caring for them so that no one is deprived of them, is disrupted.

Some Issues on the Education Front

Literacy and formal education are keys to the exercise of citizenship in a democracy. In the case of the Adivasis it is a tool in the hands of the government for bringing them into the mainstream and its model of development. There are a number of schemes such as scholarships, book banks, and the building of student hostels. Even then rural schooling, especially in Adivasi localities, has been a terrain neglected by the government. Many corruption scams have come to light as far as government funding for tribal education is concerned. Such schools are often run by corrupt businessmen in league with politicians to attract government and other funds for the same. Basic amenities are often lacking in the hostels for SC/ST students. The food provided is not always healthy or prepared under sufficiently hygienic conditions. The government has a poor record of disbursal of pre- and post-matric scholarships for Adivasi girls, among whom the school drop-out rate is the highest. The failure to provide enough good government schools particularly among the underprivileged encourages the proliferation of minority-run educational establishments. This is the background to the Sangh Parivar organisations also entering the field of education. And then it encourages a clash between the two, which is again an unnecessary diversion of the discourse on to religious terrain.

Although Article 350A of the Constitution requires primary education to be imparted in the mother tongue, this has generally only occurred in areas where the Adivasis have been assertive about it. NCERT, the premier central education research centre, has not shown any interest on this front of promoting the publication of requisite primers, though in its National Curriculum Framework of 2005, it notes: "[the mother tongue] provides a bank of memories and symbols inherited from one's fellow speakers and created in one's own lifetime. It is also a medium through which most knowledge is constructed, and hence it is closely tied to the thought and identity of the individual. In fact, it is so closely tied to the thought and identity that to deny or wipe out a child's mother tongue is to interfere with the sense of self."

Multilingual education is also a possibility at the pre-school and primary school levels. This implies that one starts the education process in the mother tongue and then introduces the State language and other languages as additional media of instruction. Such an education programme is already underway in some Adivasi languages in some parts of the country (see Wilson in Devy *et al.* vol. 2: 340; Bandhu 2014). From the neo-colonial government point of view, the empowerment that results from mother tongue education at least at the primary level and the appointment of largely Adivasi languages proficient teachers is not welcome, and it is highly lethargic in the implementation of such a constitutional provision.

The present formal education system across the country does not emphasise or even acknowledge the value of the knowledge of local natural resources and the principles and way of life on which this traditional knowledge and culture is based. On the part of the Adivasis there is a demand for modern education, the amenities of modern life and the modern professions. Though older knowledge systems and skills, such as healing practices and arts, continue to be taught to some of the younger generations, many of them do not have sufficient number of trained and skilled youngsters to carry them on as these do not provide a requisite livelihood. Such is the case of Kurumba painting in the Nilgiris to give just one example. Individualism comes up in the course of undergoing modern education and community ties are loosened. This is actually not a welcome situation for the rural or urban youth. No renewed sustainable living or development will result from such an approach.

There is a huge problem of getting community certificates which are required for admitting children in schools. While non-Adivasi certificates are issued within a day and signed only by the tehsildar, Adivasi certificates have to do the rounds of six different officials – from the Village Administrative Officer (VAO) to the Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) – and it becomes a tedious and sometimes humiliating process if there is no Adivasi elder and leader to vouch for the authenticity of application. Cases of the issuance of false community certificates against bribes are rampant. When there is a constitutional provision for universal free education for children and Right to Education Act, why do they stage such drama?

Drop-out rates increase at the secondary level of education and at the graduate and postgraduate levels their representation is not in proportion to their population. Discrimination against ST students is a common phenomenon. The first woman graduate of the Lodha Shabar (denotified) community, Chuni Kotal, who was doing post-graduation at the Vidyasagar University in Bengal committed suicide in

1992 for this reason. And many such cases are there in various higher educational institutions all over the country. Since the medium of instruction becomes English at the higher levels of education many coming from regional language schools find it difficult to cope with their studies. Remedial English language classes are not offered systematically and seriously.

With the entire education system in the doldrums the promotion of Adivasi languages and literatures at the college and university levels is not being done effectively. Lack of competent teaching personnel, library and research and publications facilities in the tribal languages is a bitter fact.

The Politics of Reservation

As mentioned earlier, the Constitution makes a provision for reservation in government jobs and in elections to State legislatures and the Parliament. Government's own records show many vacant posts. These vacant positions are filled by 'others' under the pretext of unavailability of suitable candidates from among the STs. Or there is rampant use of false caste certificates by non-Dalits and non-Adivasis to snatch these posts and seats which are meant specially for Adivasis. If STs and SCs are clubbed together it could result in greater deprivation of the former.

In 2008, the Congress-led UPA government through the Department of Personnel and Training tried unsuccessfully to push forward a bill, "Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation in Posts and Services) 2008", to do away with reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs at faculty level in institutions labelled as being of 'national importance,' presumably because these sections lack the requisite academic calibre or 'merit.' So far 92 institutions have been categorised as such and they include the older IITs and IIMs, NITs, AIIMS, Aligarh Muslim University, Visva-Bharati, Delhi University, Benaras Hindu University among others. This is at a time when the ground level situation regarding the filling of such posts in all these institutions is totally unsatisfactory as per reports of the National Commissions on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This is not to speak of the situation concerning women and minorities as the Muslims.

Public money is put into these institutions and permanent faculty are paid hefty amount as salaries. Although primary education remains a sorely neglected terrain, their half-breed products are more interested in intensifying the globalisation process in every respect, preferably by settling abroad, particularly in the US, than in finding solutions to the problems besetting this country. The private sector in

general and the big corporate houses in particular with their mostly dominant caste-based personnel structure, have been resisting the reservation quota system in jobs to be imposed on them by the government, again in the name of safeguarding merit and quality in a globalised economy. Even the Asian Development Bank has warned against such a move saying it would lead to a flight of skilled labour and foreign and domestic capital (*The Hindu*, 28 April 2006).

Since the current globalised economy cannot provide jobs for all, varied kinds of exclusionary methods are used. Privatisation is one of them, where the capitation fee and the generally high fees make education unaffordable for the poor. High cut-off points for admission to postgraduate courses; increased weightage for the viva voce in the entrance examinations for various courses; internal assessment, humiliating and discriminating treatment of those coming from these underprivileged sections... these are the more refined methods of exclusion by the dominant castes, who do not want to share the cake. Cruder and more belligerent methods are used by the right wing and its student organisations, not least being assault, 'disappearance', suspension of the marginalised and underprivileged as has happened in the University of Hyderabad and Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The tirade of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and some sections of society against the reservation policy do not take ground level facts into account, which are as follows:

> "Taking medical, dental, physiotherapy and engineering colleges, the number of seats to which reservation applies, namely Government colleges, Government-aided colleges (only 75% seats in Government-aided colleges, the rest being management quota) and autonomous colleges is 11,531, while the number of seats to which reservation does not apply, namely, private and 'self-financing' colleges, PPP (public private partnership) colleges and management quota part of government-aided colleges is 63,438. Out of the seats to which reservation applies only 49% is reserved for SCs, STs and BCs; this comes to 5,650 seats, the remaining 5,881 being unreserved seats. Adding this also the total number of unreserved seats rises to 69,319. The ratio is 7.5% seats reserved and 92.5% unreserved" (Narayanan 2015: 7).

We, of course, know that reservation quotas for seats as well as jobs are not filled on various pretexts.

> "Nearly half the teaching positions for SCs and STs in Central universities are still unfilled. In 2010-2011 in the ST category 197 or 53% of lecturer level posts were vacant out of the required posts of 369. The position for SCs and STs together was more dismal in the case of posts of Readers (84% vacant) and Professors (92% unfilled) during the same period" (Gaikwad 2012).

What kind of education is being imparted? The not so right kind can be problematic. It is important to include the wisdom of Adivasis into mainstream education so that they are no longer considered as hopelessly backward people. The problem of educated unemployed is there among the SC and ST graduates. There is a need for planning on a local level and resolving the land problem and associated cottage industry development, which would help in resolving the issue of unemployment. Required changes in the education system could then be implemented.

Notes

1. 2015 statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau show that Kerala had the highest crime rate against tribals per unit of population. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were third and fourth in the list; Karnataka ranked ninth and Tamil Nadu tenth (*Indian Express*, 1 September 2016). Moreover, the three communities of the Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims, which together constitute 39% of the population, accounted for over 55% of all under-trials in jail and 50.4% of all convicts.
2. Dr. J.C. Kumarappa was one of the few to make a caustic criticism of the community development programme as well as of the Bhoodan movement at that time [see Bandhu (ed.) 2011: 256-260 and 413-14].
3. Delhi collects rupees 1,000 insidiously from rural India, retains 900 out of that for its 'alakpuris' (Alakapuri was a mythical rich city, capital of the Yaksha kingdom and abode of the god of wealth Kubera, in the *Mahabharata*) and sends remaining 100 to rural India, out of which only 15 reaches the destination. The tragedy is that dog-like fights begin for that 15, the strongest among them runs away with the booty (Sharma 2010).
4. See Bhabani Das: Economic Liberalisation, Decentralised Governance and the Adivasis of Odisha. In: Milind Wani. 2008. *Nought Without Cause: Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation*, p. 73. Pune: Kalpavriksh, Vasundhara and Global Forest Coalition. See also Rajesh Ramakrishnan: Forests and Livelihoods in India. In: Darwin Initiative, pp. 122-147.

5. India: Unlocking Opportunities for Forest-Dependent People. Report no. 34481 – IN published by World Bank, South Asia Region, 2006.
6. Kanchi Kohli and Manju Menon: Growing Forests in the Air. *The Hindu*, 26 October 2015.
7. See Debaranjan Sarangi: Forest for People. *Frontier*, 30 November - 6 December, 2003.
8. A public interest litigation was filed in 1995 by Godavarman Thirumulpad against illicit felling in his ancestral forest estate that had been taken over by the Forest Department after independence. In its response in 1996 the Supreme Court expanded the meaning of 'forest' in the Forest Conservation Act to all forests irrespective of ownership. Mining and saw mill operations got included in non-forestry operations, which now required Central government approval. Tree felling was allowed only according to working plans of Forest Departments, which were required to be approved by the MoEF. The survival rights of marginalised STs and other forest dwellers were not taken into account in the judgement [Lele and Menon (eds.) 2014]
9. See Lal Singh Bhujel and Lila Kumar Gurung: Forests and Forest Communities, *Frontier*, 19-25 April 2015, p. 13, for a critical appraisal of the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, especially in the State of West Bengal.

9

NEO-IMPERIALISM AND ITS AVATARS

In the Web of Neo-colonisation

In the post-colonial era, economic tools like free transnational trade regimes are used by the Western industrialised nations to capture resources from countries that had newly liberated themselves from their direct political rule. Having already mostly unsustainably exploited their own natural resources and continuing to depend on their ex-colonies for unavailable resources they are now using laws and legal mechanisms and military force, whenever necessary, to acquire these fast-depleting non-renewable resources and expand markets for the sake of their economic growth and profit-making. Multilateral funding agencies like the World Bank and IMF were created to this end. India opened its economy to free investment and trade in the early nineties and adopted the WTO regime, which is a threat to democracy because it drastically curtails the powers of lesser nation states to formulate economic policy representing as it does the interests of Euro-North American imperialist corporations and financiers in gaining market access.

From the earliest days of independence the World Bank has been influential in India's economic policy-making pushing it in the direction of the encouragement of the private sector and market forces.[1] The World Bank and the IMF, being the handmaidens of global capital, international private banks and giant corporations now have a commanding position in the formulation of the entire macro-economic policy of the country. Dependent on external aid and financial flows India is an

indebted country and these debts are serviced at the cost of the common man, while the number of billionaires in the country continues to rise. The structural adjustment policies enforced upon the country in the early 1990s ushering in the LPG era have intensified the drain on the economy to fatten the elite of the imperialist bastions at the cost of those at the bottom, who have to face increasing cuts in welfare schemes, inflation, rising costs of basic food items, innumerable indirect taxes and cesses and various new means of depriving them of their hard earned assets as demonetisation and the linking of welfare schemes and subsidies with Aadhaar number.

Globalisation and structural adjustment policies are contributing to deindustrialisation and uneven regional development. These policies have resulted in the privatisation, downsizing, outsourcing and flexibility of labour. Global competition encourages formal firms to hire workers at low wages with few benefits or to subcontract and outsource the production of goods and services. Unionisation and collective bargaining are discouraged and labour laws are being tilted in favour of capital and against the working people. Consequently there is a decline in formal employment and the informalisation (contractualisation/casualisation) of employment relations. Globalisation has also emphasised the interlinkages and interdependence between the formal and informal sectors, which are largely part of global value chains controlled by lead firms. Formal and informal, in most cases, can no longer be seen as mutually exclusive sectors. Informalisation is a worldwide trend (John 2006: 35). While enhancing the pay packets of employees in certain sectors, such as the central universities, the recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission led to the abolition of a good number of posts, most of them from the category of 'backlog,' in the class I, II and III positions and introduced the practice of contract labour including the employment of teaching staff.

The Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) regime under the TRIPS agreement of the WTO relegates traditional knowledge to the public domain as common property, and is as such available to anyone who wants to use it. It does not accept CBD concepts of national sovereignty or indigenous community ownership of natural resources. As it allows patenting of life forms and related knowledge, a very large proportion of the pharmaceutical products have been and are being pirated. In fact, three-quarters of currently prescribed medicinal drugs have their origins in indigenous people's knowledge without any acknowledgement or respect (Gray 1991: 45). Commercial exploitation of indigenous people's traditional knowledge is very much an ongoing process by biotech and seed companies.

The MoEF launched an All-India Coordinated Research Project on Ethnobiology (AICRPE) from 1982-1998. Genome saviour awards were instituted to recognise and reward the contributions of tribal and rural families who have conserved genetic resources over a long period of time at personal cost. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted in 1992 during the Earth Summit (UN Conference on Environment and Development) at Rio de Janeiro raised the issue of sharing the wealth gained through commercial exploitation of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge. The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) constituted an Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore to look into issues of traditional knowledge and its exploitation. A group of biodiversity-rich 'developing' countries is of the opinion that WIPO represents the interests and monopolistic rights of corporate and individual innovators and have raised the following demands to make TRIPs provisions CBD compliant: (1) The source of origin of biological/genetic resources should be disclosed. (2) Evidence on prior informed consent should be provided. (3) Evidence on a benefit-sharing agreement with the knowledge source communities should be provided. Intellectual or any other forms of their rights and the principles of equity and environmental safety should not be infringed upon (Pushpangadan and Pradeep 2008: 132-37).

Nevertheless, the state is still providing protection and encouragement to forces that are bent upon plundering the traditional resource base of the Adivasis. State-supported privatisation of common property resources, piracy and patenting by transnational and national corporations of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity, implementation of foreign-funded mega projects in their territories, destruction of the environment and defrauding of the Adivasis are taking place even in the face of strong Adivasi protests. Full trade liberalisation under WTO rules in forest produce would further undermine the Adivasi resource base and hit conservation even more.

In the name of development there is virtual loot and plunder of valuable ores and minerals like iron, aluminium, manganese, tin, gold, diamonds. Big companies, Indian and foreign, like Vedanta, Birla, Reliance, Essar, Jindal, Tata, POSCO, Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton, Mittal, etc., have become notorious in this regard. Permanent loss of very important natural people's wealth is occurring simultaneously with environmental and ecosystem destruction. Deregulation and liberalisation of mining allows for greater inflow of foreign capital and technology to support these operations. The "Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Ordinance of 2015" granted mining leases to global mining giants and their Indian agencies for 50 years at a time instead of processing mineral ores within the country

at sustainable levels. The advanced capitalist countries are the major consumers of minerals and with their own deposits getting depleted mining multinationals are turning their profit-hungry eyes to countries like India. Disinvestment and privatisation also lead to constitutional safeguards for these communities being thrown to the wind.

Large-scale mining activity in the coal belt of Jharkhand has affected the traditional lives of the Adivasis in many ways, not least by destroying their sacred groves (*sarnas*), usually one in each village, in large numbers. Uranium mining and processing in Jaduguda has exposed indigenous people and others living there to the hazards of radioactivity. Mining has been hitting at the indigenous communities all over the world. In 2014, India and Australia signed a nuclear deal to mine uranium in southern Australia affecting the local aboriginal communities there. In the US too Native Americans have revolted as their areas are being used for uranium mining and dumping of the waste. In recent years there has been a spate of reconnaissance permits for luxury minerals such as diamonds in some of the most ecologically fragile areas of our country. Diamond mining in Botswana has led to brutal displacement of the Kalahari Bushmen. Though not as environmentally damaging as mining, exploration for minerals too has its negative impacts.[2]

The fact that biodiversity is a precious resource has now been recognised. While all humans are classified as Homo sapiens, it is a fact that there is considerable biodiversity among different races and communities. The West has recognised it and their governments are spending billions of dollars to preserve the genetic code—from blood, hair and cheek scrapings—of the Adivasi communities that are expected to die out sooner or later because annihilatory policies towards that end are very much at work. The Human Genome Diversity Project was established in the US in 1991 with the objective of collecting, analysing and preserving genetic samples from a host of vanishing human populations. This project comes under the Human Genome Organisation that is trying to establish the genetic basis of biodiversity among humans. By discovering the specific DNA differences between different populations it might be possible to establish the hereditary basis for differences in human susceptibility to disease. However, the relationship of this project with profit-oriented biotechnology corporations such as Genentech and Monsanto are too close for comfort and it may all end up in the common human heritage of genes being owned and controlled by a few companies. In our rush to 'develop', we are destroying human and biological diversity that can help us and avoid unnecessary dependency on the West. Internationally, indigenous peoples' organisations have been protesting against the reductionist and determinist

scientific approach underpinning biotechnology, which goes against their holistic world view based on the web of life concept. The manner of collection of genetic materials from their bodies is considered a violation of the rights to their territories and resources and their intellectual and cultural heritage (see Tauli-Corpuz 2001).

Global finance has become lord and master of the earth determining the pace and pattern of resource use according to its short-term profit-maximising calculus and has contributed heavily to the concentrated accumulation of toxic wastes, climate change and loss of biodiversity. It is antithetical to local self-reliant economies. The World Bank has coined a new word 'carbon sink' to balance environmental pollution from carbon dioxide and monoxide emissions by neutralising carbon. A 33 per cent forest cover in India, recommended by international agencies as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development and Intergovernmental Panel on Forestry, has also the international purpose of mitigating the global phenomenon of climate change by acting as a carbon sink for global industry. To implement this, a mechanism called REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) was introduced by the UN. It is a carbon emissions offset scheme on a larger than individual scale, which is being facilitated by the World Bank. Third World forests are declared as a 'global commons' and, on the condition that the trees are not felled, the carbon stored in endangered forests can be traded on the international market for voluntary carbon permits. It could also attract public monies from Western governments seeking to offset emissions that they have legally committed to cut under international protocols. Forest communities are supposed to earn a share of REDD credit sales to pay for health, education and alternative livelihoods, but this rarely happens because profit-making carbon companies, so-called 'carbon cowboys' have come into being who are buying up rights in their forests with official connivance.

If a potentially polluting industry reduces carbon emissions it earns carbon credits which it can sell to industrial corporations in the West, who in this way buy the right to emit carbon. Some Indian industries are in this business of selling carbon credits. They earn carbon credits not by using modern emission reducing technology but by locating their plants in the vicinity of forests which act as carbon sinks. Cheaply obtained forest land hikes up profit as it opens new avenues of windfall income from selling carbon credits.[3] Big environmental NGOs and rich individuals are also involved aggravating the problems of land alienation and displacement. The tenure rights of indigenous peoples remain uncertain and unprotected; even if in some exceptional cases their rights and traditional practices are not eroded (see Vidal 2009; Degawan 2008).

People in the West can also individually offset their carbon emissions by buying carbon credits, which will go towards promoting environment-friendly projects in the Third World, such as biogas plants and wind farms. Similarly, payment for forest ecosystem services encourages urban elites to continue with their profligate lifestyles while paying others not to follow the same developmental and consumer model. But such market-based solutions that allow polluters to pay their way out of pollution amount to environmental colonialism and simply cannot work because the unsustainable emission at home is not checked and lifestyles and development models do not change. The Clean Development Mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol (1997) also allowed governments in the West to achieve parts of their emissions reduction targets through funding of 'clean development' projects, such as carbon sinks, in the less industrialised countries. Mono-crop plantation carbon sink projects as signboards of mono-cultural societies hold no value for indigenous communities. Technological, geo-engineering solutions are also being thrown up such as capturing carbon and burying it in the ground. Climate change mitigation has become big business generating billions in revenues in India and worldwide.

There is an *en masse* conversion of forest resources to meet the fuel needs of the first world, for example, through the large-scale cultivation of Jatropa for the production of bio-diesel. This is done by offering local communities the temptation to make profit through the necessary credit mechanisms. Large tracts of farm land are also being transformed into agro-fuel production areas. But in the long-term production decreases lead to low income returns for the farmers besides leading to food insecurity and environmental degradation, though the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has issued guidelines for sustainable production of agro-fuels. The only solution is "unto the last", that is, observing the interests of the most vulnerable communities on a world scale.

It has been noted that the Adivasi movement acquired considerable momentum in the background of the developments associated with the assertion of the rights of indigenous peoples in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the global arena. At the 1989 ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the ILO noted that the indigenous people aspire to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development, to maintain and develop their identities, languages and religion, their laws, values, customs and perspectives and it has mentioned the importance of cultural diversity and social and ecological harmony of humankind.

Several developments came after the ILO Convention No. 169, 1989 such as: the World Bank's Operational Directive No. 4.20 of 1991, which calls for the preparation of an Indigenous Peoples Development Plan 'in projects that "affect"

Indigenous Peoples with a view to ensure they do not suffer adverse effects during the development process and receive culturally compatible social and economic benefits'; the 1992 UN Convention on Biological Diversity committing countries to protecting the customary practices and knowledge of indigenous and local communities where relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources; the UNWGIP (United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples) Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 1993 adopted in 2007 by the UN General Assembly; the declaration of 1993 as the International Year of the Indigenous Peoples, 9 August as the Day of the Indigenous Peoples, 1994–2004 as the UN Decade of the Indigenous Peoples; and a second decade for Indigenous People from 2005-2015 as the Decade for Dignity. All these were formulated due to the worldwide indigenous movements. They have helped provide legitimacy to the Adivasi struggles for land and livelihoods, but have been unable to hold back the onslaught of capitalist-imperialist forces, the UN being an instrument of the imperialism of 'big powers,' especially of US hegemonism, and not a Union of peoples in a global system of the management of human affairs, as advocated by Samir Amin among other progressive intellectuals.[4]

Environmental Policies

The preservation of biological diversity is undoubtedly urgent. But it cannot and should not be modelled on North American devices such as National Parks, which totally excluded any human habitation and intervention and have become outdated. The creation of the first 'wilderness area' happened in the USA in 1864 with the armed expulsion of Miwok and Ahwahnee Indians from their 4000-year old settlements in Yosemite Valley. Similarly Native Americans were forcibly expelled from what is called the Yellowstone National Park, though now they are allowed in for satisfying their traditional needs without paying any entry fee, and special tours are conducted to showcase Native American history there. As a Protected Area category of ecosystem conservation and recreation, they have been devised by the Commission of National Parks and Protected Areas of the IUCN. The concept of creating 'wilderness areas for wildlife' in different countries by the large international conservation organisations has already converted tens of millions of indigenous communities into 'conservation refugees' as they have been thrown out of their ancestral habitats into miserable slums and shanty towns.

Separation of Nature from humans has been intrinsic to the Western mindset since antiquity and the Western model of conservation that posits a contradiction between humans and Nature cannot be applied realistically in a country like India

where people have been living in forests for millennia without disturbing the ecology. Such an imported approach has had a deleterious effect on the forest dwellers here, which is also detrimental for the society at large that has thereby lost valuable skills and knowledge. National Parks allow agricultural activity in 'buffer' areas but not in 'core' areas, but this can actually affect the levels of biodiversity. The World Bank's Global Environmental Facility (GEF), launched in 1991, promotes such Protected Areas as a condition for loans. For example, presuming that grazing of cattle in forests damages forest growth it is forbidden, but this is not always the case. If the grazing is within limits the dung left behind helps forest growth. In the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary it was found that forbidding grazing had led to the excessive growth of a particular grass that choked the shallow marshes where migratory water fowl would come. Another case in point is forest fires that periodically destroy large tracts of forests all over the world. It is not sufficiently understood that human habitation in forests can be a highly preventive force. The harvesting of dry grass and dry fuel wood actually protects the forests from the spreading of natural fires and allows regeneration of vegetation.

It is hugely expensive to conserve forests using only employed staff, equipment and infrastructure. Most of our National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries are not taken care of properly due to lack of officials and there is inadequate funding for maintenance and related costs on the part of government. For use against poachers and other encroachers in National Parks there is need for more infrastructure, such as forest shelters inside the Park, more firearms, wireless and other equipment. Funds for all these are again solicited with a begging bowl from international banks and agencies. And then, it turns out this equipment is likely used more against the Adivasis than against poachers themselves!

Sanctuaries and National Parks are out of bounds for civil administration and civil laws. Forest conservation policies prevent Adivasis from cultivating in and around forests. Degradation of forests limits the availability of MFP. This destruction and encroachment on the Adivasi subsistence agricultural and forest produce-based economy has released them as migrant wage labour, sans even basic democratic rights, for big plantations, mining and other infrastructural and industrial enterprises, at times as bonded ones for contractors, moneylenders and landlords. They may get training and employment in anti-poaching and anti-smuggling activities, fire detection and management, and other forest conservation activities by the Forest Department but very few are employed on a permanent basis. Most are casual workers employed on a temporary basis either by the Forest Department or by contractors or they are self-employed on a piece-rate basis in the collection of NTFP. Minimum wage legislation and labour laws are not applicable

to them. At its 1989 Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the ILO spoke of minimum wages, workmen's compensation in case of accidents, the right to form associations and organisations, and to undertake collective bargaining.

Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere have been instrumental in organising the Adivasis for getting better prices for tendu leaves and other MFP that they gather for sale in the market.[5] It should be noted that as artisans and herbal medicine practitioners, and as subsistence farmers, Adivasis do not totally fit into any rigid category of worker as they are then owners of their skills, knowledge base and means of production. Adivasi workers, in general, unlike other workers do not lose their ethnic/national/cultural identities completely through dispossession and alienation.

An Environment (Protection) Act (EPA) was passed in 1986 due to the commitments India made at the UN Conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm in June 1972. It empowers the Central government through the MoEF to take necessary measures for environmental protection by setting standards, regulating the siting of industries, land use planning, and so on. Certain areas have been declared as Ecologically Sensitive Areas under this Act in order to protect biodiversity or to keep industrial pollution within limits.

In 1994, the issuance of the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) notification under the Environment (Protection) Act made it mandatory for development and industrial projects to go through the EIA and Public Hearing (from 1997) processes before starting a project. But still many projects function without these clearances. A report on bank lending practices says that assessment reports compiled by private consultants are fraudulent, shoddy copy-paste jobs seeking only easy clearance for projects (Premkumar 2014). The EIA procedures for decision-making on environment clearance were overhauled in 2006 making public hearings non-mandatory for mining activities under pressure of the investor and industry lobbies. They have become largely administrative formalities defeating their stated objective and as a result there has been a spurt of speedy clearances without adequate concern for environmental sustainability. Cultural impacts of projects are, of course, never taken note of. The entire process of impact assessment is now in the hands of developers and bureaucrats and out of the control of local communities.

A Biological Diversity Act was passed in 2002 with the objectives of conservation of biodiversity, its sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of such use. The Patent (Amendment) Act 2002 (Act 38 of 2002) also ensures the protection of the traditional knowledge of local and indigenous

communities enabling recognition and reward of them through appropriate benefit-sharing measures. But filing patents for traditional knowledge is a costly affair and well-nigh impossible for those at the bottom. Besides IPR is an alien concept for them. Foreign entities require the approval of the National Biodiversity Authority to access resources in India and Indians have to go through the respective State Biodiversity Boards. Documentation of local biological and genetic resources is happening along with an inventory of various actual and potential uses of such resources in the form of people's biodiversity registers. There is also a hurried attempt to preserve their knowledge about forest biodiversity in laboratories as germ-plasma or as gene-pools, lest it should get lost irrecoverably. Primitive wild cultivars may host genetic keys for valuable characters which breeders may require in the future. The National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources in New Delhi is building up such a collection. Some academic institutions like the Centre for Ecological Studies at Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, and some NGOs are also involved in making a respository of biogenetic resources and associated knowledge systems of the traditional and rural communities. In such a mode of preservation the principles and way of life that produced this knowledge are not sought to be retained and are getting extinct.

At the same time, there is little progress in realising local control over biodiversity and governance through Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC), for putting in place mechanisms for the protection of traditional knowledge, for the declaration of Biodiversity Heritage Sites, or for their sustainable use in income generation and IPR generation through value addition and benefit-sharing processes (Pushpangadan and Pradeep 2008: 150). On the other hand, provisions in the Act allow access to biodiversity for commercial use and research, and IPRs have been set in place and applications for the same are being processed and permissions granted without BMCs having been established at panchayat/municipality levels which can cross check the consequences of such projects. Again, speedy clearances happen even if there is local opposition (Wani 2008: 28, 64). The road is thus paved for bio-piracy and bio-imperialism by the biotechnology firms of the First World. The value system of sharing is being superseded by that of grabbing.

Stealing of their traditional knowledge is taking place on many levels. Publishers print books of folk stories, their art, designs and motifs are used in the textile industry by national and international fashion designers, without informing and taking the consent of the originating community which gets nothing. Community patents could be developed and formal contracts must be signed in such cases. Many local communities are demanding that their intellectual right to traditional

or local knowledge be respected and that the use of such knowledge by 'outsiders' be appropriately compensated or rewarded. Though the UN Convention on Biological Diversity clearly mandates that the use of such knowledge and associated practices by larger society must be done only with the permission of the communities/people holding this knowledge and by ensuring that the resulting benefits are equitably shared with them, it does not spell out how this is to be done. As India has vast biological diversity of economically important plants, the Adivasi population of the country would certainly benefit from a sound policy in this regard.

Imperialism and dependent capitalist growth have brought with them mindless and irresponsible over-consumption of natural resources. Lifestyles are now based on artificially created needs through media campaigns. The global climate change ensuing from the large-scale emissions of green house gases is altering the basic conditions of life on earth. The highly industrialised countries and the upper classes in the less industrialised ones are the major culprits in this regard, while the poor are the hardest hit by its consequences as they lack the resources to cope and adapt. In the short term it is fast leading to fresh water scarcity, droughts, heat waves, lower crop yields, coastal flooding, more intense and frequent storms, abnormal rainfall patterns, greater disease burden, accelerated biodiversity loss and changes in vegetation patterns in forests. Extreme weather conditions and changes in seasons and rainfall patterns undermine the knowledge base of indigenous communities with relation to natural phenomena and their livelihoods consequently also come under stress. A wave of 'climate refugees' is in the making.

The government's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) was formulated in 2008 more for external diplomatic consumption than for driving real changes on the ground. Its Green India Mission with its large-scale afforestation programmes and revival of degraded forest lands, as in the case of similar social forestry programmes, should not be allowed to become just a mitigation exercise in the interests of global capitalist industrialisation, but should be lobbied to keep the interests of the poor forest-dwelling and forest-dependent communities in mind, who lack the resources and legal empowerment to voice their concerns effectively.

When international and national climate change policies and initiatives are designed and implemented, indigenous peoples' rights are not recognised and they are marginalised and excluded from the decision-making process contrary to the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. Unlike the Convention on Biological Diversity where the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity is an advisory body no similar space for indigenous peoples is provided in the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change). Therefore, the climate change reversal initiatives could end up reinforcing inequalities.

In India we have the case of the Gadgil Committee (Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel – WGEEP) report (2011) on the Western Ghats, which critiqued the way development and conservation were being thrust on people without their consent and recommended that gram panchayats give proposals and have the final decision-making power as to what developmental and conservation activities they want in this ecologically sensitive zone. Economic growth cannot be at the cost of natural, human and social capital. Such decentralisation of decision-making is obviously not to the taste of the powers that be. The present government does not make any bones about its disdain for environmental protection laws viewing them as roadblocks to 'developmental' projects and moving towards their amendment.

Environmental policies on a national and international level have not helped the Adivasis to retain their traditional way of life and livelihoods and promote a developmental model that is based on sustainable management of local resources with a focus on production for the satisfaction of primary needs of food, clothing and shelter.

Agrarian Crisis

Agriculture, where the subaltern SCs and STs are majorly situated, has been the first victim of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and related policies. It was affected by the withdrawal of subsidies and increase in the prices of inputs. In any case it is difficult for Adivasis to take advantage of agricultural finance due to the legal difficulty of mortgaging their lands to financial institutions. Irrigation facilities too often do not reach them. Therefore, drought and crop failure is frequent in the case of Adivasi farmers in some areas. When they encroach on government land for cultivation, their property rights are not clearly defined and they may be evicted any time without appropriate or corresponding compensation.

The State governments do implement various schemes in the agricultural sector to help Adivasis shift from a subsistence-based to a cash economy, such as providing them with livestock, mobile veterinary clinics, assistance for horticultural production, and so on. Nevertheless, dependence on moneylenders remains high in the absence of adequate bank outreach services, and correspondingly indebtedness is a perennial status. The input requirements of present-day commercial chemical-intensive soil-degrading, at times GM technology-based, settled agriculture is much higher and makes them dependent on government aid or keeps them in the

clutches of moneylenders leading to leasing out or loss of land and taking to other seasonal occupations.

The trend of corporatisation of agriculture, a reversal of land reforms, has led to major changes in the cropping pattern and the displacement of small farmers from their land. Food is not grown in a balanced and self-reliant way for local consumption but for the national and global markets. The export-driven policies of successive governments not least due to the heavy import burden of luxury items for the rich is disastrous for the food security of the rural poor as subsistence farmers lose out to big farmers, moneylenders, real estate magnates, the tourism bourgeoisie, speculators, and so on. More and more arable land is going out of agricultural production. Many are being driven to do contract farming for agribusiness firms. MNCs like Monsanto-Bayer are expected to carry out the research in agriculture and provide the seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and GM technology. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) established in 1970 with its offices in the World Bank organises the collection and conservation of genetic resources, which are thus centralised on a world scale contributing to seed monopolisation. The farmers' suicides in many parts of the country are the tip of the iceberg of the rural situation. These suicides are the maximum in the cotton belt of Maharashtra where BT cotton has been introduced and where the market forces are tilted against the small and medium farmers cultivating cotton as a cash crop.

Although modern markets have come into existence, mobile traders, salesmen and others visit Adivasi villages during harvest time and purchase the produce on the spot at lower than existing market rates. Adivasis are leasing out their land to bigger cultivators or for plantation crops, horticulture or even grass cultivation. Agro-industrial corporations are already actively acquiring farmlands and this is a worldwide phenomenon in which Indian big business is also involved, particularly in Africa. Land has become a commodity in the global market driven by speculative finance. In irrigated areas where intensive agricultural technology is beyond their financial reach or management capability the land is passing out of their hands. The phenomenon of tribal moneylenders has come up in places and they are party to the land alienation of Adivasis in collusion with outsiders.

At the same time a shrunken village economy, which has become sucked into the monetised larger urban-oriented economy, and in which small and marginal farmers predominate, partially sustains the worker and becomes a subsidy for the capitalist, who need not pay a full wage for reproducing labour power. This, in effect, can be considered a labour rent and could be regarded as characteristic of

dependent capitalist development with state support that channelises a good part of income generated to the metropolises and transnational capital. This super exploitation of labour power pushes Adivasi households below the poverty line, lowers life expectancy among the workers and the degeneration of village life allows a number of social evils antithetical to Adivasi core values to creep in: alcoholism, sex work, criminal activities and the intensification of older evils such as witch-hunting. Notwithstanding the declared policy on prohibition under Article 47 of the Constitution, Adivasi areas have witnessed increased consumption of hard liquor and not only of their traditional home-brewed stuff generally imbibed in moderation in family and community settings. A nexus between liquor barons and Adivasi and political leaders has come up. State governments are hungry for the revenue and proclaim they cannot fund their welfare and education programmes without this revenue. The traditional brew made from rice, millet, maize or mahua has also become commercialised and is being openly sold at all hours in Adivasi bazaars and on the roadsides to Adivasis and non-Adivasis alike as a source of income.

The question is: should we consider it as progressive that Adivasis become proletarians, rural and urban, that this is a necessary stage for their ultimate emancipation? Is it really necessary and just that freedom-loving accomplished artists and artisans, innovative and hardworking organic farmers, botanists, zoologists, and medicine men and women, who are our forefathers and ancestors in a multitude of branches of knowledge and skills should become destitute and unable to practise their hard-earned skills? Here we must mention that there are cases of their skills, such as healing or snake catching, being acknowledged and being used by discerning individuals and organisations in India and abroad.

By forcing those practising slash-and-burn cultivation into settled chemicalised agriculture the government has actually often done away with their food security and lowered nutrition levels apart from the trauma suffered from an imposed break with a loved community-based customary way of life that kept them self-sufficient and free. With the globalisation of the economy and the role of US stock exchanges in fixing agricultural prices the price of food in the export market has begun to determine food prices in the local economies, again often putting a balanced nutritious diet out of the pocket of many at the bottom of the economy as some Adivasi populations. Ameliorative measures such as the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) cannot tackle the problems in agriculture in any fundamental way. Moreover, it is riddled with corrupt practices on the implementation level (*Frontier*, 29 January-4 February 2017: 15).

The unequal terms of trade between agriculture and industry are a cause behind the stirs for reservation quotas on the part of many peasant castes all over the country from Jats and Patels to the Marathas. Because the government is unable to accommodate all such demands this support base is eroding, and as an alternate vote bank Adivasis in States such as Gujarat are being wooed with some sops that will further mainstream them. The processes of the individualisation of community owned and worked land and male domination are promoted by the mainstream education system as well as through conversions to, or influences of major religions such as Christianity and Hinduism. Thus the process of class formation among the Adivasis is also furthered.

Survival or Living?

The large-scale rural to rural or rural to urban migration happening among the subaltern sections is indicative of the agrarian crisis. There are many areas without irrigation and only one crop per year is produced; and for many, migration during the non-agricultural season is one way of surviving for the rest of the year.

It is among the children of migrants that there is juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, drug addiction, empty, meaningless living, rudderless activities. "Assuring mental health to the second generation [now third or fourth], the children of the uprooted who have not yet themselves taken root, requires more than the observation of sound psychological principles...it requires new social inventions, most of which have not even been glimpsed in the outline" (Elwin 2002: 260).

Migration that has increased exponentially in India and worldwide implies and leads to a huge disorganisation at the point of origin and at the destination. It is symptomatic of the political and economic crisis creation of our times and is being used by the ruling circles to disorient any organised movement against their domination. It is easier to control migrant workers who are isolated from the general population and hence more vulnerable, and they are preferred even where local labour is available.

It is also among the migrant and semi-migrant labour that the problems regarding basic facilities like ration card, voter Id card, Aadhaar card, availability of clean drinking water, proper housing, toilet facilities and electricity are most acute. They are often cheated by their contractors who may not pay them the full amount due, or disappear before making final payment. They may only get small subsistence allowances during the work with the residue to be paid at the end so

that they do not think of leaving the work in between. Various kinds of deductions are made and they are cheated in a multitude of ways by others in the strange place they may be working. They may be 'tied' to their work through an advance given.

India's labour laws contain few provisions for the protection of migrants and do not recognise migrant labour as a separate category. The hiring of workers also usually takes place along caste and community lines obstructing unity whether at the workplace or at the place of origin.

In the case of the North-East the psycho-social health of indigenous communities who have been living for generations under conditions of low intensity conflict with the Indian state has been badly impacted. Post-traumatic stress disorders and anxiety neuroses abound, as well as psycho-somatic illnesses as peptic ulcers, high blood pressure, hyperacidity, menstrual irregularities and problems in conception. Reproductive health is impacted by the contamination of water with chemical effluents from agriculture and industry. Other symptoms of negative psycho-social health are increased irritability, poor concentration, sleep disturbances, headaches, giddiness, general weakness and lassitude, low will power and motivation (see Thokchom 1997: 48-52).

Communal Fascism and Globalisation

Hindutva fascism is a ruling class tactic to divert from core issues facing the people enabling their exploitation. It is a diversionary tool of the state to serve the minority interests of national and international capital at the cost of the mass of the people. In this sense communal fascism cannot be opposed unless the agenda of globalisation itself is tackled head on. The goal of Hindu nationalists is to found a Hindu Rashtra, in which all other religious communities have a second class status. The three enemies of a Hindu Rashtra are: Muslims, Christians and Communists.

The Hindutvavadis are trying to mould Hinduism, earlier an assimilative and relatively tolerant religion, into a rigid and ossified one with one canon and theology with the idea that this is what will help to mould India into a world power with the Brahmins on the top. They are not willing to tolerate caste migration as in earlier days or recognise the fact that religion cannot be a primary identity in a multi-religious country where syncretism is fairly widespread. There are communities following tenets of both Islam and Hinduism, communities that share Hindu and Christian traits, communities that are simultaneous believers of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism and communities that combine Christianity and Adivasi value systems (Singh 1982).

Their nationalism is based on a homogenised Hindu religious identity rather than being defined pluralistically on the basis of diverse ethnicities and nationalities, ways of living and traditions. And if the Dalits and Adivasis are not included within the Brahminical Hindu fold the Hindus cannot claim to be a large majority in the country. Similarly, if the Aryans cannot claim to be indigenous people, leaving this claim to the Adivasis, Dalits and others, they again become a minority. In this game of indigeneity the Muslims and Christians are marked as followers of 'alien' religions, although among them there are a good number of indigenes. Therefore, the dominant caste rulers are making religion into a political rather than a spiritual affair, which should actually be the private concern of each individual. In this rewriting and reinterpretation of history Adivasi contributions to Indian civilisation and the freedom movement are not given adequate recognition, nor is importance given to maintaining their religious and cultural sites.

The government is hitting at their interests in every way. One is through budgetary cuts in core programmes affecting women and children, Dalits, Adivasis, slum dwellers, farmers and workers. The move to do away with the sub-plans for SCs and STs after the merger of the Plan and Non-plan expenditure has resulted in severe shortfall in allocations for schemes dedicated to STs and SCs. The number of welfare schemes for Adivasis and Dalits has been reduced. A critical scheme for the rehabilitation of bonded labourers—the majority of whom are STs or SCs—has been scrapped in the 2017-18 Budget. Allocations for ST and SC women have also been curtailed (*The Hindu,* 4 February 2017). Doing away with the Planning Commission and replacing it with Niti Aayog, which is allowed only a policy-making and advisory role and that too in corporate interests, means that there is no institutional monitoring of diversion, non- or misutilisation of funds meant for welfare schemes.

General policies such as on the health and education fronts of the present government are also strongly pro-corporate and anti-people. Instead of increasing the share of direct taxes, the share of indirect taxes has been increased. Wealth tax has been abolished and steps to reduce corporate tax have been initiated. Reduction in fiscal deficit and public spending, which also means subsidies, is meant to placate international investors, rating agencies and international financial institutions and encourage FDI. Ideas about Universal Basic Income that were being bandied about for some time do not have the intent of social justice behind them but the curtailment of welfare and subsidy expenditures.

Banning of cow slaughter or sale of beef or a uniform civil code affect Adivasi rights too, not only those of the Dalits and Muslims. *Gau Rakshak Dals* (cow

vigilante groups) in the name of protecting the cow are creating an ambience of terror and intimidation among farmers, Dalits and Adivasis, and cattle traders and hitting at their livelihoods.

On the other hand, the BJP-led government is trying to divide people's resistance movements on religious/communal grounds, e.g., the *ghar wapasi* (reconversion programme) being carried out by the Bajrang Dal of the Sangh Parivar, the umbrella network of the Hindu right wing, is specifically targeting Christian Adivasis and trying to 'reconvert' them. Their position is that Adivasis are very much part of the Hindu community and any attempt to convert them to other religions is nothing but a sinister attempt to subvert Hinduism itself. *Ghar wapasi* (literally: returning home/homecoming) is actually a misnomer in the case of Adivasis or Dalits, because they were never a part of the Hindu society. If at all they are to return home it should be to their traditional religions and not to Hinduism, of which they were never a part. In Bastar district, communal divisions are being fomented amongst them and Christian Adivasis are being persecuted. The peoples in the North-East are a particular target. Missionaries and churches have been attacked. Any proselytisation actually divides a community and is known to affect united Adivasi resistance to forcible acquisition of lands and forests for mining purposes. It also helps the members of the proselytising religion to exercise secular power over the Adivasis – as moneylenders, traders and businessmen (see Sundar 1999).

While loudly proclaiming that Adivasis are all Hindus the Hindutva advocates do not clarify the actual status of Adivasis in the Hindu hierarchy. Brahminical Hinduism is a caste-based and caste-run religious juggernaut and without the caste hierarchy it loses its main foundation. Democratisation of Hindu religion is not even faintly imagined by the rightists. Those Adivasis brought into the Hindu fold were placed at its bottommost rungs even lower than the Dalits and not even allowed to enter Hindu temples, but are made to worship in separate shrines. They are not allowed to be served by priests or serve as priests.There is of course no question of inter-dining and inter-marriage. Another way of trying to obliterate Adivasi identity is by coercing them to return themselves as Hindus in the census enumerations. The attempt is a conscious one to fetter the original inhabitants in an octopus-like grip of casteism and as such is questionable to the extreme. This was happening even in the pre-1947 period. After the introduction of communal representation in 1909 there was a pressure on the part of the main religious groups, particularly of the Hindus, to swell their numbers. It is quite a different matter that many Adivasi communities have started to emulate the oppressor caste Hindus on a peripheral level through worshipping the mainstream gods and goddesses besides

their own traditional deities, from whom in any case mainstream Hindu gods and goddesses are often derived.

Along with this kind of integration at the bottom of the hierarchy it is also being increasingly asserted that Aryans did not come as marauding pastoral and agricultural tribes, but that they are also original inhabitants of India and the *varna* system is an organically evolved one, not something that was imposed by the conquerors who merged with the conquered to some extent. All these manufactured perspectives of the modern Hindu right wing are strongly interconnected and point at a comprehensive scheme to strengthen Brahminical control mechanisms and Hindu (religion-based) nationalism. Each time the question of reservation in public and private sectors, reservation quota in promotions in government jobs, and education comes up, the furore that is immediately raked up by the oppressor castes is a telltale illustration of the ground reality.

The Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), a Sangh Parivar affiliate, was started in the post-independence period in Madhya Pradesh chiefly to counter the activities of the Christian missions. Their nomenclature for Adivasis is intended to include them within the Hindu fold, though not all Adivasis are forest dwellers.[6] Like the Government of India they reject the term indigenous or original people with a history, prior rights and exploitation by external forces, and characterise them through spatial fixation using the term *vanavasi* or forest dweller as against *gaonvasi* (village dweller) and *shahrvasi* (city dweller), though it must be mentioned that such spatial fixation is common in many parts of India by those living in the plains indicating clear-cut cultural differences.

The VKA claims to have over 10,000 projects including schools and pre-schools, libraries, dispensaries, hospitals, agricultural development and vocational training centres, and sports centres. There are three major ends to their welfare activities in diverse fields: conversion, recruitment of full-time workers for the Sangh and the fomentation of violence against minorities. They run one-teacher schools (called Ekal Vidyalayas or Ekalavyas) in collaboration with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), pre-schools and hostels and these play a major role in the conversion/Hinduisation process. Change of names is an index of the influence of Hinduism. Some Adivasis retain their original names too. One name is the school name and the other is the home name. Other RSS and VHP affiliated organisations work in the field of school education all over India such as the Friends of Tribals Society, the Vivekanand Vidya Vikas Parishad, the Shiksha Vikas Samiti and Sewa Bharati. They are particularly active since quite some time among the peoples of the North-Eastern states.

While seemingly opposing Christian coercive and inducement-laden conversion tactics, the Hindutva forces are rather imitative in this regard. The *pracharaks* (propagandists) of the VKA, as other Sangh organisations, routinely try to warn Hindu women about being sexually exploited by men of other religions, particularly Muslim men. The whole concept of so-called "love jihad" in recent times is based on keeping Hindu women sexually within their own caste, class and religion.

Adding to Hindu numbers through conversions and *ghar wapasis* is also a vote building exercise. Nowadays not so easy to procure ration cards, voter identity cards, Aadhaar cards are used as inducements to get the poor and unemployed people into the fold of Hinduism and as foot soldiers for fascist communal crimes. Those who go through this conversion ceremony are gifted with a *trisul* (trident). Another propaganda item is that Christian Adivasis should not get reservations because they benefit doubly – from being minorities (with their own educational institutions) and as Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution has given the benefits of reservation to all STs irrespective of religion, but only to Hindu or Sikh SCs. Jaipal Singh Munda, as a Constituent Assembly member, had ensured reservations for Christian tribals despite opposition from Adivasis following the animistic *Sarna dharma*. And it was a Congress Member of Parliament, Kartik Oraon, who in 1968 took up the issue of descheduling Christian tribals in Parliament, but without any success.

Obliteration of Adivasi identity is underway through many means, not least through the messages of the government-owned and private mass media, which are mostly owned and controlled by big business interests that have their external linkages in various forms (see Bandhu 2001).Their land and resources are being snatched away, their homes destroyed. In the long run, if the Adivasis get completely Hinduised, they may lose constitutional benefits, and hence the efforts on their part to at least partially retain their Adivasi identity and way of life. The general politics and economics also stand to benefit from not completely undermining their identity and the Sangh Parivar organisations are careful about this aspect also. Policies of privatisation and disinvestment are appreciated as they do away with the reservation policy. They should forever be at the bottom as the servants and slaves of the dominant castes.

The net result of this assault on Adivasi identities and belief systems was shown very clearly during the Godhra pogrom under the Modi government in Gujarat in 2002. There, after being shoved under the Hindu umbrella, they were also induced into exhibiting an increased level of intolerance against the minority Muslim

traders and shopkeepers in the rural areas. Freedom of Religion Bills have been passed by quite a few State governments as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Arunachal Pradesh. These are basically anti-conversion Acts which prohibit forced, fraudulent or exploitative conversion of depressed social groups through offering inducements, etc. But conversion to Hinduism is often done using such means with full government support and connivance. It is taken to be an intra-religious affair.

Electoral politics of the political wing, the BJP, has its own way of enforcing the Hindutva agendas. So while there is no idea of working towards annihilation of caste it is being forced to take ameliorative measures for STs/SCs, as proto-Hindus, to win them electorally on their side and cement a polarisation in society that is anti-Muslim. However, any attempt by Indian Adivasis to take their concerns to international forums is viewed as separatist activity and they are put in the same bracket as other separatists such as the Khalistanis, Kashmiri or ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) militants.

In the name of combating the 'anti-national' Maoists and Maoism, which is equated with terrorism, Adivasis are being inhumanely targeted with impunity by the fascist state forces wherever they reside in areas rich in the resources required by the forces of large-scale industrialisation. It should also be mentioned that retaliatory violence of the Maoists against 'informers' and 'agents' from among the Adivasis is very much there making them into victims in this war against the state and decimating their numbers further.

NGO Interventions

The NGO sector is largely a field for career social workers. They play an important role in the implementation of the neo-colonial economic path being fostered under the aegis of Euro-American capital. Some NGOs are government-funded and, with the help of many altruistic or employment seeking people, they take monies from the government to help it implement welfare and environmental conservation programmes, which it would not be able to do solely through the corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy that is more focused on infrastructure and capital development than on human resource development and justice. Most NGOs tend to work within the given economic and political power parameters without organising the people to challenge and transform them in radical ways. They provide a forum for the people to struggle for their rights against the oppressive and exploitative bureaucracy using legal and constitutional means; undertake advocacy

and lobbying with policy-makers for policy changes and implementation of pro-people legislation; and they generally push for responsible business behaviour of the corporate sector and international financial institutions and organisations and for the proper use of corporate social responsibility programmes.

NGO funds can splinter movements into several groups. This has happened in the case of the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and to some extent in the case of the various Adivasi groups inhabiting the Nilgiri Biosphere. Wayanad, it seems, has the largest number of NGOs in one place. And there is intense competition among these NGOs who are jockeying for scarce funds. By using the jargon of participatory development, empowerment, capacity-building and devolution of power, NGOs often help in diversion from real issues facing the people and help the government in making a smooth passage for larger entry of global corporations and big Indian industrial houses into Adivasi areas. This is what they have done by focusing on PESA. The campaign for implementing PESA was sponsored by Oxfam and Action Aid through several Adivasi organisations, especially floated for this purpose or through local NGOs. Their demands include resettlement and rehabilitation, work orders and the formation of self-help groups, which is part of the World Bank plan for mobilising rural capital. Several wildlife conservationists are consultants to the World Bank!

They tend to divert from the task of helping Adivasi groups to fight for their resources and cultural identity which has relied more on a barter system of exchange for things and labour services. In this way the Adivasis are being accultured into the money economy, a culture of 'saving' and 'thrift', of 'planning for the future', getting fair prices for NTFP, and better marketing strategies. NGOs are mostly unable to play a meaningful role in the case of land alienation or distress sale of forest produce[7] and focus on providing alternate skills and livelihood means, which does not disturb the exploitative status quo and fits these people into the modern economy. As projects wind up because funding ceases after some time, the beneficiaries could be left in a lurch if the project has not become a self-sustaining one.

As for remuneration there is a huge gap between what is paid to a director and what is paid to the staff on the ground level and what goes into funding their activities at the grass roots. Just as in the case of government welfare funds how much of NGO funds actually reach the ground level for the use of the communities they are working for is not a moot question. It is very little because of corruption, but it does put some amount of cash into cash-starved and deprived areas. The NGOs have been accused by discerning Adivasi leaders (cf. Janu 1998: 44) of

using them for garnering funds for good living by the dominant castes, who are in the leading positions in these organisations. Rarely does one find Adivasis leading these organisations or in positions of control.

In the same way as in academics career social workers are engaged in furthering their own careers rather than making the service of the downtrodden their prime task. The extension of patronage to the Adivasis through the via media of middle class activists inferiorises and objectifies them and exhibits them out of context in special programmes. Through seeking to preserve elements of Adivasi culture with the help of NGOs, who are given the requisite finances, there is an attempt to set up a live zoo for tourist gawkers.

Starting from the 1950s the Government of India is trying to prevent proselytisation by restricting visas to foreign priests. But Indian clergy of various denominations have a live-wire contact with the various denominations of Western churches, which are engaged in providing aid, training and guidance to their Indian counterparts in their work among the depressed in this country. Proselytisation is done by Indian clergy doing various kinds of welfare work among the poor. But Indian churches have not broken away socially from the caste system and remain caste-ridden as there are different churches for different strata of the Christian population. The mindset of the Indian Christian clergy and laity is still 'Hindu' in this respect. In tribal areas wherever some degree of stratification has taken place this is reflected in the Church also. The exclusiveness of tribal mentality also did not change to make it more universally human in character. Christian Adivasis are isolated from the other Christian communities in a given locality and there is hardly any social interaction between the two. There can even be hostility and feelings of superiority/inferiority between Dalit and Adivasi Christians as in the case of Phulbani district in Odisha. The fusion of positive tribal values with core Christian values does happen but remains a challenge nevertheless.

For international financial institutions the NGOs can play an invaluable role in changing the mindset of the people to fit them into the neo-imperialist economic, political and social order and aspire for the better life in material terms and turn them away from violent radical paths. Donor agencies set agendas, targets and direct policy. NGOs, very often directly drawing funds and advice from explicitly imperialist agencies, function and expand their activities with the goal of diffusing the existing contradictions. Some Christian NGOs affiliated to the Vatican's World Council of Churches are doing just that. They act as intermediaries with a "white saviour complex" and enjoy constant benefits rather than humbly offering

themselves as advisers and consultants promoting direct representation from among the constituencies they seek to help. White supremacy does not end.

They definitely help to defuse and reduce violent social conflagrations due to rising inequality and exploitation and are of great help at times of disasters, man-made or natural. By inviting select NGOs to the UN bodies and committees and commissions they are made into representatives of people's interests while excluding them from core decision-making. Those who become the spokespersons for people's interests in this fashion are definitely constrained to articulate themselves in such a way that they do not too much offend the vested corporate interests. In fact, many INGOs and NGOs have a corporate structure and some even have a shareholding model for their staff. While their viewpoints may affect the formulation of policies and laws the ruling sections are also adept at evading these laws to a great extent, if not totally. The little good that does ensue for the masses ensures that the NGO structure is kept alive and kicking.

At the same time, the government keeps a watch on and controls the international and domestic NGO activities in various ways so that they do not unduly hurt vested interests. Recent government moves in relation to the NGO Greenpeace are a case in point. The failure of both the government and the Left in general to protect the people's interests through a bottom-up approach, particularly of some neglected sections such as informal sector workers, Adivasis, and Dalits, provides the space for NGOs to function, which unfortunately often end up perpetuating these very same exploitative structures. In the case of the 2004 tsunami some of the massive aid that flowed in through NGOs was used to construct 'modern' cemented small houses for the displaced fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu far away from the coast, which is their work area, and to hand over the coastal beaches to the tourism and entertainment industries even in violation of Coastal Zone Regulation (CZR) norms which are now proposed to be changed. Displaced and ruined small fisherfolk were also given training programmes in modern vocations and skills to integrate them into the urban economy.

Leftist Anti-imperialism – A Critique

The Adivasi question in India is strongly linked with the caste question. In the case of the CPI, being a slavish follower of the so-called Marxist method, it subsumed caste to class to fit into the Eurocentric Marxist maxim that the [written] history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. In India's case it would be more appropriate to emphasise the component and specificity of caste conflict

and not to equate the two, as even D.D. Kosambi has done, by saying that caste (*varna*) is class in the Indian context. Even to say that Indian history is marked by caste and class struggle would not be accurate. The struggle or conflict between tribes, between tribes and castes/classes would have to be included; and then not only conflict marked the relationships of different peoples but also co-operation and mutual exchange, learning, adaptation, assimilation and acculturation.

The fact that in India the democratic anti-feudal, anti-imperialist revolution has to take the factor of caste domination and subordination into account was not cognised by the various incarnations of the Left parties. Following Marx, in whose opinion modern industry would dissolve the hereditary division of labour upon which the Indian castes rest (*The New York Tribune*, 8 August 1853), they concentrated solely on class struggle in order to resolve the problem of caste, too. They have so far refused to fully take into account that no radical land reform is possible without the abolition of caste- (and gender-) based hierarchies and that this needs specially focussed struggles. In fact, the dominant caste composition and bias of the Marxist intelligentsia in India, their hypocrisy on this and on the gender question, has been fairly evident leading to the charge of their being "Brahmin communists" by Dr. Ambedkar. Similarly, there can be no caste annihilation without class struggle.

The Left Front governments in Kerala and West Bengal during their lengthy tenures have been remiss in addressing Adivasi issues and particularly in notifying all Adivasi areas as Scheduled Areas as per the recommendation of the Bhuria Committee. In general, the Left including the Far Left just as the government of India continue to refer to the Adivasis as backward and primitive. It should be remembered that Operation Barga,[8] carried out by the Left Front government in West Bengal, made the share croppers (*bargadars*) into protected tenant cultivators and not into owners of their respective lands. The registration of the tenants was mostly done bureaucratically and a large number of *bargadars* remained unregistered even after decades (1977 to 2011) of Left Front rule. Sometimes they failed to receive 3/4th of the produce. Although ameliorative together with the distribution of surplus land under the Land Ceiling Act and other governmental measures it was by no means a radical land reform as the domination of the landowners was not broken and a class of rural rich came up. The *bargadars* are largely Dalits and Adivasis and the turf conflict going on in West Bengal currently between political goons of the Trinamool Congress and their CPI (M) counterparts is a class-caste conflict between those at the very bottom who made some gains and those at the top, the landowners, those in the middle, the dominating castes/classes at the rural level, not to speak of regional, national and international urban and industrial

interests, who want to undermine these gains and snatch as much agricultural land as possible for their purposes. State agrarian policies are geared largely towards facilitating these exploitative forces.

An organised struggle against the caste system should accompany the class and mass movement and in order to conduct such a struggle separate organisations of SCs and STs are necessary and have to be formed all over the country. Mass organisations of the agricultural labourers and industrial workers must devote energy to the struggle against the caste system and gender-based discrimination as well as to the struggle against the class system. The first castes arose out of the sexual social division of labour and inequality in the classless matriarchal society. Hence, although a simultaneous anti-caste and class struggle may be fought in a class society, vestiges of caste and gender oppression may remain even in a classless society and would have to be struggled against to build a fully equalitarian society (cf. Patil 1982: 116-7). The anti-caste and anti-patriarchy struggle has to be waged both on the material and superstructural (consciousness) levels to be successful in its goals.

The question also comes up whether the working class is the most advanced class and the vanguard for the emancipation of humankind. What exactly is the role of the peasants and of the other sections such as artisans? There can be tensions between the depressed Adivasi peasantry of a region and the working class, who may be from outside the region and more privileged. This is the case in Jharkhand. It is the case in the Nilgiris where there is some dissonance between the indigenous communities and outsiders, such as even the repatriate Dalit labour from Sri Lanka working in the tea plantations and vegetable farms. The Adivasi and non-Adivasi peasantry may see the highly skilled, privileged, urban working class in an antagonistic manner.

Trade unionist approaches, while necessary, are not going to solve the problems. On the local level, where different communities live together, various affirmative actions need to be taken up to ensure equal rights to those suppressed and oppressed on the basis of caste, gender, ethnicity/nationality, language and religion. Due share in all resources and structures of power have to be ensured to all subordinated, suppressed and marginalised groups without essentialising any of these identities and retaining fluidity, flux, transformational and evolutionary possibilities (cf. Engineer 2015: 11).

As the Left Marxist tradition believes in the necessity of establishing an advanced industrial society the notions of work and worker are different from those in the various Adivasi modes of production and views of the world. Without

always having an understanding of the specific situations of the Adivasis and how to deal with them, the official Left focuses on issues facing them as workers and peasants together with the general sections of these classes. The aim thereby is to incorporate them into the national democratic movement and not to leave them as "helpless prey to the machinations of the rightists or the adventurism of the ultra-leftists" (Bardhan 1973: 57). Support for autonomy, separate States or special autonomous regions within States where the Adivasis are a majority finds favour because, being staunch national integrationists, they think it would serve to subvert radical separatist sentiments.

The failure of Eurocentric Marxist theory to produce a liberationist theory is evident. Are there any other streams in Western and Occidental thought that could provide bedrock for the same? According to Sharad Patil the reflectionist epistemology of traditional Marxist theory which, not including the subconscious, limits itself to change in human consciousness to bring about revolutionary social change and usher in a socialist/communist society cannot succeed in the task it has set itself. In the West psychoanalytic theory ushered in by Freud and developed by Carl Jung and many others have indicated the need to engage with the individual and collective subconscious mind. Among Marxists, Christopher Caudwell understood the need of transforming both consciousness and the subconscious in a revolutionary way. In India, the subconscious and the need to engage with it was discovered long ago by the Yogic and Buddhist philosophers. *Sruti* (heard literature) comprises not only the *Vedas* but also the *Tantras*, the non-Brahminical philosophical tradition, whose origins lay in the gynocracy of Nirriti (earth mother). Buddhist scholars, Dignaga with his *Sautrantika Vijnanavada* and Dharmakirti, were able to build on this and these could be taken as some of the starting points for forging new liberationist epistemological tools.[9]

Notes

1. The World Bank recommends direct access to private markets by forest communities rather than through the State Forest Departments. It wants these Departments to play the role of facilitator and guide for getting the private sector to invest in production and marketing through outgrower and contract schemes, much in the same way as contract farming in the agricultural sector (see World Bank 2006). If, consequently, the goal for these communities becomes maximisation of a cash income, then class and gender contradictions will certainly arise in them and biodiversity conservation will also suffer.

2. See Neeraj Vagholikar and Kaustubh A. Moghe with Ritwick Dutta: *Undermining India: Impacts of Mining on Ecologically Sensitive Areas*, Pune: Kalpavriksh, 2004.
3. Sarajit Mazumdar: Denying Communities their own Niche. *The New Indian Express*, 6 January 2010.
4. B.K. Roy Burman (2003) has pointed out in his critical review of the UNDRIP that international aid (as per Article 39) need not always result in improving the lot of the indigenous peoples and that there are many examples to the contrary.
5. Incidentally, the Naxalites also charge a levy to the traders. In a way this is comparable to their alleged extortions from the mining mafia to fund their war against the state. In such a scenario the Adivasis remain at the bottom.
6. In the Constitutional Assembly Debates, the 'Hindu' opinion wanted to use the word *vanjati* for the Scheduled Tribes, but this was opposed by the Adivasi representative who wanted the word Adivasi to be used. Finally, the House decided upon the word *Anusuchit Janjati* (Scheduled Tribe), thereby clearly signalling the temporary status of being scheduled and of being within the caste system (*jati*) and, therefore, Hindus.
7. Debaranjan Sarangi: Of Tribals and Development. *Frontier*, 22-28 August 2004.
8. In the course of Operation Barga (1977 to the mid-1980s) rural sharecroppers were recorded and granted permanent and inheritable land tenure so long as they paid their landlord at least 25% of their agricultural output as rent.
9. Sharad Patil: Revisiting Caste Controversy. *Frontier*, 4-10 August 2002.

10

A NOTE ON ADIVASI ECONOMIES AND POLITICS

Adivasis Through Indian History

D.D. Kosambi in his *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* states that history is "the presentation in chronological order of successive stages in the means and relations of human social production." We can add that these successive stages were within and acting upon a given historically developing natural environment and geographical/topographical locale; that the production was undertaken, not just through co-operation between human beings, but also with dependence on and the co-operation of Nature, that is, of other sentient and non-sentient beings.

According to Hobsbawm, the general theory of historical materialism requires only that there should be a succession of modes of production, though not necessarily any particular modes, and within limits perhaps not in any particular predetermined order expressing historical laws of development. Again, we can add that in a region there could be the simultaneous existence and interaction of more than one mode of production even within communities. And there could be diversity and variation in these interpenetrating modes of production across regions, in their expression and succession. India is a classic case of just such uneven development. A generalist characterisation of a particular mode of production as being that of slavery, feudalism, capitalism or socialism may not do justice to the complex fact

of simultaneous existence of a variety of modes, even if one particular mode is the dominating one. Moreover, as we already said, this particular general mode may exhibit different features in different parts of the world at different points of time. For example, in a slave society, such as that of the Greeks and the Romans during a particular period, production was carried out not only by slaves but by free peasants and artisans also. Similarly, capitalist production could be mercantile, imperialist-monopoly, dependent, or bureaucrat-state capitalism and so forth. And when one dominating mode of production transits into another it may not fully supersede earlier mode/s and may enter into a relationship with them creating hybrid social formations such as semi-feudal semi-colonial. The Indian subcontinent is a large geographical terrain where, due to uneven development resisting homogeneity, a variety of modes of production exist including those hailing from a remote past even if all are being brought under the domination of global finance capital.

Mode of production means certain relations of production and distribution, certain forms of property and social structures, which are in a relation to the development of productive forces. The relations of production show how the means of production are socially distributed and how surplus labour is appropriated and how different groups of people produce and reproduce their social existence. The productive forces include the ideas, values, attitudes of the humans involved in production and the science and technology developed by them to act on natural forces. Progress cannot be seen only in technical/technological terms or in terms of individualisation in the production process or 'emancipation' from Nature, but has to be seen from the point of view of the development of the quality of human beings, their ethics, values and attitudes to each other and to nature. Each social formation would have its own characteristic mode/s (with their intertwining/interrelationship), relations and forces of production, and an accurate understanding of these would be required for its transformation in the desired direction.

Taking the above as our hypothetical starting point let us look at the historical development in our subcontinent from the point of view of the original or first peoples. No distinctive stock of human beings originated on this subcontinent itself. In this sense it is not fully correct to speak in terms of "indigenous peoples" in the subcontinental context. All human beings came here only from the outside in succeeding waves and brought their languages with them. As previously mentioned, it only makes sense to talk in terms of those who came first and those who came later. Moreover, there have been various migrations within the subcontinent and this continues. There is evidence of human activities on the subcontinent dating from 100,000 to 75,000 years back. The first group to have arrived here are the Negrito pygmy people from Africa. Some descendants are traced in southern and

eastern India and in some tribal groups of the Andaman Islands. Other sets of peoples who came were the 'Austric' or 'Proto-Austroloid' and the Dravidian group that came around 5000 years ago. The Sino-Tibetan or Mongoloid branch of the human family entered along the Himalayas and from the east. The fourth to come were the Indo-European speaking peoples (the Aryans), who came in waves about three and a half millennia ago (Haldar 2008: 19-21). On the one hand, there has been a 'racial' and linguistic intermingling of all these various strands of peoples. So we find influences of these autochthonous languages in the major regional languages, but also on a classical language like Sanskrit. On the other hand, some groups of the earlier peoples retreated further into the hills, forests, coastal areas, islands, or lived nomadically on the peripheries of mainstream society in relative isolation to avoid assimilation and possible domination by groups coming later.

The first three original groups lived in small clan-based settlements of 10-12 people in forests and river valleys by hunting and gathering fruits, root vegetables and other kinds of food. They did progress to becoming food-producing societies learning gradually to practise agriculture and animal husbandry, as the Santhals, one of the earliest people here, did by clearing the forests and tilling the soil with wooden implements, or carrying out slash-and-burn cultivation within forests. In fact, a number of agricultural implements mentioned in Vedic literature are of Mundari origin – *langala/hala* for plough, *kuddala* for hoe, *khala* for threshing floor (Pathy 1984: 50). The number of inhabitants of a village settlement grew to 20-25 inhabitants. At the time of the disintegration of the Indus Valley Civilisation clan-based (gentile) communitarian village societies using bronze (a technology borrowed from the Indus Valley) were formed by the Mundas in the Ganges Valley. It is these village communities, based on the production of use values—though gradually undergoing class and caste based transformations—which for millennia have remained the characteristic building blocks of society in the Indian subcontinent. An organic connection between agriculture, animal husbandry and the crafts using a barter system was a typical characteristic of the village economy. Raiding and banditry also took place. People captured in battles, who in the initial period used to be beheaded and sacrificed, were later used as domestic slaves instead of being killed; so too indebted kinsmen.

To again quote D.D. Kosambi: "The entire course of Indian history shows tribal elements being fused into a general society." This process has been variously categorised as the Hindu/Brahminical or *varna-jati* method of tribal absorption, which had both coercive and relatively peaceful elements. Food producers using the iron plough met food gatherers and hunters and food producers using wooden and stone implements and a mutual acculturation process took place. Settled

agriculturists also relied heavily on food gathering and brought wild foodstuffs under cultivation. Some food gatherers became settled cultivators retaining endogamy and non-commensality. Clan-based hamlets or villages gave way to neighbourhood villages, hierarchically organised with a division of labour based on caste, which were endogamous occupational groups. It could happen that when a tribe became Shudra peasants, their chiefs became Kshatriyas, part of the military caste. India's society was built, layer upon layer, assimilating everything there was, without complete annihilation. That is why we still find pockets of "living prehistory". We can find groups and cultures in Bengal, in Kerala, or in the Andaman Islands, who in their mode of subsistence are still largely hunters and gatherers of plant foods growing in the wild where they are still allowed to flourish. Older cults and forms were not demolished as much by force to transit into a class/caste-based society, but were largely assimilated. Linkages were established with the periphery on a regional basis. The marginalised ethnic groups also exerted their influence on communities that came into an interaction with them as we have seen. Superstition reduced the need for direct violence, though this was not entirely lacking. Similar developments in Europe or the Americas involved far greater brutality.

At the same time, the ethnic groups that had come in earlier were driven by the newcomers or fled into more inhospitable and difficult terrain. For example, people of the Austric group, called the Savaras in Sanskrit, and who had once lived scattered throughout India were forced to gradually retreat or preferred to retreat under the onslaught of first the Dravidians and then the Aryans. The Indus Valley Civilisation (3000–1500 BCE) was initially classless matriarchal agricultural tribal settlements with periodic redistribution of land growing into an urban-based civilisation with a theocratic patriarchal monarchy, where the tribal moieties (*vargas* or *pakshas* of the tribe) morphed into classes (Patil 1982: 108-09). Temple slaves were the menial workers. It is surmised that this civilisation, in which crafts and trade were well developed and that grew cotton and wheat, was the creation of Dravidian peoples who had migrated to this part of the world from the Mediterranean region.

But it was from these earlier settlers, some of whom lived in villages under a chief, that the agro-pastoralist Aryans learnt a great deal: how to build in stone rather than just wood, or live in caves, apart from learning agricultural techniques and about products in the new terrain. The incursion of the Aryan tribes resulted in the demolition of barriers between numerous communities and their coming together in neighbourhood villages rather than subsisting in clan-based hamlets and the introduction of new relations of production. The pastoral patriarchal

nomadic Aryan tribes in the late bronze and early iron ages initiated the two-*varna* system consisting of the Aryans and the other pre-existing tribes whom they called Dasyus. The Dasyus differed from the Aryans in language, ritual, deities, customs, skin tone and physical characteristics. A process of domination over and subjugation of the Dasyus by the newcomers ensued and the word Dasa was now used for them as well as to denote the enslaved ones who laboured for others. By 800 BCE the two-*varna* system developed into a *Chatur-varna* (four-*varna*) one, which unlike the earlier two-*varna* division was based on occupational divisions and involved marriage relations. Shudra labour was used along with iron axes to clear forests and the iron plough, technical contributions of the Aryans, in order to till the land for agricultural production in the alluvial Gangetic valley. This was done mostly under Magadhan state enterprise (from 500 BCE). There was a split between agricultural, craft and trading activities. Magico-mythological rituals, carrying out of fertility rites for agricultural production and generally knowledge of all kinds were claimed by the priestly (Brahmin) sections as their exclusive domain as an incipient intellectual class with a division of mental and manual labour. Clan chiefs began to assume privileges that were later incorporated into kingship and a system combining status by birth, access to resources, social status and occupation with notions of ritual purity and pollution came into being that "was doubtless thought to be virtually infallible as a mechanism of social control" (Thapar 2003: 124).

A fusion of Dravidian and Indo-Aryan cultures, languages and technical knowledge together with those of the pre-existing tribes and peoples constituted the beginnings of what has come to be known as the Indian civilisation. This civilisation was basically organised on the basis of *varna* (ritual ranking) and caste (*jati*) and the classes that formed were not made up of economically, politically and socially homogenous groups of persons, but of a cluster of castes. Moreover, caste and class were and are not always synonymous or overlapping. There were poor Brahmins, Shudras who were traders, shepherds and Mlechchas who became emperors. Class was a communal category (cf. Patil 1982: 103) or at least it had a communal aspect. In the pre-colonial period castes themselves did not split into classes and even capitalist development in colonial and post-colonial times has not succeeded in completely enabling such a process. This fusion of divergent cultures including that of Islamic countries and the Christian West is a continuing process. In any analysis, we must note that caste came up on the basis of professions on a territorial basis and the process of nationality formation was a slow one. Regional and local specificities and variations are important considerations in the subcontinent.

Jati or caste is a product of feudalising society representing the multiplying and increasing division of labour, greater surplus production, but also social and economic inequalities. It emerged in the non-tribal feudal monarchies such as Kosala, Magadha, etc., that had arisen in Buddha's time. Initially, in the *Chatur-varna* system evolved in tribal slave society, membership of a *varna* was based on initiation and was fluid and not rigid; for example: the coming together of a Brahmin caste included Indo-Aryan speakers as well as Dravidians. Through recombination of tribes some of the indigenous peoples got Aryanised. Caste on the basis of territorial specialisation came up together with state and class as a kind of protection and defence mechanism of occupational groups against other such groups and against the coercive state (Ruben 1967: 214-15).

However, in the *jati*-based system evolving in a feudalising society initiation lost its efficacy and membership of a *jati* became hereditary and rigid; one was born into a particular *jati*. In the Buddhist canons, the word *jati* is still used in the sense of tribe. *Jatis* evolved out of disintegrated or subjugated tribal states or tribes. They became parts of a feudal class society, but regulated their internal affairs on a tribal model subject to the powers vested in the feudal State functionaries as is evident from the characteristics listed by P.V. Kane.[1] They took their place in the new non-tribal feudal society in the framework of the old *varna* system according to the new division of labour in a hierarchical manner. Instead of the clan the joint family became the primary and most important unit of society. Communal use of land, forests and waters was displaced by joint family property. The priestly and military castes were the dominant/ruling castes in the feudal societies of the Indian subcontinent (Patil 1982: 106ff).

According to Romila Thapar, *jati* and *varna* had separate origins and *jati* probably predated *varna*. She thinks that *jatis* could have been derived from clans and came up in the Indus Valley Civilisation as different occupations emerged that were inherited and became hierarchically organised with unequal access to resources and with strict marriage rules and rituals becoming a very rigid system over a period of time. This kind of division of labour between farmers and artisans carrying out exchange also came up in other pre-Vedic communities. Castes in this sense came into being not just through the conversion of tribal clans and division of labour among them, but urban professional associations (guilds) too developed caste/*jati*-like features. Religious sects, such as that of the Lingayats in Karnataka, could also convert into castes or caste clusters. In the cases where clans developed into castes the families of the lesser clansmen became the labouring sections. Kinship connections and lineage determined who controlled labour and who laboured. By subjugating whole groups of clans or tribes entire groups could

be made into a labouring section. Later individual *Shudras* could become domestic slaves in individual households but they remained the members of their village communities. D.D. Kosambi also traces the possible origins of the caste system in the effort of indigenous food gatherers to establish them as being superior to the immigrant ploughmen. Over a period of time due to the preponderance of numbers as a result of better food supply the settled agriculturists start dominating over the original tribes (Chattopadhyaya 2002: 34). Some pastoralist nomadic tribes developed symbiotic relationships with settled cultivators.

Transition to an agrarian village economy based on caste through dissolution of tribes into it was largely done under the Mauryas (c. 320-187 BCE). This phase is termed as proto-feudal by some (see Satyanarayana 1975). The Mauryan state was the main land clearing agency, the greatest landowner, the principal owner of mines and heavy industry and the greatest producer of commodities. Some village settlement took place by direct conquest, some by quiet and slow absorption. Chanakya's *Arthasastra* describes some of the crude 'barbaric' methods of systematically breaking up free, powerful, armed tribes of food producers. Wine, cash bribes, internal provocations and other similar unethical methods were used to weaken tribal solidarity. Then the king of the state would intervene militarily and fragment the tribe by deporting the tribesmen to distant lands and settle them there in groups of five to ten households, well away from each other. The old tribal territories became crown land. The methods adopted by the later Gupta state (c. 320-550 CE) were a little different in that the role of the Brahminical religion in subjugating tribes into castes was greater (Sau 2003: 44). Sometimes tribal chiefs themselves turned into absolute monarchs with Brahminical theological backing and with the help of a standing army paid out of regular taxes (Chattopadhyaya 2002: 795).

During the Gupta period trade with the Roman-Greek world thrived. The urban rich developed excessive fondness for exotic wines, concubines and other luxury items of art and craft work and exhausted the country's foreign exchange reserves. To solve the currency problem for domestic transactions the rulers established caste-based villages which used the barter system and were self-sufficient. The kinds of feudal lords who emerged in India were specific to this part of the world. The *Mirasdars*, who were Shudra village chiefs, formed themselves into a collective upper stratum of hereditary landowners and slowly robbed the farmers of their land through indebtedness. The Kshatriyas, who controlled villages as chiefs or became feudatory lords to overlords, were another kind; and the Brahmins, who were gifted with villages and could collect the taxes while remaining tax-free themselves, were the third kind.

Social development in the subcontinent had many specific features. The transitions from one mode of production to another were slow; the original populations retained a great deal of their way of life despite being tributary or providing labour rent or rent in kind after being incorporated into alien kingdoms and there was some erosion of their autonomy. An inner differentiation and hierarchisation within some tribal communities was there in pre-colonial society where rajas, *jagirdars* and zamindars arose as a result of the feudalisation of society in general. Confederacies of Adivasi chieftains were broken up; trade routes passing through jungles and connecting various empires were established and consolidated and surplus extracted from their areas. On the whole local chieftains enjoyed substantial autonomy and the state in feudal India was often of a benevolent nature; the rulers often had a sense of duty towards those whom they had subjugated and made dependents and servants. Unpaid labour was often used for public works like building roads, irrigation facilities and inns, and maintaining these and not for private works. For this reason we find that class and caste struggles and conflicts did not take on sharp forms in the way class struggles did in ancient Europe. Slave and peasant rebellions and uprisings in the way they took place in European history cannot be found in the early history of India.

In the period of mature feudalism in Mughal India mass peasant struggles against the state did take place and definitely so under colonial and neo-colonial conditions due to the extreme rapacity of exploitation. There are records of revolts by the Kolis living in north-western Pune and their suppression by both the Mughals and the Marathas. By the end of the eighteenth century peasantised Adivasis had emerged in Assam, Rajasthan and Central India. Other groups retained their earlier way of life and there were varying regional local permutations and combinations in terms of their relations with each other and with caste society. Migration into non-Adivasi areas was also there. Under colonialism, however, a full-scale appropriation of Adivasi land and forest resources took place.

The foundational base, the first layer, in the interacting multilayered Hindwi/Hindi civilisation has been the aboriginal one – of the Mundas, Santhals, Savaras, etc. Then there are the Dravidian and Aryan layers. After this Greeks, Arabs, Parsis, Nazrani Christians, Turkic people, Afghans, Turkic-Mongols, French, Portuguese, British and US Americans have all left their imprints on this land and its cultures. Through their incursions syncretic, hybrid cultures were created with some groups and peoples dominating politically and culturally and suppressing and exploiting others economically without total eradication of sub-cultural groups and peoples; in fact, often learning from and assimilating knowledge from them. Incoming invading groups brought new inventions and new religions and were

in turn influenced by and influenced pre-existing ones. What is the position and status of Adivasis in this scenario? Our concern here is with these first people who currently form the bottommost layer.

Modes of Production

The earliest Adivasi mode of production is self-reliant and self-sufficient, based on co-operation and common property in land with only a rudimentary natural division of labour along gender and age lines, and politically self-governing. It is a natural economy depending for livelihood on the natural resources of the habitat. There is negligible surplus, no antagonism in the production relations due to the absence of exploitation of labour and class divisions or coercive state powers. The population density is thin and has fairly abundant natural resources at hand. The mode of production at this early stage is called the natural-communal mode by sociologist J. Pathy. At this stage the people are basically food gatherers rather than food producers.

With population increase there comes up the need for refinement of tools and technology to cater to subsistence on a limited resource base and cultivation is carried out using the hoe. Territorial boundaries of communities get specified and there is some specialisation of labour activities. The people at this stage developed ecological techniques of farming such as crop rotation, inter-cropping, mulching, organic pesticides and developed many fine rice varieties. Most of the basic food items, the vegetables, fruits and roots, meats and fishes, medicinal plants, use of silk and iron in India were discovered by the Adivasis. They were the first artisans. They amassed a huge amount of scientific knowledge about natural phenomena and flora and fauna through observations and a practical process of trial and error, which were passed down from generation to generation as they were pre-literate societies. Their medical and healing system combines the material/physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of illness. They were the teachers of later settlers in this regard. The Ayurveda and Siddha medical systems used the Adivasi knowledge of medicinal plants and animal parts. Their stories and oral folklore contain much of this knowledge and wisdom related to living in balance with Nature, using her bounty and conserving it. There is no future tense in many tribal dialects and like children they tend to live strongly in the present. This is linked to their mode of production which does not allow for a morbid anxiety about the future as the structure works for their preservation. They have faith in mother earth as sustaining all life and being and providing for their needs. Acute time consciousness is a product of bourgeois society and its mode of industrial

production, where time is money and must be maximally utilised for productive activity to produce surplus value for the capitalist.

Territories for hunting, collecting and sometimes fishing were demarcated among various tribal groups. In order to safeguard their territory from encroachment or raiding by others chiefdom, headmanship, priesthood and other administrative bodies like councils and general assemblies were devised. The mode of production remains a communal co-operative one and class exploitative and dominating divisions do not arise as these administrative bodies have no permanent hereditary structure.

The Adivasi economy is found in the less fertile hilly and forest tracts where the people were more dependent on forest produce and animal husbandry than on agriculture as compared to the plains inhabitants and there are strong cultural differences among them. They produce for use rather than for exchange. Commodity production and money do not play a role in their economies. They are thus production-consumption economies. The stage of distribution does not play any role. The tools used are simple as is their culture and economy.

Many forest dwelling Adivasis have been practising shifting cultivation. Because the British wanted to monopolise the forest resources they condemned this form of cultivation and banned it outright in many parts of India. They held it to be detrimental to the preservation of forests, but the fact is that some of the largest natural forests exist in those areas where slash-and-burn cultivation has been practised for centuries, whereas intensive iron plough-based cultivation is carried out by destroying forests. The ethos of these communities did not permit slashing the breasts of mother earth with a metal plough, just as it does not permit them to wound mountains for mining minerals and make the earth bleed. Commercialisation of forest produce has also led to far greater deforestation and monoculture has impoverished the soil and led to less ground water recharge. Most of the medicinal plants grow on the ground level or within the middle canopy of multi-canopy forests. These are periodically burnt under controlled burning or are eliminated through operations for facilitating the growth of tree varieties considered commercially valuable. This definitely lowers biological diversity. Hills, the sources of water, are facing water scarcity, not to speak of pollution, in many parts of the country. Apart from promoting a communitarian ethos shifting cultivation was carried out in an environmentally sustainable way, not on very steep slopes in hilly areas, and according to the seasons in order to get a balanced diet. As a cultivation technology it requires a deep and intimate knowledge of the character of different areas of the forests. Premature jhuming of an area destroys its fertility.

Late jhuming predisposes the area to uncontrollable forest fires.[2] Sometimes the crops are sown only using hoes. The types of crops depend on the type of land, and whether it is a medium or gentle slope in the hills. Higher slopes where there is danger of soil erosion are cultivated before the monsoons set in and with varieties that set deep roots into the soil before the rains (Fernandes 1993: 86).

This form of socio-economic organisation is usually internally peaceful. There could be clashes with other tribes over resources or when territorial boundaries are transgressed. On the other hand, interactions with other tribal groups could be conducted on a peaceful basis and there could be a non-exploitative barter system of the exchange of items of use. Examples of peaceful tribes are the Toda of the Nilgiris, the Lepchas (who call themselves *Rong*) of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. Territorial conquest and expansion is not on their agenda and hence they have never cared to develop the weapons of warfare. Consultation and dialogue has always been their preferred mode of conflict resolution. The Naga tribes of the North-East could be considered as among those indulging in inter-tribal warfare. Among some tribes the lineage structure becomes strong and dominating, the so-called segmentary mode. Smaller tribes and their segments, clans or villages could be conquered and enslaved by the bigger tribes or their segments. Chiefs and their lineage members could get additional economic privileges and permanent ownership of some land. But appropriation of tributes by chiefs was carried out through the relationship of distribution and not through the alienation of property relations from the act of production. Work co-operation was on the basis of lineage (Pathy 1982: 39; Pathy 1984: 15). Slavery and serfdom did develop to an extent among some tribes as the Nagas without becoming a mode of production. The Apa Tanis of Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, developed terraced rice fields after migrating from Tibet and used slave labour. Then there are tribes who continue to follow, to an extent, their traditional pastoral mode of production as the Todas, the Gujjars, the Gaddi and Ahirs.

Wealth was also derived from trade both local and long distance. But any accumulated surplus was consumed or redistributed. On the whole, each village or tribe occupied its own ecological resource-based niche and did not transgress unwritten but customary boundaries except perhaps when hunting or fishing. Nevertheless, natural, sustainable and hence by and large internally peaceful economies of these original peoples, producing more for use rather than exchange, especially wherever they still exist even in broken forms, could be used as reference points to transit to a modern socialist/communist society on a higher level of productive forces.

They have been managing all their affairs as members of virtual 'village republics.'[3] Traditionally, land is not property for them; it is definitely not a commodity. But in the case of agricultural tribes, they consider themselves as the real owners of the land they cultivate. They claim the rights of the first occupants; only the labour spent on cultivating their lands gives them any rights. The whole feudal land system with its landlords is repudiated. Their vocabulary does not have words to characterise such a system. Even though the individual ownership frame is spreading largely as a superimposition by the state, the traditional frame of 'community ownership and individual use' is still in vogue amongst many communities, especially in the North-East. So is labour exchange whereby they jointly contribute their labour in major works such as erecting mud walls, making cottages, undertaking various chores during the harvesting season and so on. For Gandhians such as J.C. Kumarappa the methods of these ancient village republics are worth studying and emulating in so far as revenue collection and its disbursal on the local level are considered so as to avoid an exploitative drain of resources.

In the case of some of the Adivasi villages a partial feudalisation had begun to take place in the pre-colonial period as in the case of the Mundas of Chhotanagpur. In their villages the descendants in the male line of the original founders of the village were at the top. They enjoyed equal status among themselves even if small differences in wealth were there. As a group they were the 'owners' of the area included in the village boundaries and paid an annual 'chanda' (share, gift, tax, donation) to a superior landlord. Over a time the periodic re-distribution of lands and equalisation of shares of land gave way to ownership by individual families. Then there was a stratum of ryots or farmers, some of them paying rent to the original settler clans as serfs. These then reduced the amount of their own contribution as the rent they were paid by the *parjas* or settler farmers was added to their tax payment to the landlord. In addition, there was a section of subsidiary service castes, such as blacksmiths and weavers, settled in the villages (Hoffman 2005: 27).

The self-reliant nature of their economies was retained even after the incursion of feudal forces in the form of *thekedars* and *jagirdars* brought in by some chiefs for the collection of taxes. In Chhotanagpur the villages were confederated into several *parahs*, administered under the chiefs, which, in turn, joined together and formed a kingdom. Rather than playing the role of being the first among equals such a king started styling himself as a Maharaja with a bent for luxuries and requiring the taxes to pay for these. This happened in the case of the Chhotanagpur Raja of the Oraon and Munda communities. If he could not pay for all the luxury items he wanted

he allotted areas—*jagirs*—to the merchants as repayment of the debt incurred in buying these items (Fernandes 1993: 88). The Bhumij Mundas had developed a hierarchical feudal state with a king at the top followed by various orders of chiefs. The State of Gondwana of the Gonds was also based on tribute and exacted labour service for production and military duties (Pathy 1984: 22). It was characterised by walled towns, forts and great irrigation works, but their kingdom was finally destroyed by the Marathas. Such kingdoms were also formed in the North-East. These kingdoms did not cover all the members of a tribe, could incorporate other tribes as well as some non-tribals, particularly peasant castes to contribute to the agricultural surplus. Some of them invited Brahmins also and granted them land. In addition, they allowed the immigration of all those wanting to escape from the feudal oppression under some of the Hindu kings (Pathy 1984: 53-4).

Tribal economies are basically subsistence economies, notwithstanding production of a certain amount of surplus for internal consumption and exchange with other communities for basic items. Rituals and customs abound all over the world for the redistribution and/or destruction of excess wealth so that no accumulation takes place. A definitive break-up of their autarchy happens when an external state power—slave, feudal or colonial capitalist—is able to introduce the money element and its need in order to pay rents, debt, etc.

In the case of India the land settlement made by the British broke up these kinds of highly autarkic villages to a large extent and pauperised a good section of the villagers through the rent extraction, which sometimes became rack-renting, and subsequent land alienation that happened with the introduction of the zamindari system. The old taxation system was based on assessment and levied by the village councils. The British system introduced ruthless alien intermediaries such as the trader and the moneylender. The new corrupt legal system, which the Adivasis did not comprehend, worked against the interests and way of life of the original settlers, who were reduced to penury and forced to hire themselves out as agricultural labourers in plantations or as workers in coal mines or industrial towns. Incursions of the new classes and state power also introduced an element of rivalry among clans and broke up their original unity vis-à-vis outsiders and aliens.

Adivasi groups that had hitherto enjoyed reciprocal relations entered into an unequal caste-imitating hierarchy with one another maintaining social distance. Individualisation begins to take place because of the influence of the dominant culture. The powers that the village and village union chiefs and the priestly clans began to acquire went beyond those that they had enjoyed earlier and many become one with the exploitative outsiders. Some hill chiefs were treated as kings and made

de facto owners of common lands as in the case of the Lushai and Khasi. Some influential ones among them were made into officials of the British and collected house tax for them, forced people to work in construction projects and catered to the colonial officials during their tours. In some areas becoming *malguzars*, *muttadars* or *inam* holders for the sake of revenue collection for the British, they began to extract exorbitant rents and forced labour without accountability to anyone. They began to take control of the most fertile shifting cultivation land, of commercially valuable trees in the commons and of NTFP that are close to the village. But sometimes after elevating themselves to the position of landlords with a subjugated rent-paying peasantry, they fell into the hands of moneylenders and got expropriated.

Capitalist development integrates them into a regional, national and global market economy in order to exploit their material and human resources. Various ethnic groups scheduled as tribes are in varied degrees of integration and assimilation into mainstream economy and society. Hardly any of these group members live in complete isolation. Most of them are semi-assimilated; a few almost completely so. Economically, the assimilation and integration is incomplete also because it allows super exploitation by commercial capitalist forces.

Rather than considering the early Adivasi mode of production as described above to be a primitive mode and welcoming their integration into the mainstream along with its value system, we should be able to think of it as a different mode of production and way of life that is fast degenerating and eroding due to the onslaught of modern capitalist civilisation which is assimilating the peoples who were still following this mode at the margins. This does not mean that production techniques cannot be improved and refined in some cases or that modern technologies cannot play any role at all.

Democracy, Self-determination and Self-Rule

The establishment of self-ruling, independent 'village republics' based on more or less egalitarian kinship relations and with elected chiefs, who enjoyed no special privileges, were the contribution of the first indigenous populations of this subcontinent. The method of decision-making that is practised in the absence of a class divided society is communitarian-participatory and oriented to that of consensus-making rather than that of coercion or majoritarianism. There is a continuous process of negotiation until an agreement is reached that tries to accommodate all significant viewpoints and aspects. The community is

simultaneously the decision-making and implementing body. Life is a single organic whole and there is no compartmentalisation of economic, political, religious and administrative functions as in class- and caste-based societies. The Adivasi has been and is a 'man of his word', truthful and honest, and proud to be so. It is their sense of self-reliance that gives them their dignity. It should be noted that the early Buddhist Sanghas were modelled on the democratic tribal pattern of social organisation geared to consensus building. Many Adivasi people at the time of 'independence' had no notion about the Indian Nation, Constitution, State, Government, Laws, Administration and Citizenship. The state is an unknown and undesirable entity.

While reservation gave Adivasis access to state power post-1950, and empowered them to have a say in the decision-making processes of the state, they have very little say or power insofar as their own communities are concerned. There are too few of them at this level (almost a kind of tokenism), and secondly they do not have access to those levels of power which affect the interests of the Adivasis the most. Their rights over land and resources continue to be taken away and indeed are justified by the facts of welfarism and reservation. Dependency on the bureaucracy is very high.[4]

> "The extension of reservation has provided the Adivasi peoples a space for participating in the state decision-making process, but the question is raised as to whether this participation in the Parliament and State legislatures has not been merely formal and symbolic? Have they made any contribution in terms of posing questions and participating in the debates on issues or enactments? If so, has their contribution been effective and substantive? What is the extent to which tribal legislators have been able to effectively address and articulate the interest and problems of the tribes, whether they pertained to tribes as a whole or tribes of a given region/constituency or some specific group/community? Have they been able to initiate any Bill towards the welfare and protection of the tribes and the promotion of their interests, and pursue it? Have they been able to stall any Bill or project that had the potential of adversely affecting the tribes?" (Xaxa 2006: 41).

Xaxa answers the above questions in the negative and gives the following reasons: There is no unified pressure group or lobby to press for Adivasi demands. Elected leaders are not always true representatives of community interests and

aspirations. Having often come to power through dubious means they do not feel a sense of responsibility towards their own communities. Incorporation into the state bureaucratic and politico-administrative power structures happens of opportunistic, greedy and corrupt and disunited elites among them. These could be Adivasi leaders, beneficiaries of reservations, elected representatives, panchayat leaders, rich peasants, JFM members, etc. Leaders thrown up are prone to be purchased by the lures of power and pelf and become corrupt and undemocratic power brokers between their communities and the external power as in the case of Jaipal Singh of the Jharkhand Party in the 1950s. Adivasi agents of moneylenders, poaching, smuggling and bootlegging mafia are there. Many Adivasis wish to and are integrating into the capitalist system in their own way. The reservation system of the state hinders full assimilation also and makes them retain their identity, even if it is an eroded and inauthentic one, due to the battering it has received through colonial and neo-colonial processes. Throwing a few crumbs in the form of affirmative action seals them to the ST status.

The administrative understanding of a tribe is that of an endogamous group with an ethnic identity who have retained, to an extent, their traditional cultural identity: they have a distinct language or dialect of their own; they are economically backward and live in seclusion governed by their own social norms and used to possess a largely self-contained economy. The constitutional provisions have thus given, and continue to give, legitimacy to the various Adivasi movements and struggles for greater political power and autonomy, for equal rights as citizens. For example, the movement that created Jharkhand. In 1948, Jaipal Singh, leader of the Adibasi Mahasabha, had again articulated the aspirations of the regional Adivasi middle class for a separate State, first raised in the late 1930s in the pre-independence period, not least because industrialisation of the mineral-rich region was benefitting non-Adivasis, whereas they remained poor. Jharkhandi in this case was not narrowly defined to include only the autochthonous inhabitants, but meant a producer, irrespective of caste, tribe or nationality, residing in Jharkhand and non-Adivasi Jharkhandis constituted a major part of the Jharkhand movement (Sengupta 1982: 130).

Sub-regional assertion of Adivasi identities is there despite their being split up into various States post-1947. The demand for gaining political power through a separate State or an autonomous area within a State has been coming up again and again. Agitations around self-rule have been there in Adivasi areas of Karnataka, Telangana, Vidarbha, and southern Odisha. The Gonds and the Bhils voiced their demand for the formation of a separate State in Gujarat and in Telangana

at the beginning of the Second World War. However, this was neither spelt out in any kind of detail nor sustained by organised movements for the same. A memorandum for a separate State for the Adivasis to be carved out of the tribal areas of Chhattisgarh and contiguous districts of Rewa region and Vidarbha was submitted in a memorandum before the States Reorganisation Commission and a demand for the formation of a Gondwana State was reiterated in 1963 to protect them against exploitation by outsiders. There was a movement for tribal autonomy in the South Gujarat region in the Dangs in 1969 where the Adivasis called for a *Swayat Raj* (autonomous Adivasi State). The Adivasi Rashtriya Mahasabha called for the creation of a full-fledged State separate from Gujarat comprising adjoining Adivasi territories of neighbouring States.

On the other hand, there are indigenous people's movements that aim at secession, such as that for the struggle for Nagalim in the North-East. The Indian Army was sent in to crush the guerrilla warfare being carried out for the national liberation of the Nagas. There are many indigenous ethnic groups in the North-East raising demands for autonomy or separate States, such as the Hmar in Mizoram and the Bodos in Assam. The indigenous people in Tripura have raised the demand for Twipraland and in Nagaland itself there has been a demand for the formation of Mon and Tuensang districts into a Union Territory due to the domination by other indigenous ethnic groups.

Adivasi societies are rarely broken up internally on a class exploitative basis even if there is stratification of rich, poor and better-off and there are elites and commoners among them. Rather, forces of ethnic consolidation are at play vis-à-vis non-Adivasi society because of the rampant exploitation. When Adivasi communities fight for their rights, a just share of resources, autonomy, self-determination or self-rule and even secession against political domination, they are dubbed as anti-national and extremist elements. Considering themselves as a disinherited and deprived people they lay prior claim to the natural resources of the areas they have inhabited since ancient times.

This is in view of the fact that while natural resources worth billions of rupees are taken out by the public sector and through private corporates very little has been ploughed back to minster to their needs. Even in the case of dams they hardly benefit through electricity and irrigation, even potable water becomes scarce in their areas. When big industries, in the public or private sector, have been set up in their areas, their employment in these is marginal. They are employed in the initial construction phase as casual labour or contract labour, but after this the jobs invariably go to non-Adivasi immigrants and their own employment may range

from 5 to 1 per cent. If they organise themselves in trade unions for their demands they are met with special police brutality. It should be mentioned that Adivasi mining and industrial workers have been at the forefront of many a strike for better working conditions.

The Mavalibhata Declaration (Bastar 1992), therefore, asserted full ownership of resources, full decision-making and majority share-holding and absorption without displacement in case of any industrial project. And the community's claims would be the first charge on the project. What is taken out of the area shall flow back to the community in the form of money-entitlements in the name of the *Gaon Sabha* (village assembly) which should be used to improve the social, economic and ecological status of the habitatation (Sharma 1995: 106-07).

In today's context, self-determination can and should only mean the setting up of appropriate political and social institutions and the requisite powers to manage the indigenous society and culture on economically sustainable and self-reliant lines, particularly insofar as food security and safety is concerned. Claims to full ownership of resources can be sustained only in the framework of a sustainable economy and not a profit- or rent-seeking one. In this sense they have to design their struggles to fit into the global context of anti-imperialism. On the other hand, if the people are not vigilant and think in the longer term, smaller States, devolution of power and community control, which is often reduced to a farce, make it that much easier for a corrupt elite section to connive with all-India and international profit-oriented business forces for the short-sighted extraction and exploitation of natural resources in an unsustainable way. This has happened in the case of Jharkhand (see Kela 2012: 336-7 and 347). Mainstream political parties tend to lend support for the formation of such States for these reasons; this danger has to be seen and avoided.

India was signatory to the 1957 ILO Convention 107 on the 'Protection and Integration of Indigenous and other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in independent countries', which entered into force in 1959, and consequently legally recognised the right of 'Scheduled Tribes' to the collective ownership of the lands they traditionally occupy. However, this Convention also allowed the removal of these peoples from their habitual territories "in accordance with national laws and regulations for reasons relating to national security, or in the interest of national economic development or of the health of the said population." The ILO Convention 169 of 1989 on the Indigenous and Adivasi Peoples, which revised the 107 Convention, has rescinded the assimilatory and integrationist approach of the earlier Convention and recognises their right to self-determination within a nation

state and sets standards for governments regarding their economic, socio-cultural and political rights including the right to a land base, which includes ownership rights over traditionally occupied land and rights of use and access to lands they have traditionally had access to for subsistence. But there is greater emphasis on consultation and participation in 'development' projects rather than consent and control of the indigenous and tribal peoples in the development of the areas they inhabit. This Convention paved the way to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Although India is yet to ratify the ILO Convention 169, it has voted in favour of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in the UN General Assembly in 2007. But as it does not consider the concept of 'indigenous peoples' applicable to India it asserts that the self-determination clauses apply only to the peoples under foreign domination, and that this concept does not apply to sovereign independent states and avers that the right to self-determination will be exercised by indigenous peoples only in terms of their right to autonomy or self-government.

The right to self-determination is a movement of indigenous and tribal peoples all over the world to renegotiate their relationship to the nation state in more equitable and democratic ways. Some governments like the Norwegian government have granted a Sami-Parliament to the Sami Indigenous People in Norway and the Canadian government has allowed the creation of Independent Indian Indigenous Nations within Canada. In India, the right to self-determination can be exercised meaningfully only if Indians recognise it to be a multi-nationality, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, and if it can be reorganised as a confederation where all the federating units come together on a voluntary and equal basis.

Who are the Savages, Who are the Barbarians?

Colonial anthropology provided a view of human societal development from primitive savagery to barbarism and then civilisation.[5] This categorisation was done on the basis of man's relationship to Nature, the development of the technical forces of production, and patterns of social and political organisation such as marriage, family and the state. The food gatherers and hunters were considered to be at a parasitic stage of savagery. They used relatively simple tools such as bow and arrow and discovered how to make fire. The barbarians were those who began producing food through domestication and herding of animals and carrying out agriculture in co-operation with Nature. Pottery was invented around this time as well as in

some areas cloth production through spinning and weaving. The economy is still a natural one, largely subsistence-based.

Civilisation is said to have come when human societies discovered the use of metals such as copper, invented bronze, and later the use of iron, pioneered in South India, for tool and utensil making. Due to the production of surplus food in this stage, also through the use of irrigation, it became possible to support an urban population of specialised craftspeople, merchants and financiers, priests, officials and clerks. A more settled life different from the earlier nomadic and semi-nomadic one became possible. Society got divided into urban and rural, city and village and along class lines. Writing invented for record keeping and literacy became the monopoly of certain classes. The development from a savage to a civilised state was seen as a transition from dependence on Nature to emancipation from her and the exercising of greater control with final mastery over her. The relationship to Nature was perceived in adverse terms and as largely a conflict-ridden one and hence the need for conquest. The subordination of women took place parallel to the objectification of Nature and an attempt to use her laws in man's own interest. This homogenising understanding, of the advancement of humankind from the 'savage' state to that of 'industrial civilisation', is accepted by both bourgeois and mechanical Marxist social scientists.

The official and mainstream view of the Adivasis is that of backward, primitive, naked or semi-naked savages, promiscuous, lovers of drink and dance, lazy, non-vegetarian scavengers, filth eaters, wild, uncivilised, barbaric, unclean, impure, inferior, simple, backward, non-Hindu/backward Hindu, irresponsible, stupid and so it goes on. In contrast, aware Adivasis under duress today perceive their culture as life celebrating, as more simple, innocent, egalitarian and democratic, not just nature-friendly but nature-worshipping, communitarian/sharing/exchanging, having respect for elders, valuing truthfulness and honesty, lacking greed, arrogance, or jealousy, and freedom and peace-loving. Help from others in times of need is considered a right. Carrying themselves with pride and dignity, possessing a strong sense of beauty, joy and enthusiasm they feel they belong to the earth and not that the earth belongs to them. They feel a sense of belongingness to their territories as the abode of natural and ancestral spirits, which makes it a holy place for them. All these qualities are reflected in their music and dance, songs, myths, institutions, dress and ornaments, in their life in general.

They have a culture and tradition of being accomplished agriculturists, artisans, textile producers, botanists, zoologists, psychologists, healers and doctors. Agriculture, crafts production and to some extent trade requires societal peace for

their development and for those practising them to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Mainstreaming is happening to an extent among the Adivasis, but civilisational differences with the mainstream continue to exist.

"Who are the barbarians in our land?" question the Adivasis of Jharkhand. The European understanding of civilisation was based on the separation of the individual from society and nature and their objectification. This separation happened subsequently to the coming up of the division of labour, especially between mental and manual, the consequent exchange of products which eventually gave rise to commodity production with money as the medium of exchange. In the Marxist understanding the division of labour undermines collective clan-based production and appropriation and makes appropriation by individuals into the general rule. This kind of change in production relations happened exemplarily in ancient Greece and Palestine, more so in the former, during the iron age, where along with private ownership of land and slave labour, metal money (as exchange medium, capital, interest and usury) and merchants as intermediaries became a general trend. Individual proprietors produced independently for the open market. Merchant capital was a driving force behind colonisation, piracy, robbery and slavery. With the ascendancy of money as an exchange medium the rule became: buy in order to sell rather than sell in order to buy. Money-making became an end in itself. Under feudalism subsistence economy and barter returned to an extent but capitalism has seen the rule of the market, of commodity production instead of production for use, as in ancient society and a resurgence of imperialism for the control of markets and raw materials.

Tagore had said that savagery is actually the unrestrained pursuit of material gains, which is a destructive and not creative process. It is the spiritual night of barren negativity, suspicion, jealousy, fierce destructiveness and cruel rapacity. The rampant individualism of modern man represents a 'primitive' cramped spirit, a restricted consciousness. For Tagore, just as for Gandhi and Kumarappa, civilisation exists where the spirit of co-operation, of mutual help, reciprocity and sharing prevails, when the co-operation is not just among men but simultaneously with nature too where returns are made for what is taken and we take without destroying the faculty of production by man and nature. Primitive barbarism and bloodthirsty savagery were revealed in the two World Wars in the twentieth century by the West and in innumerable locations since then. Capitalist society has often been referred to as a man-eats-man society, a cannibalistic one preying upon its own people and those of other lands, especially of Latin America, Asia and Africa. To paraphrase Tagore, the world's atmosphere is filled today with the barbarity of the aggressive individualism and self-aggrandisement of nations,

pitiless in their greed and unashamed of their boastful brutality. The barbarism and genocidal policies of the Indian ruling classes/castes have been exhibited many times against the peoples of their own internal colonies and against religious minorities. Colonisation begets the forging of national/ethnic identity and consciousness, which could be destructively narrow and regressive or sane, progressive, inclusive and healthily emancipatory, or a mix of the two.

The criteria for characterising peoples as savages or civilised cannot be technological ones. What matters are character and personality development and a lag between this development and scientific and technological development leads to highly destructive and not creative activities. What matters, too, is the absence of predatory or parasitic development and the development of the spirit of altruistic loving service, which can usher peace. Progress is not the speed at which material objects can be multiplied. "Civilisation must be the expression of some guiding moral force which we have evolved in our society for the object of attaining perfection" (Tagore 2008: 268). The cleavage between the subjective, practical, concrete mindset of early humans in contrast to the overtly rational, abstract and theoretical mindset of class-based societies needs to be bridged for humans to find their destiny. Civilisation in this sense is yet an ideal to be attained.

The narrow insular exclusivities of tribe and caste continue to inform societies on the subcontinent, where love and inter-marriage, inter-dining and even entering into the area inhabited by the other can be taboo. Inter- and even intra-group clashes and rivalries do occur. The village community is constituted by individual families with common descent from one ancestor; this kinship relationship imposes obligations and duties, which an outsider may not have the inclination to share. Within the tribal villages there was often a balance struck between the needs of the individual, family and of the village. The state was not allowed to encroach on the family or the internal affairs of the village, which were in the hands of the village council, consisting of the elders presided over by the chief. Ideas of humans certainly do not change automatically with a change in the economic system. Adherence to exogamy and endogamy for marriage purposes, propitiation of gods and goddesses for protection against calamities, diseases and failure in examinations continue to grip the minds of people even today (Satynarayana 1975: 93). Love and other tender feelings were to a large extent circumscribed by the limitations of tribal institutions and in Dasa-Shudra slavery by class and caste institutions in the tribal framework itself. It was the Buddhist and Christian philosophies that universalised love and compassion beyond narrow bounds of kinship and extended it to all neighbours, the whole of humankind and in the case of Buddhism to all sentient and non-sentient beings following tribal respect for all living and non-living beings.

Tribal societies can by no means be considered the 'golden age of humanity' due to their relative egalitarianism. Sub-clan or lineage divisions that regulated sex and marriage could be hierarchical. Status and ranking differences were there based on descent or even occupation of ecological niches and mode of livelihood. Inter- and intra-tribal warfare and conflict were realities, in which the 'other' could be killed with impunity; so were blood and human sacrifices, cannibalism, superstitions and witch-hunting. Some of these evils continue among some tribal ethnic groups even today. These early societies only indicate the possibility of once again having an egalitarian and just society encompassing the globe on a higher level of development of productive forces and awareness. For the constitution of such a society co-operation and not competition would be the key component of the economy between peoples and nations and among themselves.

Contours of a New Economic Paradigm

Capitalist-imperialist industrialisation is rapacious in its energy and hence mineral resource requirements. In India the natural resource rich areas and suppliers of hydropower are often the Adivasi areas. The beneficiaries are in the cities. Exploitation of these areas has been done and is still planned to be done in an ecologically senseless manner and without regard to the consequences for the livelihoods of hitherto sustainably living communities. The idea of extracting shale oil and gas by government oil companies in Arunachal Pradesh, for example, would definitely ruin virgin forests and affect hilly areas, the local habitats and inhabitants. The only alternative to this highly destructive predatory mode of production is a more sustainable one that considers mining to be the last resort for the use of land and that too in sustainable quantities and manners of extraction. There should be the realisation that there is much greater wealth for humankind above these minerals and, while curtailing energy production and consumption to the extent possible, renewable sources of energy should be promoted. Similarly, other wasteful uses of forest plants such as bamboo can be curtailed to an enormous extent if we change our mode of production from a large-scale profit-making one to a small-scale people-oriented one. A far-reaching *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) approach is needed, which calls for strong decentralisation of political power and economic activities. The idea of small self-reliant communities is one espoused by many to live sustainably in tune with Nature. Gandhi was for it and so were Kumarappa and Masanobu Fukuoka. We can profitably cite J.C. Kumarappa in this context:

> "In many cases, the large-scale units are the most extravagant when looked at from the national viewpoint. Take paper-making from bamboo for example. No large-scale unit can function unless it has a forest of bamboos at its disposal. Fresh-cut bamboos have to be fed into the mill steadily. On the other hand, in a cottage unit fresh-cut bamboos are used for baskets, mats, granaries, roofs, etc. in the first instance; when these get rotten with use, such waste bamboos can be converted into beautiful paper, which then is the more economic use of our resources". (Bandhu (ed.) 2011: 274-5)

If this kind of a shift of mode of production and lifestyle can be made, we do not need to cut down vast mixed species forests for so-called production forestry for industrial use. And Adivasi and other rural artisans can sustain themselves through forest-based handicrafts. The Forest Department has to revamp itself from being revenue-oriented to being service-oriented towards the needs of the poor. Conservation and afforestation have to be carried out from this point of view. Mini hydel projects managed by local communities with control over other local resources might be a better option than unsustainable large dams.

Is a surplus producing and profit-oriented economy that uses up both scarce or non-renewable natural resources and renewable resources at an unsustainable pace really superior to or more progressive than social reproduction in co-existence and co-operation with the efficient, sometimes gentle, and sometimes violent methods of Mother Nature involving to the extent possible slow-paced small-scale rural industries and handicrafts geared to people's and not touristic flim flam needs and ensuring maximum employment? Restitution of the rights of the Adivasis can only be attained by means of a thoroughgoing revolutionisation of society, economy and politics getting rid of caste and class hierarchies and domination and exploitation on that basis, an end to the parasitism of urban areas on rural ones through unequal exchange and the attempted imitation in rural areas of proven unsustainable urban lifestyles.

How do we resolve the contradiction between the urban and the rural? How do we do away with the fact that as the rural economy disintegrates large-scale migration to the towns becomes inevitable? The villages have to be revived and their industries reconstructed for Swaraj to become a reality. The Gandhian/ Tagorean perspective gains relevance. So also Kumarappa's Gandhian economic concepts of a mother economy, a nurturing economy, an economy geared towards the satisfaction of primary natural needs and not of artificial wants created by vested interests, which are sought to be satisfied through over-exploitation of non-

renewable resources, particularly highly polluting fossil fuels. It is non-monetary and based on commonly-'owned' not privately-owned land and other resources. His categorisation of societies as being parasitic, predatory, enterprise, gregarious or service oriented in terms of their value system and degree of violence or non-violence involved is useful except that unlike him we may not consider hunter-gatherers as parasitic, predatory or primitive and regard settled agricultural civilisation as necessarily being more advanced and human. For him, the hill peoples needed to be brought over to the plains as settled cultivators. His opposition to linguistic States, however, was indeed prescient as was his advocacy of political boundaries being drawn on the basis of bio-geographic criteria such as riverine valleys. Today environmentalists also recommend that decision-making should be aligned more to bio-regions, to ecological boundaries such as river basins and watersheds, lakes and hill ranges (Wani 2008: 32), which would help in conserving social diversity.

The relationship between rural and urban areas has to be readjusted to avoid exploitation of the former by the latter. The trend of migration from rural to urban areas has to be reversed by revitalising agriculture and by fostering value addition at the village level by promoting cottage industries. We should not make India a planet of slums, joining the global reserve army of exploited labourers and workers. Reunification of production and consumption through the promotion of small-scale units is desirable for personality development and non-alienated exploited human labour. Work has to be designed to develop modes of production which fit into the actually existing conditions in terms of capital availability relative to labour availability. Technologies need to be cheap enough in terms of capital to give the chance of work to everybody.[6]

There should be an intrinsic relationship between agriculture and industry through the promotion of village industries. Local, regional, national self-sufficiency and self-reliance and decentralisation should be promoted to the extent possible. The village needs to become the basic unit of politics, economics and society. The internal conflicts need to be resolved in the common interests of all. They need restructuring on a casteless and classless basis with social justice for women too; the unjust division of labour on caste and gender basis has to be rescinded. Social evils such as dowry and alcoholism have to be tackled along with consumerism, individualism, and greed. A new value system with changed consciousness and awareness is the need of the hour. The exclusionary mindset of Hindutvavadis fits into the exclusionary paradigm of a globalised economy which is unable to fully provide a space for each being. The former cannot be resisted without simultaneously tackling the issue of local versus global. The contributions that the Adivasis—who have their own forms of exclusion and social distance from

others/outsiders—can make towards this with their knowledge and communitarian work culture should be recognised in the interest of all.

Notes

1. P.V. Kane gives the following characteristics of *jati*: 1) Membership of a caste is hereditary. 2) Principle of marrying within the same caste, and within the same caste not marrying certain relations or other persons. 3) Food restrictions including from whom food can be taken. 4) Caste-based fixing of occupations. 5) Hierarchy principle among castes with some at the top and others at the bottom. 6) The caste council with a chief has the power to regulate the conduct of its members, to impose the penalties of fines or excommunication for lapses. The general medieval rule was that each caste had its own legal customs which must be consulted before the king's judges could give a decision (*History of the Dharmasastra*. Vol. II: 23).
2. See Reeta Nongmaithem, "Food First", in: Statement of the Joint Forum of Indigenous Women, North-East India at the Sixth National Conference of Women's Movements, 28-30 December, 1997, Ranchi, Bihar, p. 40.
3. The tribal republics or Gana Sanghas were fairly small chiefdoms, where elected/selected and later even hereditary chiefs of clans in a confederacy of clans or the heads of families belonging to a clan claiming to be of equal status met in assemblies (*sanghas*) to make important decisions. In some cases the earlier practices of full clan assemblies for decision-making (*samithis*), equal distribution of booty, gift-giving and clan feasts to avoid accumulation began to be given the go-by. This became rule by an oligarchy because there was some degree of social stratification into clans that owned land in common and slaves that worked on them as well as in the household without state formation. They were not kingdoms, at the most proto-states. They rejected Vedic orthodoxy (Thapar 2003: 147).
4. Virginius Xaxa: Empowerment of Tribes. In: Debal K. Singha Roy (ed.): *Social Development and the Empowerment of Marginalised Groups: Perspectives and Strategies*. Sage Publications, 2001: 202-22.
5. This was an earlier Montesquieuan categorisation of evolutionists famously popularised by the nineteenth century anthropologist Lewis H. Morgan in his work *Ancient Society* (1877), and followed by Marx and Engels and later Marxism oriented anthropologists as Gordon Childe and historians such as D.D. Kosambi. The 'savages' were often considered as 'noble savages' by the evolutionists due to their many positive character traits and customs.
6. Surur Hoda: Schuhmacher on Gandhi. *Sarvodaya Talisman*, November-December 2015, p. 9. (Available online at www.gandhifoundation.org)

11

BORN FREE
ADIVASI CULTURE AND VALUES

There is a widely prevalent conception of Adivasi societies as static and idyllic, especially in literature and art. Even during the pre-colonial period this was not true. The history of these communities has been turbulent over a very long period of time, for at least the last five thousand years. For better or worse there was dynamism. They were being continuously pushed to the margins and this process continues in the present also. There is no scope for any romantic conceptions in this regard. All through, it was brutalisation and marginalisation for them by the other 'civilised' elements of society. Their symbiotic relations with Mother Nature, comparative egalitarianism, lack of greed and acquisitiveness, simplicity and innocence still remain so to a large extent. But these characteristics too have not remained static. Adivasis in many areas have been forcibly corrupted and even criminalised. The force of circumstances is such that they are cornered into accepting what others impose on them. Our case studies have made this point more explicit. Here we will touch upon some of the enduring values of their culture as well as some changes that have entered their lives over time.

Religion

Early tribal religions all over the world are natural religions. They involve magic and black magic, totem worship, shamanism (invocation of ancestral spirits), nature

worship in general and worship of the earth as mother goddess accompanied by ritual blood sacrifice. Ancestor worship, spirit worship, simultaneous worship of gods and demons, that is, positive and negative forces or energies, is a heritage of early society. The living and the deceased were held in one unit and were the sources of life and moral action. Nature and society are one (Thomson 1977: 153). Myths and legends woven around various deities and rites provide them with the norms of their community life and their outlook on nature. Their rites and festivals are linked to seasons on an annual basis and are in tune with agricultural or other activities. Relationships with ancestors, gods and other natural and supernatural entities are affirmed in the course of the rituals. Worship of trees, taboos on certain foods and articles of use, festivals associated with sexual promiscuity are still observed in a few isolated villages in India. Clan names can be traced back to plant and animal totems of earlier societies. In Buddhism and Jainism, tribal totemic ideas were utilised by organising them into a theory of transmigration (Chattopadhyaya 2002: 65). Adivasi groups have their own priests or others authorised as such by the community and do not have Brahmin priests officiating at their rituals. Their own languages and not an unknown language like Sanskrit are used during ceremonies. Unlike Hindus they bury their dead and do not cremate them. Their festivals and celebrations are centred on seasons and they do not celebrate the presence of personified deities. They are affirmations of the existence of the cosmos in its entirety.

Early religions are forms of pantheism which respect all life forms. It leads to a way of life. It means that you do not disturb the plants when they are sleeping in the evenings/nights, that you take only as much as you need in terms of food, that you apologise for taking another life form for keeping yourself alive; in short, that you tread lightly on the life-giving alive earth. There are no particular sanctuaries or shrines with idols symbolising power or natural forces specially designated for the purpose of worship. This comes later with the destruction of jungles and the advent of agricultural societies.

Overlapping with the practices of Hindu religion is there because there has been interaction and a give and take between the two. Hindus also have the traditions of nature worship and animism. Initially, there was more giving from the Adivasi side, but now due to their loss of land to others they are more at the receiving end. A process of destructive acculturation by deculturising the Adivasi culture is taking place, instead of a positive acculturation.[1] Once the economic base of an equalitarian subsistence economy takes a hit the path is opened up for a cultural colonisation too and this includes taking over some of the religious beliefs and other values of the dominant Western and Hindu cultures. Hindu

Brahminical imperialism has ensured a greater spread of Hinduism all over the country unlike the Adivasi religions which are confined to their own territories. Positive acculturation would celebrate and affirm the existence of diverse small cultures and their interaction with dominant cultures on their own terms.

As part of identity assertion traditional religions show a trend of revival. In Jharkhand, there is a movement to have Adivasi religion recognised as *Sarna dharma* or *Adi dharma* among the Munda, Ho and Santhal. (*Sarnas* are sal tree groves and serve as sites of worship). The *Sarna* religious tradition was initiated by Birsa Munda who found all the major religions to be oppressive to the Adivasis and therefore strived to revive Adivasi religious practices. The followers of *Sarna dharma* have been trying to get it recognised as a minority religion with all the attendant benefits; and to this end they have been agitating for the introduction of a separate Sarna religion code in the Census operations. There is a perception that Christian Adivasis have better access to higher education and jobs and a Central Sarna Committee in Jharkhand has been aggressively pursuing reconversion from Christianity to *Sarna dharma* with the active support of right-wing Sangh Parivar organisations (Yadav 2014).

Gondi Dharma has been revived in Madhya Pradesh. Even 'new' religions are devised to assert their distinct identities, such as Doni Polyo, a resurrection of nature worship, in Arunachal Pradesh. The Adivasis would not like their holy places, the trees, rivers, the mountains, and land to be desecrated just as people following other faiths would not like their places of worship to be destroyed. These and some other attempts to strengthen and retain indigenous practices and religions or blend them with the major religions are a response to the religious imperialism of overzealous Hindu and Christian missionaries.

Arts, Crafts, Literature

Various arts and crafts prevail among the Adivasi groups, such as dance and music, wall painting, stone carving, drawing, body tattooing, basketry, embroidery, weaving, pottery and so on. Their arts and crafts are functionally integrated into their day-to-day lives and are in tune with Nature. Among the Santhals there is a custom that only if they make a flute out of a fallen branch it will tune properly and sound sweet. Various Adivasi groups in the country have evolved their own styles of painting such as Kurumba painting on rocks in the Nilgiris, the Gond pointillist juxtaposition of an infinite number of coloured dots. The Kotas of the Nilgiris are the musicians of the hills. Artistic activity is part of their daily life

and is carried out by all people without undue specialisation. Their houses, and this is so particularly in the case of the Santhals, Hos and Kondhs, have painted walls or have mud sculpted figures. Items of daily use, clothing and ornaments are aesthetically designed. Embroidery done by Toda women, for example, exhibits the creative use of motifs from Nature. Designs are by no means static and show changes with changing times without losing the link with traditions. Songs are for all occasions to express various moods and feelings as love, humour, satire, anger, sadness, to record and commemorate events, to reinforce social values and can be composed impromptu. They can be sung during work individually and collectively.

Appropriation of Art Forms

Theyyam is an ancient magical masked dance form prevalent in Tamil Nadu, Malabar, South Kanara and Tulunad (where it is called *Bhuta*), wherein the performer is the deity dancing out its presence before the collective. The Theyyam cult is a complex system of rituals and beliefs, narratives and music, dances and dialogues, social gatherings and entertainments, trances and oracles, healing and counselling, dispute resolutions and blessings, where the message of the divine being is conveyed (Dasan 2012: 2, 6). The dance is generally performed by Dalits. Some Adivasis of Kerala and Karnataka, such as the Mavilan in Kerala and the Meera and Koraga of Karnataka also perform this dance form.

The genesis of Theyyam can be found in the worship of ancestors, Mother and Nature (trees, animals, serpents), practised by people of ancient India. This indicated their respect for the sacredness of all life and the attempt to negotiate with positive and negative natural forces through propitiation, explanation and control. The Adivasis of Kerala still perform Theyyams worshipping their ancestors to ensure peace to the soul of the departed and to get their blessings. Once the people living in the forests began to practise slash-and-burn agriculture the concept of fertility of the soil and the body began to play a role in the collective psyche and the concept of the mother goddess, of the Earth Mother, took strong root among them. These mother goddesses are considered as part of the positive and negative natural forces and constitute a major part of the contemporary Theyyam deities.

With the feudalisation and Brahminical transformation of Keralan society the Theyyams too were incorporated into the stratified social order giving it sanctity rather than observing the ethos of common property resources. The land-owning system and plough agriculture introduced by Brahmins forced the indigenous peoples into either slavery or bonded labour. Many of the legends related to Theyyam reflect the unfair deal meted out to human beings (men and women),

particularly of the oppressed castes, by the feudal oppressor castes. Their traditions and rituals began to be appropriated and misinterpreted through interpolations in order to manufacture consent to their hegemony. Rituals reinforcing the purity-pollution principle began to be carried out prior to the performance.

Theyyam is considered to be an integrative occasion for Malayalee society, but it actually reinforces the caste hierarchy. For example, the Mavilans are ranked lower than the Dalits in terms of the acceptance of their performance before the dominant castes of Kerala and they are simpler, less spectacular and Hinduised than the ones performed by those caste groups ranked above them. This imposed internal hierarchy among the subaltern groups has been internalised by them and pre-empts the forging of unity among the competing performing communities vis-à-vis the exploitative treatment by the dominant castes. Those Dalits and Adivasis living at the margins of mainstream society have evolved hybrid highly stylised and sophisticated forms of the ritual dance.

At one point of time everyone should have participated in the ritual dance. Today, only some of the people, generally men—even if the deity concerned is female—perform it with the support of all others for everyone's well-being (Dasan 2012: 21). This male domination in the performing field is there despite the fact that goddesses outnumber gods in the Theyyam pantheon. Since most Theyyams are designed and performed by men even if they involve female deities this could in some cases be viewed as an appropriation of women's voices. In the case of some of the female deities they were made so because their chastity was falsely suspected and they preferred to die. To worship them later as deities actually fits into entrenched patriarchal discourses.

Some of the methods of appropriation by the dominant castes are as follows: There is a conscious attempt to Sanskritise the *thottams*, which are the ritual songs of the Theyyam giving information regarding socio-cultural life, practices and beliefs, and also containing criticism on slavery, caste and gender discrimination and other social evils. The indigenous deities, who had no anthropomorphic form, have been gradually interpreted as one or other of the Hindu gods or its incarnations; especially the indigenous female gods/deities were made either wife or sister of the Vedic male god/deity. Furthermore, the myths and legends have been reinterpreted to suit the hegemonic agenda blunting their critical edge. Animal sacrifice and the offering of blood were changed into a vegetarian mode by splitting ash gourd and sprinkling red powder (kumkum) on it. The sacred groves (*kavus*) which were the locus of indigenous rituals and worship were converted into *kshethrams* (temples) in which the Brahmin priests dominate. Considering

the indigenous people's rituals unclean and primitive they are relegated to specific marginal areas of the temples now owned and controlled by the oppressor castes. Even the codification and definition of the Theyyams was done by them through stealing the knowledge from its practitioners. This also enabled the falsifying interpolations in the original legends. Slavery by the dominant castes was also enforced using religion and inventing new myths, legends and rituals using the element of fear displacing the emotions of wonder and reverence that were features of their traditional religion.

As oral narratives *thottams* have no rigid authentic form; they take on minor variations according to the context, narrators and performers. But once they are collected and published in printed form it becomes an authentic fixed version. This is tantamount to an infringement of their intellectual and cultural property rights. The performer becomes bound to the printed version set down by the dominant sections, which may result in a bundle of inconsistencies and contradictions (Dasan 2012: 90-91). Patronage of this religious art form by members of the oppressor castes is also used in various ways to reinforce their domination. They choose the performer, for instance, take other important decisions with regard to the rituals, and expect paeans of their august selves before the performance. Though presently all-caste and all-party committees have been set up for organising the Theyyam festivals the dominant caste members have the upper hand in them.

Interaction between divergent cultures leads to acculturation or assimilation of elements of one by the other. In the case of an unequal relationship between the two some pitfalls may arise. When a 'modern' materially richer culture appropriates elements from the art practices of another culture, specifically from a so-called primitive one, it is often done without any real understanding and involves taking the practice out of its social context rendering it meaningless and making it into a commodity for the consumption of the materially better-off dominant sections. These sections may also involve themselves in the production process influencing the motifs and other creative processes. In the end the original culture is silenced and erased, its rebellious edge subdued, memories wiped out, just as the people are in the political processes due to their economic marginalisation.

In India, in pre-colonial times, the process of the suppression and/or appropriation of divergent strains of culture and thought was at times so thorough and violent that often texts expressing these alternative thoughts are no longer available. We have to reconstruct them from the counter arguments available in the Brahminical texts. During the anti-colonial movement and in the post-colonial period the construction of the Indian nation has in no sense always been

a democratic one politically or culturally. The hegemony of the Brahmin-Bania combine continues. The tourism industry catering to the domestic and international elite has everywhere, including in Kerala, appropriated and decontextualised the Adivasi rituals and art forms and package them as exotic spectacles for the voyeuristic amusement-oriented consumption of mobile camera-toting 'others' in their vacuous leisure time. 'Tribal dances' are performed at hotels near National Parks. Or to cater to the spiritualistic healing needs of those suffering tensions and neuroses in the capitalist materialistic West, a certain version of philosophical Hinduism sans its imperialistic violence to other traditions is manufactured and marketed. The advertising, fashion, media and education industries have also appropriated these forms as part of the nationalist imagination in an attention-drawing exploitative way concealing the contradictions involved.

Adivasi dances from all over India are presented in the Republic Day Parade in the capital city of Delhi. In the States, Independence Day and other festivals and celebrations also have the State Adivasis performing their respective dances. Apart from being spectacles this has also got ritualistic value for the ruling classes and the general public. These ethnic groups get recognition as part of the regional State culture and attract the same touristy crowds. At the same time, the hegemony of the dominant classes/castes goes unchallenged through this patronage and control of the performance and performers.

It is ironical that the system which thrives on the logic of intellectual and cultural property rights is at the same time ruthless in appropriating and marketing the indigenous cultural expressions least bothering about the very same rights. Australian aboriginals and First Nation Canadians have defended their cultural property rights as they are ensured in the UN Convention on Tangible and Intangible Cultural Property Rights. The process by which Adivasi art has been incorporated into other art traditions and the way their culture is presented is not an equalitarian intercultural one. Often intermediaries from the dominant sections are involved. Even if this intermediating role is carried out by an Adivasi, who has the requisite language and other skills for this, they tend to get singled out repeatedly as the sole spokespersons/representatives of their communities neglecting the voices of the vast majority of their ethnic group. The availability of skilled performers, musicians and other artists is not commensurate with the demand, and members of other castes for whom these were not hereditary occupations are entering the fray. There is much more experimentation taking the performance away from the ritualistic element further into the sphere of spectacle and celebration, festival and carnival. In some urban areas like Calicut it becomes one part of a variety of entertainments offered at the same time. The noise from modern urban civilisation has increased.

Media, particularly those of TV and cinema, have made inroads into Adivasi culture. Rather than representing their voices, their problems, their lost wealth, their struggles, in their own languages, these media act as a mainstreaming channel like the education system. All India Radio, for example, has no channel in any tribal language. Faced by such an onslaught loss of cultural values such as co-operation and sharing, promotion of consumer goods, dying out of art, craft and music traditions, tales, folk songs, performing arts, notions of aesthetics and so on are reported and visible in their lifestyles. Even as the Adivasi culture and means of livelihood are being destroyed, their arts, crafts and herbal products with design inputs by NGOs and other middle persons are finding urban markets both in India and abroad. Trade in Adivasi paintings has become a lucrative national and international business. There are art galleries specialising in Indian tribal art in India and abroad. As in the case of the weavers, who are mercilessly fleeced by the middlemen, well-known tribal artists and painters are also fleeced by national and international traders, who may contract them on a small monthly salary for producing their art works, and then sell the output at much higher prices in the international art market. Art that is produced for commercial sale in this way has no community-based productive links anymore, and the individual artist works almost in the relationship of a bonded labourer to the middleman. A celebrated Gond artist, Mr. Jangarh Singh Shyam, committed suicide in Japan in 2001 while working under just such conditions.

Oral and Written Literatures

Pathaal Ganga (subterranean Ganga) is a term coined by Gujarati Dalit poet Kishan Sosa to describe subaltern artistic and literary discourses. Adivasi literatures till the recent past have been mostly oral traditions in the form of songs and folktales/stories/myths representing their world view and social value systems. Conservation of plants and animals of the forest is part of their lifestyle, faith and traditions, fables and folklore. The storytelling tradition of the Lepcha tribe, for instance, is unique in its environmental educational content and is a repository of environmental history. Amalee, the last shaman of the Paniyar, says, "If we do not have our stories, what do we have? How will we know that the tiger is our great guardian? How will my grandchildren know that these Blue Mountains are our homeland? How will we know who we were?"[2] It is ironical that people with this history of co-existence with wild animals like tigers despite losing occasional livestock to them are today considered undesirable elements in today's tiger reserves. Oral traditions include the history of the communities as well as knowledge

about the geographical area they live in, which is carried on from generation to generation. The level of ecological monitoring that these people living in symbiotic relationships with nature undertake cannot be replicated by modern formal science with all its technological gadgetry.

This literary heritage is now acknowledged by academics as orature with its own aesthetics. Their oral literature is usually intermixed with song, music, dance, ritual and craft. With literacy slowly penetrating into their ranks writers too have emerged among the Adivasis. Dalit literature asserted itself as a literary trend along with the rise of the Dalit Panthers, particularly in Maharashtra. Marathi writers such as Atmaram Rathod, Laxman Mane and Laxman Gaikwad from nomadic tribal communities, depicting the life of these communities in fictional or autobiographical form, were subsumed under Dalit literature. Soon independent tribal literary organisations came up promoting their specific issues. They have begun to use the print medium like writing books and novels and publishing magazines, forming theatre groups and writing, directing and performing plays. There is a remarkable increase in the number of books being published in Adivasi languages.

Kocharethi, *Ooralikudi* and *Vannala* are novels written in Malayalam by Narayan, an Adivasi. Much of the modern poetry by Adivasis is protest literature against their exploitation, destruction and annihilation; they sing songs of freedom; they self-assert and they also self-criticize. Little magazines like *Gothra Bhoomi* from Kerala, websites, mobile phone radio platforms, and literary conferences complete the scene for the emergence of contemporary literature by and for Adivasis. This is apart from writers like Mahasweta Devi and Pratibha Ray, who have written on their behalf. In addition, feature filmmakers have made films with Adivasi protagonists and engaged filmmakers have made documentary and short films dealing with their problems including one by Ritwik Ghatak entitled *Adivasiyon ka Jeevan Srot* (The Life Source of the Adivasis). Some Adivasi ethnic groups such as the Santhal have entered this particular medium also.

Adivasi culture on the whole reflects their communitarian ethos. Formerly, among many such ethnic groups the houses used to be in a circular cluster and, at the centre, the people used to keep the fire burning throughout the night in cold weather. They dance and sing mostly in circular forms with their arms often interlinking. Men and women usually dance separately, but occasionally together and intermingled to reinforce their communal co-operative way of life. Because the Adivasi is standing on the brink of extinction, a whole continent of India's creative energy is rapidly sinking (Devy 2006: 190).

Concept of Work

There was no dichotomy between work and worship. Because of their belief in spirits hunting was also a sacred pastime and had a ritualistic aspect. Work as such is a supreme virtue and, depending on the terrain, these people are accustomed to hard labour. An idle man is the subject of scorn. Excessive indulgence, laziness and selfishness are looked down upon. Straightforwardness, honesty, fearlessness are cherished virtues. Solidarity, mutual co-operation and a sense of responsibility are characteristic of these communities. Among the Nicobarese an individual or family is expected to fulfil the obligations, duties and needs of the community first and then attend to those pertaining to their own needs. Work is also a celebration. Traditionally, the Paniyas of Kerala not only sing and dance during work; they make it into a ritual. Planting of paddy saplings is done in a reverential mood, gracefully and rhythmically.

In an article, *From Forest to Factory: The Santhal Conception of Labour*, Marine Carrine-Bouez, the writer, says that in the mythical origin, work is related to death. During the golden age, Santhals did not have to work. Work and death were introduced in their world by the Hindu god, Thakur. Traditionally, the Santhal term for work, *kami*, has its origin in the Hindi word *kam*. Their own term, *raska*, is of Mundari origin and means pleasure. Santhals work for others and receive work from others, but these are within the kinship framework of *ghar jamai*.[3]

In the Ho language there are two different words for work (for oneself and one's kin) and labour (alienated work for others for receiving wages). The corresponding words are *paiti* and *nalla*. *Paiti* is creative, honoured and relished. On certain occasions, *paiti* for others becomes obligatory and this is called *hermoot*. It has greater depth of meaning than helping one's neighbour. *Hermoot* is collective ploughing and sowing for the blessings of nature 'for all collectively and equally.' This concept eliminates unhealthy individual competition and maintains egalitarianism in prosperity.

> "When one sells his/her ability to work for money such work is called *nalla*. It was shameful to do *nalla*. *Nalla* was forced on them after the arrival of the demonic *dikku*. When there is no food and, therefore, no *paiti*, they are forced to go out to do *nalla*. *Nalla* keeps them away from starvation and death. Before the arrival of the *dikku*, there was no *nalla*, and only *paiti* was practised. This means that with the arrival of the *dikku* dramatic changes came about forcing them to do something that they had never done before and which was

> considered shameful. They see *paiti* as work done for their progress; it keeps their village together, happy and healthy. But *nalla,* they realise, is for someone else's progress. Hence, while *paiti* makes their lives and community better, *nalla* makes someone else better. *Nalla* makes them coolies and *rejas* or *mazdoors* (labourers). It alienates them from the spiritual dimensions of work" (Dias Xavier, Keynote address, Mazdoor Adhikar Sammelan Chaibasa. Cited in *Labour File,* November 2006: 7).

Unremunerated and forced labour for others is a legacy of feudal times. *Nalla deshum* is the country where *nalla* is available and migration there is done only under compulsion in the absence of survival means in their own homelands due to deforestation, ecological havoc and devaluation of their own tradable products and skills.

Adivasis are generally hardworking, hospitable and kind to one another. They are affectionate fathers, loving husbands and loyal friends, but suspicious of strangers. They hate pride as it divides and disrupts unity; they condemn miserliness as a kind of theft; they reproach scandal-mongers as stealing a man's good name. Any man who does not work is, in their view, a thief because he takes his share of food without doing his share of work (Satyanarayana 1975: 75). But becoming rich through work that entails stripping the earth of its resources is not something to be strived for; if you do that you are forsaking the earth and will not be able to guard it.

The Irulas of Tamil Nadu have their special skills of snake catching and venom extraction. They have developed nature-friendly organic farming and conservation practices, medicinal plant use and herbal healing systems, which need revitalisation. Many skills of house building using rammed earth, protection from many insect pests through the use of cow dung manure as a house plaster and umpteen other cultural practices innovated by the indigenous peoples are more sound than the modern chemicals-based and polluting, environmentally destructive practices in modern house building, transportation and agriculture.

The traditional skills, knowledge and arts of Adivasis can and are being used to create livelihood opportunities as in the case of anti-venom serum production by the Irulas, embroidery by Toda women, honey collection by Kurumbas, and earthen pot-making by Kotas. Traditional skills should not be allowed to die out even as it does not mean that Adivasis should not take to other occupations and professions or that non-Adivasis cannot learn and practise their crafts, music,

dance and occupational skills and develop an understanding of the world view on which they are based.

Adivasi Women

The mother goddess concept is also linked to the actual and magical function of the periodic apportioning of the communal land and its produce equally among the tribal members and this was the original and most important function of queenship since the times of the great matriarchal riparian agriculture during early Indus Valley Civilisation. Women ruled the tribe and its constituents politically; marriage was matrilocal and descent and inheritance were in the female line. This is called *stri-rajya*, that is, matriarchy, or rule of the mother. Though Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, three major religions of the world, right from their commencement have been patriarchal, they have not been able to overcome the most important vestiges of matriarchy in regions or countries which passed over to the agricultural stage without previously having to go through the pastoral stage (Patil 1982: 100-4).

Women had more or less equal status with men in the tribal modes of production. Their decision-making power is conditioned by control of the family economy—the forest-based economy of food gathering and slash-and-burn agriculture—where they played a major role. They are generally treated with respect and, though not members of the councils, they exert strong and positive influence on their working and decision-making through the male family members. When being integrated into the wider capitalist framework the council can be manipulated by leading families and clans to further their own interests; patriarchy and parochialism become entrenched, lesser clans and families are pushed into lower strata. Among tribes also some can attain a dominant status. Customary law is also a means by which the dominant sections hold on to their power and could keep patriarchy entrenched, whereby men represent the household in public affairs hindering full and equal participation by women in self-governance.

Many Adivasi villages have the institution of dormitories for the young boys and girls, where they sleep during the nights. As the system of territorial exogamy is strictly enforced, dancing expeditions visit neighbouring villages during nights where boys and girls meet each other. These institutions provide opportunities for unmarried young men and maidens to stabilise and strengthen intimacies which may be a prelude to marriage. These dormitories also play a role in the village economy. During the agricultural season when the cultivators need the services

of extra hands, they approach the dormitory chief who directs the boys and girls to render all possible help. They also help in thatching, erecting cottage walls and undertaking other house-building activities. During a marriage ceremony the boys collect fuel and leaves, and help in all possible ways, while the girls prepare dishes for the wedding feast. The dormitories thus work as a kind of overall youth organisation (Satyanarayana 1975: 83).

There are plenty of opportunities for meetings between boys and girls of marriageable age. Premarital sexual unions are common and tolerated. There is freedom of movement and voluntary unions are recognised. Often, it is the girl's choice that prevails. A youth, if he is particularly attracted by the charms of a girl, does not generally bother about her previous love affairs. No high expenses are incurred during the marriage ceremony. Divorce is as free as marriage and no formal procedure is laid down. Adultery is not considered a cause for throwing a wife out. The male culprit can get away by paying a fine in the form of a feast for the elders. Sometimes more stringent punishments may be there. On the whole, marriages are characterised by fidelity and restraint. Divorce and widow remarriage are permitted and tolerated, but not inter-tribal marriages or marrying someone from another community. Those who do so or even indulge in extra-marital or sexual relations with anyone outside the community are not accepted and may even be punished for this act by their village or community elders. Christian Todas are not considered to be Todas, for example, for they are seen to have broken with the basic traditions and customs of the community.

With the slow demise of the dormitory institution and the penetration of the values of patriarchal society the spontaneous expressions of love among the youth are facing inroads and sadly violence is seen to become a part of sexual relations. This trend has been given an impetus by the spread of pornography, especially rape porn, via mobile phones. With development tearing their societies asunder young Adivasis become vulnerable to aspiring for and imitating hitherto shunned *dikku* values, which include the subordination and exploitation of women sexually and as labour power.

Women's role in rituals is limited or they are completely excluded. Toda women were not allowed near the sacred dairies. Priests are exclusively men who carry out the various rituals, which women are not allowed to carry out. Among the Warlis of Maharashtra too the women are debarred from participating in the entire cycle of magico-religious ceremonies. When tribes take to settled agriculture the division of labour of caste-based society is often taken over in that the women are tabooed from using the plough. Such and other restrictions imposed on them

on the basis of purity/pollution basis are reflective of the asymmetries existing in gender relations. On this front, too, Adivasi women have begun to take initiatives to upturn patriarchal practices while asserting Adivasi identity. One instance is the worship of *Sarna Mata* in the Adivasi belt of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh. Traditionally prohibited from entering sacred groves (*sarnas*), women are now reporting possession by *Sarna Mata* (earth mother) and are gathering in these hitherto prohibited groves for her worship. This worship includes concerted efforts to protect the *sarnas* and regenerate their biodiversity. Alienated Adivasi lands are being reclaimed by claiming they are the abode of *Sarna Mata*. By coming together for this worship the women also support each other against patriarchal oppression manifested in wife-beating, etc. This movement is not confined only to the Adivasi women of the region (see Borde 2009).

In their indigenous economies they were/are agriculturalists, artisans, mothers and healers. Spinning and weaving cloth have been, like agriculture, the invention of women, and in antiquity were exclusively in their hands. Irula women, for example, are known for their wonderful knowledge of various herbal medicinal plants and their uses and as healers and craftspersons. As unskilled or semi-skilled (in terms of modern industries) migrant labour they are employed in agriculture, domestic work, construction, brick kilns, mining and industry, and petty trade. In fact, women constitute the majority of the workforce in the rural areas of southern India. Among Dalits and Adivasis constraints on women working outside the house are less and it is not a prestige issue. It is an economic necessity. Usually such migration is in family units but the women workers are paid less than their male counterparts, or their wages may be paid to the husband and not to them individually. Children who work in a family unit may not be paid at all. The entire family may have to work because piece rates are so low. If the man only migrates and leaves the women and children at home, it is obviously a problematic and difficult situation for her in many ways. Earnings of women are spent on family needs. Husbands often squander their earnings on drinking, smoking and gambling and indulge in wife-beating. The women have to use their wages for the household expenses. Often women reduce the amount of food they consume to keep households running. In many tribal communities land rights are not enjoyed by women.

The plight of the Adivasi women is an index of the depths of degradation and deprivation that is the lot of the Adivasis in general as a result of 'integration' into the mainstream. The burdens on the migrant Adivasi women workers are high and multifarious. Their workload has often increased, unless they are in some

government job with fixed salaries irrespective of work done. They may be subject to various forms of sexual harassment and exploitation, rape and other forms of insult and humiliation including physical beating, especially as domestic workers. Perpetrators could be forest officials, estate/farm/house owners, moneylenders, revenue officers, police and other non-Adivasis. All over South India, in forest areas, the price of permission to collect minor forest produce is often coerced sexual favours. Though women do the bulk of the collection of resources like fuel, fodder and NTFP they have very little direct role in the decision-making about the management of natural resources. Their views are often conveyed through their husbands or other male family members. But in multi-caste and class societies their men are also underprivileged and excluded from any major decision-making roles.

With the exception of mining and industry, where they usually work as contract or temporary/casual workers, they come under the unorganised sector earning low wages and losing their health. The influx of outsiders in their areas leads to an increased lack of safety. As workers in the unorganised sector they are exploited, inhumanly treated, cheated, raped and terrorised by the rich people, the forest officials, and footloose migrants. Indigenous women worldwide are vulnerable to sexual predation on the sites of extractive mining projects. Women's labour in conjunction with migration (whether women migrate or not) serves as a means of subsidising others: local capital, capital at the destination site, contractors, and men in general. The overall impact is one of an intensified extraction of surplus from women, with the benefits distributed to different social sectors and actors.[4]

Being often illiterate they are ignorant and naive about the world outside their own domains. They are unable to have an adequate and balanced diet. Adivasi women are more susceptible to diseases than men on the whole. Sickle cell anaemia, high blood pressure, heart diseases and other health problems are more common among them and more neglected. Alcoholism is a health and financial issue among both men and women due to the imposed changes coming into their lives and not being able to cope with them. In the case of men it can lead to domestic violence against women. Adivasi women have participated in anti-liquor agitations to combat this evil. Child marriages are common. The practice of dowry has permeated into some Adivasi communities to some extent; in others the practice of bride price continues. Cases of female infanticide have started coming up, though female foeticide is as yet unknown. Acute poverty and preference for male children have led to the killing or sale of baby girls in some Adivasi hamlets of Andhra Pradesh (see Box). In some cases, bride price acts like a selling of the daughters for a price by the father; it is an alternative income source and could in some cases be spent on drinking. Bride price as well as dowry can weigh hard on poor parents and

in some communities has led to a regressive sex ratio among children with more boys than girls. The government also tries to implement aggressive family planning programmes among these vulnerable people. Instances of forced sterilisation have come to light.

Disposable Daughters

Among Adivasis, cultural degradation has crept in on many levels: alcoholism, prostitution, drug addiction, sale of female infants as by the Lambadas of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. This last one is an illustration of how 'well-meant' governmental tribal welfare programmes are actually impacting on the Adivasi culture and way of life. Lambada women started selling their girl children for adoption by Western couples at a pittance because the scourge of dowry had entered into their community. Girl children, who hitherto had been loved and welcomed in the same way as male offspring, began to be perceived as an unbearable burden. First, this led to the practice of female infanticide. Then, later, a well-organised 'adoption' racket came to light, whereby women agents of some NGOs and child care centres were found to be scouring the Lambada *tandas* (settlements) for unwanted baby girls, 'booking' the babies and buying them for a few thousand rupees once they were born, if they turned out to be female. Collusion of government departments and agencies was alleged in allowing the sale of these new-born babies to adoption centres, which in turn sold them to foreign couples at much higher prices ranging from $3000 to $20,000. These were particularly interested in procuring Lambada children because of their fair complexion and looks which, it seems, match more with those of Westerners unlike the looks of other Adivasi groups.

The Lambada families who resorted to this were usually highly indebted as a result of their general lack of land and other resources. Hailing from Nalgonda and Chincholi in A.P., some of them were carrying out cultivation on encroached forest lands, or trying to live by collecting tendu leaves, for which they were regularly hauled up by the forest and excise officials concerned. The evil of dowry crept into the community around 1977 after the State government of A.P. recognised the Lambadas as a Scheduled Tribe and threw open government jobs to them under reservation. Men with some

education and a government job were able to assure economic stability and prestige to the girls they married, and so the system of boys paying bride price and bearing the marriage expenses was overturned. Today, even an illiterate Lambada youth demands and gets Rs. 20,000 to 30,000 as dowry with all marriage expenses paid for by the bride's father. While girl children can fetch Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 10,000 in the 'adoption' market, there are cases in Nalgonda district of 'distress' sales by 'thirsty' fathers for a few bottles of country liquor. Girls have been sold into prostitution for the same reason sometimes.

Source "Dispensable Daughters" by R. Akhileshwari, *Deccan Herald*, 14 May 2000.

The earlier practice of witch-hunting among some communities, an expression of the gender struggle for power, has got incorporated into the consumerist and acquisitive culture that is making its inroads into Adivasi society. Women who own assets can be targeted and killed as witches if their assets are coveted by relatives. This is related to the transition of community or family control of property to that of individual ownership of property which is invariably in the name of men, while women have a right to maintenance only unless the tribe happens to be matrilineal or those where property is shared equally among sons and daughters. Patrilineality is a greater trend. The amendment in 2005 in the Hindu Succession Act granted equal property rights to women. In the same way as women of other religions such as Christianity, Islam and Sikhism continue to be under their own patriarchal personal laws, women belonging to tribal communities are also excluded from this Act and customary law prevails when it comes to inheritance.

While in the case of men the movement to the non-agricultural sector is greater, women have largely remained in agriculture. Common Property Resources are important to their well-being and if 'development' induced displacement deprives them of these it affects their economic and social status. Rehabilitation packages invariably give land, if at all, in the name of the head of the family, a male. In the case of jobs provided to displaced persons by industrial projects on the formula of one job per family it is usually males who get these jobs. Housewification and its consequent loss of status and independent income is often the result. Secure and effective land rights for women are a very important factor. Some patriarchal Adivasi groups as the Mundas exclude a daughter from all shares in the family property and dispose of her in marriage without reference to her inclinations (Hoffman 2005: 14).

Adivasi and Dalit fisherwomen are affected by mechanisation of the sector. Fish peeling women face displacement from the mechanised peeling units and the net-weaving women face displacement due to the introduction of net-making machines. Similarly, grinding of coffee berries earlier done manually by Adivasi women in Kerala is now done mechanically leading to loss of work. On the other hand, feminisation of labour is a trend in agriculture. In some States as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat the BT cotton fields have a good number of Adivasi girl children as labourers. They are preferred because they are low cost and being young are suited for the manual cross pollination work of hybrid and GM varieties. However, this is a highly hazardous occupation as the children come in close contact with toxic pesticides.

The general economic instability has hit the institution of family badly and has made marriages more unstable, too. It has increased the incidence of pre- and extra-marital relationships, the breaking up of families, sexual assault and aggression and the desertion by men of older wives for younger women. In such a situation the incidence of sex work has increased and so has the spread of venereal diseases. HIV positive cases are also found. The phenomenon of teenage unwed tribal mothers where the fathers are largely non-Adivasi is a highly exploitative one. Adivasi women are also taking recourse to remaining single like many a dominant caste woman to avoid the marital problems of an unequal, often exploitative, relationship.

Tourism is another threat to Adivasi women. Non-Adivasis settle down in the Scheduled Areas for petty trades, contracts, establishing entertainment and hotel industries thereby displacing the local tribal communities from their lands and resources, forcing some Adivasi women into prostitution and subjecting them to other forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. It has led to Adivasi women being deserted by the non-Adivasi men after short-term liaisons and they then face ostracism from their own communities. When development programmes are allotted for Adivasi women they have to go to various government offices to get the programmes sanctioned. In this process they may encounter sexual harassment at the hands of some of the officials. They also have to be at the beck and call of officials and contractors who come to tribal areas to implement development projects.[5]

The brutal suppression of ethnic assertion in the North-East by the Indian Army over the years, where the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) continues to remain in force, has hit the women there the hardest leading to a fear psychosis and innumerable tragedies. But indigenous women of the North-East

have organised themselves and are in the forefront in the fight for the repeal of this Act. In Chhattisgarh, Operation Green Hunt (2009-10), the military counter insurgency operation run jointly by the Central and State governments and the corporate sponsored Adivasi militia Salwa Judum, the meaning of which in Gondi is ironically 'peace campaign' or 'purification hunt,' also hit Adivasi women very hard. CRPF personnel were accused of rape and sexual slavery. Incidentally, among the reservists are young Nagas and Mizos whose people themselves have been and are similar targets. Girls feel scared of even going to school. This is the case in all wars. A.P. Greyhounds (who are directly answerable only to the Chief Minister) and special police forces in other States not only indulge in encounter killings of Adivasis and Dalits in the name of anti-Maoist operations but have been accused of gang rapes too. Rape of the womenfolk is established military tactics in the response of the Indian Army and paramilitary forces to insurgency as in the case of the Naga movement for self-determination.

Sad to say, when the suppressed nationalities reassert their identity the experience and suppression of the women are not taken as the starting point for establishing a just society. In national liberation movements and in the class struggle to assert rights and overthrow bourgeois rule the women of the most oppressed castes and classes often fight alongside the men and often take the brunt in the form of assault and rape. But once the struggle is over the women are pushed back by the men and expected to wait endlessly for the coming utopia where they can enjoy social dignity and equal status. Where Adivasis have converted to Christianity, this too has failed to bring about full parity in gender relations.

There are cases of Adivasi women emerging as political leaders earlier and currently. Many Adivasi women, such as C.K. Janu of Wayanad in Kerala, have emerged as fighters and leaders in the general struggles for the restoration of their rights and improvements in their conditions of living. As Ruth Manorama asserts, the issues facing the Dalit and Adivasi women should become the focus of the women's movement in India. Within this indigenous women in north-eastern India have their own priorities. Indigenous women all over the world are organising and fighting for their rights within the framework of the self-determination rights of indigenous peoples.

Need to Preserve Linguistic Diversity

Out of the total number of languages currently spoken in the world, estimated at around 6500, about 96% are small languages spoken by marginalised groups that

are becoming extinct at a rate that surpasses the extinction of plant and animal species. It is estimated that half of these languages maybe extinct by the end of the twenty-first century. UNESCO has identified about 196 endangered languages in India. While most Great Andamanese tribes are extinct or on the brink of extinction together with their respective languages, the Sentinelese and Jarawa languages in A&N are in the critically endangered list. So is the Toda language in the Nilgiris. Linguistic and cultural diversity are interlinked and human ethnic diversity is linked to biological diversity, though there may be a certain degree of autonomy as well. Those regions that are biologically more diverse tend to have a greater variety of languages being spoken such as the North-East in India. Generally, if biodiversity vanishes, as is increasingly happening, ethnic diversity too gets diminished.

When an ethnic group is fully or partially assimilated into another loss of language may happen without the group or its dialect disappearing. This fusion of tribal groups into nationalities with corresponding linguistic homogenisation trends has been considered a progressive trend.

The privileging of language/s dates back to feudal society. The tribal societies and states had carried on their affairs in their own languages. The feudal system introduced the practice of all religious ceremonies being carried out in the Sanskrit language, which ceased to be a language spoken by the people. Shudras, Ati-Shudras and women could only speak in the Prakrits and were not allowed to learn Sanskrit.

Adivasi languages belong to several language groups: Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman and Dravidian. Missionaries have played a role in helping the Adivasi languages get a written script and in collecting their oral literature forms. This has happened in the cases of the Mundari, Khasi and the Lepcha languages, for example. On the one hand, due to the state policies and the kind of development taking place, many small minority ethnic groups have lost their mother tongues, such as the Oraons and the Bo; among many others there is a resurgence of cultural identity which includes linguistic assertion. The trend to declare local languages as the mother tongue has shot up and there are concerted efforts to preserve and develop languages. Those languages earlier classified as dialects are also being asserted as languages by their speakers.

There is controversy over whether Devanagari, Roman, a local-regional script should be used, or a new one invented. Some of the Adivasi languages in Andhra/Telangana, Odisha, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh have had scripts designed for them. Other languages such as that of the Toda are

still in the process of acquiring a written script as part of cultural identity assertion. Raghunath Murmu had developed the Ol Chiki script for the Santhali language in 1905, which now has three scripts. Many Adivasi languages do not have a script as yet.

The People's Linguistic Survey of India led by G.N. Devy in 2010-11 found that the number of living languages in India is approximately 850. This implies a forest of languages, but the number of languages recognised as official languages listed in the Eighth Schedule is 22. Manipuri or Meiteilon as it is called by its speakers was added after a prolonged violent agitation in 1992; Santhali and Bodo were added in 2003 through the 92nd amendment. There are no other tribal languages in the Schedule. The 1961 Census reports mentioned a total of 1,652 'mother tongues,' with some of these languages being spoken by even less than five speakers, others by around 1,000 and some below 10,000. This is in the background of the fact that linguistic plurality is a characteristic of the people of India including the Adivasi groups. Most Adivasis (64% it has been estimated) living in close contact with other communities are bilingual, many are multilingual. They are conversant with the regional/State language spoken in their vicinity. 'Mixed' languages such as Nagamese in Nagaland and Sadri in the Jharkhand have emerged for inter-community communication. Looking at this data it seems that half the languages have become extinct within a period of 50 years. And speakers of languages other than the main official ones were constrained to pick up one or the other of these in order to carry out their livelihoods and often return these as their mother tongue during census operations.

In this multi-nationality subcontinent, including in countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, there is a privileging of some of the languages of the dominant nationalities. This is the case worldwide. The fact of West European languages like English becoming the global lingua franca and European languages like German and French being privileged over the teaching of local languages in Third World countries are a reflection of the economic and political market domination of the respective nationalities worldwide, in short of neo-colonialism in full bloom. Such a spectacular variety of linguistic multifariousness is actually the collective heritage of humankind and the phonocide of a large number of them is not in our collective interest. Traditional local knowledge is getting lost along with languages due to non-utility in the modern context. In the process of occupation and settlement by outsiders meaningful place names get distorted into meaningless ones, such as Darjeeling (an anglicised derivation from Lepcha 'Daarjyoolyaang' which meant the abode of gods and deities).

In India, the languages that had scripts were taken into account and if the number of speakers is small they do not get covered by the Census of India operations. The ones that had not acquired scripts, and therefore did not have printed literature, did not get their own States during linguistic reorganisation. Schools and colleges were established only for the official language groups. The ones without scripts, even if they had a great stock of wisdom carried forward orally, were not provided with state educational institutions. However, a guarantee for providing patronage was enshrined in the Constitution in Article 347.[6]

Universities such as Ranchi University are teaching some Adivasi and local languages. Some universities in West Bengal have Santhali departments. Bharathiar University of Tamil Nadu has been documenting Adivasi languages since 1995. The Centre for Dalit and Adivasi Studies and Translation of the University of Hyderabad is undertaking translation of manuscripts written in the extinct Gondi script into Hindi and Telugu (*The Hindu*, 20 January 2014). Classic works in English, Persian and Sanskrit have been translated into Gojri, the language of the Gujjar tribe of J&K and more are in the pipeline. The Centre for Endangered Languages set up at Visva-Bharati under the UGC has the purpose of documenting endangered small languages in India. On the international level the National Geographic Society runs the Enduring Voices project. But documentation of dying and endangered languages, that is, creating dictionaries, grammars, recordings and such like cannot and should not be a substitute for undertaking requisite measures so that the communities together with their languages themselves stay alive.

The provision of opportunities for growth of every kind for even the languages of minor, so-called backward ethnic groups should be part of a truly democratic policy and one that promotes peace and justice. It is only by according the rights of all ethnic groups, communities and languages, large and small, to grow equally that social unity can be ensured. Likewise, each State can ensure its internal integration by according recognition to the small languages wherever these exist within its borders. The small ethnic groups should be given all rights to their languages and cultures for their full economic and social development in a framework of self-determination. Each language has not only a communicative function but a cognitive one too and is a fount of knowledge about the particular terrain in which it has emerged and the life sustained there, and hence carries universal value. Language is intrinsic to a group's culture and perception of its environment, which in the case of aboriginals can be incredibly nuanced. If not suppressed, it can lead to a great explosion of creativity of the mind.

New Liberationist Ethnic Identity and Consciousness

Dogmatic interpretations of loosely articulated statements by Marx and Engels led many a Marxist to affirm a theory of productive forces, whereby productive forces were narrowly understood as production technology. Moreover, that it is the hampering of the development of the material productive forces which necessitates a revolution in the production relations. Such an interpretation fails to clearly mention that if production relations have seen many stages of development, these stages ensuing in the course of class struggles have been in the interest of the dominant, exploitative classes in human history and while they have (seemingly) led to greater freedom of the subaltern sections they have also led to their greater degree of exploitation to the exponential benefit of the ruling sections.

Marxism also places prime emphasis on contradiction and struggle as the motive forces of development. The basic contradiction in 'primitive' society is seen as that between humans and Nature viewing humans' dependency on the bounty of Nature only in a negative way. In class-based society conflict is between man and man for the control of the material produced from the 'struggle' with Nature. The problem of the conflict between man and woman is overlooked and so is the deep chasm that has opened up between humans and Nature and the aspects of co-operation and interpenetration of all Being are completely ignored. This unreal perspective could only lead to very violent results. Egalitarianism and communal living are linked in a unilinear way with a low development of productive forces which did not allow for exploitation. Once surplus production allows for exploitative relations to come up and flourish, how can we on this basis build up a classless society? The following conclusions can be derived from this: For a classless society to exist we have to revert to an on the whole lower, simpler technological mode, or that the primary focus has to be on the development of consciousness and awareness that are geared towards justice and equality. Or it has to be a combination of these two aspects and possibly more.

In this context the question of the motive or driving forces of history become an important one. How do we account for the transition of pre-historical clan-communal society to a class or class- and caste-based one? Marx traces the disintegration of tribal society to internal destructive forces as the existence of private ownership and use of property within an overall communal system of production. Nevertheless, the incipient private dimension starts predominating only with population growth, technological advancement, and the consequent development of production, social division of labour and commodity exchange (Pathy 1984: 30). At the tribal level of society there used to be gift exchange of

several types to create and reinforce relationships of alliance between individuals and groups. Social division of labour, especially the distinction between mental and manual labour, undermines the collectivism of production and appropriation and creates exchange between individuals, and the transformation of the articles being exchanged into commodities forms the material base for a class order to come up (Thomson 1977: 175).

We can contrast this materialist approach with one Buddhist account of the origin of the state:

> There was a time in the remote past when complete harmony prevailed among all created beings, men and women, having no desires, as everything was provided for.
>
> Gradually, a process of decay began (the original sin, the fall of man) when needs, wants and desires became manifest. These led to the notion of ownership that resulted in the concept of family, which then led to private property. These in turn were followed by disputes and struggles that necessitated law and a controlling authority. Thus it was decided that, in order to avoid conflict, one person be elected to rule and maintain justice. He was to be the Great Elect and was given a fixed share in the produce of the land as a wage (Thapar 2003: 149).

The question that arises is: was it the herding of horses or other animals, or plough agriculture creating surplus wealth that gave rise to the domination of private property and the overthrow of the rule of the mothers replacing it with patriarchal control? Or were the motive forces those of greed and power, not just over other humans, but over Nature, too? Or both reasons combined. The much desired human mastery over Nature is only a reflection of exploitation of her finite resources and of becoming a slave of one's desires and emotions.

Do we believe in the mechanical Marxian axiom that it is not the consciousness of human beings that determines their existence, that on the contrary it is their social existence that determines their consciousness and that this social existence came about due to the contradiction between the material productive forces of society coming into contradiction with the existing property relations? Do we believe in watertight compartments of base and superstructure that get formed after a change or revolution in the former? Such an approach would be the epistemological one of reflectionism, the reflection in the subjective mind of objective reality, whereas reality is a continuum of subjective-objective and the mode of production includes consciousness/awareness,[7] and there is a reciprocity

between 'base' and 'superstructure.' Such an approach would focus more on change of consciousness and awareness, on mental liberation, on the development of a cosmic consciousness as a prerequisite for the social and economic revolution.

The early cultures of ancient humans are the result of millennia of trial and error in obtaining the best possible from the available resources. These were considered a gift of Nature and their ancestors and were meant to be used equitably keeping the interests of the entire community in mind; it was considered important to conserve them with care for the future generations. In modern parlance, these cultures were sustainable. In their world view there can be no property without human labour being invested. With the development of class and caste-based societies came the fall of man from an imagined shalomist, paradisiacal state. Are we willing to learn from them, update them, and create the kingdom of God on earth, where the interests of all are taken care of?

Notes

1. See V.S. Varughese: Cultural Disorganisation among the Adivasis: A Study of the Paniyas of Wayanad. *Religion and Society*. 44(2), June 1997, p. 103, citing F.S. Downs in his use of this terminology.
2. Cited by Salil Mukhia, co-founder of Acoustic Traditional, an initiative to revive ancient storytelling traditions.
3. J. John: Class or Community: The Existential Dichotomy of Adivasi Workers. *Labour File*, July-August 2006: 3. *Ghar jamai* is the marital system whereby the husband stays with and works for the wife's family.
4. See *The Political Economy of Migrant Labour* by Shankar Gopalakrishnan and Priya Sreenivasa. New Delhi: Aakar in association with SRUTI, 2009: 21.
5. See: Ajay Pathalil and Thresy Vallikappen: Social Exclusion: Health Concerns over Tribal Women and Children in Attappady, Kerala. In: Pranab Kumar Chattopadhyay (ed.): *Some Empirical Aspects of Economic Growth and Diversification in India's Emerging Economy*. New Delhi Publishers, 2014: 99-110.
6. This article reads: "On a demand made in that behalf, the President may, if he is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the population of the State desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognised by that State, direct that such language shall also be officially recognised throughout that State or any part thereof for such purposes as he may specify."
7. Man by nature is an artist. He never receives passively and accurately in his mind a physical representation of things around him. There goes on a continual adaptation,

a transformation of facts into human imagery, through constant touches of his sentiments, imagination and personal internal geography (Tagore 2008: 409).



This is an image of the still-continuing ancient mother goddess cult rituals that were practised in Afro-Arabia and India.

Photo\: Abul Kalam Azad

APPENDIX
MAJOR ADIVASI STRUGGLES AND MOVEMENTS

Year/s	Adivasi Group, Area and Event
1769	Khonds of northern Odisha and southern Jharkhand revolt against Robert Clive of the East India Company
1770-1787	Chakmas of Chittagong Hill Tracts rebel against the hegemony of the East India Company
1772, 1778, 1820, 1832, 1867, 1889	Revolt of the Pahariya Sardars of Chhotanagpur
1795-1800	Tamar and Munda revolt (under Vishnu Manki)
1800-1802, 1819-20	Munda revolts under Dhukan Manki and Bhukan Singh
1803	Koya uprising in the Rampa area of the East Godavari Agency in Andhra Pradesh
1809-1828	Bhil revolt in Gujarat
1811, 1817, 1820	Agrarian revolts by Adivasis in Bihar
1812	Revolt of Kurichiars and Kurumbas in Wayanad against the British

Year/s	Adivasi Group, Area and Event
1820, 1821, 1831-32, 1867	Munda, Ho, Oraon revolts in Chhotanagpur in Bihar against the British rulers, local moneylenders and zamindars
1825	Singphos attack and set fire to the British magazine at Sadiya in order to expel them from there
1827	Mishmis murder explorer Wilcox
1828	Singphos' chief attacks Sadiya with 3000 tribal warriors
1828-1830	Revolt of the Kolis in Thane district, Maharashtra
1829-33	Revolt of Khasis in Assam
1829	Khasi Tirot Singh massacres the British generals and their Indian sepoys
1831-32	The Great Kol Insurrection in Chhotanagpur against government officers and moneylenders
1832-33	Kherwar rising in Bihar under the leadership of Bhagirath
1833	Gonds of Sambalpur revolt
1833-34	Bhumij revolt under the leadership of Ganga Narain of Birbhum
1835	Daflas (of Arunachal Pradesh) raid the British plains' subjects and the British take to reprisals to avenge this raid
1835	The Raja of Jaintia Hills of Assam is deposed by the British owing to anti-British activities and given a pension
1836	Mishmis (Assam) kill botanist Griffiths suspecting his intentions
1837-1856	Kandha uprising in Odisha wherein the revolt of Chakra Bisoi in 1850 led the uprising to a new twist and turn
1838	Naik revolt in Gujarat
1839	Khamptis of Assam attack and kill the British agent Adam White and 80 others (inclusive of officers and soldiers)
1842	Captain Blunt's troops attacked by Bastar Gonds leading to the withdrawal of his troops
1842	Lushais (Assam) raid the British territory of Arakan, Sylhet and defeat the British forces
1843	Singpho chief, Nirang Phidu, attacks the British garrison and kills several soldiers

Year/s	Adivasi Group, Area and Event
1844	Lushais attack Manipuri villagers and in the ensuing massacre take 20 heads as trophies. Reprisal by the British follows and the leader, Lal Sukla, is arrested and transported for life
1846	Bhil revolt in Gujarat under the leadership of Kuwar Jivo Vasavo
1846	Khond insurrection in Ganjam in Odisha
1848-1856	Revolt of the Garos of Garo Hills
1848-1900	Abor rebellions in the North-East
1849	Kadma Singpho attacks British villages in Assam and is captured
1855-1856	Revolt (*Hul*) of the Santhals in Bihar and parts of Bengal against the Permanent Settlement of Lord Cornwallis to set up their own raj leading to the death of at least 30,000 of them
1857	First War of Independence with participation of various Adivasi groups
1857-58	Bhil revolt in Gujarat under the leadership of Bhagoji Naik and Kajar Singh
1857-1864	Sambhalpur revolt in Odisha
1858	Naikdas' revolt against the British in Gujarat
1860	Lushai chief raids British Tripura and kills 186 British subjects
1860-62	Revolt of the Syntengs of Jaintia Hills of Assam
1861	The Phulagiri uprising of tribal peasants
1861	The Juang revolt in Odisha
1862-1879	Koya revolt against the *muttadars*, the corrupt police and their supporters, the British, in Andhra
1867-68	Bhuyan uprising of Keonjhar in Odisha
1869-70	Santhal unrest in Dhanbad against the Raja of Tundi, which is subsequently quelled by Colonel Dalton
1879	Naga revolt
1880	Koya revolt under the leadership of Tammandora in Malkangiri of Odisha
1883	Sentinel Islanders attack Humphrey of Andamans
1888	Sardar Larai (Munda agitation) to recover their ancient rights against the zamindars
1891	Manipur revolt led by Tikendrajit Singh against the British

Year/s	Adivasi Group, Area and Event
1891-93	Lushais of Assam raid the British territory of Arakan, Sylhet and defeat the British forces
1895-1900	Birsa *ulgulan* (upheaval) led by Birsa Munda wherein Munda, Oraon and other tribes join
1908	Massacre of Bhils, Dalits and other oppressed castes at Mangarh Hills in Rajasthan by British-led forces to quell an anti-colonial, anti-feudal movement under the leadership of Dharmacharya Govind Guru
1911	Bastar tribal uprising (*bhumakal*) against the reservation of large forest areas as state forest
1913, 1914, 1920, 1921	Tana Bhagat rebellions in Bihar against land tax payment to the colonial government merging finally with the nationalist civil disobedience movement
1922	Rampa rebellion of the Koyas under Alluri Sreerama Raju against the British
1875-1999	Sporadic clashes of Jarawas of the Andaman Islands with colonising British and Indian administration personnel and settlers from mainland India
1930s	Tribes of the Garhwal region launch a movement against forest contractors
1930	Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, leader of the Bodos, submits a memorandum to the Simon Commission for a separate political set-up for the indigenous people of Assam
1932	Rani Guidallo leads Naga revolt to drive away the British from Manipur and surrounding Naga areas
1940-1950	Raj Mohinidevi, a Gond social activist, spearheads a movement against alcoholism
1940-41	Gond and Kolam revolt led by Bhimu in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh against the forest policies of the British government
1942	Lakshman Naik's Koraput revolt in Odisha leading to his execution by hanging
1942-45	Revolt by the indigenous peoples of Andaman Group of Islands against the occupation by the Japanese Army
1945-47	Warli revolt in Maharashtra under CPI leadership against the landlords, forest contractors, *sahukars* and the British

Year/s	Adivasi Group, Area and Event
1946-51	Telangana agrarian uprising under CPI leadership with good participation of Dalits and Adivasis (Khonds, Chenchus and Lambadas who join the struggle in 1948)
1946	Tebhaga agrarian movement in Bengal under CPI leadership which asserted the tenant's right to give up only a third rather than half of the harvest to the landlord
1957	Khairwars of Madhya Pradesh agitate against paying land revenue and forest dues and attempt to set up their own *sarkar* (government)
1963-71	Naga revolt against the Indian state
1966	Revolt of the Adivasis of Bastar against the internal colonial policy of the Congress government. Their king, who led the war against the state, Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo, is killed in police action
1966-71	Revolt of the Syntengs of Jaintia Hills of Assam and Mizo revolt
1967	Movement demanding a separate Union Territory called Udayachal by Bodos of Assam
1967-71	Naxalite revolts in Jalpaiguri, Srikakulam and Wayanad involving Adivasi peasants and workers too
1970s-2000s	Koel Karo movement in Bihar (later in Jharkhand) by Munda and Oraon people against a hydel project
1977-1981	Movement for a sovereign Kolhanistan by the Hos in Singhbhum district of Bihar
1980s	Resistance to the Bodhghat hydroelectric project on the Indravati River in Bastar district (now in Chhattisgarh State) by affected Bison Horn Maria, Jhoria Muria and Raj Muria tribes
1983-84	Opposition by affected tribal people to the Inchampalli and Bhopalpatnam hydroelectric projects on the Godavari and Indravati Rivers respectively
1987	Struggle by the Bodos in the name of self-determination under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma
2000s and continuing	Adivasi struggles in the Dandakaranya region of Central India covering 8 States against land acquisitions and displacement by mining corporations with Maoist involvement and support

Year/s	Adivasi Group, Area and Event
2003	Occupation of parts of the Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary in Wayanad, Kerala, by the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha led by C.K. Janu and M. Geethanandan
2006 and continuing	Agitation against Polavaram dam by Adivasis and other affected groups
2008-09	Struggle of Adivasi peasantry of Lalgarh, West Bengal, against the Left Front police state
2011	Opposition by Bhutias and Lepchas to power projects on the Rathong Chu River in Sikkim
2017-2018	"Pathalgadi" movement by tribals in some villages of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh M.P. and Bengal for self-rule and their rights in land, water and forests
2018	About 10,000 tribal farmers in India marched to Mumbai in Maharashtra demanding loan waivers and land rights

Source Tribal Museum, Tribal Research Centre, M. Palada, Ooty; Srikant Ghosh: *Law Enforcement in Tribal Areas*. A.P.H. Corporation, New Delhi, 1987; Archana Prasad: *1857 Rebellion: A Prehistory* [available at archives.peoplesdemocracy.in/2007/0304/03112007_1857.htm]; C.R. Bijoy, 2001; *The Indigenous World 2019* published by IWGIA, Copenhagen.



GLOSSARY

Abkari Revenue/excise tax on the manufacture and sale of liquor and drugs.

Fasli The Fasli Calendar was introduced by Emperor Akbar for land revenue purposes in northern India. The calendar formation year is 963 of the Islamic Hijri Calendar. From 963 the Fasli Calendar follows the solar year of the Indian Samavat Calendar. Adding 590 to the Fasli Year brings it on par with the Western Gregorian Calendar. The word is Arabic in origin and is taken over into Urdu to mean harvest. One Fasli year is a period of 12 months from July-June.

Jagirdar *Jagirdari* is a feudal land grant introduced by the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century and continued under the Mughal Empire, wherein the powers to govern and collect tax from an estate were granted to an appointee (*jagirdar*) of the state. It was usually for the lifetime of the grantee and lapsed to the state after his death, although it eventually became *de facto* a hereditary position. It was retained by Rajput and Sikh kingdoms and later by the British East India Company. The *jagirdars* in turn appointed administrators for revenue collection, variously called *patwari*, *tehsildar*, *munsif*, *dewan*, and so on.

Jajmani System Feudal caste-based social system wherein the lower castes provided services and goods to the upper landed castes against provision of grains.

Janmom Land Land owned on a hereditary basis by a landlord.

Mahout One who looks after and rides a domesticated elephant.

Malguzar Tribute payer

Mansabadar Member of the imperial bureaucracy of the Mughal Empire. T
mansabadars, ranked in a hierarchy, governed the Empire and commanded its armie

Mlechcha Sanskrit term referring to those differing from mainstream caste society ar
considered impure and inferior. The word has similar connotations as the English wo
barbarian. Initially the word referred to non-Aryan tribes who did not offer sacrifice

Mokhasadar Holders/landlords of individual villages.

Patel Title/surname of a caste of village leaders. They were originally chiefs/headme
of communities, who had the task of taking care of or farming a piece of land.

Pargana Cluster of villages as a subdivision of a district.

Pathalgadi Movement Tribal villagers inscribed principles regarding self-rule on ston
plaques, which they installed at the entry points of their villages, and also banned th
entry of outsiders, particularly government officials.

Patta Legal document (title deed) issued by the government in the name of the owne
of a particular plot of land.

Patwari Revenue collector (cf. tehsildar).

Sardar Chief

Sahukar Merchant-cum-usurious moneylender.

Tehsildar Taluk revenue collector.

Thekedar Contractor for the supply of labour or materials to do a job.

Varnashram Dharma Duties performed according to the four *varnas* and the four
stages of life prescribed by the sages: attaining knowledge as a student, running a
household, retirement and renunciation.

Zamindari System This land holding system was formalised by the colonial
administration, whereby the landlords were the legal intermediaries between the actual
cultivators and the state. Under the ryotwari system the cultivators paid taxes directly
to the state.

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ENCOUNTERING THE ADIVASI QUESTION

ANTHROPOLOGY
SOCIOLOGY

The main problem facing most Adivasi groups in the country is displacement and loss of their own original habitats and livelihood through 'development' projects like dams, tourism and wildlife sanctuaries. By generally categorising them as girijan (mountain dwellers), vanavasis (forest dwellers), or tribal (with its connotations of primitive and backward), or even the popular jangli (wild), in official parlance and in the mass media, they are robbed of their identity, dignity and rights as among the first peoples of this subcontinent, who earlier enjoyed economic and political freedom and autonomy in the form of self-rule. All over India the process of uprooting indigenous people from their rich culture is on – the disruption of a way of life, fundamental to which is the belief that it is not the earth which belongs to man, but man who belongs to the earth.

Colliding Civilisations

We know that the white man does not understand our ways.
Teach your children what we have taught our children:
that the earth is our mother.
Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth.
If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.
All things are connected.
Man did not weave the web of life: he is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.
Our God is the same God.
You may think now that you own Him as you wish to own our land;
but you cannot.
The whites too shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes.
Contaminate your bed, and you will one night suffocate in your own waste.
Where is the thicket? Gone.
Where is the eagle? Gone.
The end of living and the beginning of survival.

(From: Chief Seattle's reply to the 'Great White Chief' in Washington, 1854)

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