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ISOLATION, INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

The case of Adivasis in India

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The idea of social exclusion and inclusion stems from a value premise that every member of a group or society be treated as equal or as having full membership of a group or society in reference. Outside of this value, a group or society cannot be problematised in the framework of social exclusion and inclusion. Underlying the idea of social exclusion and inclusion then lies the idea of citizenship, which is the status of equality though status has invariably been associated with the idea of inequality (Béteille 1996). Social exclusion means denial to or deprivation from things valued in the society. It is denial to the full membership of the society.

Things valued in society and from which certain groups are denied or excluded fall broadly into three distinct categories. These are wealth/income, power and status. In a sense then social exclusion is rooted in social inequality, which can broadly be discerned in four forms, that is, class, caste, race/ethnicity and gender. At times, religion too assumes the form of social exclusion. In India the major form of social exclusion has been identified as caste, tribe/ethnicity and religion.

Social exclusion has been a pervasive feature of societies historically. This is so with all class-ridden society. Marx's classification of the type of societies points to this in the strongest manner possible. Indian society is no exception. And yet social exclusion for a long stretch of history was not seen as a problem. This is not to say that there was no challenge to it. There have been resistance, movements and revolution against this. However, hierarchy, inequality continued to remain the dominant values of society.

Since the 18th century, such an ideology and system began to be questioned. There was replacement of the value of hierarchy and inequality with the value of equality, freedom and justice. However, such a value in itself may not present the phenomenon of social exclusion and inclusion as problematic until that value becomes the dominant value or ideology in the society. Indeed, for a long stretch of history of humankind, the value that has been dominant in society has been the value or ideology of inequality. There was then harmony between the dominant ideology viz. that of inequality and the existing social structure. It is with the idea or ideology of equality assuming dominance in society characterised by inequality and hierarchy that brought to the surface the phenomena of social exclusion and inclusion in society.

Such a perspective emerged for the first time in Europe. This came due to the ascendancy of the ideology of freedom and equality in place of constraint to freedom and equality. The shift also led to a new notion of justice. The emergence of such an ideology in Europe as the organising principle of society spread to other parts of the world as well and India has been no exception to this. Such ideology as an organising principle of society did catch the attention of the educated elite and nationalist leadership. The British did introduce certain measures, legal, administrative and even economic, which to a limited extent broke the constraint to freedom and equality inherent in the traditional social structure. Of these the most important were legal measures that subjected the people irrespective of their caste and creed to the same law – civil and criminal, which was not the case in the traditional social context. Administration as well as new employments brought about during the British rule was theoretically open to all segments of the population unlike what was in practice in the traditional society. The post-Independence India took this matter even further. The provisions made in the Indian Constitution bear testimony to it. To begin with, all irrespective of caste, class, creed and race, were brought under the same law. They were conferred the status of citizenship, which entitled them to civil, political and social rights.

Historicising social inclusion and exclusion in the context of tribes in India

The critical idea underlying the concept of social exclusion has further been explored and expanded and today it has assumed a place of critical significance in social science literature. Though the concept has

mainly been deployed to examine the existing social structure, the concept has also been used to examine the society in reference historically. Needless to say that much of social inequality and social exclusion that characterised the society at its present stage is in fact a product of historical processes. Now, if we take Indian society as reference and explore it historically in terms of the concept of social exclusion, tribes would not have space for analysis for much of the historical past, as they were outside of what has generally been considered as constitutive of Indian society. Hence it is important to historicise the process which makes it possible to examine tribes as a part of the structure of Indian society.

It was under the British rule that tribes were drawn into the structure of the larger Indian society. To begin with, the British rule brought tribes and non-tribes under one single political and administrative authority. With some exceptions here and there, they were subjected to the same laws, rules, regulations and administrations. The same was the case in the economic sphere. Through land, labour, credit and commodity market, they were all brought under a single economic order. Tribes thus came to be part of the same political and economic system that the larger Indian society was. However, the position the tribes came to occupy in the new politico-administrative system was one characterised by steady erosion of their control and access to land, forest and other resources. In this, both the colonial administration and the non-tribal population, especially traders, merchants and moneylenders, were responsible. Tribes have thus to go through the process of twin colonialism, one of the British rule and administration and the other of the non-tribal population. Tribes who had control over land, forest and other resources and enjoyed autonomy of governance got pushed to the margin of the new political and economic system. There was thus the process of integration/inclusion of tribes into the larger system under colonial rule but a process of inclusion that came to be intertwined with the process of exclusion in the form of loss of access and control over livelihood (economic rights) as well as control over decision-making processes in determination of their own life.

The loss of land in the form of alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes that began under the colonial rule got accelerated with the consolidation of the British rule on the one hand and extension of roads, railways, trade and commerce that facilitated the movement of the population from the plains to the tribal areas in search of new avenues of livelihood, income and profit. The tribal land moved from tribes to non-tribes mainly through usury and indebtedness. Force and fraud,

however, were not altogether absent. These processes led to social differentiation in the tribal society in the form of the emergence and rise of landlessness, bonded labour and dwindling size of farm holding. The process of proletarianisation brought about by exogenous processes transformed the remaining landholders into what in the literature is termed as the middle class, a phenomenon that came by default.

While on the one hand tribal society was marked by an unprecedented process of dispossession, no steps whatsoever were taken to train and equip them for new avenues of employment, howsoever limited they may be, which were emerging under colonial rule. The colonial administration needed manpower to man the expanding colonial administration in tribal areas but no steps were taken to fill them with tribal people. In fact, modern education critical to man the administration was not even given thought to in tribal areas. These were left to the Christian missionaries. At best they gave some grants to the missionaries for spreading education among the tribal population. And so was case with modern health institutions. Neither did they take any initiative to augment agricultural production in the form of extension of modern systems of agricultural practice. Rather, even the access they had over the various life-support systems such as the forest and rivers that provided a part of their daily sustenance came to be denied to them.

Tribes as part of the structure of Indian society were more of an economic and political entity rather than a social and cultural one. As a social and cultural entity, they remained outside of the larger Indian society. Due to increasing contact and interaction with the non-tribal population because of the extension of roads and railways, growth of trade and commerce, expansion of the administrative structure, all of which attracted a non-tribal population in tribal areas, there was of course an influence of the larger Indian society leading to some degree of acculturation in the form of Sanskritisation among them. Despite that, socially and culturally, they remained independent of the structure of the larger Indian society. Some among them integrated themselves socially and culturally with the structure of the larger society, and thereby moved in the direction of becoming caste rather than remaining tribes. Hence at the dawn of Independence, although integrated economically and politically with the larger Indian society, socially and culturally, they remained outside of it. They spoke languages other than the languages spoken by the dominant linguistic communities that inhabited the different parts of India, were outside of the structure of caste that permeated these linguistic communities and represented a social and a cultural form that were markedly different from those

of the dominant linguistic communities. Dominant linguistic communities comprised many castes and were characterised by division along caste lines, but they represented cohesiveness and solidarity as a distinct linguistic, religious and cultural identity. They treated tribes as different and outside of their collective self. The division between the dominant linguistic community (whose defining feature was caste) and tribe had come to be well entrenched and became the basis not only of domination and exploitation but also of discrimination in the post-Independence nation building.

In short, what marked tribal society at the dawn of Independence was rampant dispossession from their land, forest and other life-support systems by the colonial state as well as the larger population. Whereas the colonial state laid the legal and administrative structure for the process of dispossession, the non-tribal population took advantage of the structure in dispossessing tribes from their land. Much of the deprivation that characterised tribal society at the eve of Independence was brought about by the active role of the state and its collaborators who happened to be the larger Indian population. At the same time, new avenues that were opened up by the forces of modernisation that the colonial state initiated were systematically kept outside the purview of the tribal society. These were the twin problems that marked the tribal society at Independence, which the Indian state aimed to address in the post-Independence era.

State agenda of building an inclusive society

As a part of the process to address the problem referred above and thereby build an inclusive society, many provisions were made for the tribal people in the Indian Constitution. To begin with, tribals were given the same rights and status as those accorded to members of the larger Indian society in the form of the right of citizenship. Citizenship is a status which entitles an individual to full membership of a community. It confers on individuals an array of rights and obligations. The citizenship rights in the words of Marshall comprise three components, that is, civil, political and social rights. Civil rights are composed of rights necessary for individual freedom. Political rights mean rights to participate in the exercise of political power. Social rights mean rights to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to participate fully in the social heritage, which means the right to live a life of a civilised being according to the standard prevailing in the society (Marshall 1977: 78–91).

In addition to rights as citizens, tribals along with Dalits were also given certain special rights, which the other citizens were not entitled to. The special rights granted to them was meant to compensate for the disability they suffered for centuries either due to systemic discrimination (in the case of the Dalits) or historical exploitation and isolation (in the case of tribes) and thereby ensure their effective enjoyment of citizenship rights enshrined in the Constitution. The special rights so enshrined in the Constitution come closer to what may be termed in social science literature as social rights. The special rights meant for the tribals have been of various kinds. There have been rights which were protective in the sense that they aimed at safeguarding and protecting the interest of the tribal people. Then there were rights which aimed at providing them a certain share of participation in state institutions. Towards fulfilment of these rights a certain percentage of seats were reserved for them in state institutions such as parliament/state legislatures, governments and institutions of higher learning. The rights so provided in the Constitution are more popularly known or described as the reservation facilities. Finally there are provisions in the Constitution which aim to uplift the tribal people from their existing social backwardness and underdevelopment. The special treatment given to a certain category of people in order to protect their welfare and interest and promote their development may be broadly termed as the affirmative action programme in India.

Affirmative action programmes

Affirmative action programmes are interventions that aim primarily to address the issues faced by disadvantaged groups. Possible interventions according to Myron Weiner are broadly of four types. One is a wide range of policies, which aim to reverse social inequality but which are racially/ethnically neutral. The second concerns policies directed at eliminating barriers to entry to jobs, universities etc. by ending legal and official barriers. The third type of intervention is one which aims to improve the quality of the pool (creating abilities) from which individuals are recruited. Reservation or quota fixation for the disadvantaged is the other possible intervention (Weiner 1983).

All of these possible interventions in different measures have been at work in the context of India. However, what has received wide attention and generated public debate is the reservation. The debate on reservation has not so much been on the political reservation but on the reservation in government employment and admission to institutions

of higher learning, especially medical and technological institutions. Reservation in employment and educational institutions has been at work for about 50 years. Tribes have no doubt taken advantage of these provisions. This is evident from the fact that they are now found at all levels of government service. It is a different story that in terms of their share or quota, the position is far from adequate, especially at the upper echelon of government service. In fact, even by 1999 the share of the tribes in Classes I and II central government services, for example, stood at a mere 3.39 and 3.35 per cent respectively. Even in the case of Class III (6.07 per cent) and IV (7 per cent) services, the percentage fell short of the stipulated 7.5 per cent. What is important to note here is that the tribals are yet to approximate the quota stipulated for them. The scenario is the same in the sphere of higher educational institutions as well. It is to be noted that the concern and urgency to fill in the stipulated quota is much stronger at the central government services. The same concern and urgency in general is lacking at the state levels. Unfortunately, data at state levels are not easily forthcoming.

The debate in India on reservation has been so intense that the attention to other forms of affirmative policies/interventions pursued by the Indian State has been completely glossed over both by the critics as well as protagonists of the reservation. Critics have always been arguing that rather than pursuing the system of reservation, the state must target at capacity and capability building of the disadvantaged section of the population such as the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe. Indeed, in the argument against reservation, reference to these is again and again made in the debate on the reservation policy. Those opposed to the reservation policy do not altogether rule out the affirmative policy that is aimed at enabling the disadvantaged to acquire the required skills and abilities. Needless to say, the filling in of quotas in job and educational institutions is itself contingent upon acquiring certain qualifications and skills for which special programmes for the disadvantaged do exist. Some of these programmes are provisions of scholarship, book grants, hostel facilities, remedial classes in addition to a host of other facilities. Yet no serious attempt has been made to understand the way these measures have worked and the difference/impact they have made on the disadvantaged. Now the question is, how effective and adequate have these affirmative action programmes been?

In addition to the above, there have been other forms of affirmative action programmes. These programmes are geared towards improving

the economic and social condition of the tribal people. The assumption was that the improvement in their economic and social well-being would help them to take advantage of the benefits extended for them by the state. To this end, special considerations were made for the welfare and development of the tribal people and special allocation of resources were set aside in the plan outlay. As a first step to developmental initiatives, special multipurpose development projects as supplements to the community development projects were introduced in the tribal areas. It is to be noted that the general development programmes in the case of tribes were so designed as to adequately address their special needs and that special provisions were used for securing their additional and more intensified development. Accordingly, the community development programme approach – the general approach to development in India – was reoriented keeping in mind the special problems of the tribal people. This approach continued till the fourth five-year plan. Since the approach failed to serve the interests of the tribal people, a new approach in the form of a tribal subplan was adopted in the fifth five-year plan, which continues till this day.

The fifth plan is taken as a landmark in the task of tribal development. Not only did it mark a shift in policy perspective from welfare to development, but it also introduced a new concept of the tribal subplan and integrated tribal development projects. The plan entailed a separate budgetary head for the purpose. The immediate objective of this strategy was to eliminate the forms of exploitation that existed in the tribal areas and accelerate the process of development. The tribal subplan thus primarily focused on area development with the goal of improving the quality of life of the tribal communities. Its main components were the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP), Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) and pockets and primitive tribal group projects. Over 74 primitive tribes were identified who required special care for their development both at the level of planning and of implementation.

Under the broad strategy of the tribal subplan a number of schemes have been introduced from time to time with a view to uplift the condition of the tribal people. Broadly the schemes fall under two categories – economic and social. Social development has been pursued along two lines – education and health which take up the issue of women and children as well. For promotion of education, in addition to introduction of schools of various levels, various schemes have been worked out to give a boost to education among tribal children. Some of the key schemes have been residential schools, vocational

education, scholarships, book grants, free uniforms, mid-day meals etc. In the sphere of health, emphasis has been placed on extending and improving health infrastructure such as PHC, CHC etc. as well as prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Many of the schemes under health and education exclusively deal with women and children issues. In the case of economic development, the issues taken up include mainly activities such as employment and income generation, credit and market support mechanisms, skill and vocational training etc. Under such activities, important schemes have been Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP), Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Food for Work Programme (FWP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY), Sampurna Gramin Rojgar Yojna (SGRY) and Swanjayanti Gram Swayrojgar Yojna (SGSY). National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is latest addition to address the problem of employment and poverty in rural areas including tribal areas. All such programmes constituted affirmative action programmes for the tribal people.

The development schemes under the TSP have been at work for about 36 years by now. Yet the results are still very depressing. The percentage of tribal cultivators has steadily been in decline. It decreased from 68.15 in 1961 to 54.5 in 1991. Conversely the percentage of agricultural labourers has increased from 19.71 in 1961 to 32.69 in 1991. An equally important point to be noted is that as large as 42.9 per cent of the operational holding of the tribes belong to a category of marginal farmers, which means that they hold less than 1 hectare. Another 24.1 per cent are small cultivators with a holding of 1 to 2 hectares. Only 2.2 per cent of households have holdings of more than 10 hectares. Such a scenario has far-reaching consequences for the livelihood of the tribal population.

In 1993–94, the proportion of the tribal population falling below the poverty line was 51.14 per cent, as compared with 35.97 per cent for the country as whole. By 2004–05 the share of the tribal population living below the poverty line had declined to 46.5 per cent, as compared with 27.6 per cent for the population as a whole (Mathur 2008). Thus, although there has been a decline, the level of poverty in the tribal population is still much higher than the national average and the gap between the two continues to be one of the major issues of concern in poverty discourse in India. The same is the case in regard to other indicators of social development such as education and health.

In 1991 the literacy rate of the scheduled tribes was 29.60 per cent as compared to 57.69 per cent for the general population. The gap between the two was as high as 28.09 per cent. By 2001 the literacy rate for the general population had jumped to 68.81 per cent as compared to 47.10 per cent for the tribal population. The gap between the two has been somewhat bridged but the difference of 21.71 per cent is still very large Government of India 2007). The picture is no different in respect of health of the tribal population. The infant mortality as per NHP-2002 was 84.2 per cent as compared to 67.6 per cent for the total population, child mortality was 46.3 per cent as compared to 29.3 per cent and under age five mortality as high as 126.6 per cent as compared to 94.9 for the total population. The percentage of institutional deliveries was a mere 17.1 per cent in the case of tribes as compared to 33.6 per cent for the total population. As for ANC check-up, the figure was 56.5 per cent for the tribal population, the same being 65.4 per cent in the case of the total population (ibid.).

A number of factors seem to account for this shoddy state of affairs. Firstly, the resources earmarked for tribal development, though having undergone an increase, had been far from adequate. At no point in time did the plan allocation go beyond 3.7 per cent. The only exception was the eighth plan period when the allocation was the highest at 5.2 per cent of the total outlay. It is important to note that plan allocation under Tribal Plan is meant for area and not for tribes per se. Hence the benefit of such allocation accrues to everyone living in the region and not to the tribal population alone. That means that actual allocation meant directly for the tribal people is far short of what is stipulated in the plan allocation. Given the inadequate funds earmarked for tribal development, could anything tangible be expected in tribal communities? In fact, in the first four five-year plan periods, the allocation was just around 1 per cent of the total plan outlays. That explains partly why the lack of infrastructure such as schools and health centres as well as personnel to staff them are so inadequate in tribal regions. The ineffective implementation of the programmes is seen as another line of argument by which the issue of social development among tribals is explained. In this discourse, the thrust of the solution lies in accelerated and effective implementation of state-sponsored development programmes and schemes, whether these pertain to livelihood/income-generation activities or education or health or communication facilities. The third set of argument is built around traditional socio-cultural aspects of tribal life. That is, if tribals suffer from low income and poor educational and health status as well as various kinds of

diseases, these are often attributed to their tradition and style of life. A way out to this problem is discussed in terms of adoption of new ideas, knowledge and values. This is the modernisation perspective, which has been in currency the world over in discussions of modernisation of traditional societies. This is an argument which is applicable for the whole of Indian society. However, this has been sharply problematised in the context of the tribal society as if the rest of the Indian society has already become modernised. While there is some relationship between the lack of development and traditional social structure and culture, this aspects needs to be further probed and carefully examined.

There is no denying the truth that certain aspects of traditional social structure and culture do constrain the development programme, but it is equally pertinent to ask why, even after over 60 years of national reconstruction processes, there is still a large tribal population which has not been connected with social infrastructure or why there is still poor implementation programmes or delivery mechanisms in tribal areas. This is a question which needs to be problematised and explained. Much of the answer to this lies in the relation between tribes and the larger society, especially in the regional context. The larger society has always viewed tribes as those who are alien to their society and hence there is an overall indifference towards their cause and development. Rather the relation between the two historically and even today is one of appropriation of resources of the tribal community by the larger society. The state administration too is not untouched by such an attitude and that explains why there is a problem of implementation as well as a failure of extending programmes in tribal areas.

More important than the failure to push development programmes in tribal areas due to inadequate resources or ineffective implementation or even tribal tradition and social structure is the larger question of national and regional development, which is tied with the interests of the larger regional and linguistic communities. The national and regional development has invariably been in the form of large-scale development projects such as dams, irrigation, power plants, roads, railways, industry and mineral exploitation. The latter invariably took the form of appropriation of tribal land, forest and other resources that had begun under colonial rule and has continued in the post-Independence era, except that in the post-Independence era this has gone under the garb of national and regional development. The benefits of this development, which Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first prime minister, described as the temples of modern India, did not accrue to the tribal people. These were interventions detrimental to

the interest of the tribal people and in the process affected their access to affirmative action programmes. After all, through no fault of their own, they were steadily being taken away from their control over and access to land, forest and other resources due to state-sponsored projects of national development on one side and alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes on the other. Between 1951 and 1990, a little over 21 million are estimated to have been displaced by development projects (dams, mines, industries and wildlife sanctuaries) in India. Of the total displaced population, over 16 million have been displaced by dams, about 2.6 and 1.3 million by mines and industries respectively. A little over 1 million has been displaced by other projects, wildlife sanctuaries being the most important among them. Of the total displaced, as large as 8.54 million have been enumerated as the tribals. Tribals have thus come to constitute as large as 40 per cent of the displaced population, though they constitute less than 8 per cent of the total population. Their share in the displacement from projects such as mines, wildlife sanctuaries and dams has been to the tune of over 52, 75 and 38 per cent respectively. It is only in respect of industrial and other unspecified projects that the size of their share does not exceed 25 per cent. And yet even here the proportion is much higher than the proportion of their population to the total population of the country. Of over 21 million displaced, only 5.4 million have been resettled, out of which 2.12 million are stated to be tribals. This means that only about 24.8 per cent of displaced tribals had been rehabilitated. For a very large chunk of the population, rehabilitation still remains an elusive phenomenon. Further, land alienation from tribes to non-tribes, an endemic phenomenon for centuries, continues on a wide scale even to this day.

Even more paradoxical has been that the benefits of such developments have hardly accrued to the people who have made possible these projects by their sacrifice. In Jharkhand by 1996, for example, 8 major and 55 medium hydraulic projects along with many more minor projects had come up. Needless to say, these had displaced a large number of households. Yet the area under irrigation in Jharkhand constituted only 7.68 per cent of the net sown area and households electrified was mere 9.04 per cent. As many as 201 large- and medium-scale industries have come up in Jharkhand, displacing a large number of families on the one hand and providing employment to thousands of people on the other. Yet the benefits of these did not go to tribal people of Jharkhand or to the displaced tribals. This can be vividly illustrated by citing the case of coal mine industries. Between 1981 and

1985, the industry had displaced 32,750 families but had provided jobs to only 11,901 heads of households. The gravity of this situation is compounded by the fact that the displaced until very recent years were hardly thought of in terms of rehabilitation. They were summarily dismissed by cash compensation. Yet even here the state has been found faltering in its responsibility. It was found out in 1988 that after 30 years of filling in of Hirakund reservoir, the compensation amounting to 15 crore rupees was due for payment to 9,913 claimants who had lost their land. In the case of the Machkund Hydroelectric project, even when they have been rehabilitated, benefits of the project in general had hardly accrued to the displaced. In terms of irrigation, electric power, tourism, pisciculture and other schemes for economic development, the government, for example, justified the Upper Kolab project. However, the rehabilitated displaced had none of these benefits. In the process of the development of these projects, a large number of tribal people have been displaced from their land and other sources of livelihood. Neither have they been given adequate compensation nor have they been provided proper rehabilitation.

An equally important aspect that adversely affected the tribal population was the policy that restricted the access to forest resources. Tribes were greatly dependent on the forest for their food, shelter, instruments, medicine and even clothing in some cases. As long as tribes were in control of the forest in the sense of unrestricted use of the forest and its produce, they had no difficulty meeting these needs. The entry of the British, however, drastically altered this relationship. To the British the forest was an important source of revenue and commercial exploitation. Hence the forest policy that was enunciated by the British introduced state control over forest resources and imposed curtailment of rights and privileges over the forest resources. The policy pursued by the British was continued in the post-Independence era of economic development with even stricter regulation and enforcement. All these were justified on the ground that these were necessary for the wider and national public interest. However, this had and still has serious consequences on access to basic necessities of life such as food, shelter etc. for the tribals. Not only that, but forest law also turned them into encroachers under constant threat of eviction and violence.

The large-scale development projects and policy of denial of access to forest resources were interventions of greater magnitude and scale than reservation and other affirmative action programmes developed for the welfare of the tribal people. Such intervention offset all that was desired to be achieved by affirmative action programmes. The

latter, the state has displayed as a post-Independence sign of tribal development. In close introspection, however, affirmative action in the case of tribes tends to be no longer affirmative action, as it does not tend to lift them from the given social base in which they were traditionally located. Rather, affirmative action has been pushed through alongside the larger processes of development that kept on uprooting tribes from their economic and social base, thereby further deteriorating their existing social and economic condition and exposing them to even greater vulnerability than before. Hence, there is nothing affirmative about affirmative action programmes in the case of tribes in India. Rather, there has been a term of trade or exchange between state and tribes, a term of trade that has been exploitative of tribes. The state has gained much more out of this trade than it has given to tribes.

This being the dominant pattern of development in the case of tribes, those in northeast India in post-Independence India, and if we are to place it in the frame of social exclusion and inclusion, then the concept/category that captures this reality best is not that of 'tribe' but of 'Adivasi', the indigenous peoples. Tribe as a concept/category points to difference, not only in regard to language and culture but more importantly the state of development, but it does not capture the relations producing social exclusion. In contrast, Adivasi as a concept/category does. It is a concept rooted in features of exploitation, domination and discrimination and this is the framework that captures better the state of tribal development in India.

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IN BETWEEN INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

The changing face of health and disease management practices among Gonds in a central Indian village

S.N. Chaudhary

In order to understand health and disease, from the historical perspective, especially among tribes, scholars have heavily relied on subjective interpretation across the world. Clement (1932) documented five fundamental reasons of disease as perceived by primitive people. These are sorcery, breach of taboo, object intrusion, spirit intrusion and soul loss. Most of these reasons are related to spirit or what may be called 'ghost'. Hence, primitive people in particular, living across the globe, have faith in ghost and its ugly face. Under subjective interpretation experience-based narratives and opinions of people have been elaborated. Their views about both health and diseases differ from culture to culture and from one social group to another. In India, also subjective interpretation of health and diseases have dominated in both rural and tribal societies. There are a large number of studies on individual tribes, across the country, which disclose their fatalistic interpretation of health and disease. Kurian and Tribhuwan (1990) studied perception of the Thakur tribe of Raigad district of Maharashtra. They found that causes of diseases, as attributed by them, were supernatural i.e. visitation of gods and goddesses, wrath of gods and goddesses, evil eye, possession by evil spirits, witchcraft and sorcery, breach of taboo and failure to perform divine duty or rites (ibid.: 253). According to Chaudhuri (1993) among HOs of Bihar (now Jharkhand) there is the Deuri or religious headman and Deonwa or the spirit doctor. The Deuri worship the deities and if epidemics or diseases are there, they

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LIVELIHOODS OF ADIVASIS IN INDIA

Continuing marginalisation

G. Muralidhar

India is home to more than 60 million Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes – STs, tribal people, also known as Indigenous people), spread out the entire country. About half of them live in pockets in the hills and forests with them as majority and the remaining half live in the plains, both rural and urban. Most STs in urban areas have settled in mainstream livelihoods like any non-tribal, barring a few traditional craftsmen. The STs in rural plains pursue mixed livelihoods, predominantly dependent on agriculture, wage labour and small artisanal activities around forest products. The STs in the hills and forests have livelihoods built around forests and other natural resources. The discussion here is focused on these STs in the hills and forests and their livelihoods.

Forest is the life line for millions of tribal people. It is so intertwined in every aspect of their lives that tribal people and forest are inseparable. Whether as deities whom they revere and celebrate, their music and instruments, the way their houses are built or the way they go about with their livelihoods, all vibrates with the spirit of life echoed in the forest.

Most of them have some land. They pursue sustainable and subsistence farming. They protect forests and biodiversity. They access non-timber forest produce including medicinal herbs for their local use and sale in the local markets. There are efforts to 'tap' the biodiversity for the mainstream. However, they are not able to realise even 25 per cent of the consumer rupee. Here and there, livestock-dependent livelihoods are also pursued. There are a few who still persist with hunter-gatherer living.

Critically, resource-rich tribal people are living a life of subsistence and hand-to-mouth existence. They are caught in the 'trap' of

moneylender-trader. As they exist in the margins of the mainstream, with social and cultural diversity and geographic remoteness, most mainstream resources elude them or come with extremely unfair terms. These include financial inclusion/formal credit, infrastructure, appropriate technology, information and knowledge, aggregated demand and supply, appropriate institutional architectures, local value-addition, access to consumer market and linkages.

True, there are multiple tribes and all of them do not go about their lives and livelihoods identically. True, their lives and livelihoods have been impacted by the mainstream policies, processes and influences. Consumption habits and food habits are changing. Trading-in and therefore, wage employment, commercial farming and seasonal migration are increasing. Literacy is increasing and the new generation is seeking alternative livelihoods outside and locally. Unemployment is increasing with changing landscape and pressures on land, water and forests. A new self-employed class is emerging within their ranks.

Along with Integrated Tribal Development Agencies/Projects, Tribal Corporations and Tribal Welfare Departments, National Rural Livelihoods Mission is unveiling special efforts to evolve and support perspective plans at the state level to augment and enhance the livelihoods of the STs comprehensively and significantly.

Livelihoods of Adivasis in India

Referred to as Scheduled Tribes in the Constitution, 700 tribal communities constitute more than 8 per cent of India's population (more than 100 million) and are spread across the country. The majority of them live in and around hills/hill slopes and forests and exclusive habitations, the remaining people live in the plains – urban, suburban and plain rural areas.[1] Major tribes include Andamanese, Bodos, Bhils, Chakma, Chenchu, Dhodia Tribes of Gujarat, Gonds, Koya, Khasis, Aboriginal people of Lakshadweep, Kurichiya, Kurumbar, Tripuris, Mizos, Mundaris, Nagas, Nicobarese, Oraon, Santhals, Todas, Maldharis of Gujarat, Cholanaikkan, Warli, Kisan Tribe, Dongria Kondh, Bonda, Kutia Kondh, Bishapus A'Mishapus etc.

Profile of tribal communities

STs (8 per cent of India) live on 15 per cent of Indian area spanning various geo-climatic terrains – forests, hills, coastal areas and plains. The largest concentration (about 70 per cent of Indian STs) lives in

the hilly areas of Central India (Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and, to a lesser extent, Andhra Pradesh); in this belt, which is bounded by the Narmada River to the north and the Godavari River to the southeast, tribal peoples occupy the slopes of the region's mountains. Another concentration lives in a belt along the Himalayas stretching through Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in the west, to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland in the northeast. Other STs, the Santals, live in Bihar and West Bengal. There are smaller numbers of tribal people in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, in western India in Gujarat and Rajasthan and in the union territories of Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It may be noted that some states like Mizoram, Nagaland, etc. are entirely (almost 90 per cent) tribal. Also, there are regions within the state, districts, subdistrict areas, and clusters with mostly tribal population; 187 out of 645 districts in the country are considered as tribal districts.

Tribal communities live in relative isolation of the mainstream. They live a simple life in harmony with their environment. They use low-level technologies and sustain natural resources. They have evolved their own distinct myriad ways of living, cultures, languages and religions. Their economy is predominantly subsistence and/or low-value economy. Given this situation, in order to protect the social, cultural and land rights of the tribal communities in Scheduled Areas, special provisions, policies and regulations are available in Scheduled Areas. These include prohibition of transfer of tribal land to non-tribals and restricted moneylending business.

Further, their indicators of 'development' are low – low nutrition, high mortality rates, low literacy etc. STs are amongst the poorest in the country. While most of them are considered vulnerable, half of the STs are considered below poverty line. Overall Literacy (47 per cent) and Female literacy (34 per cent) are way below the national averages. Infant mortality rate at 36 is way above the national average of 18. Thus the disparities between the tribal and non-tribal sections of the population cut across various development indicators. However, Gross Enrolment amongst STs, as in other communities, has been increasing over the years. Their education levels are going up and mainstream employment is increasing, albeit slowly. Interestingly, sex ratio among ST communities (977 females for every 1,000 males) is more favourable than the national average.

It is to be noted here that tribal communities in the country are at different stages of development – both across the tribes and within each

tribe. Some of them pulled themselves into mainstream ways and lead lives and pursue livelihoods no different from that of non-tribals. At the same time, there are some who have been pushed out (migrated) into mainstream ways and are struggling to cope with them. There are also certain communities, within STs, characterised by a stagnant or dwindling population, low literacy and hunter-gatherer subsistence. Seventy-five such communities, referred to as 'primitive tribal groups' (PTGs), have been identified and found to be more backward and left out of the mainstream than other ST communities. Certain tribal communities dwell in plain areas and pursue mixed livelihoods but predominantly practice agriculture. Some tribal communities such as the Lambadas of AP, unlike a typical tribal community, are at the forefront of development within the tribal communities and pursue livelihoods around farming and livestock and wage labour. Within all tribal communities, there are intra-community differences. All the members are not at the same level. Some are resource-rich and some are otherwise. Still, a significant proportion of STs are still dependent on forests for their livelihoods.

Livelihoods framework

In this context, this chapter discusses the trends (not going too much into the numbers) in livelihoods of the tribal communities with the help of the livelihoods framework. The livelihoods framework helps in understanding the elements (dimensions, capitals and contexts, with their interrelationships) and complexity of portfolio of livelihoods of a household/community and the support systems/ecosystem required for these livelihoods to be pursued/practiced. The livelihoods framework, when applied to a context, identifies gaps and opportunities and indicates scope for further interventions.

Livelihoods have four characteristics: income, expenditure (money, time and energy), employment and risk.

- A household earns income in various forms and through various means. Usually, the income of the household depends on the set of knowledge-skills-resources it has. Further, the income of the household need not necessarily be in the form of wages, it can come in the form of produce/goods and services as well that may meet the needs of the household and/or could be converted into monetary income.
- A household has to spend on basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and water as well as other needs as education, health,

transport and entertainment. Some expenses, such as marriages and organising other social gatherings, though not recurring are considered while analysing the expenditure of a household. Like income, expenditure also is not always in monetary terms. The payment to meet the expenditure can be through the produce/ goods and services. Further, time and energy are also spent.

- Employment refers to the time or number of days a household is engaged in some activity or the other in the portfolio of livelihoods of the household. The employment depends upon its skill-set, resources available and the ecological and environmental context.
- Risks are the vulnerabilities the household has to face in pursuit of its livelihoods. Risks are present in every livelihood activity but the degrees of risk vary. These vulnerabilities are accentuated by the environment, technological, financial contexts of the household. The impact of the risks on the household depends on the risk-mitigating strategies adopted by the household. For instance, even a minor illness can send a poor household into disarray as it lacks access to qualitative healthcare. Further, the local ecological context and lack of health insurance augments the impact of the illness on the household.

All livelihoods interventions aim to increase income, decrease expenditure, increase employment and decrease risks. In the framework, these characteristics are known as four arrows by virtue of the desired direction they are to move in.

Livelihoods of a household depend on resources or capitals which can be broadly classified into six categories – natural, physical, social, human, financial and spiritual.

- Natural capital refers to natural resources available to the household to carry about a particular livelihood. This would include land, water, forest, air, etc.
- Physical capital comprises man-made physical structures such as roads, buildings and also machines and appliances that aid humans in their work.
- Social capital entails the support one receives due to kinship/ relationship with other individuals and institutions in society.
- Human capital essentially consists of the skills, knowledge, abilities and aptitude possessed by a person.
- Financial capital enables a household to obtain goods and also aids production (investment). There are two components of financial

capital – stock (the amount of financial capital available with the household at any given point of time) and flow (the financial capital the household earns).

- Lastly, spiritual capital refers to the quest present in the household to seek better living conditions. This drive is essential for the other capitals to be tapped fully.

The livelihoods a household pursues are influenced by the availability and accessibility to these capitals, the variety of capitals at its disposal and also its ability to tap these capitals to its advantage.

Further, these capitals as well as the households exist in a context that affects the availability, accessibility and use of the capitals. The context allows certain activities and prohibits certain activities despite the presence of required capitals. Though the context is a unified whole, for the purpose of analysis, the context is understood in four interrelated spheres – Environmental and Ecological Context, Techno-economic, Distribution and Investment and Expenditure Contexts.

- The environmental and ecological context refers to the larger environmental and social context the household exists in.
- The techno-economic context is the technical know-how available with the household to tap the capitals effectively.
- The distribution pattern of resources, infrastructure, wealth, knowledge, etc. in a society also affects the livelihood choices of a household.
- The investment and expenditure patterns of the household affect its livelihoods. Investment in production, health, food, education, insurance, employment is relevant in this context. The investment may not yield immediate results but may aid the households in pursuing or sustaining its livelihoods in the long run.

When livelihoods are thus understood, it is easier to identify the grey areas in the livelihoods being pursued by the household and plan interventions accordingly. These, then, could be consolidated upwards for making policy decisions and interventions on one hand and launching major programmes.

Understanding major Adivasi livelihoods

Adivasi Livelihoods, or Livelihoods of STs, when analysed using the livelihoods framework, reveal how the social, economic and political

injustices meted out to them have adversely and irreversibly abetted the collapse of their traditional livelihoods and economy. According to the 2001 Census, 81 per cent of STs are engaged in the primary sector – this includes Non-timber Forest Produce (NTFP) collection, agriculture, livestock rearing, daily wage labour, etc. In fact, NTFP collection is significant in the portfolio of livelihoods for nearly 70 per cent of the tribal population in the country. Considerable number of STs also feed themselves through seasonal migration.

Thus, the Adivasi livelihoods triumvirate is NTFP, farming (agriculture, horticulture and livestock and agriculture wage labour), and migration. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is also providing some employment to the STs. Only a tiny proportion of STs are outside of these four livelihoods spheres. These include petty business, artisanal activities and service.

A primary study (carried out by us two years ago) in 15 tribal villages across five states reveals that the tribal villages remain remote and important service institutions like school, health centre, veterinary sub-centre, anganwadi etc., are not in the accessible distance to the people in 50 per cent of the villages.

Major sources of income of the select families include NTFP Collection, Wage Labour, Agriculture and Livestock rearing, MGNREGA and other activities in that order. However, about 30 per cent of the days in a year on which they are not able to do any work.

Men and women share responsibility in livelihoods activity. However, women work at least three to four hours more in a day when compared to men.

More than 50 per cent the expenditure has been on food and liquor.

NTFP collection

It is revealing to note that the 187 tribal-dominated districts have 60 per cent of India's forest cover (India has a forest cover of 23.28 per cent which is about 77 million hectares and the six major types of forests identified in India are moist tropical, dry tropical, subtropical, mountain temperate, alpine and subalpine). The entire forests (read:

forest areas) in the country have been classified into reserved forests (considered to be the most valuable as far as conserving forest and wildlife are concerned and more than half of the total forest area has been classified as reserved forests); protected forests (protected only to a certain degree and the government has property rights over it); and village forests (partly owned by the government and partly by people who inhabit these lands). The STs living near the forests have rights on the usufruct in all the forests.

The relationship between tribes and the forest transcends the economic sphere. Tribal communities have intertwined every aspect of their lives with the forest. Their houses are built of the locally available timber, the tools and implements they use are made from locally available raw material, and so are their music instruments. It is commonly acknowledged that tribal religions are a form of 'animism' distinct from other 'mainstream' religions. STs consider nature and its resources as their deities and their customs and rituals invoke elements of nature. The reverence tribal people render to nature is rooted in their belief that their lives and sustenance is dependent upon these elements.

Forests are unique ecosystems that host a multitude of products and services. Products include timber, herbs, nuts, seeds, fruits, flowers, etc. They also provide raw material such as twigs, roots leaves, etc. which are value-added to make products such as ropes, plates, brooms, etc. As for services, forests play a crucial role in regulating and preserving ecological systems. Forests have served as an abode of wealth for different communities – hunter-gatherers, NTFP collectors, shifting cultivators and modern timber-based industries.

For STs, they offer life support. They meet their basic needs (food, fodder, fuel-wood, healing ailments, shelter etc.,) to a large extent. In addition, they provide income to them through the sale of NTFP (there are about 3,000 species of plants in Indian forests which provide NTFP), on which they have traditional rights. Traditionally, most of the NTFP collected was consumed by the collectors themselves. Over time, with the rise of modern economy, the collectors have also started to sell their produce in the nearest *shandies* (local markets) and use the money so generated to fulfil other needs by buying from the market. However, the income generated by collecting NTFPs is not directly proportionate to the labour spent and the risks involved in procuring them. Not even a quarter of the consumer rupee finally reaches the tribal collector. In spite of uncertainties and risks, poor gatherers resort to NTFP collection in the absence of better remunerative

opportunities, to meet their food, fodder and medical needs or as a seasonal and emergency activity.

It appears that the most disadvantageous factor for the STs is their lack of awareness of the market that NTFP actually has. Their ignorance is exploited by middlemen and industries that pay meagre sums for the labour and toil that the tribal people put into the procurement of the NTFP. The possibility of exploitation is further accentuated by the absence of a transparent, state-supported procurement system in most states barring Andhra Pradesh. Furthermore, the collectors are also unaware of the forms in which these products are marketable. Some of this exploitation could be partly attributed to the manner in which tribal people conduct business. It should be borne in mind that these are a people who have only recently done away with the barter system. Their business sense is dominated by necessity rather than profit. They generally sell only so much produce as is required for them to sustain themselves.

Yet another disadvantage to the collectors is that they lack access to the machinery/equipment required to do the value-addition to the NTFP to make it marketable. Most of the value-addition to the NTFP is done in factories and large production centres. Introduction of simple, manageable value-addition units in the local areas could go a long way in reducing the intermediaries between the collectors and the consumers. The introduction of such value-addition techniques to the tribal people should not disintegrate existing sustainable methods of collection. The market-awareness of the STs should not result in them fully exploiting the entire forest at one go. Instead, the traditional practice of taking only how much is necessary must be retained. Efforts towards enhancing the livelihoods of trials should combine the best of modern technology with the sustainable ways of traditional methods.

It is also important to know that the quality lost at the beginning may not be regained later. Therefore, the sustainable harvesting of NTFP with care and quality consciousness produces NTFP that lasts longer and the core properties of the product remaining intact. Since the consumer pays for the quality and core properties, the collector would realise better returns on the NTFP. For instance, quality *gum karaya* collection has ensured increases in returns by five to six times (500–600 per cent) to the collectors.

A vast repository of knowledge regarding the uses of the NTFP rests with tribal people. Many NTFP products have medicinal properties. Tribal communities have recognised their properties and have used

these products to treat ailments for centuries together. Some NTFP products are used as raw material in modern production industries. A case in point is the use of gum karaya by pharmaceutical companies as edible adhesive in the composition of tablets and capsules. Cleaning nuts are used as an alternative to alum. The nuts are used to clarify water and further research has also revealed that they have the properties to dispose heavy metallic waste.

Ownership, Natural Regeneration, Sustainable harvesting, Local Value-addition, Aggregation, Moving up the value-chain directly, or through institutions and partnerships are the key elements of way forward in NTFP.

Farming

While there are some hunter-gatherers amongst them, agriculture is a major occupation among tribal communities, after NTFP collection. Most STs own small tracts of land on which they pursue sustainable and subsistence farming. Tribal communities cultivate crops that the soil and land in the area support, i.e. the crops they cultivate are not different from what non-tribal farmers cultivate in the area. Major crops cultivated by the STs include paddy, millets, maize, tubers, etc. Horticulture (cashew, etc.) is also not uncommon. Tribal farming practices are thought to be sustainable methods that make best use of local resources and preserve the local ecology.

There are still some tribal families/communities that are persisting with shifting cultivation or 'slash and burn cultivation' (known as podu and jhum – in different parts of the country). This practice entails cutting down trees in a certain part of the forest, cultivating crops on the land and then burning the tract after harvest. The land is left fallow for a while (five to 10 years), allowing it to recover or recoup. Shifting cultivation practices have come under criticism and are even restricted by the Forest Policy of 1956. Critics believe that the practice contributes to massive deforestation resulting in disturbing the local ecological system. However, there are contrarian studies to show the sustainable nature of this practice that also leads to protection of the local ecology. In any case, given the pressure on the forests and land, and the restrictions, the shifting cultivation has declined significantly.

For example, in January 2011, the FAO recognised the Koraput farming systems traditionally practiced by tribes in Orissa as a Globally Important Heritage System (GIAHS). The FAO stated that the farming system has helped in preserving numerous rice, millet, pulse varieties, medicinal plants and also the local ecological system. While recognising the significant contribution of the Koraput farming system in preserving the local ecology, the FAO has also sought to bring attention to the preservation of the farming system itself.

The Koraput case is not the only such practice employed by tribes in the country. These practices are fast reaching the brink of extinction, yielding to modern agriculture practices. In the wake of a market-driven economy, agriculture has been rapidly commercialised. Tribal farmers who traditionally cultivated crops only for consumption have been compelled to shift to cultivate cash crops for survival. The introduction of Public Distribution Systems (PDS) that does not cater to the staple diet (based on local minor millets and pulses) of the STs has resulted in their food habits undergoing major changes and has contributed critically in changing the cropping patterns of STs.

As part of farming system, the STs have also pursued rearing livestock for farming. Gradually, milch animals have come in. Apart from hunting animals from the wild, they have been rearing small livestock (sheep, goats etc.,) and birds for consumption and for local market.

The labour-sharing mechanisms that exist among local STs to meet their peaks in demand for labour for farming are giving way to wage labour. Aggregated lands with a few STs and non-tribals taking over lands seek wage labour. There are cases of buying the standing agriculture crops and horticulture crops in advance at very low rates and the tribal owners of the crops become the labour in their own land.

Sustainable organic farming (agriculture, horticulture, watershed management, medicinal herbs/plants cultivation, fisheries, kitchen gardens) for food security coupled with high-value product farming for market, local value-addition, aggregation and market linkages with institutions and partnerships are the elements of the way forward.

Seasonal migration and MGNREGA

With declining forest cover, not-so-good returns for NTFP and seasonality in NTFP, large sections of tribal communities look for new

livelihoods outside the traditional sectors as well as their traditional environment. Many STs, mostly without their families, migrate for work as wage labour in other areas (away from their home), in agriculture, in construction, in road work etc. Since the launch and implementation of MNREGA, STs have been taking up work under the scheme and the seasonal migration has seen some decline.

It is revealing that STs constitute about 25 per cent of the total MGNREGA workforce. It appears that many a tribal household, more than any other social group in the country, is looking towards MGNREGA as a livelihoods activity and is participating in the scheme. The danger here is that they are giving up their traditional livelihood(s) and become dependent on casual wage labour for sustenance. It is likely that they lose their skills, knowledge and maybe their traditional rights in the process. Their resources may be alienated and their access to commons may be denied. Also, the association of certain tribes with certain occupations may start to deteriorate leading to an erosion of the unique identity of tribal community.

Livelihoods for market

Through interaction with non-tribals, markets and education, the tribal communities have started to include new elements in their existing four livelihoods spheres and/or add new livelihoods activities. Dairying, Goatery, Poultry and Fisheries for market are growing in tribal areas. However, lack of established markets for their produce in local areas and proper support systems, including marketing mechanisms, is hampering their growth as viable livelihoods activities.

Tribal people also make handicrafts from locally available raw material (like bamboo). Traditionally, these handicrafts were used as implements or decorative items but efforts are being made to market these handicrafts. Presently, these products have a huge market in urban centres in India and internationally. Yet, as is the case with other tribal livelihoods, STs engaged in this activity too face market exclusion and are not able to realise a good proportion of consumer rupee.

Resource alienation

Resources, for STs pursuing their livelihoods, are fast being eroded or captured by non-tribals. Land is a major bone of contention between tribal population and non-tribals.

Most STs own land or have access to land. Only 21 per cent of STs are landless. The average landholding among STs is 1.14 acres but land alienation is reducing per capita land of the STs. Land alienation of STs is made easier with lack of clarity on land rights among the community. For the STs, the lands they reside on are theirs and are unaware of the legal procedures to be undertaken to ensure that the land remains under their custody. Manipulation of land records, *benami* transactions, leasing or mortgage, marital alliances with tribal women, adoption of tribal families by non-tribals are all rampant methods of encroaching the land of STs.

It is estimated that as many as 375,000 cases involving 850,000 acres of land are awaiting verdict. Besides land-grabbing done by private parties, large infrastructure projects have also been responsible for infringing on land rights of STs resulting in their displacement. Loss of land and resources is a big loss for STs.

The repercussions of physical displacement are dire and far-reaching. Not only are the communities left landless, they lose their familiar ecosystem (culture, neighbours, commons, familiarity etc.) and resources to carry out their traditional occupation(s). This breakdown in their livelihoods leads to food insecurity, disintegration of the established social fabric, etc. The psychological impact that displacement has on the victims can never be compensated in monetary/physical terms. Many can never come to terms with the impact of being totally uprooted from their ecological contexts.

The Forest Rights Act, 2006 attempted to address the issue of ownership and the rights of forest dwellers over forestland. The act seeks to undo the 'historic injustice' meted out to the tribal population in the country by allowing them rights over the lands they reside on or currently practice agriculture on and letting them collect NTFP without any hassles from the local administration. Further, STs dwelling in the forest are to be given legal documents recognising their right over the land they dwell on. Even before the Forest Rights Act, efforts were made to ensure that tribal peoples administered the use of resources in the local area through Joint Forest Management (JFM) initiatives. JFM entailed the formation of a Forest Protection Committee (Vana Samrakshana Samiti – VSS) at the village level. The VSS protects the forest from depletion and destruction and in turn VSS gets the right on the NTFP and a share in income from the sale of timber from the forest.

It appears that the financial and economic contexts are extremely disadvantageous to tribal people. To start with, many of them reside

in remote and less accessible areas that do not have the required infrastructure. True, efforts have been taken to make these areas accessible through roadways, railways and telecommunications. Yet, this effort has resulted in the unprecedented entry of non-tribals into tribal areas, pushing the tribal communities up into further remote areas.

When it comes to access to financial resources such as loans, bank accounts, savings, insurance and remittances, it is the lowest in the country for tribal people. Added to this is the fact that most STs do not possess proper, government-recognised legal documents essential to open bank accounts, to take loans etc. The lack of will from formal financial institutions to cater to tribal people in general and the poor in particular is denying these communities access to much-needed credit. To worsen the situation, local moneylenders fill the vacuum left in the wake of absence of formal financial institutions. The moneylenders are often exploitative and charge high rates of interest and keep no record of transactions. Moneylenders often take away whatever little assets the STs own when the latter are unable to repay their debts. Moneylender–trader nexus ensures that the STs pay higher prices for their purchases and do not get due prices for their produce, apart from the high interest rates and consequent benami resource alienation in due course. All this is happening even with 'stringent' moneylending regulation. Further, financial exclusion of the tribal people also prevents them from having a sound insurance system essential to mitigate risks and unprecedented situations.

Even the self-help movement sweeping the country is taking its time to catch up pace in tribal areas.

In essence, STs are in the process of losing the advantage of rich endowment of natural capital and spiritual capital which they had on one hand, and they are yet to catch up to the levels of physical, human, institutional and financial capital that is required for a decent living. Building on the commons, collectivisation and savings-led financial capital are the key elements of the way forward.

Livelihoods continuum

As discussed earlier, all the tribal communities are not at the same footing and all the households within a tribal community are not at the same level and each of their livelihoods portfolios is unique and variegated. The livelihoods of the STs are in a continuum. Some STs have shifted entirely from their traditional ways of life and have assimilated into the mainstream like any other non-tribal. Such members of

the community are usually those who have had access to primary and higher education. Some others still persist in the hunting-gathering way of life. Some sections continue pursuing their traditional livelihoods along with other, non-traditional ones. But the general trend is that the tribal communities are moving away from their traditional ways of life and are fast taking to the juggernaut of being mainstreamed, although the terms are unfair to them. There is a new, rising class of self-employed service providers and entrepreneurs among the tribal people. Of course, there are some job holders too amongst the STs now. Younger generations in tribal communities who have had access to some school education are reluctant to take up traditional livelihoods and resort to wage labour, agriculture labour and migration, the only available alternatives.

Eroding tribal identity

Further, the increased literacy among tribal people has resulted in the transformation of tribal culture and social fabric. With government-aided education being in the official language of the state or in Hindi and not the mother tongue of the student, STs are fast losing their lingual identity. Of course, it may seem daunting to ensure that students are taught in their respective mother tongues (304 recognised tribal languages are spoken among the tribes), but education in an alien language is not the only onslaught on tribal identity. The reach of telecommunications and mass media too has had lasting impact on tribal identity. Mainstream cinema, music, culture is eroding the traditions of tribal people.

Eroding tribal identity combined with the tribal people not oriented psychologically and culturally to fight injustices that are being meted out to them is coming in the way of self-reliant and sustainable tribal livelihoods. It is sad to note we do not hear tribal voices speaking for their rights, justice and equity. This space is mostly occupied by the people from outside the community. Building responsive and sensitive community leadership in large numbers at various levels from within the communities is the key element in the way forward.

Special provisions to tribal communities

Under the circumstances, taking into account the vulnerabilities of the tribal population, the Constitution has made several social, economic and political provisions (enabling and empowering) to aid the

advancement of tribal communities and ensure that they are at a level-playing field with other communities in the country. The issue is how conducive an environment the state and the non-tribal population of the country have created for the tribal communities to pursue their culture, livelihoods and traditional systems economy, polity and society.

For instance, the Fundamental Right to Freedom provides for pursuing any livelihood one deems fit. This right does not seem to exist for many a tribal. STs are being pushed out of their traditional livelihoods and ecological milieu to pursue less dignified livelihoods, either in their existing habitat or away from their habitat. It is becoming clear that tribal people are not able to get over resource alienation and loss of their traditional livelihoods and move into new contexts and livelihoods smoothly.

Since the Fifth Five Year Plan, the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP, for areas with more than 50 per cent tribal population) for development of the area and the communities in the area, consolidated at state and national level, is being prepared based on the resources and funds. In a state, the funds for TSP are allocated in proportion to the population of STs in the state. The TSP is being implemented by District/sub-district Integrated Tribal Development Projects/Agencies (ITDPs/ITDAs). The Project Officer, ITDP/ITDA is a single-line administrator (all the departments in the area are responsible to the Project Officer and work in consultation and close coordination with the Project Officer).

The National Commission for Schedule Tribes is a statutory body set up in 1992. The commission's function is to look into the protection of the safeguards of the STs and report regularly to the president of India on the progress in their implementation. Similarly, the National Scheduled Tribes Financial Development Corporation (NSTFDC) was set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The mandate of the NSTFDC includes identifying and supporting economic activities of tribal communities in the form of providing financial resources of upgrading existing skills and technology used by the tribal people. Tribal Cooperative Marketing Developing Federation (TRIFED) was set up by Government of India to market and ensure better prices for the produce of the STs. In each state, there is a Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation (TDCC) to help the tribal NTFP collectors to realise higher returns.

For example, one of the TDCC, Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) of Andhra Pradesh (a federation of 45 primary cooperatives), provides support to tribal people engaged in the collection of NTFP at their doorstep and links them with potential markets. The GCC

provides necessary financial and technical support to help the NTFP collectors carry out their occupation without being exploited by middlemen and small traders. GCC also supplies daily requirements to the tribal families. GCC with its Rs. 100 crore annual turnover has been able to reach out to 4 million tribal families in the state.

National Rural Livelihoods Mission

The recently launched National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), the largest poverty reduction programme in the world, to support 10 crore poor families across the country with an outlay of about Rs. 200,000 crore [i.e. 2,000 billion] over 15 years, has specific focus on developing the perspective plans for Scheduled Tribes in each state to improve their livelihoods significantly so that they have a decent portfolio of livelihoods. Mobilising the tribal poor into self-help institutions around savings, credit and insurance, livelihoods collectives, social collectives, community-managed sustainable agriculture, health and nutrition etc., are the key elements in these perspective plans.

Further, NRLM works closely with other major flagship programmes/guarantees including MGNREGS, NRHM, Food Security (in the pipeline), RTE so that the NRLM-supported institutional structures create demand on the programmes to deliver for the STs.

Of the 187 tribal dominant districts, more than 60 of them are considered sensitive and a special support – Integrated Action Plan (IAP) – is made operational. The government is deploying three high-end young professionals – Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellows – in each district directly with District Administration, to help in implementing IAP.

Conclusion

Tribal communities are living in distress poverty despite rich natural resource, social resource and spiritual resource endowment. Their major livelihoods spheres – mostly around forests – include NTFP, farming, seasonal migration and MGNREGA. The proportion of the consumer rupee realised for their produce is extremely meagre. On the whole, they are subject to resource alienation (forests, commons and lands), financial exclusion and market exclusion. Their identity and cultural capitals are eroding, and there is an increased disruption in their social fabric. Thus, the STs are losing what they have (resource endowment) and are not getting on par with what the mainstream

could access in return or otherwise. That is the big irony. Change in the traditional diet, through Public Distribution System which is not tailored to the local tribal needs and preferences, has brought about a slow deterioration of health and nutrition among tribal people. Tribal health systems are 'fading' out. In the absence of access to quality healthcare, their health risks have multiplied.

Often we realise that we are getting back to the lifestyle and methods of STs as we pursue sustainable living. Tribal ways of living need to be appreciated and may have to be adopted if we are keen about addressing the various crises in our livelihoods domain – environment/climate, biodiversity, water, food, energy, health etc. When the crunch comes, we know that what matters the most is life – air, water, food, clothes, shelter and entertainment. All else does not matter. Therefore, we need to find ways to globalise time-tested tribal ways of living (with minor modifications, if warranted), instead of trying to pull them into exploding mainstream ways of living. Adivasis may be the original inhabitants of this land and need to have their ecosystem intact (better still, improved) so that they lead a life of dignity, contentment and peace, by pursuing their sustainable portfolios of livelihoods to meet their basic life needs directly or through realisation of a higher proportion of consumer rupee, commensurate with the real value of the products and services. Increased social, financial and institutional inclusion and support and reduced/reversed resource alienation would accelerate their prosperity for themselves, their next generations and for all of us.

Note

1 The discussion hereafter in this chapter is limited to the livelihoods of the tribes living in and around hills/hill slopes, forests and exclusive habitations.