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Adivasis in India

Resources, Livelihoods and Institutions

Lectures by Hanumanth Rao, Virginius Xaxa and Dev Nathan from the 2015 seminar on which this book is based to be found in 'Adivasis in India: issues of livelihood and labour market, public action and market solutions' Hyderabad: National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, 2015

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Contents

<i>Foreword by Prof. C.H. Hanumantha Rao</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>xi</i>
1. Development of Adivasis in India: An Overview <i>Kailash Sarap and Venkatanarayana Motkuri</i>	1
SECTION I: Poverty and Deprivations	
2. Tribal Poverty, Livelihood Struggles and Migration: Evidence from Drylands of Madhya Pradesh <i>D.C. Sah</i>	33
3. Marginalization of Agricultural Labourers among the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala: A Case Study of Adiyani Tribes of Wayanad District <i>T.P. Sudeep and S. Jayashree</i>	57
SECTION II: Labour Market – Pauperisation	
4. Labour Market and Adivasis: An Overview <i>Virginus Xaxa</i>	75
5. Histories of Proletarianisation: Migration and Adivasi Displacement as Modernisation <i>V.J. Varghese</i>	88
6. Impact of Informalisation and Role of Trade Unions on the Tea Tribe Workers in Assam <i>Angshuman Sarma and Prithiraj Borah</i>	101
7. Stagnant Structure of Workforce among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Andhra Pradesh <i>Venkatanarayana Motkuri</i>	119
8. Patterns of Employment among Tribal Women in the North Eastern Region of India <i>Bornali Borah</i>	134

SECTION III: Mining and Lost Livelihood

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 9. Improving or Worsening Livelihoods? Coal Mining and Its Effects on Adivasi Communities in Jharkhand State
<i>M. Gopinath Reddy, Prajna Paramita Mishra and Ch. Nagaraju</i> | 155 |
| 10. Indigenous Communities, Livelihoods and Displacement Due to Iron Ore Mining in Odisha: A Socio-Ecological Approach
<i>Sarmistha Pattanaik</i> | 176 |

SECTION IV: Forest and Livelihoods

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 11. Forest Based Livelihoods, Malki Practice and Forest Rights Act in Gujarat: The Case of Adivasis in the Dangs
<i>Aditi Patil, Aditya Kumar and Janmejaya Mishra</i> | 197 |
| 12. Forest Rights Act 2006 and Its Impact on Livelihoods in Odisha and Jharkhand
<i>Tapas Kumar Sarangi</i> | 211 |

SECTION V: Public Policies in Enhancing Livelihoods

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 13. Impacts of MGNREGS in Tribal Areas of Odisha
<i>Jogindra Naik</i> | 229 |
| 14. State Interventions for Livelihood Improvement: A Study on Chenchu Tribe
<i>L. Reddepa</i> | 244 |
| 15. Why Governance Matters for Livelihoods of Adivasis: Evidences from the States of Telagana and Andhra Pradesh
<i>Palla Trinadha Rao</i> | 261 |

- | | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Author Index | 277 |
|---------------------|-----|

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Development of Adivasis in India

An Overview

Kailash Sarap and Venkatanarayana Motkuri

BACKGROUND

Issues relating to improvement in the standard of living of the adivasi community have drawn the attention of scholars and policy planners. It has been emphasized that the development strategies, as followed in tribal areas in India over the decades, have not significantly impacted their livelihood conditions. Rather, the recent pattern of development has affected tribal people's access to customary land and forest based livelihood sources. There is concern over how to protect the current sources of livelihood and promote economic and human development among these communities through vibrant and pro-poor institutions. This volume deals with some of the issues relating to tribal development/underdevelopment. It will further the understanding of different stakeholders and generate a debate on how to: improve the capacity and capability of these communities, provide them with a decent living, and restore their dignity. It consists of a collection of research papers authored by experts and young scholars from various disciplines working on adivasi issues. A majority of authors have utilized field survey information to write their papers. These papers were presented in a National Seminar organized at NIRD&PR, Hyderabad, under the auspices of S.R. Sankaran Chair on rural labour, and later revised based on the comments and suggestions from seminar participants and discussants along with that of the reviewer(s).

The history of the marginalization of adivasis dates back to the period of British rule and continues unabated even after sixty years of Independence. Despite impressive economic growth in the last two decades and specific measures (protective and

promotional) taken for tribal development since independence, these communities are still lagging behind. It is observed that tribal communities lag 20 years behind the average population of the country¹ (World Bank 2011). The tribal communities of the country have been severely inflicted with the multiple deprivations. Problems such as poverty, underemployment/unemployment, land alienation, displacement, dispossession, burden of diseases, and educational deprivation are perennial. These communities are not only disproportionately bearing the burden of such sufferings, but also the acuteness is very high among them. A number of factors, including state policies, have contributed to such outcomes, particularly in respect of tribal communities. Gradual loss of control over their territories and natural resources such as land and forests (including erosion of these resources) has jeopardized the life and livelihood of the tribal people.

It is a paradox that their traditional resource base, i.e. the forest, has been used as a source of state revenue and/or as a source of growth (minerals base and mining), which has led to overall development of the society on the one hand but deprived the tribals of their livelihood on the other. Plenty of instances and evidences show that such economic growth has resulted in the erosion of tribal people's livelihood resources. It is observed that tribals have gained much less than the loss incurred in this development process (Guha 2007). Rather, they have been forced to sacrifice their livelihood for the sake of gains to the larger society. A fast growing Indian economy has left behind a considerable portion of its population to fight absolute poverty and multiple deprivations. These phenomena are largely concentrated in tribal areas (GoI 2014). It is observed that even the benefits of growth that trickled down have not been able to pull them out of their backwardness² (World Bank 2011).

Although the recent growth is considered pro-poor (or a poverty reduction measure) at an aggregate level, its impact is unequal, that is, some socio-economic groups have benefited more than the others (Dubey and Thorat 2012; Thorat and Dubey 2013). Given such differential impact, it is considered as anti-poor (Motiram and Naraparaju 2013). The poor among the marginalized sections such as tribes have benefited less than the desired level. According to Planning Commission's estimates, the average poverty rate across social groups in rural areas is about 33.8 per cent in 2009–10, whereas for Scheduled Tribes (STs) it is distinctively high at about 47.8 per cent. Poverty among STs is the highest. It is observed that among the marginalized sections³ such as STs, the decline in poverty rate over the period has been relatively small (Dubey and Thorat 2012). As a result, the poor are becoming increasingly marginalized, particularly the STs (Radhakrishna *et al.* 2013). Therefore,

particularly during the post reform period, the relative poverty of both the STs and the SCs (scheduled castes) has increased across states (*ibid.*). The outcome of high incidence of poverty among tribals reflects their poor socio-economic conditions. As observed, tribal pockets, in general, are found to be the most backward, even in developed states/districts (Bakshi *et al.* 2015). The returns to their livelihood activities are very low, which can be attributed to physical/geographical isolation, lack of or inadequate connectivity, communication infrastructure and irrigation, etc. (Kijima 2006). Besides, intervention by outside forces, including state policies, has adversely impacted their access to traditional sources of livelihood.

Table 1.1: Poverty Ratios (HCR) across Social Groups in Rural India

Year	ST	SC	OBC	Other	All
1993–94	65.7	62.2	–	43.9	50.1
2004–05	62.3	53.5	39.8	27.1	41.8
2009–10	47.4	42.3	31.9	21.0	33.8

Notes: 1. Based on Expert Group (Tendulkar) Methodology; 2. HCR – Head Count Ratio.

Source: Estimated (at S.R. Sankaran Chair) using unit record data of NSSO Consumer Expenditure Survey.

The marginalization process, which has deprived the adivasis of their livelihood and pushed them deeper into the hunger-poverty trap, has a long history. One of the factors that contributed to the marginalization of adivasis relates to the state policies. Many research studies have concentrated on state policies, particularly those relating to tribal land and the integration of adivasis into the mainstream society through uniform laws, to understand the social backwardness and economic impoverishment of the tribals. Such policies, followed since the period of British rule, have led to their adverse inclusion and deprivation (Kela 2012; Nathan and Xaxa 2012; Xaxa 2003&2007). In the integration process, tribals—an otherwise self-governed and self-sufficient subsistence tribal society/economy—have lost control over and access to their customary land and forest and other resources. The Land Policy⁴ of the British took away their land-based livelihood sources. The Forest Policy of the British restricted their livelihood opportunities (Guha 1983). Besides, with the establishment of infrastructure and increase in connectivity, the spread of factor and product markets (with the entry of creditor/money lenders/traders into tribal areas) adversely affected the tribal society and led to further land alienation and dis-possession/displacement (Kela 2012). The first contact between tribals and the non-tribals (or people from mainstream society) is considered as the beginning of their marginalization process (Elwin 1941). Tribal peasants have long been exploited by

money lenders and traders (Hardiman 1996; Kela 2012; Mosse *et al.* 2002; Sharan 2005). The integration of tribals into the mainstream society that is deeply rooted in an unequal social structure pushes them to the margins. Thus, the development process has further marginalized them.

In the post-independence era, too, tribals remain the most backward ethnic group in the country despite constitutional provisions for protecting and safeguarding their interests and promoting their development. Guha (2007) observes that adivasis as a whole have gained the least and lost the most during the six decades of democracy and development in post-independence India. Post-independence state policies, which are as worse as that of the British, have only worsened the situation for the adivasis. The autonomy over their territory that tribal communities lost was never restored. Consequently, their livelihood has deteriorated. Land alienation, displacement and restricted access to forest and forest products are some of the most severe problems faced by the Indian tribes. A large segment of the tribal population across India is found to be living in poor conditions, both socially and economically.

Size, Heterogeneity and Spread of Adivasis in India

Indeed India is the largest country in the World in terms of indigenous (tribes/ adivasis) population. As per 2011 Census, the total tribal population in India is about 104.5 million, which is 8.6 per cent of the total population (1,210 million). Of the total tribal population in the country, about 90 per cent live in the countryside, very often in inaccessible remote areas. Although tribes are distinguished by their unique linguistic and cultural traits, use of primitive modes of production, and relationship with the forest, there is heterogeneity within (Munshi 2012). There are about 705 tribes living in various parts of the country. Among these, 75 tribal communities have been identified as the most primitive tribal groups and are referred to as particularly vulnerable tribal groups⁵ (PVTGs).

In respect of their spread across the country, most of the tribes are concentrated in central, eastern, western and north-eastern parts of India. As regards their social composition, tribes form the majority in the north-east states; however, they constitute only a small segment (nine per cent) of the total tribal population of the country. The states in central, eastern and western parts of the country together comprise more than 80 per cent of the total tribal population of India. However, at an individual level, tribes in these states constitute a minority,⁶ that is, 5 to 30 per cent of the respective state's total population.

LIVELIHOOD PATTERNS OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES AND LONGSTANDING ISSUES: FOREST, LAND AND LABOUR

For a majority (around 70 per cent) of the tribals living in rural areas, agriculture and allied activities or primary sector are the prime source of livelihood, and only a small section depends on non-agricultural activities. Within the primary sector, for a large section of the tribal population, forest and forest products are important sources of livelihood along with farming (settled and swidden agriculture). But a number of factors are at work, which either restrict their access to these resources or encroach upon or deplete these resources. This has resulted in their dependence on labour market as wage labourers. In majority of the cases, their livelihood depends on agriculture, collection of forest produce and/or wage labour.

Forest Policies and Impact of PESA⁷ and FRA⁸

Since the period of British rule, tribal communities have had restricted access to forest resources for livelihood owing to stringent forest policies. The British forest policies in India were framed with the objective of extracting maximum profit, which included the construction of a network of railway lines to earn revenue through timber trade. The Indian Forest Act of 1865, superseded by 1878 Act, empowered the government to appropriate any land covered with trees, thereby asserting state monopoly over forest resources. In the process, the British forest policies not only alienated many forest dwellers from their livelihood sources (including forest and land), but also displaced quite a few (Guha 1983). Such policies continued even in the post-independence period (*ibid*). Post-independence, tribal people's access to forest produce was further restricted in the name of protected/reserve forests and various wild life sanctuaries. Large-scale development projects have displaced millions of forest dwellers. Moreover, the environmental concerns⁹ have further affected the dependency of tribals on forest resources for their livelihood. It is, however, ironical that on the one hand the Indian states blames tribals for degrading the environment, but on the other hand they allow the private/corporate sector to carry out rampant mining activities and other development projects. One of the main causes of forest degradation is illegal timber trade, mostly by non-tribals who employ tribal labourers (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1982) for the purpose. Moreover, the negative impact of mining activities on the surrounding environment and the ecological balance are completely ignored.

Since the late 1980s, forest policies have undergone changes with the introduction of participatory forest management through state sponsored programmes like Joint

Forest Management (JFM). Similarly, self-instituted community forest management groups have also evolved in many tribal areas. Although the JFM programme has the potential to improve the livelihoods of forest-dependent tribal communities, its impact is marginal due to implementation-related problems. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA empowers gram sabhas to manage forestlands and community resources, including making decisions relating to land acquisition and development projects (GoI 2014). But many studies have found that its functioning has not been satisfactory (Bijoy 2012; Ramakrishna and Mahaprashasta 2013; GoI 2008; Sarap and Sarangi 2009).

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006,¹⁰ was passed on December 15, 2006, and notified into force a year later on December 31, 2007. However, the said rules and regulations (which provide the operational details) have only recently come into force, on January 1, 2008. It is meant to correct the historical injustice done to forest dwelling communities while granting them individual/community-based tenurial rights over forestland (GoI 2014). However, the promising hopes generated by this Act failed to materialize because of tardy implementation and inadequate response from the states (Bandi 2015; Kothari and Meena 2010; Reddy *et al.* 2011; Sarap *et al.* 2013; Kashwan, 2013). Many a time states have focused more on providing land rights to individual claimants under FRA while neglecting community forest rights. It has also neglected the most vulnerable groups and residents of forest villages. Up to May 2014, 14.46 lakh titles were distributed under FRA, 2006, of which 14.12 lakhs were individual claims and 0.34 lakh community-based claims.

Land Alienation and Displacement

The phenomenon of tribal land alienation remains unabated; in fact, it has become rampant over the last few decades. Tribals have been alienated both from their private property and common property resources (CPRs) under different regimes. The land tenure system, which defined the relationship of the tribals with land and its use, was overridden with the introduction of the property (private and state) rights regime by the colonial government. As a result, land that was not settled as private property became state property, which further restricted tribal access to land. One can observe a decline in the operated area in two tribal-dominant states, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, during the period from 2005–06 to 2010–11 (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Change in Number of Holdings and Operated Area of Tribal Communities in Two Tribal-dominant States in India

Year	Chhattisgarh		Odisha	
	Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area
2005–06	1105	2210	1407	1748
2010–11	1177	2159	1426	1615

Note: Holdings are in '000' and Areas in '000' acres.

Source: Agricultural Census.

Displacement and the consequent loss of livelihood through dispossession are the major problems that the adivasis in India have been facing for a long time. There is state-led displacement in the guise of development projects for serving larger societal interests on the one hand and alienation from their land through encroachments by non-tribals on the other. Colonial land policies and laws, including administrative structure, paved the way for the entry of non-tribals into tribal areas. Tribals soon began to lose control over their territories and resources, and consequently the opportunities to enhance their livelihoods. Although according to the Government of India Act, 1935¹¹—and later the Constitution of India—laws pertaining to the administration of the Indian state are not applicable to tribal areas (i.e. notified Scheduled areas), the entry of non-tribals into tribal areas and consequent encroachment of tribal private lands has not been arrested. Land transfers from tribals to non-tribals through different means (very often deceitful) have been taking place for years (Sharan 2005; Rao P.T., 2014; Reddy 2014).

Rules that were introduced to protect both the private and the communal lands of the tribes have very often been violated by non-tribals and other institutions. As per the Annual Report 2007–08 of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, out of the 5.06 lakh cases of tribal land alienation involving 9.02 lakh acres of land, only 2.25 lakh cases (44.7 per cent) covering 5.0 lakh acres of land (55.4 per cent) have been disposed in favour of tribals, while 39.3 per cent of cases constituting 45.6 per cent of land were rejected by the court (GoI 2008; also see GoI 2014).

In India, large-scale development projects, such as irrigation and mining activities, have forcibly displaced millions from their homelands, particularly the tribals (Somayaji and Talwar 2011). Large-scale irrigation and infrastructure projects undertaken since independence and as well as the recent mining operations, particularly in the forest belt across central India, resulted in massive evictions or displacement of tribals. The Land Acquisition Act, 1894 (which was amended in 1984) had become detrimental to tribal interests. An estimate indicates that roughly 60 million persons were forcefully evicted (displaced) through land acquisition

process since independence, between 1947 and 2000, (GoI 2014; Fernandes 2008). Of which a significant proportion of them were tribals (see Fernandes, 2007). In the tribal dominant regions it is very high and increasing during the post-reform period.

Displacement also has an adverse impact on the social organization of tribal communities. In the process tribals lose their identity, their family and kinship ties become weak, and their traditional mechanism of social control vanishes. It also encourages begging and prostitution. The destruction of their traditional livelihoods without ensuring a suitable compensatory livelihood mechanism paralyzes the economic development of tribal families (George 2009: 157–188).

Resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced tribals has remained a challenge (Somayaji and Talwar 2011). It has been observed that many of the displaced are struggling to get reasonable compensation and rehabilitation. In many cases either ownership of land in tribal area is not individual but communal, or individual property (land) ownership information is not recorded or updated in the registers. In such cases, individuals holding such lands are denied compensation. Hardly 20 to 40 per of the total displaced tribals are resettled and rehabilitated (Fernandes and Asif 1997; Fernandes, 2008 & 2007; Sharma and Choudhury 2011). In most cases of rehabilitation, the displaced were provided with housing in new localities (mostly away from their homeland) but without any provision for livelihood security. Also, the rehabilitation environment is completely different from their traditional environment. In instances where tribal labourers are displaced due to industrial projects, they are compelled to move out of their traditional livelihood zones without the requisite skills (i.e. relating to industrial work) to industrial complexes nearby or elsewhere. It either leads them to industrial nomadism (Vidyarthi 1970) and/or they become footloose labourers in the urban informal sector (Bremner 1996). More importantly, until the recent past, displacement was largely caused by state-led development projects. But now, it can be attributed to the recent change in state policy which favours the private corporate sector¹² (Levien 2015).

Tribal Agriculture: Loss of Land, Marginalization of Peasantry and Low Productivity

Over the years, tribal agricultural practices have transformed from hunters-gatherers and slash-and-burn or swidden cultivation to settled agriculture. Although tribals appear to be relatively better off when compared to the other social groups in terms of landownership, most of the tribal farmers are disproportionately marginal and small farmers. More importantly, the productive potential of land and labour in tribal areas and/or of tribal farmers is distinctively low when compared to farmers in

non-tribal areas and non-tribal farmers in tribal areas. One can observe a significant difference in the yield rate of foodgrains between tribal-dominant districts and others (Figure 1, column b). The yield rate in these districts is about 25 per cent lower than that in districts with a small percentage of tribal population. As the returns to their land and labour are low, their standard of living is poor. Kijima's (2006) study observed that the differentials in the living standards between the SC/ST and the non-SC/ST households are due to differences in the returns to their economic activities.¹³ It shows that despite rapid growth in recent decades, the disparities due to differences in returns did not change much between 1983 and 1999, particularly for STs, owing to their limiting characteristics such as geographical isolation, lack of irrigation (see Table 1.3) and other communication infrastructure.

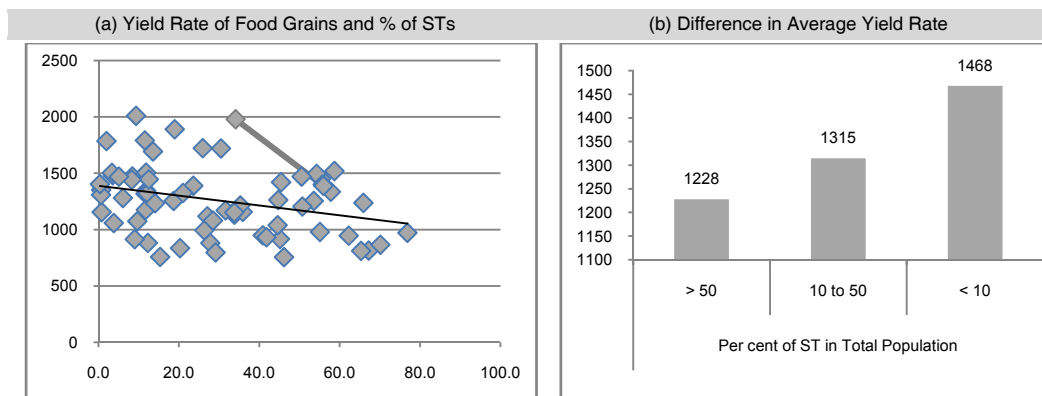


Fig. 1.1: Relationship between Yield Rate and Percentage of ST Population across Districts in Three Tribal-dominant States (Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand)

Note: 1. Three-year average (2005–06, 2006–07 and 2007–08); 2. Average of Food Grains; 3. For the second segment (b) we have taken average of the district falling in each category; categorization is based on the percentage of ST Population.

Source: 1. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India; 2. Census of India.

Per capita income has conventionally been considered as a development indicator of a country/region or a society, and is determined by: labour force participation rate, sectoral composition or occupational distribution of the labour force, and the sectoral patterns of productivity growth (Bhaduri 2006). In India, the labour force participation rate is found to be higher among tribes as compared to other social groups. As for the sectoral distribution, a large segment of the labour force, especially in rural areas, is engaged in agriculture. However, agricultural techniques and practices followed in tribal areas remain primitive. Mainstream technology and practices have not yet reached the tribal areas. A very small percentage of agricultural land—in tribal areas in general and that owned by tribals in particular—is irrigated.

Less than one-fifth of the total operated area under STs was irrigated in 2010–11 and there has been a marginal increase in the percentage of irrigated area in the last one-and-half decade (Table 1.3). Owing to poor extension services and credit facilities, such practices are leading to very low land and labour productivity.

Table 1.3: Percentage of Operated Holdings/Area Irrigated: All India

Year	ST		All	
	Holdings	Area	Holdings	Area
1995–96	26.7	12.8	48.4	32.4
2005–06	29.0	17.0	55.4	41.1
2010–11	30.5	19.0	51.8	40.5

Source: Agricultural Census for various years.

Along with lower productivity in agriculture, increasing pauperization and marginalization of peasantry have also affected tribal livelihood. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data shows an increasing trend of landlessness among tribal households, which is leading to further pauperization. The percentage of households without any land or cultivated land (landlessness) is also increasing. It is noteworthy that the percentage of households that do not have agricultural land¹⁴ increased from 28 per cent in 1987–88 to 39 per cent in 2009–10 (Table 1.4). Land alienation due to non-tribal encroachment on tribal land or displacement could be one of the reasons for increasing landlessness among tribal communities.

Table 1.4: Proportion of Adivasi Households that Did Not Own, Possess and Cultivate Any Land, Rural India, 1987–88 to 2011–12 (in %)

Year	Households That did Not Own any Land	Households that did Not Possess any Land	Households that did not Cultivate any Land
1987–88	16	13	28
1993–94	19	13	30
1999–2000	10	7	32
2004–05	24	23	34
2009–10	24	31	39
2011–12	24	25	39

Notes: 1. Data on ownership and possession of land cover all types of land. 2. For consistency over different rounds of NSS surveys, only landholdings above 0.01 hectare were counted; 3. Based on unit-level data from various rounds of the National Sample Survey Organization's (NSSO's) Surveys of Employment and Unemployment.

Source: Karat and Rawal (2014).

Marginalization of peasantry is also increasing among tribal communities. The number of land holdings (mostly small and marginal) among STs has been increasing over the years. The rate of growth in respect of the size of area operated for STs has been very low as compared to the number of holdings with them. As a result, the size of the average landholding has been decreasing. The number and thereby share of the small and marginal holdings has been increasing (Figure 2). It is observed that such a decline is more rapid among the adivasis than among other groups (World Bank, 2011). The large increase in the total number of holdings is a reflection of the increase in small and marginal holdings, which can be attributed to the disintegration of landholdings due to population pressure. Marginalization could also be due to land alienation and/or part(s) of land lost to non-tribals. The size of the landholding indicates that most of the tribals are marginal and small farmers.

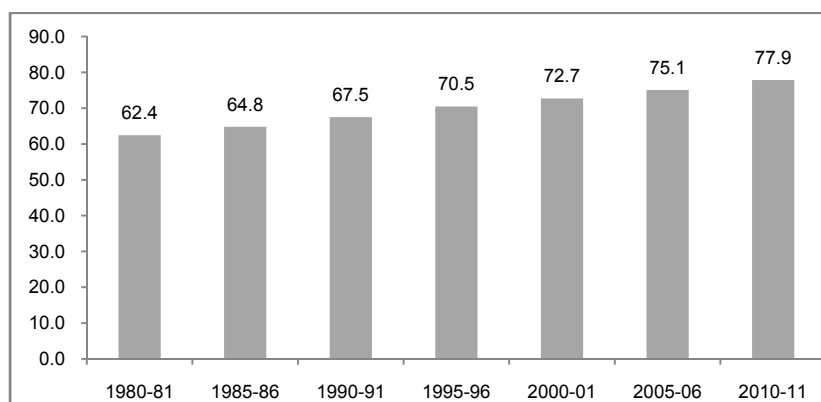


Fig. 1.2: Percentage of Marginal and Small Farmers in the Total Tribal Landholding in India

Source: Agricultural Census.

Table 1.5: Social Group-wise Percentage Distribution of Rural Households by Major Source of Livelihood, 2009–10

Social Groups	Self-employed in			Rural (Casual) Labour in			Others
	Agriculture	Non-Agriculture	Both	Agriculture	Non-Agriculture	Both	
ST	37.0	7.0	44.0	33.4	13.1	46.5	9.5
SC	17.1	13.7	30.7	36.9	22.1	58.9	10.3
OBC	34.1	17.2	51.3	23.3	14.0	37.3	11.4
Others	39.4	18.1	57.4	15.9	10.3	26.2	16.3
All	31.9	15.5	47.4	25.6	12.2	40.4	12.2

Note: Rural India.

Source: NSS Report No. 543, 2013.

The trend of landlessness and marginalization of peasantry in tribal areas is not only rising as compared to other groups (Table 1.5), but also its severity and intensity are very high owing to land alienation. The severity of increasing incidence of landlessness is leading to casualization of the labour force in agriculture.

NSS survey data indicates that 37 per cent of the households belonging to ST community engage in self-cultivation for livelihood and another 33.4 per cent depend on casual agricultural labour (Table 1.5). While their dependence on self-cultivation is declining, there is an increasing demand for agricultural work in the labour market (Table 1.6). Even those who engage in self-cultivation not only use primitive techniques, but also lack proper irrigation facilities, which leads to poor land and labour productivity. Moreover, it may not be enough to address the minimum consumption needs of the family. Hence, they either have to depend on labour market or forest or other common property resources to meet their daily needs (see Naik in this volume).

Emerging Labour Market: Casualization of Labour Force and Migration

Tribals have long been dependent on labour markets for their livelihood. Owing to strict forest policies of the British, dependence on labour market became inevitable. For the British, tribal people were a source of cheap labour: they were employed for track laying and road building as well as in mines, forest areas and plantations outside their homeland (Xaxa 2015). In independent India, such a process continued and aggravated further, leaving tribal people exposed to the vagaries of the casual labour market. Displacement and land alienation along with restriction on access to forest produce left them with no option other than to work as casual labourers. Particularly, in respect of land alienation, many a time people work on the land of non-tribal settlers who displaced the original tribal population (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1982).

Casualization of Tribal Labour Force

Over the years, casualization has increased in tribal areas, with the exception (Table 1.6) of the year 2004–05. Here, it is to be noted that the figures for the year 2004–05 are considered exceptional because of certain changes adopted in the survey (Papola 2012). There are Constitutional provisions on positive discrimination and policy reservation in formal sector jobs for the adivasis. But, it requires certain educational qualifications and skills, which are poor in the case of the adivasis. Thus, despite widespread availability of such jobs, they were initially unable to find work (Xaxa 2015). And when they were able to attain the requisite qualifications, the

shrinking public and formal sectors along with the ever growing competition and discrimination left them educationally unemployed (*ibid.*). Hence, there has been either stagnation or a slow progress of the workforce employed in regular wage/salaried stream. However, improvement in this category is only a recent phenomenon. The percentage of workforce engaged in self-employment is gradually reducing (Table 1.6). In rural areas, the casualization of tribal labour force has become quite apparent in the last two decades. The percentage of agricultural labourers is increasing with a corresponding decline in the percentage of cultivators in the ST workforce (Table 1.7). It appears to be due to the erosion of resources (land and forest) in rural areas. It is evident that the percentage of self-employed in general and of cultivators in the tribal labour force in particular has been declining. As a result, many of them resort to migration to supplement their livelihood.

Table 1.6: Trends in Percentage Distribution of ST Workforce by Nature of Employment in India

Year	% of Casual Labour	% of Self-employed	% of Regular Wage/Salaried
1983	40.2	47.1	12.7
1993–94	43.3	46.1	10.7
2004–05	40.0	47.2	13.0
2009–10	45.0	40.0	15.2

Note: 1. Rural-urban and male-female combined; 2. Undivided state of Andhra Pradesh.

Source: Estimations using unit record data of NSS Quinquennial Employment and Unemployment Surveys.

Table 1.7: Percentage of Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers in Tribal (ST) Workforce in Rural India

Year	Cultivators		Agricultural Labourers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1991	62.0	48.6	27.2	44.9
2001	51.1	42.6	32.0	45.9
2011	41.6	31.3	40.3	55.3

Note: Total Workers (including the Main and Marginal).

Source: Scheduled Tribes Primary Census Abstract, Census of India, for three years (1991, 2001 and 2011).

Migration

Casualization of labour and migration of tribal labourers to seek better opportunities outside their homeland are not new occurrences; it has been happening since the British ruled India. During the colonial period, tribals formed a major source of

labour supply for plantations in different parts of the country (Kar 1981; and Bhowmik 1982; Saravanan 1998). They were probably pulled out of their homeland to meet the growing demand for labour in plantations. But the increasing trend of out-migration (both temporary and seasonal) among tribals, including that of tribal women, in recent years is drawing the attention of researchers and policy makers (Jha 2005; Mosse *et al.* 2002; Keshri and Bhagat 2012). A number of factors have contributed to such migration—a popular livelihood strategy among tribals. These include ecological deterioration, land alienation, displacement, dispossession and indebtedness (Mosse *et al.* 2002; Saravanan 1998; Jayaraman 1979; Patel 2011). Such distressed migrant workers are trapped in an exploitative system at destination (Bremar 1994, 1996; Mosse *et al.* 2005).

Impact of Policy Intervention

Policy interventions in the rural labour market through MGNREGS appear to be benefiting the labouring poor in general and those in tribal areas in particular (Panda 2015; Saxena and Haragopal 2014). It has been found that the participation rate in MGNREGS is highest among tribals, and it is disproportionately higher than their population share (MORD 2012) as compared to other social groups (NSSO 2013). But the data reveals that half of the ST households did not get job cards at all. Amongst those who received job cards, only 40 per cent actually participated in MGNREGS projects. About 20 per cent did not get work of their choice, while the remaining 40 per cent did not seek work at all (*ibid.*). The average days of employment received under the scheme per ST household is 42 days. Though it is not less than that received by any other social group, it is less than half of the promised number of days, i.e. 100 days of employment (Table 1.8).

Table 1.8: Participation in MGNREGS across Social Groups in India, 2009–10

Social Group	% of HHs Got Job Card	Among the Households with Job Cards			Avg. No. of Days Worked among those Who Got Work
		% Got Work	% Sought Work but Didn't Get	% Didn't Seek Work	
ST	54.1	39.8	19.7	36.3	42
SC	45.0	32.9	22.2	42.9	35
OBC	30.6	20.9	18.3	58.3	42
Others	24.0	15.1	18.1	63.8	27
All	34.7	24.2	19.3	53.8	37

Source: NSSO, 2009–10.

However, it should not be presumed that not getting a job card and not seeking work does not mean that they do not want to work because they have enough employment opportunities. Rather, it could be due to lack of awareness of or access to the programme or the scheme itself may not have been implemented in remote tribal areas. With regard to MGNREGS, the workforce participation rate among tribals varies across states and regions within the states. It has been observed that despite the implementation of MGNREGS, the participation rate is very low in states with a large number of poor (Saxena 2015). Similarly, except Rajasthan, the performance of other states with substantial tribal population is observed to be poor. State capacity to implement the scheme may also affect the participation of poor in general and of the tribes in particular.

Poor Human Capital

One of the factors that contribute to the stagnant structure of workforce in terms of the shift to non-farm activities and low productivity of labour and land particularly among the tribal communities is poor or inadequate human capital¹⁵ formation. This is discussed in the context of education and healthcare.

Illiteracy and Poor Educational Levels

As per 2011 Census, a little less than 60 per cent of the tribal population in India is literate, while the rest 40 per cent is still illiterate. The overall literacy rate in India is 73 per cent. Though the gap between literacy rate among STs and the overall average of all social groups has been declining, particularly in the last three decades, it is still substantial (14 percentage points). High adult illiteracy among tribes is the result of the history of neglect of primary education. In respect of female literacy, the situation is even worse. In fact, it has been found that female literacy is less than 10 per cent (GoI 2013) in some tribal-dominant districts. If one considers the percentage of population having studied beyond primary level or secondary level, it is not only found to be very low among tribals, but also there is a wide gap between tribals and the 'others'. The gap increases when we move to higher levels of education.

Though there has been substantial progress in the school participation rate among tribal children, especially in the last two decades in the context of DPEP and SSA,¹⁶ the dropout rate (at 35 per cent in primary cycle and more than 50 per cent in elementary cycle) is still observed to be very high. It means that more than one-third of the cohorts who take admission leave school before completing primary education. As a result, they remain 'functional illiterates' throughout adulthood. One reason for

high dropout rate is that the content and language across the curriculum is alien to their environment (Sundar 2010). Another reason could be that the families need them (children) to work in order to meet their daily minimum needs.

Burden of Disease and Poor Access to Healthcare

Tribal areas are characterized by poor healthcare facilities. There is a high prevalence of child mortality, malnutrition and burden of disease among tribal communities. Child mortality is distinctively high, especially among the tribal population: it is more than double the national average. With respect to malnutrition among children, it is only high among the adivasi children, and it is rising at an alarming rate (Das *et al.* 2010; World Bank 2011). Malnutrition combined with poverty and chronic poverty is concentrated in a few geographical locations and among specific social groups (Reddy *et al.* 2004), but is especially high among the tribals.

Inadequate Access to Public Services

A large number of births in tribal areas take place at home in the absence of skilled attendants. Access to potable drinking-water and improved sanitation for hygiene promotion—which has far-reaching implications in respect of health—are very poor. As per the recent Census data, about 85 per cent of tribal households in rural areas do not have access to drinking-water from any treated source. Eighty per cent do not have any drinking-water facility within their premises. More than three-fourths of the ST households do not have sanitation facilities (lavatory, bathroom and drainage system). Poor housing condition is another dimension of multiple deprivations: that they experience. a majority of the tribal population lives in ‘habitable’ spaces (GoI 2014).

Tribal Development Programmes: Inefficient and Ineffective

In order to address the pressing issues confronting the tribal population, multiple strategies¹⁷ have been employed since independence under various Five Years Plans.¹⁸ Different institutions¹⁹ have been established as a mechanism to deliver goods and services for the development of tribal communities and various programmes have been initiated to improve their social and economic conditions²⁰ (GoI 2014). Several development programmes such as Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) and other similar schemes have been in operation in tribal areas for years. But these schemes have had a marginal impact on the livelihood condition of the tribal people. Several factors may have contributed to the malfunctioning of these schemes. These include lack of

coordination between different departments dealing with tribal issues, lack of accountability by the implementing agencies, and continued dominance of traditional elites over the decision-making process. Similarly, limited decentralization and low level of awareness among the poor are other factors that contribute to the existing state of affairs (Reddy 2014: 405; Harriss 2000; Rout and Pattnaik 2014).

Malfunctioning of factor and product markets in tribal areas may be attributed to the failure of market interlinkages. As seen above, state action is also feeble. In such a situation, market-oriented policies aimed at improving the living conditions of the tribal people will only have a limited impact.

In the context of a welfare state wherein the state is the prime mover in the development process, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure the welfare of all sections of its population, especially that of the most backward communities.²¹ The concept of a welfare state goes beyond the 'material'—it is to introduce family-based welfare through community-based activities (Sen 1999).

But as seen above, apart from feeble state actions, the social movement to strengthen the capacity and capability of tribal communities has also been very weak. As a result, stakeholders have been unable to properly articulate tribal issues and problems among the policy makers.

The foregoing analysis reveals that tribal communities are characterized by high incidence of income, human and vulnerability poverty, and land alienation and displacement from their traditional sources of livelihood. This has led to deterioration of living conditions despite high economic growth in the last two decades. Institutions that deal with improvements in living conditions of these communities have been largely ineffective. As a result, vast majority of the tribal population lives in utter misery.

STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

This volume, a collection of fourteen research papers received from different regions of India, sheds light on different aspects of tribal livelihood and the impact of state policies on it. It has been observed that rather than improving the situation, state policies have contributed to the erosion of their livelihood base. Thus, the present volume also suggests ways to improve their standard of living.

This volume is organized into six thematic sections. Section I consists of three papers that focus on poverty and marginalization of the tribes. D.C. Sah's paper depicts the interrelationship among poverty, livelihood struggles and seasonal migration in the

drylands of Madhya Pradesh, especially its Tribal Belt. It argues that a shock can induce a complex socioeconomic process like failure to access food, debt-trap and depletion of assets, repayment, short-term land transactions, and migration (with some variation across study regions and different groups of households). Given the high intensity of poverty among tribal communities, income from forest produce, agriculture and casual labour, including from MGNREGS, is not enough to satisfy their needs. As a result, they choose to migrate to nearby towns. However, the low bargaining power of labourers vis-à-vis with the employers results in exploitation in the form of deductions from wages or delay in payment or denial of access to social amenities and/or social security. The paper by Sudeep T.P. and Jayashree S. analyzes the problems faced by agricultural labourers of the Adiyani tribal community of Wayanad district in Kerala who were traditionally bonded labourers. He found that the Adiyans have limited access to the local labour market and also little access to schemes like MGNREGS and/or Kudumbashree. As a result, they have to commute to neighbouring states to work under pitiable conditions to earn subsistence income.

Section II consists of four papers which describe the circumstances leading to the dependency on labour market. Virginious Xaxa's paper discusses a number of issues relating to tribals. It traces the origin of social differentiation among tribes; the emergent, forms and pattern of labour market in tribal regions and examines the underlying forces. It then explores the extent to which the pattern of labour market, prevalence since the colonial times, has continued in the post independence era. It also delves into the new forms of employment that the planned economic development opened up and analysed the extent of participation of tribes in it. Finally, the paper has made an attempt to look into the new avenue of employment that has attracted the tribes since early 1990s. V.J. Varghese's paper sheds light on the proletarianization of the adivasis of Malabar/Wayanad in Northern Kerala during the course of modernity. The analysis is particularly with reference to the migration of Syrian Christian settlers to the highlands and forests of Malabar in the 20th century. Drawing from historical archives and ethnographic research in Wayanad, the paper argues that the process of displacement and proletarianization and dominant discourse of development have not only fractured the adivasi political consciousness, but also relegated them to the status of welfare recipients.

The paper by Angshuman Sarma and Prithiraj Borah analyzes the plight of slothful adivasi workforce in the organized tea sector in the era of globalization. It highlights how growing informalization has affected their social security. On the basis of field information the study has tried to understand the impact of trade unions on the lives and livelihood of tea garden workers. The workers, mainly tribal migrants, remain

confined to the 'enclave economy' of the gardens. As a result, social integration with local people is weak with low mobility, which, in turn, excludes them both socially and economically. The paper by Venkatanarayana Motkuri examines the changes in the structure of tribal workforce in the state of undivided Andhra Pradesh. He observes that in the last three decades the occupational structure has remained unchanged. In other words, there is no shift from agriculture to non-agricultural activities. Also, it observes an increasing trend of landlessness and casualization of tribal workforce in the State. Factors that contribute to such stagnation in occupational structure and pauperization are: increasing landlessness owing to land alienation, inadequate human capital or skills, absence of rural non-farm sector, geographical immobility and ultimately the pattern of growth itself. Bornali Borah's paper studies the female employment scenario in the North Eastern Region, especially the tribal-dominant states, and the dominance of *push* factors over *pull* factors. It observed that the states in this region have higher regional averages of female workforce participation rates, exceeding the national average. However, it argues that high rates of employment alone are insufficient to determine the economic and social status of these states and of women in particular.

Section III contains three papers that focus on the impact of mining on tribal livelihood. The paper by M. Gopinath Reddy, Prajna Paramita Mishra and Ch. Nagaraju studies the changes in the landholding position of the households due to mining activities as well as the local communities' perception on how mining activities have impacted the environment in Jharkhand. It observed that mining activities have affected the primary occupation, i.e. agriculture; as a result, a large segment of the workforce has shifted to non-agricultural sector. However, for a majority, their livelihood position declined in the post-mining phase, and only a few amongst those who found employment in the coal mining industry have benefited. It also observed that, numerically speaking, the STs are considered losers in terms of key assets like land and house. The paper by Sarmistha Pattanaik looks into the development projects undertaken by multinational companies in tribal-dominant areas of Odisha. According to her findings, tribals have not only lost their livelihoods, but also are facing resource depletion due to large-scale mining projects. This, in turn, has caused large-scale displacement of people and environmental destruction over the years. Huge investments in mineral extraction in the State seem to have made little difference to poverty and employment status.

Two papers in section IV delineate the impact of recent forest policies on the livelihoods of the adivasis. The paper by Aditi Patil, Aditya Kumar and Janmejaya Mishra examines the role of forest resources in the livelihoods of the adivasis,

focusing on the Malki system—a unique system of forest resource governance and a source of livelihood in the Dangs in Gujarat. It argues that despite having low monetary value, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), timber products and fuel wood continue to provide critical support to adivasi households. However, rapid degradation of forest resources, including other recent factors, has put these communities under considerable strain. Though Malki practice continues to be a source of income for tribals, it is unable to ensure conservation of resources partly due to intervention of outside forces. Despite implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA) to increase awareness among tribal communities, the benefits are less than modest due to certain problems. The paper by Tapas Kumar Sarangi, based on a sample survey of eight villages in Odisha and Jharkhad, examines the process of implementation and impact of FRA. He observes that though there has been some progress relating to the implementation of FRA, especially with regard to allocation of land tenure rights to individuals in Odisha compared to Jharkhand, the progress in distribution of community rights to the forest dwellers is tardy. However, after receiving property rights (*patta*) over forestland, many beneficiaries (especially in Odisha) have reported improvement in land and water resources. Besides, it has also enabled them to avail benefits under other programmes such as Indira Awas Yojna, etc.

Section V, consisting of three papers, discusses: rural labour market and its policies, process of implementation of MGNREGS to enhance livelihood security in rural areas, access to land and its role in socioeconomic empowerment of the primitive tribes, and issues of governance in the Fifth Schedule areas and its impact on the livelihoods of the adivasis. Jogindra Naik's paper examines the impact of MGNREGS on the livelihood security of tribal households, based on the primary data collected from 320 households from two tribal districts of Odisha. The implementation of MGNREGS through Integrated Natural Resources Management (INRM) approach has shown positive results in terms of enhancing the livelihoods of beneficiary households. Also, it has become a significant vehicle for regenerating the depleting natural resource base and increasing agricultural productivity. The paper by L. Reddepa examines the impact of land distribution on and effect of relevant policy interventions in improving the livelihood of a primitive tribe, the Chenchus, living in undivided Andhra Pradesh. He observed that the distribution of land and other inputs at subsidized prices to beneficiaries could not be translated into better livelihood for them due to inferior quality of land, implementation deficiencies, and various other socio-economic and cultural barriers. However, for Chenchus, the linking of land development activities with MGNREGA has led to a gradual transition—from nomadic to settled agriculture. But still, landlessness is very high

among them, and only a few have benefited from distribution of land under FRA. The last paper by P. Trinadha Rao examines governance issues in the Fifth Schedule areas and its impact on adivasi livelihood in order to assess the efficacy of the administrative mechanism. It has found that not only have governance systems become insensitive to the interests of the adivasis, but also the failure of the state machinery entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the tribals remains unquestioned. According to the author, there is a need to re-examine the processes of governance and the prevailing legal framework to check the growing inequalities, unrest and loss of natural wealth of the country. Issues such as neglect of tribal self-rule, constitutional promise and the goal of several legislations, and, subordination of the adivasi society need immediate attention.

THE WAY FORWARD

Based on the above discussion and on the deliberations that took place in the course of the seminar, there is need for a multipronged strategy that will use a combination of policy options for the development of tribal communities in the country. These include improving access to and control over land rights, forest products, and decent and productive employment. Similarly, there is need for effective public action and an efficient institutional mechanism to implement the various development schemes to protect livelihoods and promote economic and human development of these communities. Efforts must also be made to halt erosion of and encourage restoration of their livelihood resources (Rao 2015).

Provision of cultivable and homestead land is a necessary and effective public action that can help curb the growing trend of landlessness among tribal communities. Similarly, increasing agricultural productivity in tribal areas is crucial for raising income, since majority of the tribal population is still dependent on agriculture. In fact, an innovative combination of existing technology can help raise crop productivity in tribal areas. Improving irrigation infrastructure along with promoting high yield varieties and better cultivation practices is also necessary (*ibid.*). There is a policy debate on promoting organic farming in tribal areas. It is, however, to be noted that organic farming is profitable not because of its quality and yield, but its price, if marketed properly. When it comes to food security issues, organic farming is not the answer. Hence policy efforts are needed to ensure that tribal farmers get better yields using High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds and thereby better incomes as well as improved irrigation infrastructure and technology to enhance crop production. There is a need for increased and continuous access to institutional credit, both for production and consumption purposes for the poor in general and

the tribal poor in particular (Bhaduri 2006), to facilitate the adoption of new technologies.

Similarly, improving access to quality education will both enhance the productive capacity of the tribal workforce and increase awareness about the types of technology/practices to use. A number of alternative institutional frameworks will have to be worked out with dedicated support from civil society organizations. Also, there is a need to revamp the existing institutions to make them more effective and to facilitate genuine tribal representation (*ibid.*).

Effective implementation of FRA and agricultural development are crucial to ensure tribal peoples' access to forest products and to make conservation more accountable. There is need for synergetic implementation of MGNREGS with other forest-related schemes to achieve livelihood security. Distress-led and short-term seasonal migration has to be contained by improving local resources, including raising agricultural productivity, quoting fair prices for forest/farm products, and creating opportunities for regular wage employment. These will increase and/or stabilize the incomes of tribal households. Continuous effort towards effective implementation of MNREGS will prove beneficial for the development of tribal communities and contribute to the stability of their livelihood system.

Besides, effective measures must be taken by state and other stakeholders to eliminate all forms of discrimination against tribals. For this purpose, there is a need for new and innovative institutions in the form of people's political agencies to help them overcome critical obstacles to development.

It is important to improve the governance structure in tribal areas so as to revamp the current schemes. It will not only reduce the transaction cost of reaching potential beneficiaries, but also enhance implementation through effective monitoring of the programmes. To this end, genuine tribal representation in such institutions is crucial.

Lastly, there is a need to motivate the heterogeneous tribal communities through innovative educational strategies, government and civil society activism, and building role models to bring them into the mainstream and instilling confidence and self-respect in them.

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END NOTES

1. When compared with the better-off communities, the time-lag in development levels will be greater.
2. The World Bank study (2011) observed that while India's success story in respect of economic growth and poverty reduction in the recent past has received praise, the marginalized sections such as the adivasis or the STs are still lagging behind.
3. Both STs and SCs have benefited the least; the magnitude of decline in poverty ratio has been the lowest for these social groups when compared to that of other social groups (Thorat and Dubey 2013). By occupational groups, the study observed that self-employed households have done better than the wage labour households in terms of poverty reduction, and non-farm wage labour households have done better than farm wage labour households. The economic growth was least pro-poor for wage labourers, particularly for farm wage labourers. Such a trend has had a negative impact on SC/STs because most of the labouring poor belong to these communities (Ibid.).
4. Most important are the Pitt's India Act of 1784 and the Land Acquisition Act 1894 of the British.
5. See Ministry of Tribal Affairs website: <http://tribal.nic.in>
6. These states are Madhya Pradesh (21 per cent), Maharashtra (9.4 per cent), Gujarat (14.8 per cent), Rajasthan (13.5 per cent), Chhattisgarh (30.6 per cent), Karnataka (7 per cent), Telangana (8 per cent), Odisha (22 per cent), Jharkhand (26 per cent) and West Bengal (5.8 per cent).
7. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA.
8. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, popularly known as the Forests Rights Act (FRA), was enacted in 2007.
9. In the early 1970s, the protection and conservation of forests and the environment became a national priority in India. As a result, the following decade, i.e. the 1980s, witnessed the evolution of a number of laws, policies and programmes relating to the preservation of natural resources and protection of the environment. However, these constitutional measures (including the latest policies/programmes) have failed to protect the interests of the tribal communities.

10. The Act has also been called the Forest Rights Act, the Tribal Rights Act, the Tribal Bill, and the Tribal Land Act.
11. The 'Instrument of Instructions' contained in the Government of India Act, 1935 were incorporated in the Constitution of India in 1950 as 'Directive Principles of State Policy.'
12. Land acquisition for a multinational company at Kovvada in Andhra Pradesh (see Balagopal 2007) and the Niyamgiri hill area in Odisha are a few examples of such a policy (see also Pattanaik in this volume).
13. The difference in returns depends on a variety of factors, including their characteristics. Kijima's (2006) study has decomposed the disparities in mean living standards between the SC/ST and the non-SC/ST households into two components: differences in economic characteristics and differences in the returns to the characteristics. It observed that approximately half of the differentials in living standards between the SC/ST and the non-SC/ST households are due to the differences in returns. The study reports even though the Indian economy has been growing rapidly in recent decades, the proportion of disparities (explained by the different returns) did not change much between 1983 and 1999.
14. Information on land possession implies that a relatively small percentage of tribal households are landless. Herein one has to note that as land possession data includes homestead and any other non-cultivable land, many of them may be having only a homestead. If we look into land cultivation data, according to NSSO 2009–10 Employment and Unemployment survey, about 40 per cent of total tribal households in rural India are landless in terms of possession of agricultural land. Another 40 per cent of these tribal households are on the verge of landlessness as they own less than one hectare of agricultural land.
15. Human capital refers to skills, literacy level, educational attainment, training, and health condition (physical and mental/intellectual).
16. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
17. There are two types of measures: Protective and Promotional. There are various Constitutional provisions and safeguards as well as welfare programmes to protect and promote tribal development. These include: Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP), Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC), Large Area Multipurpose Societies (LAMPS), and Ashram Schools for tribal children.
18. In the Second Five Year Plan, 43 Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks (SMPTBs), later referred to as Tribal Development Blocks (TDBs), were created. In the Fourth Five Year Plan, six Integrated Tribal Development Projects/Agencies (ITDP/A) were initiated as pilot projects in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha in 1971–72. In 1976, the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) for allocation of budgetary resources meant for tribal development was initiated in the Fifth Five Year Plan. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, a Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) was initiated and 245 such pockets were identified. During the Seventh Five Year Plan, two national level institutions were set up: one is Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) in 1987 as an apex body for State Tribal Development Cooperative Corporations, and the other is the National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) in 1989. During the Eighth and Ninth Five Year Plans, efforts were made to initiate and implement the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA. During the Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans, the process began to initiate and implement the Scheduled Tribes and Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, but it has only recently come into force, on January 1, 2008.

19. Such as MultiPurpose Tribal Development Projects (MTDP), Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), etc.
20. For instance, Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP), Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC), Large Area Multipurpose Societies (LAMPS), and Ashram Schools for tribal children have been established.
21. The welfare states itself emerged as a result of the pressure in the context of growing inequalities and subsequent emerging discontent among the deprived and marginalized in the development process (see de Swaan, 1988). When it comes to the obligations of the welfare state, there are two extreme views: one emphasizes on maximum welfare of maximum number (equivalent of majoritarian rule) and other on the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged (or marginalized) sections of the society (minority rule) (Rawls, 1971).