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WHO ARE 'INDIGENOUS' IN INDIA? STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY AND LIVELIHOOD BY THE 'ADIVASIS' IN INDIA

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***Abstract:** This paper presents a detailed discussion on the popular movements led by the adivasis in the contemporary India. Their popular struggles are classified into four categories and each of them are trying to explain in brief with examples, facts and figures to illustrate the situation. The whole discussion starts with the question of origin of the indigenous people in India and their status during the colonial period and after the independence of India. The basic argument the author tries to rise is that there is no fundamental change in the life and livelihood of the adivasi community in India even after near 70 years of independence due to the continuous neglect and exploitation of these communities by the changing governments and the mainstream communities. Most of the time they have to march on to the streets, rise slogans and so on to hear their demands by the authorities. Though some of them gained success, some others were brutally suppressed by the authorities to protect the whims and wishes of the lobbies and interest groups.*

***Key Words:** Indigenous people in India, Scheduled Tribes, Adivasis, Struggles for identity, Adivasi movements, Maoism and Naxalism in India*

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1. Introduction

India is a country with immense diversity, distinctiveness and multiplicity in all spheres, especially in its geography, society, culture, tradition, language, etc. It is a home for 121 million people, with a second rank in the population after the People's Republic of China (Census of India 2011). Maintaining unity with such a gigantic and diverse population is a mammoth task, while the country has always been esteemed for its "unity in diversity". Economically, India is an emerging super power and often termed as 'the leader of the Third World'. While critiques often doubt whether India following an inclusive growth or exclusive growth process. Though the country has been climbing the strides of success, there has some distinct groups of people always been neglected from enjoying the benefits of these developments. Most mistreated and striving among such a group is the *Adivasis* in India, which literally means indigenous people. With an estimated population of 84.3 million, they constitute around 8 percent of the total population in India (Census of India 2011). They are minorities in India, but concentrated in different parts of the country.

Officially the Adivasi community in India is recognised as Scheduled Tribes (STs) or simply Tribes. In India around 461 ethnic groups are recognised as STs, however, many more ethnic groups that would qualify for ST status but which are not officially recognised. Estimates for the total number of tribal groups are as high as 635. The largest concentration of indigenous people is found in the seven states of north-east India, and the so-called 'central tribal belt' stretching from Rajasthan to West Bengal.

India has several laws and constitutional provisions, such as Fifth Schedule for mainland India and the Sixth Schedule for certain areas of north-east India which recognise indigenous people's rights to land and self-governance. The laws aimed at protecting indigenous people have numerous shortcomings and their implementation is far from satisfactory. The Indian government voted in favour of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). However, it does not consider the concept of "indigenous peoples", and thus the UNDRIP, applicable to India.

Laws and regulations are most of the time simply silent spectators of the exploitation of the indigenous people in India. Though they are the real owners of this land, a large section among the *adivasis* in India do not have own lands. The continuous encroachments on forests and hill areas for resources and development projects have been destroying the natural habitation of the tribals. So, most of the popular movements the tribals in India have ever done are for protecting their home land and livelihood for survival.

This paper presents a detailed discussion on the popular movements led by the *adivasis* in the contemporary India. Their popular struggles are classified into four categories and each of them are trying to explain in brief with examples, facts and figures to illustrate the situation. The whole discussion starts with the question of origin of the indigenous people in India and their status during the colonial period and after the independence of India. The basic argument the author tries to rise is that there is no fundamental change in the life and livelihood of the *adivasi* community in India even after near 70 years of independence due to the continuous neglect and exploitation of these communities by the changing governments and the mainstream communities. Most of the time they have to march on to streets, rise slogans and so on to hear their demands by the authorities. Though some of them gained success, some others were brutally suppressed by the authorities to protect the whims and wishes of the lobbies and interest groups.

There are a few studies dealing with tribal movements in India. Three volumes on *Tribal Movements in India*, edited by K. S. Singh (1982,1983, 1998) are an important contribution to the relatively scant literature on the subject. The first volume (1982) deals with the northeast frontier tribes, the second volume (1983) focuses on central and south India and the third volume (1998) confines itself to a survey of literature on tribal movements in different parts of the country. Different scholars have evolved different typologies of tribal movements (Mahapatra 1972; Sinha 1968; Singh 1983). The popular typologies they used are: reactionary, conservative, revisionary or revolutionary, ethnic, agrarian unrest and political autonomy movements. These typologies do not include the recent movements around the issues of forest rights and environment, and displacement of the tribals due to development programmes of the state and the market. As K. S. Singh (1998) observes, in recent years, with the rise of the international movement of indigenous people in the post-modernist phase, the focus has shifted to self-determination or self-management of the resources, identity and ethnicity. Or in other words, the tribal movements are assuming a new character. They are all now becoming more and more identity based movements, with various issues concerning control over resources etc. being considered as ramifications of this central issue. On this background, this paper explicitly deals with two research questions: first, to evaluate the origin of the term 'tribe' in India and second, to analyse the reasons and results of the popular tribal movements in contemporary India. Popular *adivasi* movements representing all geographical parts of the country are included in the

analysis. The analysis is strictly based on secondary data, mostly on various literature on tribal sociology and anthropology, case studies and reports.

2. Origin of Indigenous People in India

In the early colonial period the term 'tribe' was vague and was used interchangeably with other terms such as 'caste' and 'race'. However, by the end of the 19th century it had acquired a specific meaning, designating certain kinds of social groups and distinguishing them sharply from those labelled as 'castes'. Like enumeration by caste and religion in the census, the categorization of social groups as either castes or tribes was a strategy employed by colonial anthropology to comprehend and govern complex populace (Upadhy 1996).

In the anthropology of other colonised peoples, the term 'tribe', like 'primitive', was used to designate non-literate, 'simple' native societies that practiced non-intensive and usually mobile modes of subsistence, and that were not incorporated into larger tributary or state systems. This sweeping classification brought together diverse social groups as the basis of their 'primitiveness', in opposition to (western) 'civilisation'. But the anthropological classification of tribes in India was problematic from the start, precisely because of their coexistence with a larger 'non-tribal' society (unlike in the case of Africa, for example). Most of the Indian 'tribes' were never entirely cut off from 'Hindu' society, many were similar in terms language, culture or religion to neighbouring 'caste' groups and many were regionally dominant groups organised into independent states, belying the 'primitive' label. Clearly there was no common characteristic uniting the diverse groups labelled as 'tribes' that could justify such as classification (Upadhy 1996).

The Aryan invasion theory of Indian history says that Indian civilisation was formed by the invasion of fair-skinned, civilised Sanskrit-speaking Aryans, who conquered and partially absorbed the dark-skinned, savage aborigines. This theory in turn produced the basic ethnological division of the Indian population into Aryan and non-Aryan races, which later become the 'caste' and 'tribes' (Bayly 1995; Trautmann 1997). The writings of 19th century ethnologists are replete with racial categorising; the Dravidians, the 'wild tribes' and aborigines were seen as racially distinct from the Aryan population and therefore not part of the Brahmanical caste order (Bayly 1995). Compbell's 'Ethnology of India' (1866), for instance, divides the "black aboriginal tribes of the interior hills and jungles" from the "modern Indians" who cultivate the soil (quoted in Trautmann 1997, 162).

The 'tribals' were understood as remnants of aboriginal groups who were not conquered and absorbed by the invading Aryans, like the lower castes, but were pushed back into the remote forests and hills. Fundamentally, then, 'tribes' were defined in opposition to 'castes' rather than in terms of any concrete common characteristic of their own.

The racial theory of Indian history continued to provide the basis for certain formulations about tribes that came to dominate Indian anthropology. The dominant notions are as follows:

- a. Tribes are the indigenous inhabitants of the country who were displaced and marginalised by the progressive invasion and expansion of the Indo-Aryan Hindus.
- b. Tribes have been progressively 'absorbed' into the caste system (and continue to be so) at the bottom end, primarily through the assimilation of Hindu religion and values.
- c. The 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness' characterisation of tribes in both racial theory and its predecessor social evolutionism.
- d. Tribal societies have always been culturally and politically independent of the larger 'Hindu' civilisation (except those segments that have been assimilated).

While Pachauau (2000) contended that the creation of tribalism is artificial; it is done for the convenience of the administrative system that is thoroughly influenced by the caste stratification mindset, and politically and culturally controlled by the caste Hindu society. He also argues, on top of all, this artificially constructed identity resulted in the intensification of the already existing identity crisis of the people.

3. Colonial Period

Several scholars have argued that 'tribe' evolved mainly as a politico-administrative category, to designate particularly troublesome and rebellious groups living in inaccessible forested regions (the latter incidentally being of great interest to the state because of their rich forest and mineral resources), and who needed to be pacified and brought under colonial rule (Stansilaus and D'Souza 2003; Singh 2002; Xaxa 2008).

The increasing marginalisation, impoverishment and exploitation of tribal peoples as a result of colonial rule, together with the notion of tribal difference and primitiveness promoted by anthropology, led administrators of tribal areas to argue in favour of a policy of protectionism for tribal areas. In fact, the central aim of the tribal policies advocated by the British administrators was the preservation of indigenous 'culture', and the most

important means through which this was to be achieved was the creation and implementation of customary law. The ultimate result of these policies was the designation of 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' areas by the Government of India Act 1935 and the consequent scheduling of tribes. The classification process tended to convert what were originally fluid social systems, within which individuals were incorporated at multiple levels, into 'tribal societies' with fixed identities and rigid boundaries.

The scheduling of tribes gave rise to the well-known debate between official anthropologists (mostly British ICS officers), who favoured a policy of isolation or protection, and the (mostly Indian) nationalists, who saw it as yet another attempt to 'divide and rule'. The most visible spokesman for the protectionist side was the anthropologist Verrier Elwin, who advocated preservation of the 'tribal way of life' through state-enforced isolation from Hindu society. He writes:

The aboriginals are the real swadeshi products of India, in whose presence everyone is foreign. These are the ancient people with moral claims and rights thousands of years old. They were here first: they should come first in our regard [Elwin 1943:32, quoted].

On the other side, prominent sociologist G. S. Ghurye (1959) regraded the tribals as 'imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society' or 'backward Hindus', rather than aborigines. Further he asserts that Indian civilisation has been constituted through an ongoing process of "assimilation of smaller groups of different cultures into larger ones", because incompletely assimilated groups appeared to the British to be different from the rest, they were designated as tribals. This, to Ghurye, was the origin of the "tribal problem", whose solution lay in assimilation or "strengthening the ties of the tribals with the other backward classes through their integration" rather than the preservation of culture.

4. Status of Indigenous People After Independence

The problem with tribal identity in India, which is an official identity derived from the Constitution of India, is that no single feature can be taken to be normative in defining the "tribes". Nowhere in the Constitution do we find a definition. Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. Article 342 simply says that the President of India can "specify the tribes or tribal communities....to be Scheduled Tribes" and that the Parliament also has the power to include and exclude groups to and

from the list. To justify the enlistment of communities under the “Scheduled Tribes” the government of India did make several criteria. The list of criteria includes “tribal language, animism, primitivity, hunting and gathering, ‘carnivorous in food habits’, ‘naked or semi-naked’, and fond of drinking and dance”. But most of the criteria do not match those enlisted and it also conveys the blatant prejudice of the dominant people (Pathy 1984).

Article 342 provides for specification of tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which are deemed to be for the purposes of the Constitution the Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory. In pursuance of these provisions, the list of Scheduled Tribes are notified for each State or Union Territory and are valid only within the jurisdiction of that State or Union Territory and not outside.

The list of Scheduled Tribes is State/UT specific and a community declared as a Scheduled Tribe in a State need not be so in another State. The inclusion of a community as a Scheduled Tribe is an ongoing process. The essential characteristics, first laid down by the Lokur Committee, for a community to be identified as Scheduled Tribes are – (a) indications of primitive traits; (b) distinctive culture; (c) shyness of contact with the community at large; (d) geographical isolation; and (e) backwardness.

Tribal communities live, in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. Tribal groups are at different stages of social, economic and educational development. While some tribal communities have adopted a mainstream way of life, at the other end of the spectrum, there are certain Scheduled Tribes, 75 in number known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), who are characterised by: - (a) pre-agriculture level of technology; (b) stagnant or declining population; (c) extremely low literacy; and (d) subsistence level of economy.

“The problem in India [for the task of the anthropologists] was to identify rather than define tribes, and scientific or theoretical considerations were never allowed to displace administrative or political ones....” (Andre Beteille 1992)

A close scrutiny of the Constitution reveals that the term ‘tribe’ is used to designate a whole cluster of diverse non-Indic communities who are mostly non-Aryan and remained outside the Hindu Varna. Furthermore, one also notices that wherever a section on “Scheduled Tribes” appear in the Constitution, a “Scheduled Caste” section appears with similar descriptions and privileges bestowed (Pachauau 2000).

5. *Adivasi* Movements in India- A Retrospect

Numerous uprisings of tribals have taken place beginning with one in Bihar in 1772, followed by many revolts in Andhra Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland. Some scholars like Desai (1979), Gough (1974) and Guha (1983) have treated tribal movements after independence as peasant movements, but K.S. Singh (1985) has criticised such approach because of the nature of tribal's social and political organisation, their relative social isolation from the mainstream, their leadership pattern and the modus operandi of their political mobilisation.

Tribal's community consciousness is strong. Tribal movements were not only agrarian but also forest-based. Some revolts were ethnic in nature as these were directed against zamindars, moneylenders and petty government officials who were not only their exploiters but aliens too (Singh 1978). When tribals were unable to pay their loan or the interest thereon, moneylenders and landlords usurped their lands. The tribals thus became tenants on their own land and sometimes even bonded labourers. The police and the revenue officers never helped them. On the contrary, they also used the tribals for personal and government work without any payment.

The courts were not only ignorant of the tribal agrarian system and customs but also were unaware of the plight of the tribals (Verma 1995). All these factors of land alienation, usurpation, forced labour, minimum wages, and land grabbing compelled many tribes like Munda, Santhals, Kol, Bhils, Warli, etc., in many regions like Assam, Orissa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra to revolt.

The management of forests also led some tribes to revolt, as forests in some regions are the main sources of their livelihood. The British government had introduced certain legislations permitting merchants and contractors to cut the forests. These rules not only deprived the tribals of several forest products but also made them victims of harassment by the forest officials (Sharma 2002). This led tribes in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and some other areas to launch movements (Rout 2015).

After independence, the tribal movements may be classified into three groups: (1) movements due to exploitation by outsiders (like those of the Santhals and Mundas), (2) movements due to economic deprivation (like those of the Gonds in Madhya Pradesh and the Mahars in Andhra Pradesh), and (3) movements due to separatist tendencies (like those of the Nagas and Mizos).

The tribal movements may also be classified on the basis of their orientation into four types: (1) movements seeking political autonomy and

formation of a state (Nagas, Mizos, Jharkhand), (2) agrarian movements, (3) forest-based movements, and (4) socio-religious or socio-cultural movements (the Bhagat movement among Bhils of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, movement among tribals of south Gujarat or Raghunath Murmu's movement among the Santhals).

Mahapatra (1972) has classified tribal movements in three groups: reactionary, conservative and revolutionary. The reactionary movement tries to bring back 'the good old days', whereas the conservative movement tries to maintain the status quo. The revolutionary or the revisionary movements are those which are organised for 'improvement' or 'purification' of the cultural or social order by eliminating evil customs, beliefs or institutions.

Surajit Sinha (1968 and 1972) has classified movements into five groups: (i) Ethnic rebellion, (ii) Reform movements, (iii) Political autonomy movements within the Indian Union, (iv) Secessionist movements, and (v) Agrarian unrest. K.S. Singh (1983) has also classified them in more or less the same way, except that he has used the word 'sanskritisation' instead of reform movement and 'cultural' instead of 'ethnic'. S.M. Dubey (1982) has classified them in four categories: (a) Religious and social reform movements (b) Movements for separate statehood (c) Insurgent movements and (d) Cultural rights movements.

The rest of the paper discusses four of the popular struggles by the *Adivasis* in India in various periods after independence.

6. Political Movements for a Separate State: Jharkhand *Mukti Morcha*, Jharkhand

The modern tribal movement for regional autonomy is a phenomenon after independence. Jharkhand movement too is such a phenomenon. The main aim of the Jharkhand movement was the creation of a separate "Adivasi state".

The Jharkhand movement has a long years of legacy. Their movement came across various phases; the period of bloody revolts of the tribals, the period of moderate socio-economic movements and the political movements. The period of bloody revolts of the *Adivasis* to protect their Jharkhand land took place from 1771 to 1900 AD. The 20th century Jharkhand movement may be seen as moderate as compared to the bloody revolts of the 19th century. It was after 1939 that Jharkhand movement turned to its political phase with the formation of the Jharkhand Party.

The tribal political awakening reached its culmination point with the formation of the Jharkhand Party. It was exclusively declared as a 'political

party' not a social, economic, religious organization like the earlier one. For the first time, non-tribals were invited in the ongoing movement for autonomy and there was a shift from ethnicity to regionalism in the objectives of the movement. The Jharkhand Party declared to establish a separate state comprising of mineral belts of Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. The demand for a separate state includes autonomy and preservation of tribal culture and language. The Jharkhand Party failed to make Jharkhand a separate state. As there were a lot of contradictions within the party (Sharma 1976; Horo 2013).

A new party Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) under the leadership of Sibu Soren came into prominence in 1973. With lot of non-christian tribals supporting this party, it readily transmitted a rays of hope in the mind of people. It enlarged their roots to the Santal Pargna and Hazaribagh plateau area and soon it was found that the center of the movement has shifted from Ranchi area to Santhal Pargna region. The movement geared up in a militant way when they formed an All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU), whose main aim was to include youth of the region in the ongoing movement (Horo 2013).

The Parliament refused several proposals for the formation of the separate statehood. A lot of reasons were given and the most important was "lack of common language" across the region. As most of the states were formed by taking a common language criterion, this was insignificant in proposed Jharkhand state. Besides, there was a lack of "unified movement" among different parties. This further contributed significantly in weakening the movement for statehood.

The political dominance of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha was upon 1984. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) was the first national non-Jharkhand party who supported the issue of Jharkhand. Thus in the 1996 general election, BJP made almost a clean sweep by winning 14 seats out of 16 Lok Sabha from this region. Aspirations of Jharkhand tribes came to fruition when the Jharkhandis got their separate Jharkhand state on 15th November, 2000.

The Jharkhand movement is primarily autonomous mobilization. The assertions of their identities were and still are made in the context of a region or a provincial arena. Although the context is provincial, the mode of their assertion and the arguments for more power and economic resources aithin the arena are often couched in a collective mould.

The analysis of the Jharkhand movement suggests that, land alienation of tribals, forest cultivation, immigration and unemployment of tribals, submergence of tribal culture and unbalanced development of Jharkhand

region etc. together contributed to the emergence of the Jharkhand movement (Sharma 1976).

7. Ethnic Movements for Cultural/Religious Identity: Naga People's Movement, Nagaland

It would not be an exaggeration to state that almost all the countries of the world have witnessed some form of unrest relating to identity issues. The wave of ethnicity and ethnic political mobilization took such a pervasive character that its challenges were felt equally by both developed and developing states. For example, Srilanka, Bangladesh, Iraq, Turkey, Somalia, Australia, Canada, Germany etc. are some of the countries which have faced and are still facing the problem ethnicity and ethnic identity conflict. Such pattern of conflicts has been described as 'internal' or 'civil' war largely because it involves a clash of identities based on ethnicity (Hagg and Kagwanja 2007).

Ethnicity is the manifestation of sentiments and emotions of a group which is in pursuit to preserve its separate identity. Such sense of distinct identity generally rests on the belief of uniqueness about one's own culture and tradition. There are different view points:

1. Form instrumental viewpoint, ethnicity is the creation of elites who in order to maintain their status quo or to gain political and economic advantage induce and mobilize identity consciousness within a group (Brass 1999).
2. Primordialists, on the other hand, believe that ethnicity is a natural and given phenomenon. According to them, every individual carries with him some "attachments derived from his/her place of birth, kinship relationship, religion, language and social practices which are natural to him, spiritual in nature and that provide a basis for an easy affinity with other people from the same background" (Brass 1999:69).

Thus, there are different meanings attached to identity:

1. Schaefer in his study considers 'relative deprivation' as the potential cause of ethnic conflicts leading to extreme situation such as riots, insurgency, civil war and other instances of social deviations such as crime (Schaefer 2008).
2. Rational choice theory, on the other hand, considers ethnic identity movement as a product of human choice and decision (Hutchinson and Smith 2009).

3. Similarly, constructivist approach considers ethnic identity of individuals as a dynamic concept. Individual, according to this approach, go on changing their ethnic identity on the basis of their needs. Very often, they identify themselves with that identity which gives them more advantages- socially, politically or economically.

Whatever may be the reason, conflicts and movements based on ethnic identity are increasing throughout the world and its forces are felt more in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies like India. In northeast India, different ethnic groups which represent both tribal and non-tribal communities have been struggling long either for special constitutional safeguard or for the creation of separate political entities on the basis of their lingo-cultural identities.

When the Nagas first organised a movement for independence from India in the 1940s and the 1950s, they clearly understood themselves as a "nation", and named their organisation the "Naga National Council". Similarly, the independence movement in Mizoram from the mid 1960s also employed the concept of Mizo nation to call themselves "national". Pachauau (2000) argues that the Nagas as well as the Mizos understand themselves as nation in the sense of 'ethnonationality' and he defines it as the self-understanding of the ethnic groups in Northeast India in the various forms of their struggle for identity. It is simply the phenomenon of political movements launched on the basis of ethnic identity. In the case of the Nagas, the Mizos and others in the Northeast, the very notion as well as the movement of ethno-nationalism clearly reflects a crisis of identity.

Geographically and racially, the region of Northeast India is situated between the two great traditions of the Indic Asia and the Mangoloid Asia. This geographical-cultural condition of "in-between-ness" is an important factor for the crisis of identity. It was only since the British period that the entire region came to be associated with India politically. The law of cultural relatedness, especially of the tribal culture, weakens the new political association, and the racial and cultural difference, thus, came to play vital role in defining the self-identity. The problem of acceptance on the part of Indic culture with its caste-ridden social system, and the problem of identification on the part of the Northeasterners because of the underlying cultural difference underpins the identity problem (Ali and Das 2003).

Since independence, we have not seen a single decade of calm political atmosphere in the Northeastern region in India. Instead, each decade saw new movements of political unrest, most of which turned to violent revolutions. Insurgency, an extreme form of ethno-political upsurge, has rocked five of the seven states at one time or another, and the remaining two

states are highly poised for a similar movement (Lacina 2009; Bhaumik 2007).

The Naga National Council's original demand was some sort of regional autonomy. In the course of their interaction with the "non-tribals" they developed the fear of 'losing their identity in the midst of Hindu rule' leading to a demand for 'outright sovereign independent Nagaland state' (Kumar 2017; Nag 2002).

The new state of Nagaland came into being in December 1963. With statehood Nagaland has entered the Indian political arena which is known for corruption and the amassing of riches by unscrupulous politicians. However, the struggle of the Nagas for independence is still going on. But their claim was put aside with the argument that the Naga nation could never be economically viable. The Naga people have developed a strong sense of nationalism which is shared even by those seeking some accommodation with India.

8. Movements against Involuntary Displacements and Rehabilitation: Narmada *Bachao Andolan*, Gujarat

All available evidence shows that the alienation of the *Adivasis* from their lands, natural resources and cultures has only accelerated under the neoliberal policies followed in India after 1991 (Das 2016). The best example is the case of *Adivasis* affected by sardar sarovar dam under construction at Vadagam village in Gujarat in western part of India.

In the early 1980s, people of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat in the Narmada valley were shocked when the government began to construct 3000 small, 135 medium and 30 major dams and canals on the 1313-km long Narmada river, cradle of 5000 years of continuous civilisation and culture. The State and central governments were keen to obtain loans from the World bank for long projects, and push them through, regardless of even basic considerations of feasibility.

The brutality of displacement due to the building of dams was dramatically highlighted during the agitation over the Sardar sarovar dam. It has been called 'India's most controversial dam project' (Sahoo et al. 2014). Medha Patekar, spearhead the anti-dam movement known as the Narmada *Bachao Andolan* (NBA). This movement for the first time systematically revealed how building dams can result in total dislocation of tribal societies. The beneficiaries of the dam are meant to be large landowners; but the tribal people are paying the price. The official figure indicates that about 42000 families were displaced but the non-governmental organisations such as the

Narmada *Bachao Andolan* puts the figure to about 85000 families or 500000 people. The Narmada Valley Development Project affected the lives of 25 million people who were in the valley and were alter the ecology of an entire river basin.

The dam alone displaces more than 41000 families (over 200000 people) in the three states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh (Peterson 2010). Over 56 per cent of the people affected by the dam are *Adivasis*. Due to many reasons, most importantly due to the struggles of the people affected by the project under the banner of Narmada *Bachao Andolan*, the project has admittedly the best ever resettlement and rehabilitation policy in India.

9. Agrarian Movements for Land: *Muthanga* Land Struggle, Kerala

The human struggle for ownership of a plot of land is perhaps as old as humanity itself, and the situation is not any different in Kerala; a state often extolled for its high literacy rate (93.91 percent, Census 2011), radical land reform policies and the highest Human Development Index in India (0.7117, HDI 2015). Kerala is also glorified as the holy land of tourism or as "God's own country"- a slogan advertised for exploiting tourism potentials in the state. However, if one moves away from the glamorous world of tourism and other extolling factors, and penetrates deeper into the socio-political and economic structures that drive Kerala's society, what one gets to see is the exclusion and marginalisation of the *Adivasis* and the Dalits, especially when it comes to the issue of land ownership.

The *Adivasis* in Kerala, mostly inhabiting the mountains of the Western Ghats, constitute around 1.45 percent of the total population, while the Dalits form about 9.1 percent (Census 2011). Marginalized and oppressed by social and economic factors, the *Adivasis* have never been the real beneficiaries of the government schemes implemented to reduce landlessness among them. Instead, they have been deprived of their customary rights over their natural resources and traditional knowledge systems, leading to several struggles for land across a timeframe of several decades. Some of the key struggles are: Adivasi land struggles in Kannur (1999), *Muthanga* land struggle (2001), *Aralam* farm protest (2006), *Chengara* land struggle (2007), *Arippa bhoosamaram* (2012), *Puyamkutti* land struggle (2012), *Perichamkutty* land struggle (2012), etc. The *Chengara* Land Struggle deserves a special mention among all because of its unique way of agitation, popular support and success.

The agitation at *Chengara* in Pathanamthitta district began on August 4, 2007, when 300 families from various parts of the state converged on the rubber estate owned by Harrison Malayalam Plantations Ltd. The agitators alleged that the company was in possession of much more land than the actual extent under the government's lease. Their demand was five acres of land for cultivation (later reduced to one acre) and Rs. 50,000 as financial assistances per family. During the more than two-year long protest, lack of food, scarcity of water, absence of medical facilities and hostile weather conditions led to the death of 13 people. After 790 grueling days, the agitation was settled during a discussion between the then Chief Minister, V S Achutanandan, Laha Gopalan (leader of the *Chengara* Land Struggle) and others of the *Sadhu Jana Vimochana Samyukta Vedi* (SJVSV) - the organization that led the land struggle. As a part of the settlement, 1,432 out of the 1,738 families that had started living on the rubber plantation were enlisted for receiving financial assistance to build houses. However, the distribution of land amongst the various tribes and castes was uneven. Some received one acre of land, while others received only 25 cents. The SJVSV also alleged that the *Chengara* Package had been accepted under pressure, as CPI (M) (Communist Party of India- Marxist) leaders had been intimidating and paying off their activists. Despite bitter allegations of betrayal and conspiracy by the ruling and opposition parties, the *Chengara* land struggle was a success.

Although the *Adivasis* and Dalits form the backbone of the agricultural economy of Kerala, they have not yet benefitted from the land reforms that the Kerala Government initiated in the 1950s (Aneesh 2014). Various land distribution schemes and programmes that were meant to minimise landlessness among the *Adivasis* and the Dalits, did not actually relieve them. As far as the landlessness in Kerala is concerned, the Dalits and the *Adivasis* form around 85 per cent of the landless in the state. The state has been witnessing a steady decline in food production and farming. Since agricultural activity has hit a bottom low the state is largely dependent on the neighbouring states for its food requirements. As such, the Government of Kerala, instead of bringing back the *Adivasis* and the Dalits to agriculture and farming, has thrown them to the fringes of the society and has reduced them to living in colonies. A close look at the way the state has fared in implementing various reforms and how it has impacted the *Adivasis* and the Dalits reveals that:

- There was a lack of will among the successive governments that came to power in Kerala to properly implement various land

legislation policies and to honestly redistribute land among the *Adivasis*.

- A look at the various legislations initiated shows that there is a huge gap in the introduction of the policies and their actual effective implementation. For example, The Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act was adopted in 1975, but it was only implemented after 1986, causing a huge delay.
- *Adivasi* lands have been lost due to encroachments, land grabbing, forest notifications and the formation of private plantation companies.
- Alienation of *Adivasis* from forest and nature, and restriction on access to forest produce has increased the *Adivasi*'s dependence on other sources of income, and has forced them to migrate to other places for work such as casual labour etc.
- Frustration among the *Adivasis* due to gradual land loss over the years has led to loss of livelihood, hunger, malnutrition and starvation deaths.
- Denial of livelihood and the struggle for sheer survival has led to the formation of several *Adivasi* struggle groups for land rights across the state and the rise of *Adivasi* land rights movements.
- Ghettoization of the *Adivasi* communities through creation of *Adivasi* and *Harijan* colonies (George 2014).

Kerala, a state which implemented the land reforms in a very success should introspects the real beneficiaries of the reforms. The recent land struggles in the state by the landless Dalits and *Adivasis* underlines the obligation to address the issue of land reforms once again. What the government to be focused in the second reform should be the caste and community aspects which are left in the first one (Aneesh 2014).

10. Militarising the Movements and Rise of Maoists and Naxalites in India

The Community Party of India (Maoist), also known as “the Naxalites”, was founded on September 2004, following the merger of two of India’s far-left outfits: the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (People’s War) and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI). However, the beginning of the movement can be traced back to late 1967.

Many Naxalites see India as a backward, semi-colonial and semi-feudal state. Based on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, the objective of the armed wing is to wage “protracted people’s war” (PPW) to seize political power and herald a New Democratic Revolution (NDR), under the leadership of the agrarian class (Singh 2010). Citing the goals of the agrarian movement and the “land to the tiller” slogan, the main aim of the Naxalites is to change the present system of India’s governance, and to establish socialist-communist rule. In order to succeed in their mission, the Naxalites are reportedly working to build a base of popular support, tackling socio-economic problems such as the failure of governance, getting involved in anti-mining agitation, and fighting land acquisition and discrimination based on caste (Kumar 2013; Harriss 2010).

They establish bases in remote areas, among poor and impoverished communities. These are usually in the forested and mountainous parts of southern, central and eastern India; home to about 84 million tribal or indigenous Adivasi people. They are subsistence farmers, and many live in extreme poverty, with a lack of basic services. The Maoists say they have taken up the *adivasi* cause (Harriss 2010; Dubey 2013). The lack of basic amenities, including roads, healthcare, education, drinking water and effective governance provides the Maoists with an ideal community in which to propagate ideas of a “new democratic revolution” (Mohanti 2006). In many of the “liberated areas”, they have organised the Adivasi and taken up community projects to provide services the government does not.

Whether they side with the Maoists or not, the most affected by the ongoing conflict are the 84 million tribes people. They do not all necessarily know or understand the real agenda behind the “protracted people’s war”. They are victims of violence and counter-violence, and have seen minimal positive change in their living conditions (Marwah 2009).

Despite the fact that the Indian Constitution guarantees the safeguarding of tribal rights, people here have been denied their due. Some have waited 50 years to be compensated for land they had to give away to the government for industrial growth, soon after India’s independence from the British. Moreover, although the Constitution gives the local governing body of villages- Gram Sabha- the right to reject any expropriation of land, displacement of the Adivasi people continues. The villagers living in these “scheduled areas” complain of intimidation by corporation’s private security forces and sometimes even the government’s own security. They say they are threatened with violence, and told they must obey orders to give up their land, many have been prosecuted and imprisoned for asserting their rights (Harriss 2010).

Maoists, the self-proclaimed saviours of the tribal people, unleash violence on anyone they suspect of not supporting their cause (Dubey 2013). Some tribal people find themselves oppressed by those fighting the Maoists— languishing in Indian jails, accused of doing basic favours such as giving water or food to the Maoists. From both sides, tribal people and the economically underprivileged have been the biggest victims of the 40- year war between the Naxalites and the Indian state.

The government's fight against Naxalites often seems to be counterproductive. Several villagers living in central and eastern India, under the circumstances, they preferred the Maoists to the Indian government. Ironically, the Maoists owe much of their growing support to the government's counterinsurgency campaign. This has effectively elevated a movement with local roots into one with a national presence.

11. Conclusion

One view of India's inequality is that this is nothing to be worried about. This is the normal progression of economic development. Meanwhile, millions of Indians do not find themselves a part of the growth story. And there is growing resentment over this gaping inequality. Inequality in India operates on multiple axes- of gender, class, caste, region, religion and ethnicity. But perhaps the worst suffering is of India's tribal people, who suffer a double whammy of both disadvantaged region and ethnicity. Official data on all indicators of development reveal that India's tribal people are the worst off in terms of income, health, education, nutrition, infrastructure and governance. They have also been unfortunately at the receiving end of the injustices of the development process itself. Around 40 per cent of the 60 million people displaced following development projects in India are tribals, which is not a surprise given that 90 per cent of India's coal and more than 50 per cent of most minerals and dam sites are mainly in tribal regions.

Inequality is important not only because of the acute perception of injustice it creates. Even economists at the traditionally free-market fundamentalist International Monetary Fund, Andrew G. Berg and Jonathan D. Ostry (2011), have argued that "inequality can also be destructive to growth by amplifying the risk of crisis or making it difficult for the poor to invest in education". They conclude: "reduced inequality and sustained growth may thus be two sides of the same coin".

A retrospective analysis of popular struggles by the *Adivasis* in India reveals the story of continuous neglect and exploitation of these communities by the changing governments and the mainstream society.

India's development process should be incomplete without uplifting the downtrodden and the marginalised into the mainstream by addressing their issues and problems. Development that does not include the *Adivasi* and that leaves out the poorest of the poor is not development, but exploitation. As Aneesh (2013) is rightly stated, "The vision of inclusiveness must go beyond the traditional objective of poverty alleviation to encompass equality of opportunity, as well as economic and social mobility for all sections of society, with affirmative action for SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities and women. There must be equality of opportunity to all with freedom and dignity, and without social or political obstacles. This must be accompanied by an improvement in the opportunities for economic and social advancement. In particular, individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups should be provided special opportunities to develop their skills and participate in the growth process".

There were tribal movements lasted for a brief period, varying from a few days to a few years. Many of them disintegrated before attaining their objectives. However, a few movements took on the institutional form of pressure groups, unions or political parties. Several *Adivasi* groups have demanded more and more welfare programmes including reservation of jobs in government departments. They submitted memoranda and issued press statements, but there has been no mobilization of tribals on a large scale. These issues attain prominence in elections. However, we have to examine the reasons why such efforts have not succeeded in sustaining political movements. Similarly, how and why do some selected tribal movements take on an institutional form? How effective are they in attaining their objectives after taking on institutional forms? What is happening to the small tribal movements for livelihood or identity? Here arises an important methodological question of scaling of the movements. Mass movements in terms of enormous numerical strength of participants are only highlighted and discussed by the academia. The extent of the participation should be looked into within the context of the time and social milieu in which the movement takes place. Similarly, the level of the tribal movement in terms of the geographical area and sections of tribal group involved is important for assessing the intensity and extent of the movement. This would also facilitate a comparative study of various tribal movements in India.

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