Adivasis in India:
ISSUES OF LIVELIHOOD AND LABOUR MARKET, PUBLIC ACTION AND MARKET SOLUTIONS

January, 2015

S. R. Sankaran Chair (Rural Labour)

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PANCHAYATI RAJ

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The Adivasis communities in India in general and hinterlands in particular are most disadvantaged communities in terms of their socioeconomic status. They are poorest in terms of income and human development and face several types of vulnerabilities. The situations among the most vulnerable tribes are at rock bottom level. These communities lack access to resources and a majority of them are poor farmers and landless labourers and have to depend on forest and other common property resources for their livelihood. However, there has been erosion in the access to different types of resources. The productivity of their labour in whichever activity they engaged is low and/or the remuneration received is paltry.

In order to understand the labour market situations including the status of human resources among the Adivasi a two-day National seminar was organized by S.R.Sankaran Chair in collaboration with Council for Social Development at NIRD&PR, Hyderabad during 22-23 January, 2015. We are grateful to Professor C.H. Hanumanth Rao, Professor Virginious Xaxa and Professor Dev Nathan for giving the inaugural lecture, Key note Address and Valedictory Lecture respectively. This booklet contains those lectures.

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Lastly, I thank the NIRD&PR authorities for facilitating us in the organization of the seminar and publishing this booklet.

Kailash Sarap
Professor
S.R.Sankaran Chair

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LAND, PRODUCTIVITY AND GOVERNANCE : MAJOR ISSUES OF POLICY ACTION IN TRIBAL AREAS[1]

*C.H. Hanumantha Rao**

1. Major Issues

The socio-economic condition of Adivasis as the most marginalized section of our society has been extensively documented. I do not propose to describe their condition again within the short time at our disposal. I would rather like to straightaway raise three major issues for policy action and further research: First, the restoration, to the extent possible, and protection of the existing land and other natural resource base of the Adivasis; second, the prospects of raising agricultural productivity which is going to be their major source of sustenance for quite some time to come; and third, the issues of governance in tribal areas, including development administration in general, and Adivasis' own political participation and their collective action towards making governance work for their betterment.

2. Land Base

The process of alienation of land, traditionally held by Adivasis for cultivation, to the migrant farmers and money-lenders because of high indebtedness or other fraudulent practices which started in the colonial period continues unabated to this day. It is estimated that in the last two to

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1 Inaugural Address National Seminar on Labour Market and Issues of Adivasis in India, 22-23 January, 2015 at NIRD&PR, Hyderabad.

* Chancellor, University of Hyderabad.

three decades alone nearly half of their land under cultivation has been alienated in different parts of the country. Such alienation has been quite high in the undivided state of Andhra Pradesh: According to the Land Committee headed by Shri Koneru Ranga Rao, a Minister, in 2004, as much as half the land held by tribals had been alienated to non-tribal population and "if it is not checked with strong executive action, very soon the tribals may not have lands at all". The Committee recommended restoring lands to the tribals by reopening and reexamining of orders in favour of non-tribals and review of a large number of cases of illegal occupation by non-tribals. Thus the threat of erosion of land base of Adivasis in the country looms large calling for the requisite political will to protect their major source of living.

Despite the continuing alienation of land, the remaining land base of tribals appears slightly better than the average for all the social groups in the country. According to the Report of the High Level Committee (HLC) on Socio-Economic, Health and Educational Status of Tribal Communities in India (May, 2014), the area owned by Scheduled Tribes per rural household in 2003 was 0.77 hectares when compared to the All India average of 0.73 hectares per rural household. The Report notes, however, that the alienation of tribal lands may not be fully reflected in the records. Besides, the quality of land under cultivation by the tribals is poorer than the average for the country because of degradation and smaller proportion of area irrigated.

There were high hopes from the enactment of the Scheduled Tribes and Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, implemented since 2008. But its implementation by the states has been tardy. Only about half of the claims of individual ownership rights and very few rights on community forest resources have been accepted. Altogether, the impact of this measure on improving the land base of tribals has been minimal.

Conservation of natural resources like forests is critical for the protection of livelihoods of Adivasis because of their greater dependence on these resources when compared to other social groups. There is a threat of their displacement on account of indiscriminate exploitation of minerals – abundant in tribal areas – as well as location of various projects in the tribal belt in the post-liberalization era. Certain measures initiated by the United Progressive Alliance (U.P.A.) government like the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in

Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 sought to provide safeguards such as getting the consent of the affected people as a pre-requisite for undertaking such projects and liberal compensation to those affected. But the ordinance brought by the present government seeks to dilute or do away with these safeguards. This issue has already evoked a fierce debate in the country and the outcome is eagerly awaited, especially by those interested in the well-being of the marginalized sections like Adivasis.

3. Agricultural Productivity

According to the Concept Note for the Seminar, the dependence of STs on agriculture as a major source of livelihood in 2009-10 is as high as 70 per cent - about 37 per cent of them as self-employed in agriculture and another 33 per cent as casual labour within agriculture. Because of their shrinking land base and low agricultural productivity, their dependence on casual labour within agriculture has been increasing and is next only to SCs. Their out-migration and dependence on nonagriculture as casual labour, though low at present, has been increasing. For example, their participation in MGNREGS, in terms of number of days worked, was highest among all social groups in 2009-10.

It has been estimated that the value of agricultural output per hectare in central tribal districts of the country in 2007 was less than one-third of national average. Across the districts in Chhattisgarh in 2004-05, one finds an inverse relationship between the proportion of tribal population and yield per acre of paddy and pulses. In Odisha too, one finds a similar inverse relationship between yield rate of food grains and per cent of ST population across districts in 2005-06. In the tribal areas of the country, the proportion of area irrigated and the quantity of fertilizers used per acre are quite low when compared to the average for the country, despite the coexistence of tribal agriculture with that practiced by non-tribal migrants in the same areas who realize much higher yields by investing in minor irrigation and practicing input-intensive agriculture.

This shows the weaker resource position of the Adivasi farmers and their inadequate access to public extension services and institutional sources of credit in an otherwise exploitative environment. My own field visits to several tribal areas in the country including Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh in the late seventies and to Paderu in Andhra Pradesh in the early nineties (this visit was kindly arranged

by late Sri S. R. Sankaran) clearly brought home the willingness of tribal farmers to use irrigation and yield increasing modern inputs when access to them is ensured by public agencies.

But we do not know how productivity in tribal agriculture has been changing over a period of time in different parts of the country and factors contributing to the observed changes. An intensive investigation into these aspects is essential for devising appropriate strategies for raising productivity. We do know, however, that in general water conservation through watershed development, minor irrigation and the use of high-yielding technology including fertilizers are the promising sources for tapping the existing high potential for raising productivity in tribal agriculture. Because of unsustainable use of chemical inputs in certain areas of green revolution, it would be tempting to romanticize the low-input agriculture and advocate organic farming for tribal areas. The products of organic farming have a price advantage but not the yield advantage - essential for achieving food security. Organic farming is profitable under a highly developed marketing framework for meeting the demand from the affluent sections of consumers. Dr. Norman Borlaug's view that green revolution through the use of sustainable but input-intensive and yield-increasing technology is indispensable for Food Security cannot be overlooked.

The on-going research study on Agriculture in Tribal Areas in seven states of the country sponsored by the ICSSR and coordinated by the CESS promises to throw new light on the critical issues bearing on the growth of productivity in tribal agriculture. Indeed, the importance of this subject, I think, emphasizes the need for an officially constituted high level expert body at the national level for making a focused investigation in different parts of the country and recommending measures to restore and protect the existing land base of Adiviasis and to raise agricultural productivity.

4. Participatory Governance

Posting committed, competent and honest officials in tribal areas is a necessary condition for efficient and responsive administration. This can be supplemented by the participation of well- trained tribal youth through their induction at different levels including in services like agricultural extension, supply of inputs, institutional credit and marketing, etc. This would make administration sensitive to the local needs and would fill up the large

vacuum that exists in governance in remote tribal areas and would thus help to bring the people closer to administration by bridging the communication gap. While in the Planning Commission, my extensive visits to Bastar in 1982 had convinced me that the prevailing vacuum in administration and the communication gap was largely responsible for whatever encouragement that the extremists got for their activities in this area.

Effective community action is a well-known trait of tribal communities. This latent force can be harnessed to build up pressures from tribal population for redressing their grievances, among other things, through their effective participation in elected Panchayats. Unfortunately, however, because of the way our democratic institutions are functioning, the needs of the minority groups like tribals are not met through the effective ventilation of their grievances. As Prof. Radhakrishna observed in his opening remarks, in the North-Eastern states where tribal population is in majority and their leaders are in power, the socio-economic condition of tribal population is much better than that of their counterparts in the rest of states. In most of these states, the tribal population is a minority at the state, district and even at block levels. This accounts for their low political clout, so much so, even the left parties are not quite visible in mobilizing tribal population around their pressing demands.

A silver lining is the existence of quite a few committed NGOs without political motives of their own. Such agencies could be encouraged and supported from the highest policy level to take up the demands of tribal population and mobilize them for effective collective action. The feeling of alienation is bred when there is a sense of neglect and discrimination; and, worse, when there is no hope of redressing through democratic and peaceful means. This feeling creates a fertile ground for extremist activities with tacit support from the aggrieved population.

LABOUR MARKET AND ADIVASIS: AN OVERVIEW[2]

*Virginius Xaxa**

1. Introduction

The distinctive use of the term 'adivasi' for the purpose of identification and differentiation, as opposed to the term 'tribe,' emerged during the colonial rule. However, it could not assume the form of an official category. So, what assumed official space instead is the use of the term 'tribe'. Though the two terms have different connotations, the communities referred to by them coincide and overlap in actual reality. The term 'tribe' refers to a certain stage in the evolutionary development of human society. It also refers to certain distinctive societal features that mark it off from other societies. In a sense, the same idea seems to hold true in case of the use of the term 'tribe' in India. On the other side, the term 'adivasi' means 'original inhabitants,' referring thereby to their settlement in the territory prior to those of the immigrants. The two terms are used interchangeably in India except in the Northeast where the term 'adivasi' is used to refer to erstwhile tribal immigrants hailing from the central Indian belt who were brought to work in tea plantations in Assam from the middle of the 19th century. The tribes in this part do not refer to themselves as adivasis. This is

2 Keynote Address, National Seminar on Labour Market and Issues of Adivasis in India, 22-23 January, 2015 at NIRD&PR, Hyderabad.

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not to say that the use of the term 'original inhabitants' is absent in Northeast India. Rather, the term in use is 'indigenous peoples,' implying that it is more of a recent consciousness and development. The two terms 'tribe' and 'adivasi' (indigenous peoples) have been used interchangeably in this discussion.

Adivasis/tribes have been studied from a variety of dimensions, which has much to do with the disciplinary moorings. Anthropology is one discipline that has for long been associated with the study of tribes. Indeed, 'tribes' became a distinct subject matter of the discipline of anthropology; it was much later that it moved to the study of peasant society and urban community. India has been no exception to this tradition and there is a large body of anthropological studies and literature on tribes. However, topics related to various aspects of the adivasi economy have rarely been explored. The engagement of the other disciplines like sociology, political science and history with regard to adivasi issues has not only been recent, but also limited. Further, themes of interest and concern among them have also been ones central to their own disciplines. Of the social science disciplines, economics has been the least interested in the study of adivasi issues. This may have something to do with the very nature of the discipline of economics. That explains as to why the concern with an issue such as labour market is missing in tribal literature.

Tribes/adivasis have been conceptually conceived as a society distinct from others based on modes of livelihood and living, which have been generally described as primitive. Such modes of livelihood are not only considered as being predominantly dependent on nature, but also determined by nature. Their sources of livelihood include hunting, food-gathering, pastoralism, slash-and-burn agriculture, and settled cultivation. During the British rule, various tribes in India stood at different stages of development. However, irrespective of their level of development, the British rule did have an impact, which led to unprecedented changes in their economic and social life. Though much has changed since then and especially during the post-independence era of economic development, the then-existing disparities in the level of development and pattern of livelihood are visible even today, which has a significant bearing on the labour market.

Traditionally, apart from the primary source of livelihood, tribes/ adivasis have also been making their living through a combination of modes of livelihood, for example, hunting, food gathering and fishing activities which take place contemporaneously. Similar is the case with slash-and-burn agriculture, which was done in combination with food gathering and hunting. Even tribes with a relatively more advanced mode of livelihood such as settled agriculture, combine agriculture with other modes of livelihood such hunting, fishing and food gathering. However, even during times when there is more than one mode of livelihood, there is no division of labour amongst them with regard to different kinds of work or activity; rather everyone is engaged in the same activity. The division of labour that may prevail is generally based on age and sex. Here, too, there is no rigid division except in some activities. Different modes of livelihood have given way to differential control of resources. Among tribes that are mobile, there is generally no permanent sense of control over the resources, except for a sense of belonging to the 'territory'. Among the settled tribes, a sense of permanent control of resources exists which assumes varying forms such as ownership in the form of a village community, lineage, or family (extended or nuclear). Where ownership is vested in a community or lineage, the family is generally the effective unit of production, distribution and consumption. The size and quality of land owned by families in the community or lineage vary and give rise to farm size inequality, thus resulting in variations in agricultural productivity. However, social hierarchy (landlord, tenant, sharecropping, and landless labour) has generally been absent. Variations in the size of the farmlands gave rise to additional demand for labour that often led to hiring of attached labour from families with small, uneconomic landholdings. The phenomenon was rare and generally confined to chiefs or founding family of the village. The dominant form of livelihood was cultivation of one's own land. During peak agricultural season, most such families at times were dependent on reciprocal exchange of family labour or community labour. In short, tribal economy on the eve of British rule was marked by a relative absence of market. And, when they set out to establish a market, it remained restricted to a commodity market. Other forms of market, including labour market, were conspicuous by their absence.

Since each tribe has traditionally been a homogeneous and self-contained community, the keynote address attempts to trace the origin of social differentiation among tribes and the emergence of a 'labour market' in tribal regions. It examines the underlying forces and the emerging areas and forms of tribal labour market. The address then explores the extent to which the pattern of labour market, prevalent since the colonial times, has continued in the post-independence era. It delves into the new areas and forms of employment that the period of planned economic development opened up, and also studies the extent of participation of tribes in it. Finally, there is an attempt to look into new avenues of employment that have attracted the tribes following the introduction of the New Economic Policy of 1991.

2. The Colonial Period

The process of social differentiation in tribal society in the form of tenancy, agricultural labour, landless labour, etc., traces its roots to the colonial period. The incorporation of tribal regions into the colonial rule led to their integration into the larger social system, through uniform legal and administrative structure on the one hand and extension of roads, railways and other means of communication on the other. This facilitated the movement of non-tribals into tribal areas for employment in the colonial administration, as well as for trade and commerce; some even moved to the tribal regions in search of land for cultivation. These developments led to an unprecedented demand for land, contributing to rampant alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes through such means as fraud, deceit, indebtedness, sale, etc. After all, the colonial law introduced the notion of private property in land and written records of rights, a phenomenon alien to the tribal society. This paved the way for a class of owners who rather than cultivating the land themselves, got it done by tribal families whose very land they may have appropriated. It is these very developments that led to social differentiation in tribal society in the form of landlessness, tenancy, and agricultural labour, including a steady decline in the farm size of the tribal families. The differentiation in tribal society was thus not an outcome of internal dynamics within tribal society but was the product of forces external to tribal society. Resultantly, social differentiation in the relational form invariably assumed an ethnic dimension. Despite such developments, a large majority of the tribal population was still dependent

on their farmlands for their livelihood. However, with the passage of time, the size of tribal farmland kept shrinking due to alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes on the one hand and the growing size of the family on the other. This caused the tribes to move away from traditional occupations and even leave home in search of alternative employment. Such movement gained momentum due to the recurrence of famines in the tribal regions of Eastern India at regular intervals all through the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the economic context, the phenomenon of working outside the home for one's livelihood emerged in the tribal regions. This phenomenon gradually changed to working outside the village, vicinity and even the region due to the expansion of colonial economy as well as the colonial administration. The colonial state took over the vast forests and thereby its existing management. This decision on the one hand restricted livelihood opportunities for tribes, especially for shifting cultivators and food gatherers, but on the other hand created employment opportunities in state administration of forests. Since the major source of revenue under the colonial rule was land, hence the colonial state encouraged reclamation of forest land for cultivation. The landlord and others who reclaimed land invariably hired tribal people for forest clearance, employed them as tenants and later drove them out in favour of more enterprising peasants who were willing to pay higher rents (Rothermund, 1977; Sen, 1979). Though for a short duration, land reclamation continued into the post-independence period in some parts of India such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the Sunderbans region in West Bengal. Tribes from Eastern India have been key players in this reclamation process. In short, there were several factors that opened the space for labour market in tribal society. Of them, land dispossession was the most important reason. It either pushed the tribes towards landlessness or reduced their farm size to uneconomic holdings. The other factor was the pressure on the existing farmlands due to the increasing number of family members. Earlier, whenever such a situation arose, some members would invariably move out and find a new settlement by reclaiming forest land not far away from the native village. This was, however, no longer possible, as the right over forestland was now vested in the state. Also, the recurrence of famines at regular intervals, which had

earlier led to mass deaths, now forced them to look for other modes of employment and livelihood.

While this was one side of the story, the other side was that the colonial state was opening up new avenues for livelihood and employment. The introduction and expansion of infrastructure such as roads and railways under the colonial rule was one such step taken towards employment generation. Tribes filled in this demand by providing unskilled labour required to lay railway tracks as well as for cutting timber that was to be used as 'plates' for railway lines. Mineral extraction and exploitation, too, became an important sphere of economic activity during the colonial period and the tribal population formed the mainstay of its labour force. Much of the tribal labour force employed in these mines came from villages in the vicinity of these mines.

Apart from these new avenues of work within their own regions, other avenues had begun to emerge elsewhere as well. One of these was linked to the development of the plantation economy. A product of the colonial era, plantation economy emerged as a predominant form of economy in the 18th and 19th centuries in the Americas and the adjoining regions. The economy was, from the very outset, faced with an acute shortage of labour. This led to human trafficking - where people were brought in as slave labour - on an unprecedented scale from Africa. Soon, the plantation economy spread to other parts of world as well. The emergence of the plantation economy in the British colonies as a part of worldwide expansion of the capitalistic economy had already drawn tribal regions of central India into its orbit. Recruitment for employment in plantations in the West Indies, Fiji, Mauritius, etc., had begun, though labour recruited for work overseas came mainly from low caste background (Tinker, 1993). However, the emergence of the plantation economy within India from the middle of the 19th century changed the route of the movement of the population from the tribal regions. Indeed, the population from tribal regions constituted the main labour force for the plantation estates in Assam and Bengal all through the colonial period. However, the recruitment came to halt a few years after independence, as by then a surplus of labour was available in tea estates - both men and women and either as family or individuals. They served under indenture and semi-indenture systems. They were bound within the confines of an estate and were under constant surveillance.

Wages were low, working and living conditions were inhuman, and, hours of work were inordinately long. Violence unleashed was routine and normal (Bhowmik, 1981; Guha, 1977). Although the post-independence period did bring about some changes in their situation, they are still the lowest paid in the organized sector of India's industrial economy; unemployment in plantation economies is an acute problem. And, despite being part of the organized sector, their educational and health status is deplorable. Indeed, unemployed youth in the plantations have begun to move elsewhere in search of employment.

Tribal areas were economically and educationally less developed than the non-tribal areas and hence were described as the backward areas. The British administration took upon itself the rights over resources, especially forestlands initially owned by the tribal communities. Further, while the government imposed land revenue and taxes of various kinds on the tribal people, in turn, it did little to improve their living conditions. Measures that would aid their development - economic, educational and health - were rarely considered. In fact, education, in general, was limited to the middle school level; and, the schools were run by Christian missionaries. Those who wanted to study further had no other option but to move out of their native places. Modern education did open new opportunities for employment, though limited, in government and missionary institutions for the posts of clerks and school teachers. This kind of employment gained momentum in post-independence era due to the state policy of affirmative action programmes.

3. Post-independence Period

The colonial state did nothing to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people other than providing for protective legislative and administrative measures. Such measures aimed to protect tribes from non-tribes who had been largely responsible for exploitation and dispossession of tribes from their land and other resources. This led to series of revolts and rebellions against the British all through the late 18th and 19th centuries. Despite such protective measures, exploitation of tribes and their dispossession from land could not be halted. The post-independence India continues with the protective measures albeit with some modifications. For instance, a certain percentage of seats are reserved for tribal people in educational

institutions and state employment. In addition, unlike under colonial rule, policies and programmes have also been worked out since the first five-year plan for their economic and social (education and health) development. These measures have opened up new avenues of employment and livelihood for tribes, which was almost negligible or limited during the colonial period.

Of the new avenues of employment, state employment has been the most important in the post-independence era. The 7.5 per cent of state employment reserved for tribes in central government services and the share corresponding to the size of the state tribal population in the state government services has thrown open a large pool of employment opportunities for the tribes. However, the occupational status was largely dependent on the level of educational attainment. Nevertheless, educational attainment - at the time such provisions were introduced - was negligible among tribes. In 1961, the literacy rate among tribes was a mere 8.5 per cent; this rose to 11.3 per cent in 1971 and 16.3 per cent in 1981 (GOI, 2013). This being the educational status, it was almost impossible to fill in the central and state quotas. In case of quota for higher grade services, it was even worse, as candidates with the necessary qualifications were not available. For example, as late as 1974 the share of the scheduled tribes in central government services was a mere 155 (0.46 per cent) in group A services, 258 (0.49 per cent) in group B services, 33,383 (2.13 per cent) in group C services and 47,679 (3.84 per cent) in group D services (GOI, 2001: 21). The scenario has now changed as the literacy rate has increased. In 1991, the literacy rate had gone up to 29.6 per cent as compared to 16.3 per cent in 1981. The literacy rate was 47.1 and 59.0 per cent respectively in 2001 and 2011. With this, a larger number of people with the required qualifications are now available. The increased share of the Scheduled Tribes in central government services in recent years reflects this to a great extent. As on January 2011, for example, the share of scheduled tribes was 33,732 (4.8 per cent) in group A posts, 11,357 (6.1 per cent) in group B posts, 1, 74,562 (7.7 per cent) in group C posts, and, 32,791 (6.81 per cent) in group D posts, which included sweepers and cleaners (ACHR, 2013). Paradoxically, however, the process of shrinking of state employment had already begun in the late 1980s as part of structural adjustment programme. One of the important conditionality of structural adjustment programme was the downsizing of state employment. Class C and class D government jobs, for

which tribes are now eligible, have considerably shrunk today. As on January 1, 1994, the employment rate in categories C and D was 2381613 and 1023285 respectively, which stood at 2396426 and 949353 respectively on January 1, 1999 (GOI, 2001:21). This has reduced the number of jobs in state government departments. The share of scheduled tribes in class C and class D for the period 1996–1998 is a pointer to this. During the period, the share of scheduled tribes in class C and class D services was a mere 1, 33,179 (5.69 per cent) and 67,453 (6.48 per cent) respectively. Class D here does not include sweepers and cleaners (NCSCST, 1998). For tribes, the status of state employment at the central level is somewhat good; however, the scenario is far from satisfactory at the state level. In case of states, even at the lower level, tribes fall far short of their share to the total population. This can be attributed to lack of eligible candidates as well as discrimination against tribes by the dominant community of the state. Indeed discrimination is widespread and intense at the state level than at the national level. The Asian Centre for Human Rights in its report, The State and Tribal Employment in Public and Private Sector, documents the status of employment in states such as Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Chhattisgarh, Kerala and Karnataka. This report indeed reveals and reinforces the observation with regard to discriminatory treatment meted out, as discussed before (ACHR, 2013).

A tiny section from the educated class could also enter the private sector in the region, but mostly in low-level white collar jobs. Post-independence, the activities that had begun under the British rule underwent economic expansion. Mineral extraction was one such activity that created employment opportunities - mainly unskilled work - for the tribal population. Besides mineral extraction, tribal regions also witnessed other development activities. Some of these concerned economic infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, dams, irrigation, and power (thermal and hydraulic). Industrial projects in the form of PSUs (Public Sector Undertakings) also came up in large numbers in tribal regions. These infrastructure and industrial projects did open additional employment opportunities of a different kind and level. Most of these required certain qualifications, which, as mentioned earlier, was in short supply due to low educational qualification of the tribal people. And, those who did get jobs (a small number) suffered prejudice. At the same time, the tribal labour force filled

in for the labour required at construction sites. Non-tribal labour force had no interest in such work and hence was not available. However, once the construction phase was over and regular appointment had begun, tribes found themselves out of the labour market - even for jobs that required little skill. Even if they were employed, it was more of an exception than a rule. Thus, while the projects did provide employment opportunities to the adivasis, it was only for a short duration. From a long-term perspective, they did not gain much.

The development of tribal communities has been one of the key agendas of the Indian state in the post-independence era. Various programmes and schemes have been launched from time to time to improve the livelihood situation of the tribal people. Yet poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition loom large among tribal communities. The percentage of tribal population living below poverty line was still 47.2 per cent as compared to 36.8 per cent for scheduled castes, 26.7 per cent for OBCs, and 16.1 per cent for others. The urban scenario shows a similar pattern (GOI, 2013:31). At the same time, the protective measures provided in the Constitution and laws to safeguard the interests of the tribal population have failed. Further, the alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes continues unabated. This has been aggravated by industrial, mining and other infrastructure development projects in states, which has divested millions of tribal people from their land and other resources. As per the information available, in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar (including Jharkhand), Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh), Rajasthan and Orissa alone, a total of 21.3 million have been displaced because of projects mentioned above between 1951 and 1990. Of this 8.54 million, about 40 per cent were tribal people. Further, of the 8.54 million, only 2.12 million constituted a mere 24.8 per cent of the displaced (GOI, 2001:39). That largely explains as to why their condition has turned out be worse than before despite a plethora of tribal welfare schemes. This is evident from the rise in the number of landless labourers, agricultural labourers, marginal farmers and small farmers. Among the self-employed agricultural workers, a large chunk constituted marginal, small and medium farm households. In 2005–06, marginal, small and medium farm households constituted 49.08, 25.69 and 24.14 per cent respectively of the total tribal farm households (GOI undated). Landlessness, too, has increased manifold. It is worth noting that it is

unimaginable to think of tribes as landless in a traditional social setting. However, by 1993–94, as high as 47.89 per cent of the total tribal population was identified as 'rural labour households'. Of this, 54.07 per cent possessed some land, while the remaining 45.92 per cent were landless (Thorat, 2006).

While development induced displacement, referred to above, curtailed the scope of livelihood on the one hand and opened up new avenues of employment on the other, long-term employment was still a distant dream. Hence, owing to the resultant livelihood problems, the tribal population like in the colonial era has been forced to move to other places for work. However, tribal migration in post-independence era has taken a different trajectory. Though the rural to rural movement continues, the rural to urban movement has also gained momentum, especially in the last two decades. Migration has been both short- as well as long-term.

As noted earlier, tribal regions witnessed new forms of employment in colonial India. These predominant forms of employment were 'rural' in nature, for instance, plantation agriculture, farm forestry, forest management and mining. Of these, plantation agriculture has been the most dominant form. However, by late 1950s, the movement of labour to the plantations in Assam and Bengal almost came to halt considering the drying up of demand. Similarly, the demand for labour in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, too, has been on the wane. This has led to short-term migration, even to distant places where construction work for roads, buildings, dams, etc., was in progress. Also, some tribes have moved to the green revolution belt of Punjab and Haryana because of demand for labour in these regions. Still others have left their native villages to work in brick-kiln sectors of neighbouring states. For example, a large number of tribes from Jharkhand have been going to Bengal and Assam to work in brick-kilns. Similarly, a large percentage of tribal population, especially from Southern districts of Odisha, has been migrating to South Indian states and Gujarat for short- and long-term work. There have, of course, been attempts by governments to restrict such movement by creating employment opportunities locally. However, there has not been much success. Of such attempts, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), introduced under UPA regime in 2006 was one such scheme. The scheme, though successful in providing some

employment and restraining migration, seems to have gone out of steam due to limitations that have cropped up. Beginning with 3298.73 lakh man-days of employment in 2006–07, the man-days of employment did witness an increase and remained steady for some time. However, it soon began to fade. In 2010–11, it came down to 5361.80 lakh man-days of employment and in 2011–12 to a mere 2822.16 lakh (GOI undated; ACHR, 2013).

The predominant form of migration has been from rural to rural setting. This is so even today. However, in the post-independence era, especially since the last two decades or so, migration has taken place from a rural setting to an urban setting. Many new towns have come up in the tribal regions because of the emergence of modern industrial and mining and related enterprises. The fruit of these developments was, however, not enjoyed by the people living in these regions. And yet, even though limited, it did open up some avenues of work, mainly as unskilled and semi-skilled workers in towns that have emerged in the wake of industrial, mineral and allied activities. Of those who lost land due to industrial/mining activities or were affected by it, some were absorbed as unskilled and low-paid manual workers. And, those who could not be absorbed were forced to fend for themselves as informal sector workers. Since tribes did not have skills other than agriculture related, they were pushed to work in areas which required minimum skills, for instance, rickshaw pulling or working as domestic help. However, even in these domains, the entry of tribals has been rather limited, either due to lack of skill or because they are averse to the idea and value of such work. Further, developments in tribal regions have invariably attracted migration of people from outside since the colonial period, which has pushed the tribes out of both formal and informal labour market. At the same time, it is important to note, that the towns in tribal regions have generally been small- and/or medium-sized, and hence have failed to create a volume of work and demand that could absorb a wider and a diverse segment of the population. Thus, within the region, the movement of tribals from a rural setting to an urban setting has remained restricted. This explains as to why tribal population strength is low in urban areas despite rapid urbanization.

The creation of new districts and administrative set-ups in tribal regions

has also contributed to the growth of towns in recent years. At the same time, the push that came with a greater reliance on market forces starting with the economic reform of 1991 has given a spurt to a host of economic activities. This has led to the shift of the tribal population from a rural to an urban setting. In 1971, only one million out of the total population of 38 million were listed as 'urban'. The figure was 3 million out of the 52 million in 1981. Since 2001, however, there has been a phenomenal increase in tribal population in urban areas. Whereas it was 7 million out of 84 million (2.4 per cent) in 2001, the figure stood at 11 million out of the 104 million population (2.8 per cent) in 2011. The figure was 2.0 per cent and 2.3 per cent in 1981 and 1991 respectively (GOI, 2011). There is, of course, considerable state variation in respect of tribal population in urban areas. In the Northeast, the share of tribal population to total urban population ranges from over 70 per cent in Meghalaya and Nagaland to over 90 per cent in Mizoram as per 2011 census. The same is a mere 6 per cent in Manipur and 5 per cent in Assam. In the rest of India, the share of tribal population in urban areas ranges from about 10 per cent in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to over 3 per cent In Maharashtra and Gujarat. West Bengal had as low as 1.5 per cent tribal population in urban areas (GOI, 2011). This has led to visible change in the nature of occupation. The number of people engaged in secondary, especially tertiary, sectors has steadily risen. The phenomenon has been more pronounced in the Northeast region as compared to other parts of tribal regions in India. However, only a small section of those engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors are in the organized sector. Even in this sector, a large chunk forms part of the informal economy within the organized sector. A very large chunk of those employed in the secondary and tertiary sectors form part of an unorganized sector.

While this has been so, there has also been steady migration of tribals from a rural setting to an urban setting outside the tribal region. Such movement, to begin with, has been more in the nature of search for white-collar jobs because of expansion of education and the policy of reservation for tribes in government and semi-government services. Tribal migrants to the metropolis comprise those with higher education. The provision for reservation in employment in government and semi-government institutions has greatly facilitated their entry. However, the share of tribes in various types of employment despite

the provision of reservation falls short of the size of the population. The gap between share and the actual position has been either due to lack of qualified personnel or being discriminated against because of their tribal identity. Following this shift, there has also been movement of tribes to urban centres for work as unskilled/semi-skilled workers in the industrial sector and its allied activities.

Tribal migration to both rural and urban settings has been male-centred. Since the movement of women was linked to those of the men, it was invariably as an associate or a dependent. Though the movement of women from tribal regions to metropolis for domestic work seems to date back to the late 1970s, there is a departure from the historical pattern. It witnessed an unprecedented increase in 1980s and more so in 1990s. Today, a large number of tribal women venture out alone in search of employment, especially to metropolitan cities like Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Goa. Of course, they also move to small towns in immediate vicinity. The recent movement, unlike the one in the past, is individual-based, and includes both men and women. Rather, women seem to outnumber men. Women have overwhelmingly been engaged as domestic workers. Those working as domestic workers mainly hail from Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal. As compared to tribes from peninsular India, the migration of tribes from the Northeast to the metropolitan cities in other parts of India is a more recent phenomenon. The principal reason for migration, to begin with, was to attain higher education, which still persists. However, what is different today is that students, on completion of their studies, look for employment opportunities in metropolitan cities rather than going back to their native places. In addition, tribes from the region have also been migrating to other parts of India in search of employment. The migration and employment of tribes in the metropolis shows two distinct patterns. This is linked to education and skill. The nature and type of work that tribes from peninsular India are engaged in the metropolis relate mainly to works such as domestic help, construction workers and other low-paid menial jobs. In contrast, tribes from the Northeast are mainly employed in retail shops, hotels, restaurants and other hospitality related work. However, both form an important segment of informal and unorganized labour market.

A historical overview of labour market and tribes shows that they have been mainly absorbed in agriculture and agriculture-related activities such as in forests, plantation, quarries, mines, etc. These were spheres of work for which non-tribal labour force either did not have the skill for or were not forthcoming. Wages are low, and, living and working conditions deplorable. Today, there is lack of work in such occupational fields, which, in turn, has led to acute unemployment and livelihood problems in tribal areas. Hence, there has been unprecedented migration of tribes, especially of youth, to cities in search of employment. In spheres of work where both tribes and non-tribes were/are available, preference has generally been given to non-tribes—thus indicating the presence of labour market discrimination against tribes. This was partly addressed through the provision of reservation policy. However, despite policies of reservation, discrimination is not altogether absent. That explains as to why there has been relatively higher percentage of tribes in state employment. And yet, here too, the share of tribes falls far short of the total share viz. the size of their population. This has been the case not only at the higher levels of employment, but even at the lower levels for which, generally, skills and qualifications are readily available. When viewed against the larger backdrop, i.e. the national level, the situation is even worse in states, since prejudice and discrimination against tribes are more intense at state level rather than the national level. The share of tribes in non-state organized sector is almost invisible; however, their presence in unorganized sector is significant.

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SCHEDULED TRIBES: MARKET-BASED DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY[3]

*Dev Nathan**

1. Introduction

It is indeed an honour to give this valedictory address at a seminar organized by the Sankaran Chair at the National Institute of Rural Development. It was a privilege to have known Sankaran, who was noted for his commitment to supporting the causes of the poor and showed that you can work for the people, irrespective of who your boss is.

Sankran was always trying to find ways to benefit people. In a manner, I would like to carry forward that quest intellectually, trying to see what scope there is for the scheduled tribes (STs), adivasis or indigenous peoples to retain what they value as their identity even while they are part of market-based development.

2. Development and Inequality

A complaint that one often hears when working with development projects among indigenous peoples in various parts of Asia is that their values are being lost in the process of development. Programmes and projects among the STs promote different forms of market-based development. A shift from cultivation

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3 Valedictory Address, National Seminar on, Labour Market and Issues of Adivasis in India, 22-23 January, 2015 at NIRD&PR, Hyderabad.

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for self-consumption to cultivation for the market, an intensification of cultivation so that marketable surpluses can be produced, the collection and sale of non-timber forest products (NTFP) – these are some of the ways in which development is promoted among the STs.

Of course, such development is predicated upon the state's acceptance of certain rights of the adivasis – their property rights, whether individual or collective, over lands; their access to forests for collection of NTFP; and their rights to NTFP and minor minerals, such as sand or stone. These rights have been accepted, even if imperfectly and with a lot of bureaucratic hurdles, under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and PESA. Without such security of rights intensification of cultivation would be virtually impossible. At times, however, such security may be more de facto than de jure.

More recently, migration to work in cities, or even to the Green Revolution areas of North-west India, have also emerged as important avenues for income increases. The setting up of states such as Jharkhand, also led to a construction boom, a book which has trickled down to smaller towns. In fact, during the course of a poverty strategy study of Jharkhand for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the IHD study team found that commuting migration to nearby urban centres for work in construction had replaced NTFP collection as the main source of cash income.

But these developments, while they have increased income of the STs have also brought certain negative developments with them. Not all benefit equally from the new opportunities. Those who get government or other regular jobs do much better. Those with more family members who migrate also do better. Those with more valley-bottom land, on which rice can be followed by vegetables, also do better. Overall, inequality has increased and eroded collective identities.

There have also been reactions to the increases in inequality. Recent case studies of witch persecution show that inequalities and jealousy have appeared as factors in witch denunciations. Police data, which are underestimates of witch events, show that the numbers of those killed have increased after the formation of the state of Jharkhand. There is reported to have been a similar development

after the end of apartheid in South Africa.

3. What Is Identity?

Given the growth of inequality in the course of development that has occurred, and the concern with indigenous culture, we need to start with the question what is identity? Some may argue that identity is a particular way of life, say, that of hunter-gatherers or swidden cultivators. It could also be taken as the use of certain technologies, such as hoe or plough cultivation. This would be a kind of technological determinism of identities.

There are certainly many correspondences between ways of life, technology and identity. People think of what they do as being their identity. And what they do is very much related to the technology they use. But it is not as though there is a one-to-one relation between technology and identity. Very similar rice cultivation is carried out, for instance, by peasants in India and China. Of course, there is also a very broad similarity in that these rice cultivation regions, have been the sites where states have come into being. They are also regions where patriarchy has been built. But within this broad bush historical similarity there are many differences of culture.

Further, it is also true that we live in a time of change and, that too, rapid change. Some livelihoods that do not provide adequate means of livelihood are being given up in favour of others that secure or at least promise higher returns. For instance, many adivasis are taking up jobs, often in government service or the public sector, but also elsewhere. Urban centres were not part of traditional adivasis ways of life, but now are very much part of it.

Do those who have become urbanized or taken up jobs and given up farming of any kind, do they, therefore, cease to be adivasi? I doubt if anyone would argue in favour of denying that such persons or families continue to be adivasi.

What then constitutes adivasi identity? I would suggest that identity in this context should be taken to mean what could be called the core values of a society or community. One could suggest that the following constitute core values of adivasi communities: a value for the collective, as against the individualism of the market; a belief system (animism) that is based on the culture-nature continuum, rather than the culture-nature binary that is characteristic of market societies; and a somewhat less unequal position of women, based on men not dominating

all the hierarchies in the family and community.

If we take the position that identity is constituted by the core values that a community or tribe generally accepts, then the question of identity in contemporary development becomes: can these core values be maintained even while undertaking market-based development?

4. Alternatives in Development

In placing the alternatives in development I modify the 2x2 matrix used by Hirschman (1982) in discussing approaches to the development of capitalism.

We compare two development paths, one of 'market-based development' and the other with an 'influential presence of indigenous forms'. Since traditional systems have been substantially modified, it would be difficult to think of any tribal system as being completely indigenous; which is why, I use the term 'substantial presence of indigenous forms'.

Figure 1 : Development Alternatives

Positive Effects	Negative Effects	Negative Effects
Market-based Development	**A** Specialization, scale and learning increase productivity, income and well-being	**B** Nature-culture binary; Depletion of resources and destruction of cultures; Growing inequality and male domination
Influential Presence of Indigenous Forms	**D** Nature-culture continuum; Preserving resources and culture; Limiting both inequality and male domination	**C** Norms that inhibit accumulation and individual initiative

Each of these two development paths has both positive and negative effects. In quadrant [A], the case of market-based development, there are shown the possible benefits of specialization and large-scale production, increasing productivity and both higher income and improved well-being. The negative effects, shown in quadrant [B], are the hegemonic ideology of the nature-culture binary, which is also related to the notion of human domination of nature. Other negative effects are the destruction of cultures, along with growing inequality and male domination.

The ideology of the indigenous forms-influenced path, in quadrant [D], continues to retain the notion of nature-culture continuum, where all living beings, and even non-living substances are thought to embody a spirit, or, in other words, to have some form of agency. Not being dominated by the market, resources and cultures could both be preserved; while there is limited inequality and limited male domination. On the negative side, however, in [C] indigenous forms inhibit both accumulation and individual initiative.

Each of these quadrants contains an element of truth; but they cannot be held in isolation from each other. The horizontal quadrants go together with each other; at present, two sides of a coin. Along with [A] there is also [B]; the market not only as enabling but also destructive. Supporters of the market often point to [A], its enabling character; but ignore [B] the destructive side of the market. Similarly, those who uphold indigenous forms point to [D]; but tend to ignore [C], the negative side of inhibiting accumulation and individual development.

In a similar fashion, there tend to beliefs across the diagonals. Those who hold [A], of the income and well-being benefits of market society, also hold [C], of the inhibiting effects of indigenous beliefs on accumulation and individual initiative. On the other hand, those who point to [B] the devastating effects of market-based development on nature and culture, uphold [D] the beneficial effects of indigenous belief systems based on the human-nature continuum, limitations to inequality and restricted male domination.

5. Alternative Modernities?

The interesting question is: can the two sets of verticals exist together? Could there be a society organized on indigenous beliefs against accumulation that is also destructive

of nature and resources? All production related to nature necessarily transforms it; which is why we talk of the co-evolution of humans and nature. But can such production, without accumulation, nevertheless destroy, in a significant way, nature? Yes, this has often happened in indigenous societies. Swidden cultivators-cum-gatherers are known to shift their location when some critical wild, i.e. uncultivated, foods or materials become scarce; or, when the productivity of cultivation goes down because of the depletion of top soil. There are also the dramatic examples of the North Indian hunter-gatherers who, in the pre-colonial or pre-Columbian period, had already hunted mega fauna to extinction.

So, there have been combinations of [C] and [B], with indigenous norms that inhibit accumulation co-existing with the depletion of resource and even the extinction of some species. Of course, the scale of the depletion and extinction are both quite different from what we see now in the Anthropocene (Steffen et al, 2011), but depletion and extinction did occur through the actions of indigenous societies.

What about the co-existence of [A] and [C]? Can there be an accumulative community or village that secures the benefits of specialization, increases productivity and yet simultaneously sustains beliefs in the nature-culture continuum and preserves resources? Also a market-based production system limits inequality and even proceeds towards gender quality?

This is the type of issue posed by the approach of alternative modernities. As Rajeev Bhargava points out, there is a need for "the recognition of alternative modernities that lie unnoticed because of the hold on our imagination of a simplistic, dichotomous framework that bifurcates our world into western modernity and indigenous tradition" (2010: 311). For modernity we can substitute the economic equivalent of a market-based or capitalist economy. Are there alternatives possible, other than the dichotomies of market-based and indigenous forms?

Let us first take the question of inequality, including gender inequality. To begin with, communities can relate to the market in more than one way. The usual way of dealing with the market is on an individual basis, with each individual or household selling on and buying from the market in an atomized manner. Such individualized market behaviour is often competitive,

as each seller tries to secure a market or maximize her sales. This, for instance, was noticed among suppliers of horse-rides as tourism services among the indigenous peoples of Yunnan in China. Initially all households competed with each other and brought down prices. Over time, however, they learned that combining and rotating the provision of horse rides would enable them to sustain prices and thus their incomes.

These are small-scale examples of suppliers from indigenous communities combining to control supply and thus prevent a 'race to the bottom' in prices and income. There are bigger examples of whole villages in China that have remained collective while they operate in the market (Dev Nathan and Govind Kelkar, 1997). There are many village-owned Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) in China and a few collective villages. Instead of distributing profits as dividends to a handful of share-owners, the profits are either accumulated or used to provide basic facilities such as housing, education, medical care and even food to all members of the village collective. Of course, there are strict rules about discipline at work and those who try to 'free ride' are punished.

These collective villages in China also have a reasonably good record in reducing gender inequality. Some of the village leaders and factory managers are women and many women are skilled workers.

Among some North American indigenous peoples too collective enterprises have been set up. It has been called a form of 'indigenous capitalism', where profits do not become the private income of a few but are shared among all owners.

What these examples show is that it is possible to have collectively-owned villages as enterprises that operate in a market system. As far as buying and selling operations on the market, the type of enterprise does not matter. An enterprise could be individually owned, be a joint-stock enterprise, a cooperative or even a collective. All such enterprises, irrespective of their internal forms of organization, can operate in the market. But to remain in operation within the market, enterprises will have to continue to earn a profit and carry out at least the investments that are necessary to take account of depreciation and equipment replacement requirements. In an increasingly competitive world economy they would also have to invest in increasing productivity or in

innovation so as not to fall behind competitors.

Adivasi communities too could set up similar collective enterprises to conduct their market economic relations. Such enterprises would have to overcome collective action problems and establish discipline among members. Besides cooperative, Indian company law also provides for the setting up of what are called "worker owned companies", where only those who work in a company can be share-holders.

Forming collective enterprises is then a way in which problems of income inequality and gender inequality could be dealt with. But what about the questions of the relationship with nature and that of the preservation of resources to make production sustainable? These are more difficult questions, since it means moving away from a short-term and a purely instrumentalist approach to nature. This is a challenge the world as a whole faces, as we come to grips with the geological changes (global warming, extinction of species, etc.) that humans have created in the Anthropocene.

Dealing with these problems at both global and local levels requires a change in mindset, in culture, and analysis in the approach to nature. From seeing nature simply as a resource, we have to recognize that whatever is created is the result of human-nature interaction, and that in the course of interaction there is a co-evolution of both humans and nature.

The indigenous peoples can be aware of their co-evolutionary relationship with forests. In addition their traditional world-views start from the inter-relationship between all species, all living beings, and even of relationship between living and non-living objects. In a way that standard market-based thinking does not, indigenous thinking acknowledges that human beings are just one species among many, and the inter-relations of species do not have to be those of domination.

Moving away from a dominating view of nature to one of acknowledging inter-relationships and agency of non-humans is a big step. While the world as a whole has still to fashion ways of thinking in this manner, indigenous spirit-based animism does have some pointers in this matter. Of course, it is a long way in actually being able to analyze problems in this way, but a beginning can be made.

To conclude, I would like to say that indigenous societies should explore ways of combining collective forms of enterprise with market-based development. This would help preserve or even develop values of collectivity, and gender and other equality. Simultaneously it would be necessary to see how to fashion a social analysis that starts from the position of human beings being one species among others that too have agency, even if not to the same extent as humans. Such a shift in thinking is necessary to be able to deal with the problems of the local and global environments that human interventions have caused.

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