

THE DEVELOPMENT BLUES: THE TRIBE IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE TRIBE

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation has a negative bearing on the poor, be they the tribal people, Dalit, or women. Globalisation and economic liberalisation after 1990s in India have only accelerated the pace of displacement by taking over the productive resources of the poor in the name of development leading to livelihood crisis. Increasingly, the tribal communities are more adversely affected in terms of loss of culture, self-esteem, dignity, and identity. Tribes in India today are facing a serious crisis of their existence as a community, which was their strength in the context of adversity. Tribe as a community is on its way out. Tribal unity has been bartered for the globalisation and in its place, we now have the tribal as an individual who cannot be distinguished any more from his or her non-tribal counterparts. He or she now becomes defenceless against all odds. He or she no longer can expect his or her community to stand by him or her. This, no doubt, is leading to the death of tribe as a group, as a society and as a conception. In such an event we only can wish 'Long live the tribal' as an individual entity! Isn't it paradoxical! We continue to study tribes as unit entities, which they are not any longer. The traditional knowledge of the tribes is no longer usable for eking out livelihoods and maintaining their ecological belongingness. We now argue that the tribal cannot be denied the fruits of development. We also know how bitter these fruits are to them.

My paper deals with the contradictions of globalised and 'liberalised' world on tribe as unit and the tribal as individual entity caught in the cogwheel of mainstreaming. This paper is based on review of available literature on the subject, apart from the published research papers of the author.

Keywords: *Globalisation, traditional knowledge, local knowledge, development.*

INTRODUCTION

It is essential to note that the indigenous communities, unlike the mainstream communities, are communitarian. Community stands above an individual and it

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takes care of the needs of the households or individuals of the community. In a sense, individual is subordinate to the community's interests and individual has to abide by the dictates of the community elders, a collective leadership. In these societies traditionally land was communally owned and all the activities were undertaken collectively. In fact, the indigenous communities are in an ideological contrast to our 'civilized' societies. Right from the British, efforts are on to dismantle their communitarian approach and living to one of individualism. In spite of this, they still are largely communitarian. The processes of development and governance, including globalisation, have largely impacted the tribal communitarian life (Siva Prasad 2018a, 2018b, 2014).

Globalisation is hailed as a process that has made the world into a global village where boundaries become blurred or meaningless. It is understood as a tool to explain current social and economic issues. It includes several concepts like homogenisation, differentiation, hybridisation, plurality, localism and relativism. In its actual import the word globalisation implies integration of the world but what it really means is to help the international capital and market to control and dominate the local (Sengupta 2001). The 'free' globalised market has engulfed all the resource rich areas. Besides, it controls and dictates local markets even. This has a negative bearing on the poor, be they the tribal, Dalit, women, the marginalised, and what have you. In fact, globalisation leads to homogenisation and it acts against multi-culturalism and multilingualism. Process of globalisation acts in favour of dominant cultures and dominant languages and undermines the values of the poor and the underprivileged. The movement from cultural pluralism to monoculturalism is the result of globalisation. This trend is observable in all aspects, including in the area of agriculture, production and commerce, urban structures, development programmes, welfare programmes, etc. We do not notice any variation with regard to a mountainous or hilly region to plains area to coastal terrains. None of the programmes are designed keeping in mind the regional or local specificities. Given this, what happens to the tribals and their existence as communities in India? How can we look at their local knowledge, livelihoods and changing control and access to resources? What are their implications to the tribals at large?

There are researchers (Chomsky, 2017) who argue that globalisation is not a new phenomenon in India and it coincides with the establishment of British rule in India. Acceleration of globalisation and trade liberalisation coincided with the fall of Soviet Union and end of cold war. In fact, economic liberalisation after 1990s has opened the flood gates to foreign capital and investment. This led to changes in policy that have a bearing on the exploitation of natural resources. In the past, building of dams, hydro-electric projects, railway lines, establishing industries, National Wildlife Parks/Sanctuaries, etc., in tribal and rural areas have severely affected the communities living in these areas by way of displacement and loss of livelihoods of the people. The rates of displacement since independence due to development projects is quite disturbing.

It is quite aptly observed by Kothari that, “Since independence, development projects of the Five-Year Plans have displaced about five lakh persons each year primarily as a direct consequence of administrative land acquisition. This figure does not include displacement by non-Plan projects, changes in land-use, acquisition for urban growth, and loss of livelihood caused by environmental degradation and pollution. Also not included are the substantial displacements that are resulting as a consequence of the “systems of monoculture” that are replacing the ecological diversity along the coasts, on the lands and in the forests... Hydroelectric and irrigation projects are the largest source of displacement and destruction of habitat. Other major sources are mines (partially open-cast mines), super thermal and nuclear power plants, industrial complexes as well as military installations, weapons testing grounds, railways and roads, the notification and expansion of reserved forest areas, sanctuaries and parks and the use of profit-improving technologies (causing large-scale displacement of traditional fisher folk and handloom weavers). Most of these interventions also adversely affect artisanal communities and other self-employed people. For instance, since independence, over 1,600 major dams and tens of thousands of medium and smaller irrigation projects have been built with the attendant canal system and invariable consequences of waterlogging and soil salinisation. As a result, between 100-120 lakh people have been forcibly displaced. Another estimate places the number closer to 210 lakhs by these dams from 1951 till 1985... In the absence of firm project wise data, the estimates of the total numbers displaced by planned development interventions from 1951–1990 range from a conservative 110 lakhs to an overall figure of 185 lakhs. These figures do not include the sizeable number of people who are not acknowledged as being ‘project affected’ (i.e. by loss of livelihood caused by natural resource extraction or degradation), those displaced in urban areas and the victimised by the process of secondary displacement. If these are tallied, the number of those displaced since independence would be as high as four crores. ... A significant number of those displaced are tribals and other economically marginal rural populations who have historically depended on the natural resource base” (1996: 1476–1477). It is essential to note that the displacement due to development and infrastructure projects displaced 40 to 50 per cent of the tribal population (Fernandes 2000; Ray 2000; Kumar 2005; Housing and Land Rights Network – South Asia Regional Programme Habitat International Coalition 2009; and Negi and Ganguly 2011).

Today, we have multi-national or trans-national companies being invited under foreign direct investment (FDI) to start industries, extract mineral resources, etc. Special economic zones (SEZs) are created in several parts of the country to encourage the major players to start their ventures. These investors are given special concessions. The states have been competing among themselves to attract the capital to invest into their states. Some of them have acquired land and other resources and earmarked them for this purpose at the cost of the poor tribal and

marginalised communities. It is quite significant to note that the economic / trade liberalisation has led to large scale displacement, deprivation, and brought misery to the poor, more so for the tribals. What is quite disheartening is the rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced tribals has been the saddest story of the humanity. None of the rehabilitation and resettlement programmes have led to improvement of the lives of the oustees (Thakur 2014: 125; Kothari 1996: 1477; Cernea 1996; World Bank 1994 cited in Dwivedi 1999: 43). This, besides the other factors, led to a shift from subsistence to market-oriented production. In a way, this has largely altered the indigenous communities' pattern of life and even outlook, to a certain extent. Thus, development also leads to conflict between the tribals and the State and the non-tribal outsiders (Siva Prasad 2018a & 2018b).

The tribal had to resort to livelihood diversification as a coping mechanism for survival. Their traditional knowledge have no meaning in the new habitats and, therefore, it results in loss of livelihoods. Many of them resort to distress migration to urban areas as construction workers ending up in slums. Now they are also wage labourers, thanks to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) that has converted the independent tribals into wage workers (See table at the end). Most of the governmental programmes and policies have not benefitted the indigenous communities much. The forest policy and Acts have denied the tribals their customary rights and access to the forest resources. One has to recognise the fact that the forest resources were very well looked after for centuries by the indigenous communities, who have protected them and never abused them. The economic reforms have pushed them further down and turned them into alms seekers from being independent and never dependent on the others, except on the nature that gave them the bounty. As a result, the indigenous communities (read tribal) are increasingly more adversely affected in terms of loss of culture, self-esteem, dignity and identity. These communities are facing serious crisis of their existence as a community. Community living was their strength and, as was well known, the resources were owned communally. What we observe today is that the tribe as a community is on its way out and the tribal unity has been bartered in the name of development and globalisation. We now have the tribal as an individual who cannot be distinguished from the other non-tribal counterparts, thanks to the so-called 'mainstreaming'. The tribal now has become defenceless and can no longer expect his/her community to come to their rescue or stand by them. This process is leading to the death of tribe as a group, as a society, and as a conception. No wonder they are rightly showcased in the Museums (for instance, the Museum of Man in Bhopal that show cases their habitats and cultures that are getting disappeared) for the posterity to imagine the tribal life.

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Tribal communities have their customary institutions, including dispute resolution mechanisms, that regulate their way of life and exercise control over the deviants. Functioning of these institutions ensures harmony between the

individuals and community, between the community and the others, and between the community and the natural endowments (Siva Prasad 2005). The indigenous communities always look towards nature as a giver of bounties and, therefore, need to be revered. Any calamity is looked upon as the anger of nature for the possible mistakes committed by them. Hence, they try to maintain harmony with nature and its other creations that have equal right over the nature and its resources. The indigenes always believe that they are only a part of the nature and nature is their benefactor.

The bounties of nature were always appreciated and the tribals have managed the periods of food shortage in the annual cycles but no starvation deaths were ever reported. They have knowledge about their resources and their traditional wisdom was quite handy in overcoming the crises of nature and in coping with the situations. The livelihoods were well supported by the traditional knowledge that is very much linked to the existing natural resources. Today their traditional wisdom has become irrelevant and unusable due to the shift in the ownership of resources from the tribals to the market players. Tribals today face livelihood crisis and have become dependent on the government and others for pursuing their living. In a way, they are turned into beggars in their homeland. This course was hastened by the process of globalisation and economic liberalisation that led to large scale displacement of the tribals as their productive resources were taken over in the name of development that deepened their livelihood crisis (Siva Prasad 2015; Siva Prasad 2014; Siva Prasad and Alok Pandey 2008; Siva Prasad and Eswarappa 2006).

Development is considered as a panacea to the removal of inequalities and poverty among many of the deprived groups or households, including the indigenous communities. Development is also regarded as important for the economic growth of a nation or a region. Development implies using of natural resources, be it for mining, logging, industrialisation, construction of dams, for infrastructure development, and what have we. It also implies displacing the indigenes from their locales as it is imperative for the state to take over their resources for 'development'. The policies of the governments are guided by this very notion of development and laws are enacted to enforce such evictions. The recent Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation Act (2013) is warranted to speed up this process. It is relevant to note here that all these policies and Acts are in favour of the State and are only one-sided. They are largely weighed against the poor and more in favour of the rich and the dominant classes. It is in this context one need to analyse the problems that the tribal communities have been facing since the British and post-British rule (Siva Prasad 2018a). Also, one need to look into the Acts and policies, including the rulings of the judiciary, relating to the tribal communities as well as its territories, especially in the Schedule V Areas.

Globalisation and economic liberalisation after 1990s in India have dismantled the relations of the indigenous communities with the natural resource endowment (they use their accumulated cultural knowledge to eke out a living from the natural resources in a sustainable manner), and accelerated the pace of

displacement by taking over the productive resources of the poor in the name of development. Displacement has led to livelihood crisis among the indigenes. Increasingly, the tribal communities are more adversely affected in terms of loss of culture, self-esteem, dignity, and identity. Tribes in India today are facing a serious crisis of their existence as a community, which was their strength in the context of adversity. Tribe as a community is on its way out. Tribal unity has been bartered for the globalisation and in its place, we now have the tribal as an individual who cannot be distinguished any more from his or her non-tribal counterparts. He or she now becomes defenceless against all odds. He or she no longer can expect his or her community to stand by him or her. This, no doubt, is leading to the death of tribe as a group, as a society and as a conception. In such an event we only can wish 'Long live the tribal' as an individual!

Development has really become the bane of the tribal and rural poor (Siva Prasad 2018b). Their resources no longer belong to them. Science, sometimes, inadvertently helps the better off to the detriment of the poor. For instance, the industrial use of forest and crop wastes have deprived the access to these resources for the poor affecting their livelihoods adversely. For example, bamboo that was once regarded as a weed became industrially very important for the pulp industry. This has deprived the tribals and artisans of their access to this resource and this costed them their livelihoods (See Agarwal and Narain 1985; Siva Prasad and Alok Pandey 200). Similarly, crop wastes like the stalk of pulses and oilseeds were once available free for the poor after the harvest of the crop as fuel. Once these crop residues were found to be industrially useful, their collection became out of bounds for the poor. Increasing exploitation of natural resources by the government and private players turned the traditional resource rich (tribals and the rural poor) into resource poor.

Today we talk of sustainable development (SD) and the UN has set the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the place of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and it is expected that the world nations match their laws, policies and socio-economic activities in line these SDGs targeted till 2030. Tribal cultures, economies, and management of their resources are highly sustainable and we need to learn a lot from them in this regard. In fact, the process of globalisation and unsustainable development does not allow the sustainable development to be sustainable. The moot question is, can we delink sustainable development from natural resources, the people and their livelihoods? Is sustainable development possible without people-nature harmony or without the participation of the people (Siva Prasad 2006a)? Can there be a balance and dialogue between sustainable development and globalisation and economic liberalisation? In other words, can globalisation and economic liberalisation co-exist with sustainable development? Answers to these questions are important for the future of environment and the poor.

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It is also essential to look at the way the Constitutional guarantees are enforced to protect the tribal interests. This really matters very much for the tribals and the marginalised. Even when their resources are grabbed, at least if the Constitutional guarantees are protected, there will be some sense of relief at least. This is also very much denied to the tribals by the State that is expected to protect them. Thus, besides the negative bearing of development on the tribals, the inclusion of non-tribal groups into the ST category has negatively impacted these indigenous communities. This is actually a matter of denial of their rights to the resources, livelihoods, benefits that are guaranteed in the Constitution, and representation in decision making and participation in the entire process of development (Siva Prasad 2011 and 2006a).

It is pertinent to note here that due to the definitional problems, many communities that are not tribal are included into the Scheduled Tribes list subsequently. This has done more harm to the real indigenous communities, as the communities that were included belong to numerically larger groups forming into vote banks. In 1950, the Constitutional Order declared 212 tribes in 14 States as Scheduled tribes. This grew into 635 in 1991 and it is estimated in 2006 the number of STs is more than 700 (The Draft National Tribal Policy 2006; Siva Prasad 2009). This increase in number of tribal groups is perplexing. Increasing demand for including many communities into ST category, and the promises of further inclusions by the political leaders, is an important aspect to be kept in mind. This is not specific to only STs and the same can be noticed in the case of SC and OBC categories too. Numerically and politically dominant communities get themselves included into the lists to the peril of the really deserving communities. There are plenty of examples available. For example, the inclusion of Banjara/Lambada in case of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka into ST and SC, respectively; Meena of Rajasthan into ST category. There are now agitations for the inclusion of dominant communities like Patidars of Gujarat, Jats of Haryana and Panjab, Marathas in Maharashtra, Kapus of Andhra Pradesh, to name a few. Backwardness is a resource for the forwards. Isn't it a paradox! In this game of inclusion, the real losers are the communities that are really the needy and no one cares for them because their votes do not matter at all.

Isn't it paradoxical! We continue to study tribes as unit entities, which they are not any longer. The traditional knowledge of the tribes is no longer usable for eking out livelihoods and maintaining their ecological belongingness and balance. We now argue that the tribal cannot be denied the fruits of development and we know how bitter these fruits are to them. The tribals are caught in between the contradictions of globalised and 'liberalised' world and this has been threatening the tribes as social and cultural units and due to this the tribal as individual entity is caught in the cogwheel of mainstreaming.

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MGNREGA. Total Job Cards for the Scheduled Tribes

State Name	Total job cards (ST)
ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR	705
ANDHRA PRADESH	1362522
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	160181
ASSAM	1257748
BIHAR	272763
CHHATTISGARH	1422993
DADRA & NAGAR HAVELI	0
DAMAN & DIU	0
GOA	7236
GUJARAT	1339955
HARYANA	0
HIMACHAL PRADESH	79547
JAMMU AND KASHMIR	214059
JHARKHAND	1470747
KARNATAKA	450319
KERALA	93122
LAKSHADWEEP	0
MADHYA PRADESH	2854138
MAHARASHTRA	969025
MANIPUR	236676
MEGHALAYA	376125

MIZORAM	170586
NAGALAND	350815
ODISHA	1699942
PUDUCHERRY	62
PUNJAB	144
RAJASTHAN	1827904
SIKKIM	30263
TAMIL NADU	144170
TRIPURA	226912
UTTAR PRADESH	120848
UTTARAKHAND	41648
WEST BENGAL	1019155
Total	18200310

Source: http://nregarep2.nic.in/netnrega/dynamic2/ReportGenerated_MPR.aspx,
Accessed on May 15, 2019.