AZAAD आवाज़

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Azaad आवाज़ aims to tackle an erosion of empathy in our society. This monthly magazine (Patrika) aims to focus on the marginalized sections whose voices are often muted in the cacophony of flashy mainstream media discourse. When referring to the marginalization, this platform does not aim to restrict itself to the traditional focus on social aggregates like caste and race alone but aspires to include a discussion on class, gender, sexual orientation etc. Azaad आवाज़ sculpted as a digital media station focuses on issues that debilitate the "deliberately silenced", drawing no boundaries and aspires to evolve and voice the needs of those silenced.

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TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA: HISTORY,CULTURE AND IDENTITY

The Adivasis are one of the most marginalized groups in India. According to the 2011 census, the community constitutes 8.6% of the total Indian population, making them a minority group. They lead a traditional lifestyle that is intrinsically tied to the forest areas of India.

The Adivasi community has historically been the subject of state-inflicted oppression, trapping them in a vicious cycle of poverty and violence.

To understand the complexity of issues that the Scheduled Tribes are subject to, it is important to first understand who the Adivasis are, and the criteria which determine which tribes are considered as scheduled tribes and which ones are not. As defined by Dr. B.H. Mehta (1953),

"A tribe consists of a group of families who are bound together by kinship, usually descending from a common mythical or legendary ancestor and who live in a common region, speak a common dialect, and have a common history."

However, some tribes have acculturated with non-tribal communities thus some suggest categorizing the tribal population into four groups namely, forest dwellers, ruralized tribals, acculturated tribals, and assimilated tribals. The Scheduled Tribes are only those who have not been acculturated to any large degree with non-tribal communities.

It is important to note that there is no homogeneous category of 'Scheduled Tribes'. Each tribe has a distinct identity, each with its own religion, customs, and way of life. There are over 750 Scheduled Tribes living in 26 states in India. The majority of the tribes reside in forest areas of Central and East India and in North-East India.

The rights of the Scheduled Tribes are protected by Article 19(5) of the Constitution of India where the state has reserved the right to impose reasonable restrictions on the freedom to move freely throughout the territory of India and to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India for the protection of the interests of any Scheduled Tribe.

The emphasis on mobility and territory pertaining to the interests of Adivasis indicates the significance of land and territory with regard to their rights. Schedules V and VI of the Constitution list out special provisions for the tribal communities in Central and North-East India respectively.

60% of the forest area in the country is in the tribal areas. Fifty-one of the 57 districts with forest cover greater than 67% are tribal districts. Three states— Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand— account for 70% of India's coal reserves, 80% of its high-grade iron ore, 60% of its bauxite, and almost 100% of its chromite reserves. 40% of those displaced by dams are tribal people.

A look at violent conflict, whether in Schedule V states or in Schedule VI states, shows that 'the state is involved in all of these conflicts in one way or another.'

The main conflict that the Adivasis are subject to are displacement and dispossession due to development. The rich presence of minerals and natural resources such as coal and bauxite in the forest areas has attracted various state projects and private corporations to extract those reserves and industrialize those areas.

The Government's mining operations exploit natural resources in the resource-rich tribal areas, thus making the tribes "outsiders in their own land". As a result, millions of tribal communities native to those areas have been displaced and dispossessed of their land and property.

The Adivasis have a symbiotic relationship with their land, which has a symbolic – spiritual – historical significance. Their identities are thus intertwined with the forest areas in which a majority of them reside, and thus having to leave or commodify their land goes against their belief system and is detrimental to their existence.

While a number of schemes and plans have been drafted by the government to resettle those that were displaced and compensate for their losses, in reality, very few people have actually been resettled. There also exists a power dynamic that determines how much compensation a group is or isn't able to get.

A lack of education and awareness of their rights is often used against them to deny a displaced person access to what is rightfully theirs. Meanwhile, those that were not compensated are further marginalized as they are compelled to relocate to other cities and towns and forced to live in dire conditions.

> **The Adivasis have a symbiotic relationship with their land, which has a spiritual – historical significance.**

Adivasi women are subject to sexual violence and their labour is gravely exploited at the workplace. They are made to undertake the harshest forms of manual labour. Their marginalized status prevents these cases from even being reported, let alone fought for in the justice system.

Over time, tribal rights activists and mass mobilization has been able to gain enough traction to have their voices and issues be heard and addressed, especially in the legislature which has passed a series of bills for the protection of tribal rights and their territories.

However, these Acts have not been implemented to their full extent and some remain only as black letter law. These movements have applied pressure on the government to protect the rights of the marginalized tribal communities which has brought many projects and operations in those areas to a standstill.

But, the pressure and need for those resources for the development of the country is a pressing one that has caused the two to be landlocked with no solution in sight. Tribals continue to be displaced, violated, and further marginalized and the areas remain to be stuck in a perpetual state of violence and conflict.

The Origins of Tribal History in India

IN CONVERSATION WITH DR. SANGEETA DASGUPTA & DR. SAAGAR TEWARI

Dr. Sangeeta Dasgupta
Associate Professor
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Dr. Saagar Tewari
Associate Professor of History
Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities

"Stories of Adivasis must be told, not only to express difference and dissonance but also to point to the multiplicity of cultures and the different ways of thinking."

- Dr. Sangeeta Dasgupta

Reading tribal history is hard, especially in India, because of the complex relationship the community shares with the mainstream Indian society which is marked by class and caste differences. Yet, it is very important to acknowledge them and understand their place in history to answer questions about development and upliftment.

So many scholars from different fields, from trained anthropologists to members of the erstwhile Indian Civil Services, have contributed to this vast study of Indian tribal communities, in the form of papers, articles, and debates.

Access the podcast here

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Many of these debates would go on to shape the way the Indian state and the Indian Constitution perceive these communities and guarantee the rights and duties. With tribal history being this complex and important, the question remains, how should people view tribal history?

What can be done to be more sensible to address key developmental questions, keeping in mind the history of Tribal communities?

To address these questions, this edition of Vichaar hosted Professor (Dr.) Saagar Tewari, Associate Professor of History at the Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, and Professor (Dr.) Sangeeta Dasgupta, Associate Professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Professor Tewari begins by pointing out the connotations of the terms 'civilization' and 'tribe', with the former being more relatable to river banks, and the latter, to the wilderness.

He then talks about how these groups were eventually marginalized as cities, and a flourishing economy developed, and how colonization arrested the development of individual, autonomous tribal groups.

We also discuss the role of left-wing politics in amplifying the voices of the tribal communities, and how, the failure of the State to deliver on its promises, has also led to the infiltration of Maoism and other left-wing extremist elements in the tribal areas.

We also talk about how the thriving of tribal culture is important for sustainability, and this requires more research from different angles into tribal history, whose avenues are now open for the generations to come.

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> *Adivasi history cannot be truly understood without taking into account their pasts and lived experiences.*

Prof. Dasgupta commences her podcast by differentiating between the terms Adivasi, tribe, scheduled tribe, and indigenous people. Professor Dasgupta not only talks about the politics of tribal representation but also stresses the contemporary need of reconstructing the way tribes are perceived in India.

Adivasi history cannot be truly understood without taking into account their pasts and lived experiences. She concludes by saying that we cannot write unbiased history, but as young students of History, we must be cautious of what we write and how they write history.

In totality, these podcasts discuss critical aspects of reading and understanding Adivasi history. The tribal history in India is highly politicized and for anybody interested in reading tribal history through an unbiased perspective, these podcasts are a must listen!

Post-conflict reconstruction of the tribal communities

1. How does the term 'Tribe' differ from the term 'Adivasi'? There has been an ongoing debate about the term 'Adivasi' and the people who are categorized as being part of the Adivasi community. It is observed that the term 'Adivasi' resonates more with the tribal people in Central India (places like Jharkhand) than the people in North East India. Why is this so? Do you think there should be a redefinition and recategorization of who should be considered as belonging to the 'Adivasi' community?

The term Adivasi is a term that is still in use and at the same time, an encompassing term. The application of the term Adivasi is more dominant and correlates with the tribes in Central India, in states such as Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, etc. term.

The term has a historic connotation, but it is important to remember that several other sub-tribes are also identified by this term. There is a debate going on vis-a-vis the usage of the term. In the case of Assam, there is a distinction between using the term 'Adivasi' and 'Tribe'. When one is trying to look at those disparities in livelihood, healthcare, etc., there are two competing categorizations.

One is the government's categorization, for which one must study the work by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and look at the classification of tribes and the specific constitutional protections that were assigned to them.

Dr. Samrat Sinha
Associate Professor,
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The term 'Scheduled Tribe' is very broad in itself and refers to the tribes in the Northeast as well.

The tribes in the North-East have a slightly different history from the tribes in Central India. The term Adivasi in Assam is used commonly by the community themselves. The same community is present in other states of the North-East such as Nagaland. The key connection between all these communities is the way British Colonialismplayed out in the Indian subcontinent.

In the case of Assam, the community was closely connected with the political economy of British colonialism. Their entry into these areas from Central India (through the indentured labour system) was for enabling forest clearance and providing labour for tea-gardens (in North Bengal and Assam).

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When you look at the establishment of colonialism in the Northeast, it was a duality of administration in Hills and Plains districts of undivided Assam- they created institutions and mechanisms by which they had separate forms of governance for the tribal communities (especially in mountainous regions) but weaker forms of protections in plains (example Upper and Western Assam).

The British also attributed the ideas of backwardness to these communities. The term 'Backwardness' was coined in terms of access to development, development indicators, education, etc. In the post- independence era, the state tried to take a protectionist approach towards various tribal groups, and for that one has to take a look at the agency of the tribal group.

This was borne out of non-violent and violent agitations. It is interesting to look at Central India because a lot of the tribal movements against British Rule took place there, but were put down very brutally. The developments in North-East frontier had a distinct approach.

.It was seen more as a frontier society, and British intervention was not that deep- in terms of trying to influence the tribes or weaken their social structures. They always maintained some sense of separatism and autonomy from the main colonial bureaucratic machinery.

The British approach towards the areas covered by modern states like Nagaland, Meghalaya, etc was quite distinct in terms of integration into the British empire.

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> *There is a need for dialogue and cooperation between the state and Non-Governmental Organisations.*

2. How does one demarcate the situation of on-going conflict and the process of post-conflict reconstruction? In other words, is there an end to the conflict, or can it be said that it is never-ending?

The idea of strife itself has a very long history, but that history was always preceded by degrees of peaceful and non-violent movements for self- determination. Most communities only resorted to arms and participation in insurgency due to two or three dimensions.

There were also localized factors that led to strife. When one looks at the armed violence and conflict, one realizes that the Central Government was the weapon of last resort. Looking at undivided Assam there were discrepancies in the development paradigm. The state capacity during those times was also weak, whether it was the state, police, or mechanisms available for accommodating people's aspirations.

Many tribal communities saw British Colonialism as an empowering force and not necessarily as oppression. This is because the tribes in the North-East wanted to gradually come closer and align themselves with the Centre as a policy of protection.

Interestingly, in the Indian case, regardless of the levels of violence that several regions of the Northeast have seen and witnessed historically, as well as the high levels of suffering that people have endured over the last 50-60 years, the political negotiations have always remained open.

Another ignored aspect is that societies can build back themselves from this intense conflict as well and these local capacities are extremely important. The example of Bodoland is the best to explain this.

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> *Many tribal communities saw British Colonialism as an empowering force and not necessarily as oppression.*

Their capacity to start looking ahead in terms of movement and reshaping their key interests stemmed from a negotiations perspective as well as a community perspective. When one looks at tribal movements, it is important to understand that popular narratives focus only on conflict. Underlying that layer of strife is also a layer of pre-existing connections that don't break down. This is counter-intuitive to what we understand about conflict.

There are a lot of pre-existing relationships that allow seemingly conflicted ethnic communities to build back and there is a need to identify the local capacities for peace. The State's role in peacebuilding is important but requires alignment with community processes.

In most conflicts, communities themselves have had enough internal, social, economic, and political resources to mobilize and bridge those differences. It only occurs after a lot of effort by the local-level civil society organizations and political leadership. In most cases, the local capacity is the strongest mechanism.

This is being correlated with the literature on humanitarian response and peacebuilding. Regardless of the level of violence in Bodoland, this is one society that has witnessed approaches that sought to bridge ethnic divides. Post-conflict reconstruction has to be done in a way that captures these local level connectors and strengthens them.

3. Since conflict is not a legally recognized situation, what are the various ways in which help is extended by the state (if any) for post-conflict reconstruction - of livelihood, culture, habitat, etc.

In the application of international humanitarian law to internal conflicts, the situation is such that it does agree to the application of any international norms as it is a domestic matter. Although these conflicts are looked at from a law and order perspective, there are special schemes in place for providing some kind of assistance to the conflict-affected communities. It a policy space that has not had a lot of work done on it.

However, the government of India, through the Ministry of Home Affairs has separate sets of programs that are implemented specifically for the victims of violence.

> **At the local level, there is overlap in the nodal authorities.**

There are four or five schemes that require a lot of advocacy work and they require to be improved. This is because, in the case of India, the state is the biggest humanitarian actor (in terms of capacity) and not NGOs. Most of these schemes are implemented at the district level.

There are three sets of schemes. One is the scheme launched in 2010 for the assistance of victims of terrorism and communal and Naxal violence. Recently they have now added cross-border shelling and IED attacks. This provides direct rehabilitation for victims of conflict.

At the state level, there is something known as one-time assistance schemes called ex-gratia, for victims of conflict mainly administered by the state government. Another layer is called Project assist, specifically for children.

This is to create norms and provide rehabilitation for children of victims of conflict. This is done through MHA through the National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH). There are also state-level schemes, border area schemes and there are also development schemes run by the security forces that help in local development work and can be used indirectly to mitigate the costs of conflict. These are called civic action programs.

These schemes are administered separately and have a separate policy space. However, at the local level, there is overlap in the nodal authorities. These schemes are not prioritized often. The last problem is that the victims themselves have to prove their victimhood. This leads to a lot of potential beneficiaries falling off of the scheme due to poor information.

4. We know that there is a huge lacuna when it comes to the State's response to uniquely positioned tribal conflicts and state administration in remote areas. In that aspect, what is the role that non-state actors play i.e. NGOs?

When one is talking about conflict, it is very challenging for the communities because most of the time, they are left on their own to rebuild. When the question of what is the role of state and non-state actors comes in, the state can do the work, and it is better that the state does it because the local level institutions will remain and they have a consistent flow of funding.

NGOs are always in a constraint of funding. As a consequence, their programs might be good; but these are independent of what the state is trying to do. Many NGOs have very limited capacities. They might have very good local links but their capacity to rebuild a conflict-affected society over a long period is constrained. Only the state can bear the costs of these long-term rehabilitation projects.

Thus, there is a need for dialogue and cooperation between the state and NGOs. NGOs are especially well-positioned to understand community-level processes and suggest new models of rehabilitation. India has very few post-conflict reconstruction programs through which peace-building and infrastructure-building exercises were well aligned.

Specific to the past situation is Assam. In terms of internal forced displacement despite significant numbers, we do not know the trajectories taken to rebuild their lives, given that minimal support was received from the state.

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You also have the problem of having multiple levels of administration in certain post-conflict areas. These are places that come under the Sixth Schedule, which means that there is an autonomous council, the state administration, and the central administration - how you navigate these levels of administration becomes a challenge for these civil society organizations.

One also has to keep in mind that there are a large number of community-based organizations that played a significant role in advocating for and implementing the rehabilitation program. In the end, an outside-based humanitarian organization can only do this much.

It's either the state or the community that must ultimately develop the solutions that are contextually appropriate.

5. How do the state and non-state actors (NGOs) synergize to work for the betterment of the community and in what ways are the non-state actors able to help such conflict-ridden population, how does their funding work, are they comprised of people from within the conflict areas or foreigners?

In the specific context of Western Assam mentioned earlier, there were three major layers. One is large-scale organizations– either nationally based or international. These organizations have a huge capacity to mitigate in the initial stages of the conflict, especially when it came to sustaining life in relief camps. The second layer is development organizations that are based out of that region and have been working for a long time.

The third is community-based organizations. It is a combination of all these layers. If one is doing a project, you need to know which organization is relevant for what aspect. It is also essential because most humanitarian response organizations don't necessarily stay for too long. They always work with an exit plan. Community-based organizations and developmental organizations always remain and they have closer links with society.

I'm not saying that NGOs are not important. They do fill a certain gap, but the true success of an NGO is if it can slowly stop working; if the society itself becomes strong enough to monitor the government schemes, encourage accountability, and conduct its own social audits.

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> *The term Adivasi is a term that is still in use and at the same time, an encompassing term.*

If the idea of securing rights and entitlements comes from within the community, and the mechanisms are strong enough to negotiate with the state actors, that is also a vision of sustainability. NGOs play a role of serving as a link between government and society and have developed models that work very well.

One also has to keep in mind that there are a large number of community-based organizations that play a significant role in advocating for and implementing the rehabilitation program. In the end, an outside-based humanitarian organization can only do this much.

It is the government models that also need to be adaptive. They need to have a holistic vision of human security when they are implementing programs and ensure real community consultation. It is a mixed picture, and one has to make a judgment concerning this issue, but there is a serious necessity for cross-sectoral collaboration.

6. We are aware that a post-conflict reconstruction also implies a long-term establishment of the displaced community in the temporary camps that were built for them at the time of the conflict. To that effect - how does the process of their rehabilitation take place (if at all)? If not, how are they rehabilitated at some other place?

It is a very complicated problem. Given the number of people who were displaced, population tracking is very difficult. However, when you study these camps, one thing stands out: the camp management communities collect their data most accurately.

That is because, as they had the largest stake in the rehabilitation process, they depend on it for their daily survival. Also, the costs are multi-dimensional: children's schooling gets discontinued, access to hospitals is disrupted, there is very little privacy, poor access to water, and food supplies are dwindling.

.Within the camp, there is also a high degree of social violence (including domestic violence). There are a lot of mental health issues that occur post the trauma incurred either during the conflict or what they see in these camps. They live with this trauma and that fact always lives within them.

When you are looking at peacebuilding and reconciliation, it is a long-term project. Does the state have the capacity to strengthen the capacity for providing mental health services for the long term? Even though you have frameworks such as the psychosocial responses to conflict how many people (are providing) and can be provided these services?

The key is whether the community leaves the camp stronger or not. The other issue is not only loss of development entitlements, but the fact that you lose your social linkage with the other community and you start to look at them as hostile. How do you build this back? A fascinating development in Bodoland that took place post-2015 was that the local community organization (both Bodos and Adivasis) came together to prevent further outbreaks of violence.

I think that the key is to tap into this pre-existing linkage that already exists. But the issue is also that the humanitarian organizations will not work with these community-based organizations because neutrality and impartiality are their working principles. So you cannot engage in the conflict as actors, as your work is only relief. But if you do want to partake in peacebuilding, you will have to engage in local political processes.

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The Bodo conflict is very important because it has given a signal that if the community wants to secure peace, it is possible. A conflict is not an abstract category, there are significant human costs, but also potentialities for social capital to be incorporated into potential structures of peace. You have to understand the role of community organizations and it is only when they come together that anything finally happens. The 2020 Peace Accord is very interesting because you can see these communities' ability to bridge these intense conflicts. I am actually hopeful for the future and the possibilities of peace if the accord is implemented holistically.

There is work coming out of academic institutions (regarding the Bodoland conflict) that unfortunately have a very deterministic view of human nature.

> *It's either the state or the community that must ultimately develop the solutions that are contextually appropriate.*

The use of the word "conflict" is misleading because one cannot label an entire community or a geographical area as a conflict-affected area. There is a high degree of variation. For building peace you have to understand the local level variation, understand the connectors and understand the societies very deeply; and, then make that judgment.

Not all societies want to be conflict-affected; they have an inbuilt mechanism of peace, it is just that these works haven't documented it. Also, you can have interesting results which might be unforeseen. During the peak of the emergency in 2015, an external humanitarian NGO experimented with unconditional cash transfers.

Cash transfers in emergencies tend to be conditional with restrictions, but they transferred cash to people in the relief camps in their project locations, unconditionally. Interestingly it led to the revival of local markets that had temporarily collapsed.

The local markets in the project areas have a significant Nepali population (who are looked at as neutral) who significantly control the markets. With time both the Bodos and Adivasis from the relief camps started accessing the markets for day-to-day purchases; and, that indirectly worked as a channel for reviving prior linkages that had been disrupted.

Unfortunately, such models do not get documented and a lot of research on the context of Bodoland (also the Northeast) does not seek to study local capacities for peace or examine community solutions and privilege conflict factors.

The Predatory Paradigm of Development
By Nathishia Chandy

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> *'Development is a mischievous term, one which is universally understood as something ideal- perhaps a 'better life'. But, such usage conceals the real meaning of development.*
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> *-Rajan Gurukkal,*
> *Death of Democracy: An Inevitable Possibility*
> *under Capitalism*

Karl Marx, in his monumental work Das Kapital, traces the origin of capital and consequently the class distinction between possessors and non-possessors, to the Enclosure Movement in England which facilitated the primitive accumulation of capital in the form of land.

In the 16th century, empowered by the Enclosure Act, arable land which was previously held in common by peasants and agriculturalists, were forcibly expropriated and converted to privately owned pasturelands for the grazing of sheep and the shearing of wool- the raw material for the booming textile industry.

The latter half of the 18th Century brought with it the de-population of these enclosures and pasturage. Peasants, agriculturalists, clans, and sometimes even whole villages were swept away by the large-scale appropriation of communal land by the nobility.

Between 1814 to 1820, 15,000 members of the Highland Celtic Clan i.e, about 3000 families were systematically hunted and rooted out, an eviction enforced by British soldiers.

Their villages were burnt and resistance met with violence. This 'systematic theft' (in the words of Marx), of communal property, according to Francis Bacon, *'bred a decay of people, livelihoods, a decay of towns, churches, and tithes'.*

A few centuries hence, in 2018, in a whole different part of the world, the 14th Prime Minister while inaugurating the world's tallest statue standing upon forcibly acquired Adivasi sacred ground, in a state still grappling with the aftermath of a mega-dam project, proclaimed, to a crowd of protesting Adivasis, facing the grim prospect of another displacement, that *'Tourism would surely boom'.*

Except that these events occurred several hundred years apart, there is very little difference between the two instances. There is a singular antagonist in these stories- the capitalist paradigm of development which is induced by the State, facilitated by the law, and upheld by the judiciary.

The Paradigm of Development

The Preamble to the Indian Constitution declares the country as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic.

However, in the years immediately after independence, the Indian Government ironically adopted colonial notions of development that prioritized rapid industrialization, privatization, and accelerated economic growth, the same notions which had resulted in India's depredation during the 200 years of colonial rule. The New Economic Policy of 1991, adopted neo-liberal economic policies and equated socialism with economic growth.

This perpetuated the narrative that undertaking mega-projects like the construction of dams, steel, and nuclear power plants, mines, ports, and the provision of unlimited cheap labor and raw materials in the form of natural resources would invite foreign investments into India.

This would not only result in her development and progression but would also eradicate the problems of unemployment and poverty, consequently creating social welfare.

But, this paradigm of 'development' owing to its colonial roots has proved to be predatory, almost parasitic, for it thrives upon the oppression, the continued impoverishment of the powerless, in order to not only acquire but accumulate communally held resources.

This paradigm of development deprives common people of their means of subsistence and vastly benefits the capitalist class by placing colossal amounts of wealth- wealth produced by the exploitation of the 'de-titled' masses- in the hands of a few. It has conditioned the common man to accept 'anti-people schemes as natural, inevitable or even, 'a necessary evil' for growth and progression of the State.

Under such a paradigm, the seizure of communally owned property by the State, the displacement of occupiers, the destruction of their livelihoods, their death, injury or exploitation, environmental degradation, exhaustion of natural resources, destruction of habitats, etc, that is, the social costs become 'collateral damage', inconsequential, even justified in 'national interest' or for 'the greater good'.

According to a study conducted by the Indian Social Institute in 2011, around 50 million people have been displaced in India due to 'development' projects in over 50 years. Of these, the Adivasi communities constitute 40% of the total displaced population.

These figures are not accidental. Large-scale development-induced displacement is not the result of a State mishap. Booker prize Winner, Arundhati Roy in her article, *'For the Greater Good'* writes, *"The Indian State is not a state that has failed. It is a State which has succeeded impressively in what it set out to do. It has been ruthlessly efficient in the way it has appropriated India's resources-its land, its water, its forests, its fish, its air- and re-distributed it to a favored few (in return, no doubt, for a few favors)."*

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> *It has conditioned the common man to accept 'anti-people schemes as natural, inevitable or even, 'a necessary evil' for growth and progression of the State.*

It is equally ironic as it is disappointing, that it is the very institutions set up for the protection of the poor and marginalized that take advantage of their incomprehension and orchestrate, through the systematic dissolution of rights and the abuse of wide ambit of 'public use', large scale land acquisitions - a euphemism for day-light robbery.

The *Doctrine of Eminent Domain* enshrined within the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 has been the most potent tool in dispossession for the purpose of development. According to the doctrine, the State enjoys ultimate power over all land within its territory.

It follows that the State has the right to invoke this right for the 'public good', and the consequent compulsory acquisition of land cannot be legally challenged or resisted by any person or community. What constitutes 'public purpose' is deliberately left open in the law, and the power to determine its definition rests essentially with the State.

The State empowered by the liberal construction of 'public purpose' along with the reiteration of the Supreme Court that public interest must be given priority over individual interests, has used the wide ambit of public purpose, to acquire property for everything-- from the construction of a statute on forcibly acquired Adivasi sacred ground to the construction of a network of dams displacing 40,000 families including indigenous tribes.

From the construction of a resort on tribal land encouraging 'human safaris', to the redirection of natural resources to private entities at the cost of Adivasi livelihood- all sanctioned by the Supreme Court at the cost of minority interest. Democracy wailed in her grave.

Adivasi communities are disproportionately impacted

The Adivasi communities are disproportionately impacted by displacement induced by the current development paradigm. According to a study conducted by the Centre for Policy Research in 2013, the Scheduled Tribes (ST) constitute 55% of the people displaced since independence due to the construction of dams, mines, industrial development, and the creation of wildlife parks and sanctuaries. 65% of the STs are landless as per the 2011 Census.

This, despite the fact that the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution carve out a separate legal and administrative framework for certain designated tribal majority areas within the territory of India.

> **Tribal communities often bear the cost of development, the development of which they are rarely the beneficiaries.**

Tribal communities often bear the cost of development – the development of which they are rarely the beneficiaries. The tribal way of life is intrinsically linked to the land upon which they have historically dwelt. Their livelihood, traditions, beliefs, culture, and identity are built around the spaces occupied by and resources accessible to them. Nature, to many tribal communities, is sacred.

Therefore, the displacement of tribal communities from spaces which they have historically occupied not only affects their traditional livelihoods but also compels a restructuring of their lives as a consequence of which traditional knowledge, history, and culture is lost and the community scattered. Therefore, for tribal communities, resettlement does not amount to rehabilitation.

Section 41 and 42 of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in land Acquisition Act, 2013, prohibits the acquisition of scheduled areas for developmental purposes. However, the prospective application of the Act provides little benefit to tribal communities already displaced, who still have not obtained compensation due to the lack of formal documentation proving their title over the land of which they have been dispossessed.

In 2009, around 245 Baiga families in Chhattisgarh were evicted from the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve. The families were moved to an area where their traditional livelihood of collecting Sal leaves, Tendu, and Bamboo was no longer viable.

Not only was this a gross violation of the constitutional right to livelihood under Article 21, but this also resulted in food insecurity, abysmal health conditions, and forced urbanization of tribal lives.

> **With their traditional means of livelihood becoming non-feasible, displaced tribals, in an attempt to earn a livelihood, are pushed into the mainstream informal sector.**

With their traditional means of livelihood becoming non-feasible, displaced tribals, in an attempt to earn a livelihood, are pushed into the mainstream informal sector and end up building the very dams that displaced them.

Perhaps this has been the outcome the State desired- to create a self-producing capitalist system, where every new profit-making project, generated through forced displacement, sufficient cheap labour required for the project, adding to the already voluminous, insecure, and gravely exploited proletariat class.

Under such a development paradigm that thrives upon the continued existence of the exploiter and the exploited, a class struggle is inevitable. As instances of tribal insurgency rise, some would say that it has already begun.

In Conversation with Adivasi Lives Matter

1. What prompted you to begin Adivasi Lives Matter? What does your initiative aim to achieve and how does your work help realize those goals?

The journey of Adivasi Lives Matter started in 2016 when Ankush made a 2000 Km cycle yatra to some parts of Orissa Jharkhand to learn and to know about the Adivasi communities. During that yatra Ankush happened to visit Jaduguda which is home to India's first Uranium mine, home to India's first radioactive dumping zone. Unfortunately, it is also my home.

The stories about Jadugoda did not make it to mainstream media, and the stories that do exist on media platforms on the internet are all covered by non-Adivasis.

I did not depend on non-Adivasi journalists for information and I covered the story of Jaduguda myself in order to provide real and accurate information, in order to do justice to the stories and experiences of the lives of those living in Jadugoda.

My story moved Ankush and we are both passionate photographers. He told me that my work was important. My non-dependence on non-Adivasi journalists to tell my stories was significant.

Mr. Ashish Birulee
Co-Founder, Adivasi Lives Matter

That is where the idea of creating Adivasi Lives Matter began. We created this platform where Adivasis tell their own stories in their languages. They will not be dependent on other people writing their stories.

The stories that we hear are written by non-Adivasis and are littered with misrepresentations. We thought that it was best that Adivasis told their own stories in their own tongues, to share unadulterated stories and experiences. We hope to continue our work for a very long time.

2. What does being part of the Adivasi community mean to you and what are some of the common misconceptions regarding the Adivasi community?

The Adivasi community is often misrepresented. The misrepresentation has been done by non-Adivasis, the result being that the minute someone hears the word 'Adivasi' they imagine members of the community to be savage and uncivilized, as something to be feared. But, being an Adivasi myself, I am proud to be part of my community. I feel these misrepresentations are done purposely because people do not want us or our identity to be in existence.

The reason is simple if I were to introduce myself as Adivasi, as the 'first settler of India', this implies that all those who came after me are colonizers, invaders. They came to my land and grabbed my land by force and they claim themselves to be indigenous to India.

They proclaim themselves to be the first settlers. This is wrong and far removed from fact. Communities have been living on this land long before they arrived on this land- they are indigenous. Those who step on their land after can be called 'colonizers'.

Adivasi can be described as 'the original occupiers of land or those who lived on the land from the beginning of time'. Adivasi communities are the guardians of nature. Their lifestyle, livelihoods, festivals, rituals beliefs, the sustainable life they follow, does not harm nature.

> " **At Adivasi Lives Matter we try to look beyond our community-based identity, we are all human first.**

The community tries to bring balance to nature and our way of living protects biodiversity. As I mentioned before, it gives me great pride to be part of this community who is the 'real guardians of nature'.

3. What are some of the challenges you have faced in your workplace or in your educational institutions due to your identity?

The identity in which we are labeled today is not our own. We always forget that we are human first and this is something that I have experienced in ALM. ALM is not completely run by Adivasis, there are non-Adivasis in the organization as well. At ALM we try to look beyond our community-based identity, we are all human first.

Working in this kind of environment is not per se challenging, but I would say, it is an environment within which we learn things, about people and ourselves. What I have learnt, is that the decisions which we make in Adivasi Lives Matter are all taken by Adivasis and not non-Adivasis.

The team is growing now with a greater mix of Adivasis. Members of the Adivasi community occupy leadership positions at ALM. One thing I find to be true is that all the non-Adivasis that I work with are great examples of allies to the Adivasi community. We have learnt from them, how their privilege can create change in society.

They use their privilege for the development of other communities, they have taught me to appreciate all of our differences and grow together as human beings rather than as a labelled community as we are today

> *Adivasi communities are the guardians of nature.*

Adivasi Lives Matter is a platform that works towards amplifying the Adivasi and Tribal voices of India. The initiative was started in 2016 so that Adivasi/Tribal youth and individuals can create articles and videos highlighting their lives and culture.

ALM is an attempt to bridge the gap by helping Adivasi/Tribal youth assert their identity through digital story-telling.
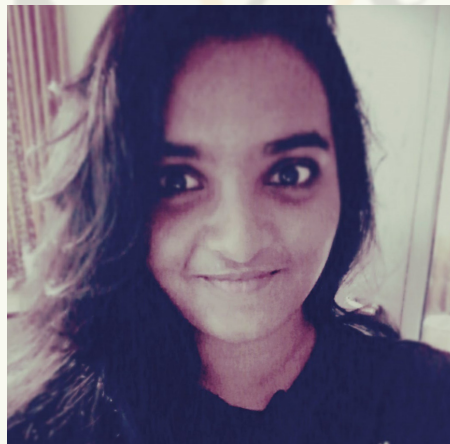
Ada Nagar
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Prof. (Dr.) Ambreen Agha
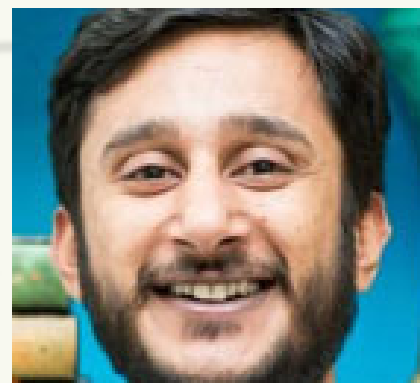Associate Professor,
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